

# ARNEC CONNECTIONS

Working Together for Early Childhood

No. 9, 2015



The transformative power of  
Early Childhood Development (ECD)  
for equitable development'



**ARNEC**

Asia-Pacific Regional Network  
for Early Childhood

# ARNEC CONNECTIONS

Working Together for Early Childhood



Photocredit@Leonor Diaz: Puppet show on care for the environment

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# Contents

## Introduction

---

### **Editorial Note ..... 3**

By PROFESSOR MARGARET SIMS

## The Child

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### **Enabling Sustainable ECD Service Delivery through Social Enterprise ..... 5**

Authors: BEATA DOLINSKA  
PETER DOWNEY  
JESSICA CHEW

### **Early Childhood Development Interventions and their Potential to Reduce Childhood Fatality and Injury from Unexploded Ordnance in Southeast Asia ..... 9**

Author: KATHRYN MOORE

### **Joining Forces to Manage Crisi Situations among Children Through Interactive Storytelling & Play ..... 13**

Author: LEONOR E. DIAZ, PHD.

### **Resilience through connectedness: A pathway to promote an equitable early childhood development in adverse contexts ..... 15**

Author: NANDITHA HETTITANTRI

## The environment the child lives – The microsystem, the mesosystem and exosystem

---

**Significance of adult-child interaction  
for promoting language and literacy skills  
in early years: The Indian context..... 17**

Author: DR. NEELIMA CHOPRA

**Expectations of ‘readiness’ in preschool children:  
a politically influenced socio-cultural phenomenon.....20**

Author: DR. SAPNA THAPA UNI

**Building Capacity in Aga Khan Education Services  
(AKES) Early Childhood Programmes:  
Using Effective Tools for Professional Development .....23**

Authors: MS. SAIRA NAZARALI , M.Ed.,  
KAREN L. KELLY

**From Measurement to Action-Using programmatic  
assessments to promote ‘Quality in ECD’: Model Exemplars  
from Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, and U.A.E.....25**

Authors: MS. MONISHA SINGH DIWAN  
MS. SAIRA NAZARALI  
DR. KAREN L. KELLY

**The Impact of Parents’ Education on Parenting  
and Pedagogy on Child’s Development and Learning .....28**

By: SHAHIDULLAH SHARIF

**Impacting Young Children’s Development  
in Indonesia through “Lonto Leok” Contextual  
Collaborative Approach ..... 30**

Authors: TOMMY PINEM  
MS. AJENG HERNING  
MS. FIONA WINOTO

## The society and culture – the macrosystem

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**Community of Practice in Early Childhood Development:  
Experience of ChildFund India..... 33**

By: APURVA KUMAR PANDYA

## Editorial Note

By:

**PROFESSOR MARGARET SIMS**

University of New England

One of the key challenges facing early childhood professionals in our region is the necessity to share our understanding of the importance of the work we do. When politicians understand that ensuring all young children have the best possible start to life benefits the nation, they are more likely to develop policies and commit funding to early childhood initiatives. When organisations understand they can make the greatest impact by supporting young children and their families they are more likely to develop programmes to do so, and to support and train their staff to work effectively in those programmes. When community members, mums, dads, grandparents, aunties and uncles all understand how the experiences they offer their young children every day impact on children's learning and wellbeing then they are more likely to demand the services they need to help them do the best possible job they can for their children. And when we in early childhood are vocal and share our excitement, our knowledge and our experiences we are making it possible for politicians, organisations and community members to understand and to help us make children's lives better, and through our children, make the world a better place for us all.

Many of our interventions focus on improving the lived experience of young children, and through this, we aim to improve adult outcomes. In this volume we have some exciting stories to share of programmes in our region working successfully with children's young children. Beata Dolinska, Peter Downey and Jessica Chew share their work with Aide et Action Cambodia and their development of the iLEAD programme. This programme aims to improve rural and regional children's access to quality ECCD programmes in a manner that is sustainable, and at the same time, encourage increased social cohesion between diverse social groups. Kathryn Moore discusses the importance of educating children appropriately in relation to unexploded ordnance in SE Asia. Moore argues that we specifically need to develop programmes for younger children and that it is not yet clear if those programmes are

best delivered as special packages or integrated into children's normal ECCD programmes. Leonor E. Diaz shares her experience of involving students enrolled in The University of the Philippines in an outreach project that involved them working with young children who had experienced a significant crisis. Students used interactive storytelling and play to help young children process their traumatic experiences. Nanditha Hettitantri presents a case study of one child who is living in a village in Eastern Sri Lanka attempting to recover from armed conflict. She uses the concept of connectedness to examine this young boy's connections to his family, school and community. Finally in this section Neelima Chopra examined interactions between children and their teachers in pre-primary and primary classes in India. There were differences found between teacher styles in pre-primary and primary classes and these impacted on the literacy learning opportunities children experienced.

We are all inter-connected and what we do has an impact beyond our immediate environment. Bronfenbrenner (1979) first explained this in western world theory but for many in our region, this understanding has guided people for centuries. Bronfenbrenner talked about layers of influence, about the reciprocal interconnection of all that we do and experience. Children grow up in their world of family (however we chose to define family). Bronfenbrenner called this level of interconnection the microsystem. We know that when families are stressed, when they are struggling for resources (physical or emotional resources) they are less able to support their children (Parke et al., 2004; Respler-Herman, Mowder, Yasik, & Shamah, 2012; Sims, 2002). There are many families in our region who are experiencing significant levels of stress. Families are living in poverty with limited access to basic human requirements such as food, shelter and clothing. Families are living in contexts where they are not safe (through conflict at national, regional, local and/or familial levels). Even in what one might consider more advantaged communities, the stresses of modern life impact on family resilience and on children's development. In Australia, for example, Silburn et al. (2006) demonstrated that children growing

up exposed to 7 or more risk factors (these included factors such as growing up with dysfunctional family relationships, poverty, membership of a minority group) were experiencing a similar level of stress as that experienced by children growing up in a war zone. The long term outcomes of this chronic stress for children include increased risk of adult chronic illness (such as coronary artery disease, chronic pulmonary disease, cancer, mental health problems) and an increased risk of social exclusion through alcoholism, drug abuse and criminal behaviours (Sims, 2013).

Many services focus on working with children in the context of their families. The ultimate aim is to improve outcomes for children by not only providing quality learning experiences for children, but to support families (reduce family stress) so that they are able to provide an improved child rearing environment for their children. Working with families requires a sensitive understanding of individual, family, community and cultural differences. Let's take an example to illustrate. Much of the western literature presents particular types of parenting behaviours as most desirable as they are linked in the research to better child outcomes. Baumrind (1971) first introduced the concept of parenting styles in 1966 and researchers soon identified authoritative parenting as providing the best child outcomes (Barton & Hirsch, 2015; Rivers, Mullis, Fortner, & Mullis, 2012; Spera, 2005). It was not long however before researchers began to question the universal nature of this work particularly as it became clear that the link between authoritarian parenting style and improved child outcomes did not hold true in non-western cultures (García & Gracia, 2005; Park & Bauer, 2002; Runions & Keating, 2005), nor even in all contexts within western culture: for example when families are living in situations of great stress, such as in the ghettos in America, it is possible that authoritarian parenting produces more desirable child outcomes than authoritative parenting (Coplan, Hastings, Lagacé-Séguin, & Moulton, 2002; Ispa et al., 2004). These examples illustrate Bronfenbrenner's (1979) microsystem: this is each of the immediate environments

## INTRODUCTION

in which young children live. The home environment is a microsystem consisting of physical, social and emotional elements. Where children are reared in a communal setting the home environment may consist of multiple dwellings and multiple people. The school or ECCD Centre is another microsystem. When expectations of children are the same in the home and the ECCD environments we say that the mesosystem (the relationship between different microsystems) is strong. Children who have strong mesosystems are thought to demonstrate better developmental outcomes (Hindman, Miller, Froyen, & Skibbe, 2012). However I suggest that children who need to learn to behave differently in different contexts are provided with an opportunity to learn meta-cognitive functioning (the ability to read a situation and judge for oneself the most appropriate behaviour) and this is likely to advantage them in complex thinking and problem solving (Lai, 2011). The exosystem is the third layer in this representation; this is the environments around children in which they do not directly participate but which nevertheless impact on them. Parental employment is the usual example given: parents who are required to work long hours and who come home exhausted at the end of the day are less able to engage positively with their children. Thus parental employment impacts on parenting quality and through parenting quality, indirectly on child outcomes.

In this volume we have 5 articles that we have positioned in the next section focusing on the environments in which children participate (that is Bronfenbrenner's microsystem, mesosystem or exosystem). Sapna Thapa Uni discusses the concept of school readiness, particularly as it relates to Kathmandu. School readiness is a contested concept and many have argued that it is not for children to be made ready for schools, but rather for schools to be made ready for children (Dockett, Perry, & Kearney, 2010). In the context of Kathmandu, the article argues that school readiness translates into colonisation of children. Saira Nazarali and Karen Kelly share their story of the Aga Khan Education Services (AKES) evaluation tool for early childhood programmes in India. A global evaluation tool (AECI Global Guidelines Assessment Tool - Association for Childhood

Education International, no date) is used which provides a common framework for programmes across the country to share information. Using the same evaluation tool Monisha Singh Diwan, Saira Nazarali and Karen Kelly compared results from evaluations in Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, and U.A.E.. Results have helped identify the most pressing areas for staff professional development and to more clearly identify positive outcomes to stakeholders. Shahidullah Sharif explains the pressure Bangladeshi parents experience when trying to support their children's education in the home environment. Many parents have little education and find this task particularly challenging. Parent education programmes have a role to play in supporting parents to succeed in this role. From Indonesia, Tommy Pinem, Ajeng Herning Danastri, and Fiona Winoto describe the Lonto Leok approach initiated by World Vision. This approach uses the strengths of what currently exists in communities. ECCD activities are attached to existing services and aim to address early learning, health, nutrition, community based management and income generating activities for families.

We all know that culture impacts on the experiences children have, and on their development. Children in different cultures are exposed to different learning opportunities. Māori children growing up in New Zealand today have the opportunity to speak their language (Te Reo Māori, either totally or in combination with English). In contrast, most white Australian children are only exposed to one language growing up (English) unless their parents are migrants and strive to keep the family language for their children. Young children in India may be exposed to several different languages and think being multilingual is normal (which of course it is in their context). Opportunities for learning different things come from living in different cultures. This is the level of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system called the macrosystem. The macrosystem encompasses the beliefs and values that impact on practices, on decision making and on how people live their lives. Even within a culture, the experiences children have change over time. When I was a child it was normal to be given a picnic lunch and told to go

out and play and not to come back until it was getting dark. An Australian parent doing the same thing today would run the risk of being accused of child neglect. Bronfenbrenner (1979) calls this the chronosystem. We have one article that addresses issues at the macrosystem level. Apurva Kumar Pandya discusses communities of practice in early childhood in India. The aim of this model is to provide a framework for practitioners across different programmes to work together, to collaborate, and through their collaboration to learn from each other. Local wisdom is respected and those participating are able to learn and grow in their knowledge and skills.

The 2015 ARNEC Connections provides a range of papers which give a good overview of the important work happening in early childhood around the Australasian and Pacific regions. It is vitally important that we share this work, celebrate our successes and learn from our challenges. What we do in early childhood today may change tomorrow's world. We need to make sure that we are leading not only with our heart, but with sound knowledge and expertise in our heads.

***Whāia te iti kahurangi ki te tūohu koe me he maunga teitei***

**(Seek the treasure you value most dearly: if you bow your head, let it be to a lofty mountain)**

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## Enabling Sustainable ECD Service Delivery through Social Enterprise

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### The State of ECD in Cambodia

The earliest years of life are pivotal in forming the foundation for healthy development of children and the opportunity to reach their maximum potential. Children in Cambodia, as in many developing countries, are not able to develop to this potential because of deficits in health, nutrition, cognitive and non-cognitive stimulation. The effects of the delayed development in the early years can be deleterious and long lasting, reinforcing intergenerational poverty. Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs are seen as a promising way to reduce such delays and foster early development ("Why Early Childhood Development," 2013). Despite progress made in basic education increasing the net enrolment ratio from 81% in 2001 to 95% in 2011, ECD in Cambodia has developed very slowly (Education, UNICEF). However it is only recently that there has been a greater focus on educating parents, teachers and communities on the importance of ECD. In 2012-13, only 24.85% of rural 3-4 year old children had access to ECD and the Royal Government of Cambodian (RGC) has the capacity to only extend ECD to 38% of preschool-aged children in 2018. At the same time the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) only has capacity to train 200-300 new preschool teachers per year of the more than 1000 teachers who need this training (Education Strategic Plan, 2014). The RGC has therefore called upon non-state actors to help fill ECD teaching gaps ("Education Congress," 2014).

### Project Background

iLEAD Education Social Enterprise (iLEAD ESE) is a progressive ECD model

by Aide et Action Cambodia (AEAC) that responds to the RGC's call. The model is a multi-layered approach to sustainable ECD service delivery that has three mutually beneficial activity streams:

1. iLEAD Community Centres deliver ECD services in rural Cambodia, including the provision of preschool services;
2. iLEAD International School social enterprise caters to middle-income families in Phnom Penh;
3. iLEAD Teacher Training Centre provides high quality teacher training and professional support to teachers in iLEAD Community Centre preschools.

The iLEAD ESE model of education service delivery achieves three key interrelated outcomes:

- (i) Improved access to and quality of holistic, child-centred ECD services in rural and urban areas;
- (ii) Improved project sustainability;
- (iii) Increased social cohesion between diverse social groups in Cambodia.

This article describes iLEAD ESE's ECD philosophy, project design approach and importantly its financial sustainability mechanism.

### iLEAD Community Centres

The iLEAD Community Centres are the regional coordinating offices of rural community preschool clusters. These centres manage social development components and provide essential and holistic community services including a rural community preschool, health and nutrition, parental education, agriculture development, youth engagement and environment and climate change awareness. A unique feature of the iLEAD ESE model is that the community preschools are a focal point for addressing issues prevalent in rural Cambodia that can negatively impact children's growth and development. The holistic community based approach ensures the listed services are available to complement our community preschools and thus influences positive parental behaviours that benefit the child beyond the school setting.

### iLEAD Community Centre ECD Delivery: A Three Pillar Approach

The iLEAD Community Centre's approach to ECD delivery is centred on three pillars, where parents and communities, teachers and the children themselves are together key actors in every child's development and education. The relationships children develop at school and in the community with adults and other children influence their development as a person. Parents are the first teachers and homes are the first schools that form children's characters and values in life. iLEAD ESE provides a space for the child to develop positive social relationships and to grow safely in a child friendly learning environment. The iLEAD ESE educational program encourages families to be highly engaged in their children's education through parental education as well as increased local community engagement in ECD as a critical strategy to ensure long-term project sustainability.

### iLEAD Community Centre ECD Delivery: Preschool Access

The AEAC ECD project launched in 2009 and has been working together with local government authorities and community leaders in Kep, Kandal, Takeo and Prey Veng provinces delivering preschool services based on the Three Pillar approach. The project has successfully established 40 rural preschool services, both as community preschools and preschools established within public schools, and has plans to reach 50 community preschools in 2015, 100 preschools in 2016 and 150 preschools in 2017. AEAC co-funds the teachers' salaries, the construction of school facilities and the provision of teacher training and school materials. The project partnership structure facilitates collaboration and local actor buy-in, to achieve sustainable and holistic ECD service delivery for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children in the

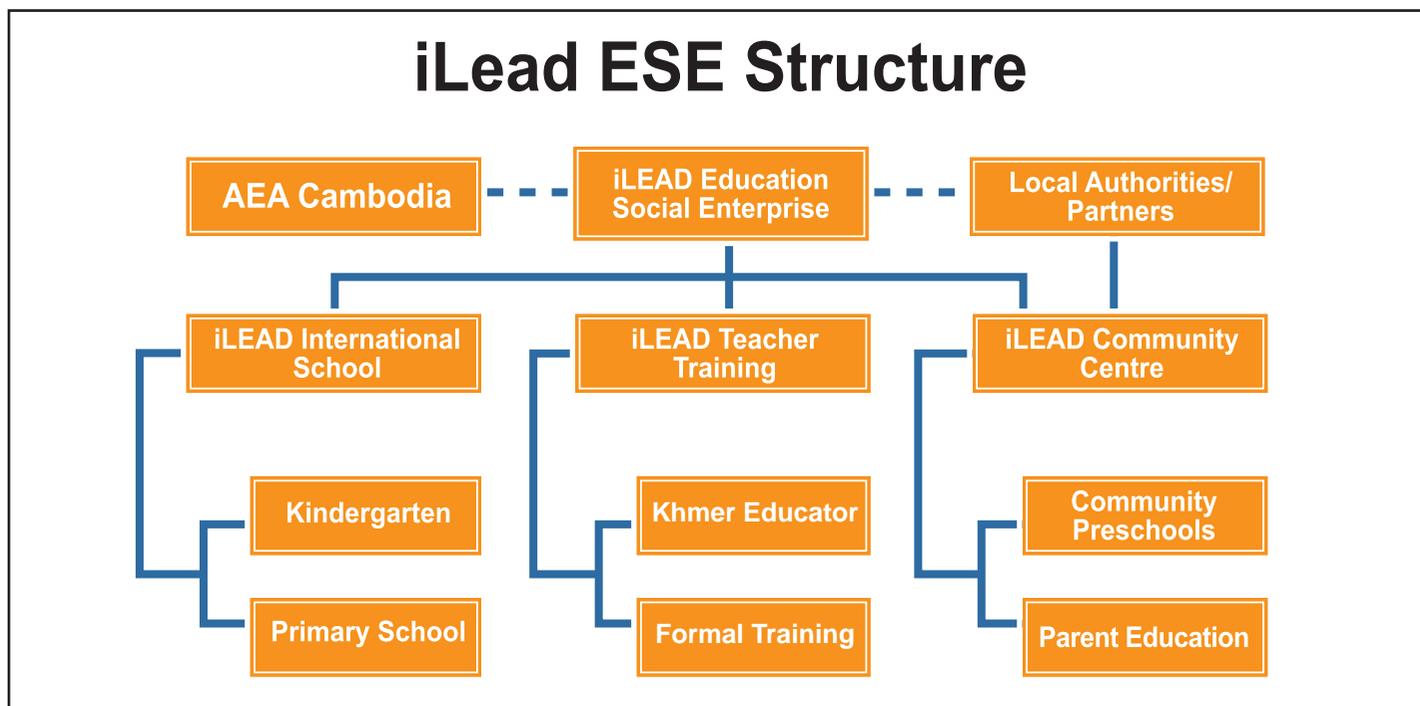
targeted areas. In 2014 the preschool project transitioned to iLEAD ESE. With ongoing support from AEAC iLEAD continues to finance the community preschools and provide continuous teacher training, educational materials and school infrastructure repair into the future.

### Financial Sustainability Challenges

AEAC recognised the financial challenge in supporting local actors to deliver holistic ECD services early on in the project's inception. In order to develop a project income stream to complement donor funding, two sustainability schemes: rural community microfinance and rice banks were piloted to finance preschool teacher salaries and school construction. However these initiatives had too many borrowers defaulting on their loans and an alternative financing solution had to be found to continue operations.



*The Breakfast Programme in an iLEAD Community Preschool located in rural Kandal Province.*



### Sustainability through Social Enterprise: iLEAD International School

After learning the lessons from the microfinance and rice bank pilots, AEAC investigated social enterprise as viable alternative to maintaining the delivery of ECD services. In October 2014 AEAC launched the iLEAD International School in Phnom Penh to deliver international

standard, affordable, early childhood and primary education to serve the capital's rising demand.

Prior to launch, a market study was conducted to test the feasibility of the enterprise. Some months since the opening, thirty students have already enrolled. The iLEAD team are rigorously monitoring the financial return of this sustainability strategy in order to evaluate the future of directions

of the iLEAD ESE pilot initiative.

### iLEAD Community Centre and International School Synergy

The iLEAD International School is part of a broader strategic enterprise strategy that will also provide complementary services to the iLEAD Community Centres, namely the iLEAD Teacher Training Centre, currently based at the iLEAD International School.



Preschool teachers attending the iLEAD Teacher Training course in January 2015



*iLEAD International School students learning about plants and the environment*

The centre provides training and resources and is also the quality assurance arm of the iLEAD Community Centre preschool service delivery. Faculty from iLEAD International School deliver training to the teachers of the iLEAD Community Centre preschools in modern, child-friendly pedagogical methodology.

The iLEAD Teacher Training Centre also seeks to create a professional Community of Practice for all educators in Cambodia that will result in professional development, mutual learning and networking opportunities, in addition to teacher training. It will provide greater access to preschool teacher training to address the teacher shortage in Cambodia and improve the quality of nationwide preschool teaching. The training centre will work with government education authorities to influence national education policies and curricula, and advocate for better ECD educational services in Cambodia.

### **Solidarity: Foster Social Cohesion**

In addition to the financial sustainability generated from this social enterprise iLEAD International School is the mechanism to

promote social cohesion between diverse social groups in the country. The model taps into internal resources and provides urban parents with the mechanism to become local sponsors of rural children's early childhood education and this closes the gap between sponsor and beneficiary. Parents will strengthen their solidarity links and involvement with rural communities by having the opportunity to sit on iLEAD International School's governance board, consult with rural parents and community preschool teachers, help organise field trips for students between iLEAD International School and the rural community preschools and shape the way that all preschools in the project run their curricula and activities. In the process, children from rural Cambodia have access to holistic ECD of which the quality is continuously improved with the assistance of iLEAD supervision.

### **Education as a Foundation for Early Childhood Development**

Above all, AEAC aims to provide access to quality education to the poorest and recognises ECD is as the foundation for every child's development. How can the intervention be sustainable? This is the key question that drives all activities in the iLEAD ESE project. The iLEAD ESE was

designed to address more than just the improved access to and quality of ECD services as its core objective. It seeks to be financially sustainable and independent, drawing on local community buy-in, the efficient use of development resources and the results and impact of AEAC interventions as evidence of good value for money. The project additionally builds solidarity links and strengthens relationships across diverse Cambodian societal groups for social cohesion. This ECD model provides a scalable opportunity for communities to access sustainable holistic ECD services in support of the RGC vision. Together with the iLEAD International School, this model exploring new avenues for economically viable solutions to providing high quality ECD services to the children of Cambodia.

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# Early Childhood Development Interventions and their Potential to Reduce Childhood Fatality and Injury from Unexploded Ordnance in Southeast Asia

**Authors:**

**Ms. KATHRYN MOORE**

## Introduction

In 2013, in 39 states and three territories, children represented 46% of all explosive remnants of war (ERW) casualties despite landmines being the sixth-most preventable cause of death of children (Handicap International 2015; Mapp 2011). Reports have noted that decades after wars in Southeast Asia subsided, landmines remain a leading cause of injury in countries such as Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar with children being the most vulnerable group to casualties or injuries from unexploded ordnance (UXO) (UNICEF 2003; Hunt 2013; Mapp 2011; as cited in Detels, Sullivan, & Tan 2012).

Children are particularly vulnerable to mortality or disability caused by UXOs. There are a number of explanations for this vulnerability. Families in lower- and middle-income countries rely on children to collect scrap metal as a source of income. Children often have to help with household chores such as collecting firewood, harvesting crops, and herding animals and are unable to read signs posted where UXO dangers have been documented. Young children are sometimes left unattended when parents or caregivers conduct livelihood activities or are left under the care of older children. Young children have a natural curiosity to shiny UXOs which may resemble small toys (Hunt 2013, Mapp 2011, UNICEF 2003).

It is clear that UXOs still pose a grave threat to the safety, security and overall wellbeing of young children and their families. This article presents findings from a literature review examining Mine Risk Education (MRE) and Early Childhood Development (ECD) interventions in Southeast Asia and if and how these interventions have been identified as opportunities to provide quality learning and development opportunities for young children, birth to age eight, as well as

protective and preventive spaces to reduce childhood mortality from UXOs.

## Findings suggest:

- there are limited MRE interventions which specifically target young children between birth and eight years old,
- current MRE and education programmes are integrated and there is limited research on the effectiveness of these integrated programmes;
- there are no studies making rigorous linkages between ECD and MRE interventions as a combined approach (refer to the definition below of combined programs) to reduce childhood mortality in UXO-contaminated areas, and
- there are no ECD nor MRE programmes in Southeast Asia specifically designed and implemented to posit ECD and MRE interventions as a combined, preventative intervention to reduce childhood mortality in highly contaminated UXO areas.

Recommendations for future research and interventionist approaches are outlined at the end of the article.

## Definition of Terms Used

Early Childhood Development (ECD) has been internationally accepted as the development process from birth to eight or nine years old by international organizations and governments (Britto, Engle, & Super 2013). ECD interventions are defined in this paper holistically (including health, nutrition, protection, care and education), with formal and non-formal approaches and environmental settings considered (Britto, Engle, & Super 2013).

Mine Risk Education (MRE) refers to educational activities aimed at reducing risks of injury or casualties from mines and UXOs through awareness raising and behavior change activities including public-information campaigns, education, and training in a variety of formal and non-

formal spaces (United Nations IMAS 2005).

Combined services, defined by ECD policy expert Van Ravens, are situations where “some/many/all children have access to multiple services, but without these services being integrated. Two or more services come together in one child, but they are delivered as part of distinct programs and policies, and usually by distinct providers” (Van Ravens 2015). Combined services’ definition emerged as a response to states’ inability to successfully integrate ECD interventions in an efficient way as observed by dramatic delays in integrated policies’ endorsement and significant failures in policy implementation (Van Ravens 2015). In this paper, as in the case of Van Ravens definition, combined services are defined as services provided by distinct providers (i.e. MRE interventions by MRE professionals and ECD interventions by ECD professionals). Integrated services, on the other hand, are services whereby distinct programs are conducted by the same provider (i.e. MRE activities/programming conducted by teachers in a school-based setting).

## Research Questions, Methods, Limitations & Analysis

Guiding research questions were the following:

- Are formal and non-formal ECD interventions recognized as specific mechanisms for reducing early childhood fatality (children between ages of birth to eight) from ERW/UXOs? If so, how?
- Do current MRE interventions target early childhood years from the age of birth to eight? If so, how? If not, why not?
- What type of ECD and MRE programmes currently exist: integrated programmes, combined programmes, and/or separated programmes?
- What are the challenges in implementing current ECD and MRE interventions (integrated programming, combined programming and/or separate

programming) in Southeast Asia? The review conducted for the purposes of this article was a “rapid literature review” (RLR) (Ganann, Ciliska, & Thomas 2010). The RLR strategy, conducted over a 4-week period employed a) searching online, open-source search engines and specialist websites and b) asking personal contacts, authors and experts in the field. Omitting electronic databases and information hand-selected from academic journals, where access is limited to subscription holders, is a limitation of the RLR, though this was intentional to reflect the resources which grassroots development practitioners and

government officials typically have access. The main search terms employed were the following: ECD and MRE. Additional terms searched included: ECD programs, Southeast Asia, MRE programs, landmines, out of school children, children with disabilities, young children, preschool-aged children, families affected by UXOs, communities affected by UXOs, UXOs, ERW, preschool programs, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Myanmar. Sources had to come from a formally published source and had to be dated within the past fifteen years. A third criteria was limiting sources to those originating

in Southeast Asia, however due to limited resources, the review was expanded to consider sources from other regions.

A total of thirteen sources were reviewed. The sources included evaluation reports of MRE programs, mapping reports and/or evaluations of multi-country ECD interventions in the region, MRE toolkits for practitioners, journal articles in MRE open-access academic journals, project profile documents, and communications publications from international organizations. Please refer to Table 1 below for a complete source list.

**Table 1: MRE & ECD Sources Reviewed as Part of Rapid Literature Review**

No.	Source Title* <small>*Note: for complete references, please refer to the reference list at the end of the article</small>	Description of Source	Type of Program(s)	Explicit Mention of ECD Interventions or Interventions for Children Ages 0-8	Explicit Mention of MRE Interventions
1	Mine Risk Education (MRE) Circus	Single-Country Project Profile	Integrated MRE & Life Skills Programming	No	Yes
2	Crisis Education Project Profile: Mine Risk Education for Children (MREC)	Single-Country Project Profile	Integrated MRE & Education Programming	No	Yes
3	Challenges of Mine Awareness Education for Children in Afghanistan	Single-Country Open-Access Academic Journal	Integrated MRE and Education, Health, and Housing Programming	No	Yes
4	Early Childhood Education and Education in Emergencies	Multi-Country Project Profile	Integrated MRE and ECD Programming	Yes	Yes
5	Fulfilling Child Rights through Early Childhood Development	Regional Working Paper	ECD Programming	Yes	No
6	An Evaluation of Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes in Cambodia	Single-Country Evaluation Report	ECD Programming	Yes	No
7	Child-to-Child Trust: A Child-Oriented Approach to Landmine Education	Multi-Context Open-Access Academic Journal	Integrated MRE & Education Programming	No	Yes
8	Transforming Early Childhood Care and Education in the Insular Southeast Asia and Mekong Sub-Regions	Multi-Country Report	ECD Programming	Yes	No
9	Children killed and injured by landmines and unexploded ordinance in Eastern Ukraine	Single-Country News Note	Integrated MRE & Education Programming	No	Yes
10	Emergency Mine Risk Education Toolkit	General Practitioners Guidebook	Integrated MRE, Education, Life Skills, Emergencies and Livelihoods Programming	Yes	Yes
11	Impacts of Landmines on Children in the East Asia and Pacific Region	Regional Multi-Country Project Report	Integrated MRE & Education Programming	No	Yes
12	Mitigating the threat of UXO to children	Single-Country Profile	Integrated MRE & Education Programming	No	Yes
13	Landmine Monitor Report 2004: Toward a Mine-Free World	Multi-Country Advocacy Report	Integrated MRE & Education, General Mine Action Programs	No	Yes

Qualitative analysis was conducted by coding the sources garnered from the online search, identifying emerging themes and sub-themes.

**Findings**

**10 MRE-related sources mentioned integrating MRE & other social services’ programming, and 3 sources were specific to ECD interventions only**

Of the 13 sources, 10 were MRE-related and mentioned integrating MRE with other programs, namely education (refer to Table 1 Items No. 1-4, 7, 9-13). Two of the ten MRE-related sources included additional integrated programmes with their MRE and education

programming, including life skills (Table 1 Item 1 &10), health and housing (Table 1 Item 3), and general mine action (Table 1 Item 13). Three sources (Table 1 Items No. 5, 6, and 8) were only specific to ECD interventions with no mention of integrated nor combined

MRE interventions; these interventions may be classified as separate ECD interventions. Only one source, and ECD source, was an evaluation report (Table 1 Item 6) suggesting that there are limited, rigorous evaluations conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of integrated MRE interventions. Sources on MRE and ECD interventions did not study the link between ECD and MRE interventions for achieving their respective intervention protection aims.

**Limited MRE interventions focus on young children globally, with none specifically targeting messages and activities for young children birth to age 8 and their caregivers in Southeast Asia.**

Of the thirteen sources, only two gave specific information on addressing young children's MRE needs (ISSA No Date; UNICEF 2008). Only one of these two interventions was geared towards direct integrated MRE and ECD-related service provision through the distribution of general MRE kits to preschools (ISSA No Date). These kits were limited in their ability to provide quality MRE programming as they were not explicitly designed for preschool-age children; teachers were not trained well enough to deliver the MRE messages and only schools held only one session over a one-year period (ISSA No Date). These integrated MRE and ECD issues align with challenges Van Ravens previously identified related with other types of integrated ECD interventions (Van Ravens 2015). Several MRE-related sources targeted children generally (refer to Table 1 Items No. 1-3, 7, 9 & 11-13), and four sources had guidance or evidence from programming targeting out-of-school children (OOSC) (Refer to Table 1 Items No. 1, 3, 10, & 13).

**ECD Programs in SE Asia do not specifically include MRE as part of their protection nor education interventions.**

One Southeast Asia single-country and two Southeast Asia multi-country ECD interventions' reports included information on the need for holistic interventions, including protection (Pearson & Sim 2013; Rao 2007; UNESCO 2007). However, these reports did not explicitly mention ERW risks or MRE interventions as part of their holistic approach (Pearson & Sim 2013; Rao 2007; UNESCO 2007). The health risks cited most commonly were related to malnutrition and stunting (Pearson & Sim 2013; Rao 2007; UNESCO 2007).

**Challenges of MRE and ECD programs are similar.**

Challenges included limited financing; need for prioritization on government and development agendas; need for further research and need for further expansion to the most remote, marginalized communities.

**Recommendations for Future Research and Proposed Interventions**

There has been limited research conducted on the benefits from attending integrated ECD and MRE programs globally. More advocacy for funding mobilization and research is needed to determine if integrating MRE and ECD or combining MRE and ECD programs garner the same or varying benefits for children and their families (UNICEF 2013; UNICEF 2003). My recommendations below outline the way forward:

**1) Research is needed to determine if combined MRE and education interventions (for both early childhood stages of a child's life and for older children) are more effective than current, limited integrated approaches**

The integrated, school-based program, whereby teachers were trained to deliver MRE messages in the classroom to children through preschool kits, was determined problematic (ISSA No Date). While teachers have the potential to be one stakeholder for delivering MRE interventions, the results highlight the need for combined programs per policy expert Jan Van Ravens' definition (Van Ravens 2015). In combined programs, teachers are merely one stakeholder for delivering MRE interventions. If utilizing a combined approach, MRE experts would take a broader approach to delivering MRE messages within and outside educational settings, working alongside other service providers such as teachers. In sum, additional research is needed on how MRE service providers may partner with schools and other community-based programs, working alongside formal and non-formal service providers, to deliver interventions. Research is needed to determine if these combined programs are more effective than current, integrated approaches that rely on non-MRE professionals becoming trained MRE providers and delivering MRE services.

**2) Advocate to Government, Development Partner Service Providers, and UXO Clearance Advocacy Groups to Mobilize Funding for the Designing, Piloting and Evaluation of Combined and Integrated MRE and ECD Programs in Heavily Contaminated Communities to Determine Effectiveness**

Funding is limited in the MRE and ECD sectors in Southeast Asia (Pearson & Sim 2013; Rao & Pearson 2007; UNESCO 2007; LandMine and Cluster Munition Monitor 2014). Champions in government must be identified to take these causes to higher-levels to mobilize funds. Funds are needed to design, pilot and evaluate combined and integrated programs to determine their respective potential for providing equitable, quality services and decreasing fatalities is a reality.

**3) Develop MRE Messages Specifically Targeting Young Children Birth to Age Eight and Their Caregivers**

This is a significant need as demonstrated through the review and via personal communication with an NGO staff from the region supporting MRE efforts. The NGO staff member noted that MRE efforts aim to reach all stakeholders, including children and caregivers in the community; parents are more generally targeted with protection messages through dramas, songs/music and publications (personal communication, 2015). Parents/caregivers accept the risks as "a way of life" (personal communication, 2015).

- Combined MRE and ECD interventions designed to reach the household or small group level, such as home visits or ECD group parenting sessions by both MRE and ECD service providers, offer an opportunity for household level behavior change efforts which could be more effective in encouraging parents/caregivers behavior change than community-wide interventions.
- Non-formal ECD programs, such as home visits, would give MRE service provider organizations a space to implement MRE interventions and to closely monitor and evaluate behavior change at the household-level to determine which messages and activities are most effective for young children's and caretakers' behavior change. The messages found effective at the

household-level could be scaled up and included in community-level and national MRE efforts.

- The cost-benefit of household level MRE interventions, combined with ECD interventions, should be determined.

**4) Conduct Further Research on Health, Protection, and Economic Benefits of Combined and Integrated ECD and MRE Programs**

- Combined and Integrated ECD and MRE programs would give children a safe place for supervised learning and play, thus limiting the time young children are left unattended, time which puts this age group at significant risks from ERW. Research is needed on whether this increased protection and decreased time left unattended decreases UXO accidents or fatalities amongst young children.
- Families could potentially gain economic benefits if parents were trained as community preschool facilitators and received compensation to serve in this capacity. Because parents would be paid trainers, they would have a source of income, which may decrease the need for themselves or their children to conduct risky behavior (i.e. searching for scrap metal).
- Research would then be needed to determine if parents being paid as ECD service providers would reduce death or injury rates related with UXO accidents.

**5) Conduct Further Research on the Potential of Increased Social Cohesion as a Result of Combined ECD and MRE Programs**

- The review did not yield sufficient information on the disaggregated participation of men, women, girls and boys, and children/persons with disabilities in current MRE and ECD interventions in Southeast Asia. Communication with an NGO staff in the region working on MRE noted that the percentage of adults, particularly women, with knowledge on how to prevent landmine accidents is very low (personal communication, 2015).
- A proposed theory of change could be: providing combined MRE and ECD programs, in an inclusive way engaging men, women, and persons with disabilities, is proposed to increase access to basic services, protect citizens from mine-related risks, leading to a more cohesive society.
- The more parents are actively involved,

including parents from marginalized groups, it is proposed that ECD and MRE interventions would have a greater impact. Further research would be needed to determine how inclusion affects the success of combined interventions.

- Further research is also needed to determine how to effectively engage parents and persons with disabilities, both men and women, in serving as active participants in the provision of ECD services and mine risk prevention.

**Conclusion**

The findings, that existing interventions do not explicitly link MRE and ECD interventions, is a significant first step to advocate for the need for more research and piloting combined and integrated interventions to determine their respective effectiveness. These interventions and research may be designed by Southeast Asian governments, with development partners, in order for young children and their families to have increased access to both Mine Risk Education (MRE) and high quality ECD opportunities. The interventions have the potential to reduce childhood mortality, the number of children living with disabilities, decrease healthcare costs paid to victims of UXO accidents over their lifetime, and increase social cohesion in Southeast Asia.

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# Joining Forces to Manage Crisis Situations among Children Through Interactive Storytelling & Play

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## Introduction

Ways to link theory to practice are an endless challenge to educators. Classroom experiences should center on real experiences that allow construction of knowledge that address social scenarios. Dewey highlighted that education is “a process of living and not a preparation for future living” (Dewey, 1897, p. 77). Learning is more meaningful when educational experiences are offered in ways that are relevant to children’s daily life. Mentoring pre-service and in-service early childhood education teachers is also more effective when learning is offered through relevant everyday experiences.

## Background

The Philippines has experienced a series of natural disasters in the past several years and the consequences of these have had a significant impact on society. In times of catastrophies of a great magnitude, efforts of national and international agencies are not enough. Young children are not spared and the impact of these situations may leave trauma that may take a lifetime to heal. It is within this context that this paper aims to present how tertiary level classes at the College of Education in the national state university were challenged to help manage crisis situations among young children in three separate instances. It illustrates how an outreach project, which initially started as a class activity, evolved into one, which tapped into various forces that collaborated to address the needs of young learners.

## Getting Armed with Tools for the Outreach Project

In the three scenarios that are presented in this paper, it is evident that the college students’ willingness to respond to the needs of children affected by typhoons was not enough. Knowledge and skills on how to deal with victims in such crises are necessary. Thus, prior to each outreach project, a one-day seminar on critical incident stress management (CISM) was offered by counseling experts in the college. Students

were instructed in a range of issues including strategies in encouraging victim response, providing appropriate reactions and acknowledgement of their feelings. Students were introduced to psychological debriefing through instruction (PDI). The experts in the seminar identified PDI as the most appropriate strategy given young children were the target of their planned intervention.

## Translating Theory into Practice

College students enrolled in a foundation course on teaching young children planned and delivered three separate PDI sessions. Their course topics on external factors affecting children, developmentally appropriate practice, and children with special needs were viewed as directly related to the situation. Understanding of the theories learned in class was transformed into real-life applications. Crafting learning experiences for the PDI meant using the knowledge of the characteristics and needs of children and responding in a way that is respectful of their culture (Lindon, 2012). This is the core of developmentally appropriate practice. Emphasis was on the integration of activities that were built from children’s interests to create meaningful learning (Getswicki, 2014). The power of storybooks and its effect in the lives of children was acknowledged. Play was also seen as the avenue through which children learn (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). Thus, this paper presents the processes by which interactive story sharing and play were designed for each PDI session.

## Preparation and Delivery of the PDI A Class Outreach Project

A state of national calamity was declared in September 2009 across the country after super typhoon Ondoy (international codename Ketsana) affected over 990,000 families in 23 provinces (“By the Numbers,” 2013). The task of the tertiary classes on early childhood education was to search for an appropriate resource that could capture the realities of the victims and use this as a springboard to help children process the event and their experiences. Relevance of the activities to the event came in many forms. One class selected a story of a young boy who lost a dear friend in the flood after he tried to save a valued possession. A big book was prepared for the grandma storyteller who was named Lola Onday (after the typhoon). A show was planned featuring stick puppets since these were seen as non-threatening and inviting to children.

Another class created a story about children waking up to find rising floodwater in their homes. The narrator invited the children to join in the unraveling of the story by having them act out the events during the presentation. Indigenous musical instruments were used during the interactive delivery of the story.

Art activities followed where the children depicted their experience during the heavy rain and floods. With around eight children in a group, each child talked about his/her artwork and shared his/her experience. It was cathartic for the children as they found an avenue to express their feelings. Knowledge from the seminar on CISM



*A relay game during the PDI*

became useful. College students worked in pairs to facilitate each group sharing.

This was followed by a play session. The structured play activities consisted of relay games such as “Going Out on a Stormy Day” with umbrellas as props or guessing typhoon-related words while clues were given. The objective of the play activities was to create new and positive associations with their typhoon experience. The session ended with the provision of school supplies and food. The relief goods were from the pupils of some graduate students, who were teachers as well. All throughout the session, there were songs and rhymes. The PDI sessions, which revolved around the theme of rainy weather, were delivered to primary level children in two public schools in nearby communities.

### Collaboration with other Institutions

The world’s deadliest tropical storm in December 2011, Sendong (international codename Washi), registered a death toll of over 1,266 in 13 regions in the Philippines (“Final Report on the Effects,” 2012). Iligan city in the Northern Mindanao region was one of the most severely damaged areas with some villages totally wiped out. A university in Iligan sought assistance from our college.

Since our team was deployed in the site two months after the incident, the objective of the PDI did not focus on managing the immediate consequences of the typhoon. Rather, it focused on how children can help minimize the impact of similar events in the future. Teachers from the Reading, Early Grades, Language, and Art Education areas of our college collaborated to develop the content of the PDI. The agreed themes were care for the environment and teamwork since reports showed that the high casualty rate from the typhoon was partly due to illegal logging in the area. The storybook chosen for this purpose captured how the practices of three children ruined their environment. Through a fairy’s power, they experienced what such a world would be like in the future. In the end, the characters became stewards of the earth instead. Since a puppet show was the mode of delivery, the teachers developed a script based on this story.

A graduate student created four puppets for the story. The Art Education students worked on the backdrop for the puppet show. Puppets show rehearsals were undertaken. The play session consisted of games and songs that revolved around watering plants and gathering and segregating trash that were

scattered in the venue.

Prior to the delivery of PDI in Iligan, our college organized a benefit seminar for schools affected by typhoon Sendong. Four faculty members with teaching excellence awards, shared their expertise on the theme “Living up to the Teacher’s Diverse Roles: Mentoring by the Experts”.

With the success of the seminar, the outreach team flew to Iligan. The puppet show was presented in a relocation site using an improvised stage. A local teacher was tapped to narrate the story in Cebuano, which was the language of the children. The puppet show and interaction with the puppets was a good break for the children who had been in the relocation site for over two months.

It was also the goal of this outreach project to empower the people in the area to deliver the PDI to as many children as possible even after the departure of the outreach team. Thus, a half-day capability-building seminar was held for the faculty and tertiary level Education students of the partner university and the public elementary school teachers in the area. Topics centered on crisis management strategies and an actual demonstration of the PDI session flow. The tertiary students from the partner university translated the PDI guide to Cebuano and delivered it to two kindergarten classes in a public school while our team served as support during the session.

The resources for the PDI were turned over to the Department of Education so that these could benefit many children. The materials included the storybook, the PDI session guide, and the set of puppets. It was agreed that these would be made available to teachers who decide to use the resources.

### Partnership with a Service-oriented Group

Fierce and heavy southwest monsoon rains in August 2012 affected 934,285 families in seven regions in the country (“By the Numbers”, 2013). While the same theme and story for the PDI in Iligan was used in this instance, the challenge faced was the creation of a new set of puppets for the outreach project. To address this, the graduate student who made the puppets during the Iligan outreach conducted a hands-on session with the tertiary students. Preparation for the PDI centered primarily on puppet making, rehearsals for the puppet show, planning play activities, and creation of songs that centered on the theme. Games came in the form of “The flood is rising, group yourself into 5’s...” or “The rain is pouring, let’s take shelter by 4’s...(with

newspapers used as shelters), among others. Partnership with a service-oriented organization and donations of pupils from a private school allowed the provision of snacks, a storybook, vitamin supplements, and relief goods to three primary classes in a nearby public school. It was interesting how the children excitedly engaged in reading the book the moment it was handed to them. It was the same picture book used in the puppet show. The book served as a reminder that even young children could take small actions to care for the environment.

### Lessons Learned

These experiences in providing PDI to manage crisis situations among young children captured how essential understandings from a tertiary course were transformed to real-life applications. Developmentally appropriate activities were important elements of the PDI. These outreach programs were undertaken through the synergy of different forces in the child’s microsystem and exosystem. Impact of the PDIs was evident at two levels: the children beneficiaries and the college students. Their experiences and their social contexts became meaningful learning opportunities. The journal entry of a college volunteer reflected it all: “Singing and playing released the children’s ever present inner power and liveliness as if they did not get weary of their past misfortune. Laughter, excitement, enthusiasm, vigor, and hope were shared – qualities that no mishap and disaster can ever whip. They gave an impression that they are in another place and time. Their depiction of the past typhoon encounter was liberated; but the recounting of the events were in some way, difficult. Nonetheless, the optimism and delight of the present were gleaming. The outreach project was truly a rewarding experience. It ended with an internalized knowledge - lessons that cannot be learned or discovered in the four walls of a classroom.”

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Photos that accompany the paper in the publication:  
Note: Leonor Diaz, the author of the paper, personally took all the photos.

# Resilience through connectedness: A pathway to promote an equitable early childhood development in adverse contexts

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## Introduction

Increased adverse conditions of disasters, conflicts and war impact young children's lives creating an inequity in early childhood development in many parts of the world. Contextual risk factors such as poverty, political instability, lack of access to economic, health, welfare and psychosocial services for affected children and families may exacerbate adversity and inequity. Care, protection and education that are essential for children's development are seriously affected in adverse situations, resulting in negative effects on young children's survival, development and overall wellbeing (Garbarino, Kostelny, & Dubrow, 1991; Kamel, 2006).

Challenging the notion of children's vulnerability, research and practice based experiences from adverse contexts found that children can build resilience, which can help them to bounce back from the negative effects of adversity and to strive to develop and thrive (Masten & Narayan, 2012; Ungar, 2015). Social connectedness within family, school and community, as protective factors, can be instrumental in strengthening children's capacities and resilience (Boothby, Strang, & Wessells, 2006). By illustrating one child's life experiences drawn from a larger research that investigated young children's experiences of connectedness in a conflict affected context in Sri Lanka, this article demonstrates that strengthened social connectedness within family, education and community can be helpful in building young children's resilience and the capacity to flourish in adverse contexts.

## Connectedness

A review of empirical literature that focused on identifying key principals that can guide policy and interventions for those who are affected by disasters and conflicts concluded developing 'connectedness' among communities as vital in improving necessary skills and capacity in responding to the situations effectively (Hobfoll et al., 2007). Connectedness is defined as "social support and sustained attachments to loved ones and social groups" (Hobfoll et al., 2007, p. 296). 'Social connectedness' supports

a sense of acceptance, respect and self and collective efficacy (Hobfoll et al. 2007).

It is widely accepted that strengthening sustained attachment relationships and developing connectedness to the social world is highly important for children in adverse contexts (Betancourt & Khan, 2008; Dybdahl, 2001; Kostelny & Wessells, 2008; Paardekooper, De Jong, & Hermanns, 1999; Swick & Freeman, 2004). Young children's connections to the social world enhance a sense of belonging, which is "about relating to people and places, to beliefs and ideas" (p.3) and understanding the ways of life (Woodhead & Brooker, 2008). Connectedness supports children to feel protected, cared for and accepted, which in-turn can be instrumental in building resilience and coping skills among children who are affected by various adversities. However, in adverse situations social networks and supportive social structures are often affected.

## The study

The child's case study discussed in this article is drawn from a doctoral research that was conducted in a conflict affected, rebuilding context, (Malgama - a pseudonym), in Eastern Sri Lanka (Hettitantri, in preparation). This research was aimed at investigating young children's lived experiences within their family, school and the wider community in the conflict affected context. The research used an ecological framework and investigated diverse perspectives about children's lived experiences; thus young children (as the key research participants), caregivers, community leaders and service providers were included as research participants. The field study was conducted four years after the end of the armed conflict. The ethics approvals for conducting this study were obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Human Sciences, Macquarie University, Australia.

## The research context

Drawing on the findings from the larger study, one child participant's experiences of social connectedness are presented, situated within a post conflict context. Sri Lanka experienced a prolonged armed conflict for 26 years, which ended after an internal war in 2009. Due to the ongoing conflict, Malgama (the research context) has been abandoned nearly for two decades and

the communities were internally displaced. After ending the armed conflict in the Eastern province in Sri Lanka, the communities were returning and resettling in Malgama, rebuilding infrastructure and developing social systems and networks. Government and non-government organisations have been extending various support and services including; infrastructure, livelihood, housing, health and education for children and families since their return and resettlement. Although more improvement is needed, at the time this field study was conducted, basic infrastructure, health, education and livelihood (mainly agrarian) had been established. The wild elephants' arrivals to the village was identified as one of the major environmental risks in Malgama. The families who returned or resettled, because of their prolonged displacement, were new to both the social and physical environment in Malgama. Most of the child-participants who involved in this research had few relatives in this village. This is the context where one child's experiences of connectedness are unfolded.

## Child's case study: Ahil

Ahil (a pseudonym) is a five years old boy who was in grade one in school in Malgama. Ahil participated in this study through individual interviews, drawings and narratives.

Ahil was living with his nuclear family; mother, father, elder brother and an infant sister. Due to the impact of conflict, historically, Ahil's family had been displaced and lived in temporary residences for a prolonged period of time. Similar to other families, Ahil's family has permanently resettled in Malgama 3 years ago. Ahil, with his family, lived in a temporarily built small house. Malgama's physical and social environment was new to Ahil and his family. As reported, they did not have close relatives in Malgama.

Ahil and his baby sister suffered from a skin disease since birth, for which the medical treatments were taken from the nearest public hospital. Ahil's father was disabled due to polio disease and later as a result of a wild elephant's attack during their resettlement period in Malgama. Therefore his mother had to undertake multiple roles and responsibilities in taking care of the family. In addition, she was selling firewood to earn an income.

Ahil's narratives included the ways his mother

was attending his needs; health and nutrition (cooking, feeding, taking him to hospital for treatments), being available for emotional support (when scared of something Ahil sought protection from his mother), supporting his education (taking him to school, providing material needs), and encouraging his agency (providing the opportunity for participation – for example, in this research).

Despite his physical condition and the difficult family condition, Ahil was attending school (with some inconsistency). Similar to other young children from Ahil's school who were involved in this study, it was noted that Ahil owned a school bag, uniforms and some stationary that were necessary for schooling. He mentioned schooling, studying and playing with peers as part of his daily routine. At the school, Ahil was accepted and included without discrimination. Ahil's narratives about his friends and teachers showed that he enjoyed being with them. He mentioned his friends at school and conveyed the idea that he liked playing with them. During the research process at school, I noted Ahil as a happy and engaged child, who interacted and played with his friends and participated in research activities with confidence. Importantly, Ahil was attending to the Children's Club/Group facilitated by a non-government organisation in Malgama building his own social network.

Risk factors of disability, children's sickness, limited livelihood options and impoverishment seems to have affected Ahil and his family's wellbeing. However, the social networks (formal and informal) were the sources of support for Ahil's family. The government and non-government organisations, as Ahil's mother reported, have extended support including education, health, Samurdhi (financial support for low income families) and funds for housing. Most importantly, the village community has been a protective factor, providing various support to Ahil's family. The village community has been providing emotional (through empathetic understanding, accepting and inclusion), material (for example, food, clothing), and financial support (costs for travelling to hospital) to Ahil's family within their limited capacities.

## Discussion

Ahil's narratives presented above suggested that he has developed connectedness within his family, his school and the community. Ahil's experiences demonstrated three processes that were instrumental in developing and strengthening social connectedness. Those are; 1) love and care within family, 2)

opportunities for education, friendships and participation at school, and 3) supportive social networks within his community.

Ahil's experiences within his family, and in particular with his mother, suggested that he received appropriate affection and care and he felt connected. His mother was attending his material, physical and emotional needs and was strongly visible in every aspect of his life. Ahil's interviews and narratives mostly included experiences that are attached to his mother and family. Ahil identified his mother as the person he liked most. Ahil's experiences included play with his elder brother. Ahil could contribute to family, as narrated, by fetching water and watering plants in their home garden. Ahil expressed his willingness to take care of his incapacitated father.

Ahil was connected to his school and peers through the opportunity for education, play and participation. His narratives conveyed that he perceived school as a safe environment. It was, as Ahil mentioned, his other favourite place. The school was the place for hope and support to thrive. Ahil was comfortable in participating in this research at school. It was noted that he enjoyed play and friendships with peers at school.

Ahil's experiences included a number of adversities; poverty, disability, sickness, displacement and resettlement and environmental risks. However, the social support networks within community have attended Ahil and his family's needs. Therefore, despite these adversities, Ahil demonstrated resilience, capacity and self-esteem. One of his narratives was that he could look after his father and help with household chores (by fetching water and washing pots) during his mother's absence. Ahil was attending school; engaged happy and active at school. He showed confidence in his research participation and play at school. Despite his sickness, Ahil was interacting with teachers and his peers at school with confidence.

## Conclusion

Within children's rights framework, even young children are identified as a distinct social group with their own rights, capacities and agency. Challenging the notion of vulnerability, in adverse situations, children demonstrate their ability to cope with the situations. One child's experiences, as presented in this article, demonstrate that sustained and caring relationships within family, education and community play an

important role in building children's social connectedness and resilience. In this conflict affected context, connectedness and resilience were supported through love and care, acceptance and inclusion within family, school and community. The policy and practice should aim to strengthen; a) caregivers' capacities and resources, b) establish inclusive and supportive social networks, and c) provide equal opportunity for quality early childhood education within adverse contexts. When these protective factors within family, school and community are established, even in adverse situations, young children will gain an equal opportunity to develop and flourish.

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# Significance of adult-child interaction for promoting language and literacy skills in early years: The Indian context

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Early childhood educational programmes play a significant role in a child's life as they provide appropriate stimulation to young children at a 'critical' stage of their life and help them develop their full potential (Sylva, et al., 2010). The positive impact of early childhood education is observed on different outcomes in children, including language and literacy development among children. Although, language acquisition starts even before infants can speak their first word, it is strengthened during the early childhood years. Language and literacy skills acquired during the early years help children to communicate, build relationships with others and enable them to make sense of the world around them and are also crucial to young children's overall development. Early language and literacy experiences, such as hearing the sounds of language, listening/reading of stories lay pathways in the brain that facilitate later learning (Dickinson and Neuman, 2007; Dickinson and Porche, 2011). Language stimulation during early years helps the child in later school years also (Massey, 2004; Neuman, 2004).

## Theoretical orientation to language learning

The development of language and literacy skills in children has been explained by 'behaviourist' theories and 'nativist' theories (Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2013). However, 'Cognitive' and 'social interaction' theories by Piaget (1959) and Vygotsky (1978) provide a different approach to understanding the development of language and literacy skills among children. These learning theories are based on the principle that knowledge

is constructed by the child over time and is based on experiences and interactions of the young children with their environment. The exchanges between children and their social environments are considered extremely important. Language acquisition is believed to occur in the context of social interactions of children and is seen as a component of 'social practice'. Engaging children in meaningful experiences also influences the development of language and literacy skills of children. This conceptual framework acknowledges the social and cultural context of children's language learning and recognizes the significance of children's diverse backgrounds and the richness of the language and literacy knowledge they bring.

## Adult-child interaction

Many researchers have identified adult-child interactions and dialogue as the main component influencing learning language in early years (Hoff, 2004; Mashburn et al., 2008; Zimmerman et al., 2009). Aspects of adult-child interactions that help in promoting language and literacy skills among children include the interactive style of the adult's response to children's communicative attempts. Directive responding styles, including trying to control children's communication, have been reported to be negatively related to children's language and literacy development in Head Start classrooms (Dickinson, Darrow & Tinubu, 2008). Extended conversations with children to promote their language and literacy development and the role of dialogue for learning have been highlighted as useful strategies (Henry & Pianta, 2011). Use of effective teacher talk strategies (Sylva et al., 2010; Chen & Kim, 2014) in the development of more complex language skills is also important. 'Extending', 'Labeling' and 'Open Questioning' are among the strategies which educators can use to promote

language and literacy development in children (Girolamelto and Weitzman, 2003). Use of these strategies and the quality of interactional style of teachers are highly effective for language and literacy development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

## Background

All children should be provided with quality early childhood experiences as there is strong and compelling evidence that links the quality of language and literacy experiences with school readiness skills, school achievement and overall development (Massey, 2004; Zimmerman et al., 2009; Chen & Kim, 2014). Yet these experiences continue to elude many young children in the Indian context, particularly children from the disadvantaged background. Concern has often been expressed on the 'functional literacy' of the children who complete primary education as quality of education experienced by children in the Indian schools is extremely insufficient to develop and master basic literacy skills (Bajpai, Sachs and Volavka, 2005). Lack of basic literacy skills among young Indian children have been reported by many studies across the country (Aggarwal, 2000; Grover and Sing, 2002; Leclercq, 2003 and Banerji, 2003). The low quality of education has an adverse impact on the language learning of children.

Given the importance of adult-child interaction on development of language and literacy skills of children, it is critical to examine the nature and quality of these interactions in the Indian context. The present study was conducted in two schools of Delhi, a pre-primary school and a primary school. Students in both the schools belonged to marginalised group as the schools catered to predominantly a low income Muslim population. The pre-primary classrooms catered to children in the age group of 3.5- 6 years, while the primary school admitted children from

six years onwards. Four pre-primary classrooms and four primary classrooms (grade I and II) were observed. Three hours of observation were conducted daily in one classroom for a period of five days amounting to a total of 120 hours of observation. To render the study ethical, the rights to anonymity and confidentiality of children and teachers were observed. Informed consent from school principals and teachers were obtained.

The interaction of the teacher and children in the class was observed and recorded using an observation schedule developed for the study. The schedule identified opportunities provided to children for speaking and interacting with teachers, the teachers' instructional strategies and teachers' responses to children's interests, needs and queries.

## Findings

### 1. Opportunities for speaking:

Children in the primary classrooms were not provided many opportunities to speak. They were not encouraged to describe things/events or to communicate their needs and thoughts in the classroom. Although, children were allowed to ask questions related to their academic work, opportunities to engage in other discussions with teachers were not observed. Teachers were not observed to use extended conversation in the primary classrooms. Following is an example of limited opportunities for conversation in the primary classrooms.

Observation 1-During one Math period in grade two the teacher explained the meaning and use of greater than, less than and equal to (<, >, =) signs. Children were not allowed to talk or ask questions while she was explaining the concept. She then wrote the numbers 200- 250 on the blackboard. Children were asked to read the numbers aloud as a group from the blackboard and then copy them in their notebooks. Teacher then asked the children to submit their

notebooks and put their head down after finishing their work. Teacher emphasised there should be no talking in the class. The class monitor was asked to maintain 'discipline' in the class and ensure that no child talks to their peers.

As is evident, the interaction of teacher with her children was limited to disciplining and providing instructions for completing academic work by the children.

### 2. Instructional strategies:

Efforts to provide detailed instructions to promote children's understanding were observed in the pre-primary classrooms as teachers provided clear and detailed instructions on things to be kept in mind while doing written work e.g.: start the new work on a new page, draw the picture in front of the letter, use of margins and so on. Teachers also kept moving around the classroom to supervise children's written work. In contrast, primary teachers were observed to provide limited verbal instructions.

### 3. Making learning meaningful for children:

Efforts made by the primary teacher to integrate language and literacy instruction with real-life experiences of children were limited. Teachers were not observed to support their instructions with demonstrations of real objects or pictures of familiar objects in the classrooms. Discussions of children's real-life experiences were also not encouraged. Play activities, where children could assimilate and apply their language and literacy learning in the real-life experiences, were not included as part of curriculum planning. In contrast, teachers in pre-primary classrooms made use of pictures and discussions of real-life experiences to help children better understand the class activity. Teachers also showed real life objects while referring to them in the classroom.

A pre-primary teacher prepared a sample worksheet for demonstration and displayed it in the class to help the children. Another teacher was observed to have a detailed discussion and use the blackboard to demonstrate and explain the concept before distributing the worksheets to the children.

### 4. Building positive relationships between teachers and children:

The focus of adult-child interactions in primary classrooms was on teaching the concept and giving the children written work to be copied from the blackboard. Teachers in the primary classrooms were not observed to engage in many social conversations with the children during arrival, dispersal or eating breaks. Teachers did not indulge in, or encourage, extended conversations with children. The main focus was to provide instructions related to the academic work and help children complete their class work. Moreover, few events of positive reinforcement to motivate or encourage children were observed being used by the teachers.

In contrast, pre-primary teachers were observed to engage in frequent social conversations with the children during eating break, arrival and dispersal of children. Children and teachers were also observed to engage in frequent joint laughter especially during recitation of rhymes. Teachers engaged in social conversations with children during the lunch break and asked questions like 'what have you got for lunch today? Do you like this dish? Which is your favourite fruit?'

Despite the differences in teaching styles observed between pre-primary and primary teachers, there were also differences observed between some of the primary teachers themselves.

Observation 2-Detailed instructions were given by the English teacher in a grade one classroom before the children started their work. The teacher also provided a brief introduction of what they were going to do in the class. Once the work was

finished children were given a positive feedback and were asked to open their textbooks and read the chapter.

Observation 3-An English teacher in grade two explained the use of question marks and full stops to the class. She explained the concepts using flash cards which could be stuck on to the board. After explaining the concept, the teacher wrote a few sentences on the blackboard and asked the students to verbally put a question mark (?) or a full stop (.) after the written sentences. The majority of the children participated in this activity. Children were also asked to clap for the child who gave a correct answer while mistakes made by the children were politely corrected by the teacher. Extended conversation between the teacher and children was also observed during this session. This was followed by a reading activity where personal feedback was given to the children to improve their reading. The same teacher continued the class after lunch and played a game on the use of question marks and full stops in the class. The class was divided in two teams. Sentences were written on sheets of paper brought by the teacher in the class and distributed among children in groups of two. Children had to read the sentence and tell whether a question mark or a full stop should be used at the end of the sentence. Children participated in the activity with enthusiasm. A 'star' was also given to some students who gave the correct answer.

### Concluding Remarks

Literacy development is not just a matter of learning a set of technical skills. It is a purposeful activity involving children in ways of making, interpreting and communicating meaning with written language (Neuman, Roskos, Wright, & Lenhart, 2007). Therefore teachers' efforts to relate classroom learning to real-life experiences of children are important for language and literacy development. Although research indicates that sustained and shared talking time, involving open-ended questions to extend children's thinking and giving formative feedback during the activities are linked with good language and literacy outcomes among children (Raban, Brown, Care Rickards &

O'Connell, 2011), these opportunities for language and literacy were not provided to children in the schools observed.

In order to provide effective language and literacy opportunities to children, teachers need to plan small and large group activities like show-n-tell, individual and group recitations for children. Story books in different languages should be made available in classrooms and children can be encouraged to read them by allotting a shared or guided reading time with peers and teachers. Teacher-child or peer discussions on these stories will help in promoting comprehension, vocabulary and expression among children. In addition, teachers in primary classrooms need to engage in theme based planning across subjects and provide children with opportunities or experiences that integrate language and literacy activities with other subjects. Last but not the least; it is important that there is less emphasis on formal written work in both primary and pre-primary classrooms. Instead, fun activities that will help children experiment with reading and writing need to be planned and conducted e.g.: writing letters to their grandparents or friends, making a list or making birthday invites.

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## Expectations of 'readiness' in preschool children: a politically influenced socio-cultural phenomenon

By:

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Wisconsin USA Expectations of  
readiness in preschool children

### Introduction

The critical issues outlined in this paper deal with expectations of school readiness, assessments of readiness and the developmental appropriateness of preschool programmes across the globe. Through this paper I argue that ideologies of readiness and its assessment are socio-cultural perceptions highly influenced by socio-economy and politics at local and international levels. For example Arnold, Bartlett, Gowani and Merali, (2007) argue that in developing nations such as Nepal and India, perceptions of readiness among low income parents are based on positive experiences regarding their children's social development rather than their academic progress. On the contrary, perceptions of high-income parents are 'frequently oriented towards academic accomplishments' (p. 5). These conflicting views cultivate fertile grounds for further debate. Scott-Little (2011) states that the ECE curriculum in developed nations has evolved drastically and emphasis is laid on 'teaching academic skills' (p. 112). Developing nations are following these examples and preschools are simply "downward extensions" of primary schools where children have to endure rigorous academic curricula content (Shrestha, 2006).

Education in Nepal was not considered a priority until 1950 (KC Bahadur, 1956; Andersson and Lindkvist, 2000) and children were either sacralised or preserved as "economic resources" (Onta-Bhatta, 2001, p. 241). The declaration of democracy brought about a commitment to creating an educated nation and the state declared that all children should be educated (Shaha, 2001; Sinha, 2008). However, education was positioned as appropriate for children over the age of five and the responsibility for children under the age of five was placed with the family or the community. Other archived reports (for example (Shrestha and Aryal, 2008) demonstrate that ECE was initiated in 1950

*Several studies suggest that global and political attitudes towards early childhood education (ECE) are linked to equipping the child with a set of skills appropriate for further education and learning in an academic environment. This, according to economic experts, is a means to eradicate intergenerational poverty and to enhance the Human Development index (HDI). Scott-Little (2011) states school readiness is a hot issue debatable among a large cohort of parents, educators and researchers since the American government announced their first education goal "all children will start school ready to learn' in 1989" (p. 100). Likewise, Brown (2010) argues that policy makers in the United States are concerned with ECE and are continually looking "to improve students' academic readiness..." prior to entering school (p. 133). In identifying the pre-primary focus of the English ECEC system, David (2008) also positions the purpose of English ECEC as school preparation. Several Asian countries such as Nepal have similar ECE policies with objectives that increasingly mention the importance of preparing or readying four and five year old children for basic/primary education (Ministry Of Education and Sports, Nepal, 2009). Kamerman (2008) suggests that a narrow definition of readiness includes a set of academic skills that the children are expected to demonstrate before they enter school. These skills are thought to ensure progressive success in academic areas such as language, literacy and numeracy. A broader definition of readiness includes assessments of developmental areas such as physical development, social and emotional development, language, cognition, and general knowledge. Based on the economist 'mantra' of raising HDI, readiness in preschool children from urban hubs such as Kathmandu has been defined as structured and formal academic skill sets similar to the narrow definition mentioned above (Viruru, 2001; Shrestha, 2006; Chopra, 2012). These skills are assessed through standardized tests/entrance examinations especially when parents want their children admitted into mainstream/ popular schools (Sharma, 2013). This paper questions the concept of school readiness across nations and concludes by highlighting relevant critical issues.*

through a Montessori school but did not gain momentum until the late 1970s. During the later half of the 1980s and 90s the government actively engaged in community-based ECE programmes to run 'Shishu-Kakshyas' (child-care centres). Likewise, in neighbouring India, childhoods and children were not studied until the last three decades (Viruru, 2001; Kaul and Sankar, 2009). Viruru (2001) explains that ECE was not considered part of the indigenous culture of India and is "still a phenomenon that is evolving" (p. 86). Kaul and Sankar (2009) further add that

early childhood care and education before the 20th century was informally provided by grandmothers through "caring practices, stories, lullabies and traditional infant games..." (p. 2). Montessori's visit in 1939 led towards 'Indianizing' her methodology to suit the needs of young Indian children hence 'voluntary agencies and private institutions' began providing early education through preschools (p. 3).

As discussed above, readiness and expectations of readiness remain a global

challenge as perceptions relative to assessment, developmental appropriateness and curricula content tend to be culturally, economically and politically contextualized. For example, Aboud and Hossain (2011) report that readiness in children from rural Bangladesh is assessed through development of language and cognition while 'red shirting' or 'holding children out of kindergarten to give them an extra year to get ready for school' is a popular practice in western nations. This practice, Scott-Little (2011) informs, "emanates from the maturationist view of readiness for school" (p. 115) and is applied if the child's age does not match with the required criteria for readiness. In poorer nations, the importance of academic skills as a mandatory readiness feature is linked to political strategies to eradicate poverty and to boost economic development (Britto, 2012, p. 4). The potential danger lies when transitioning children become victims of expectations of academic readiness especially from the primary schools/teachers. Zhang, Sun and Gai (2008) explain that such discrepancies occur when judgements of readiness between teachers of kindergarten and elementary/primary schools are conflicted and outcomes such as "improper assessments, wrong ability grouping or grade retention' impact children negatively" (p. 426). In some contexts developmental appropriateness of programmes is based on outcomes of standardized curricula that 'prepare' children for further schooling (Nutbrown, 2008). Nutbrown warns that "preparation is a dangerous word when used to refer to young children's learning and development..." as it could impel practitioners to "insult the intellect of young children by requiring them too soon to do things that they will need to do..." when they are older or when they are in school (p. 124).

The concept of developmental appropriateness originated in America and dates back to 1989 (Bredenkamp, 2011). However, America's announcement of the National Education Goal 'to have all children start school ready to learn by the year 2000' met with severe opposition from a large cohort of early childhood practitioners (p. 259). The issues expressed were based on "the wide range of individual variation in the development of young children" as well as on the lack of equitable services for diverse groups from linguistic and cultural minorities (Bredenkamp, 2011, p. 259). Similarly the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) generated controversies amongst early

childhood educators when it introduced, in 2006, standards made up of specific goals aimed at assessing children's learning and development (Bredenkamp, 2011, p. 259/261; Lunenburg, 2011). According to Bredenkamp (2011) this decision was perceived as "antithetical to the association's commitment to developmentally appropriate practice..." (p. 258). Maxwell, McWilliam, Hemmeter, Ault, and Schuster (2001) argue that a developmentally appropriate practice should have the characteristics that allow children to be meaningfully engaged in hands-on learning activities so that they "actively construct knowledge" (p. 432). Likewise Burt, Harts, Charlesworth and Kirk (1990) state that developmentally appropriate practice should facilitate "learning through a prepared environment" where children "actively explore concrete materials and interact with peers and adults" (p. 408). Therefore, assessing children's readiness through specified standards and goals as prescribed by NAEYC were apposite to the developmental appropriateness of ECE curricula content.

Similar controversies were noted in the UK when policies were reformed in 1997 declaring that "each young child had a right to pre-primary education" and 'vouchers were awarded to parents to enable children as young as four to access schools (Swiniarski, 2007, p. 20). Many early educators thought that the rigid "national curriculum and its testing practices were inappropriate" (Swiniarski, 2007, p. 20). These allegations spurred several reforms and the Foundation Stage Curriculum became the statutory framework "aligned with primary schooling" (Aubrey 2008, p. 14). These reforms eventually led to the establishment of Sure Start centres to assimilate different child care services into a single entity to serve marginalized communities (p. 17). To negotiate justice for children Woodhead (2006) suggested that a preschool programme rather than just "influencing individual children in isolation..." should reconsider the influence of social contexts on children's learning and development since research has shown that "the effects of preschool education are context specific" (p.133/138). This led several countries "to develop contextually appropriate measures" for ECE so that curricula content and practice could "define what children are expected to know and expected to do" (Rao, Sun, Ngan, Ma, Lee, Zhang and Chow 2012, p. 116). Rao et al., (2012) state that these reforms would standardize "expectations for young children

and provides a basis for measurement of young children's learning" (p.116).

I argue that curriculum is an important factor when considering expectations of readiness and as mentioned above, curricula content of both developed and developing nations have changed over the years owing to economic policy reforms. Moravcik and Feeney (2011) state "curriculum is a product of its time" and it evolves with socio-cultural, economical educational and political values of the society in which it is located (p. 220). Duffy (2008) also suggests that a curriculum is "much more than a body of knowledge to be transmitted" through "formal learning contexts or schooling" (p. 80). However in countries like Nepal and India where preschool education is a relatively new phenomenon, the word curriculum defines a definite structure of instruction to determine readiness. For example Chopra (2012) states that preschools in Delhi follow a "rigid time-table and subject-based teaching..." (p. 169). Likewise the Nepali curriculum guidance for 3 and 4 year olds outline specific learning outcomes in areas such as "language skills, mathematics; visual art, working style and creativity; environment science and social studies" as preparation skills for acceptance into primary school (UNESCO, 2011, p. 17).

The contested concept of readiness has given rise to lucrative businesses running private preschools or "teaching shops that do not respect/regard the developmental norms of children" but subject them to rote learning from prescribed books and texts (Kaul and Sankar, 2009, p. 24). Viruru (2001) explains this phenomenon as colonization of children and if is responsible for the transformation of ECE into "business organizations" (p. 151). As governments all over the world jostle for economic emancipation through investments in ECE, the achievement bar for preschool children is being raised higher. Wyness (2006) describes this as "equating childhood with ignorance" where curriculum is "propelled up through a hierarchy of knowledge ordered in terms of age-grading". Expectations of readiness therefore, are consistent with controlling children "whether this takes the form of learning or indoctrination..." (p.144).

## Conclusion

Eliminating expectations of readiness of children would contribute to supporting children's diverse needs (Rafoth et al., 2004). Nutbrown (2008) proposes that "real progress in ECE depends on the acceptance that children themselves are fundamental to the process of education" (p. 125). Therefore I argue the ultimate expectations of readiness alters curriculum, defies developmental appropriateness and places ECE into stringent academic silos. The alternative is a focus on holistic/child friendly methodologies and a learner and person-centred philosophy. A curriculum that "affords children's minds the respect they deserve" would be unjustifiable if such approaches are created only to meet expectations of readiness and prepare children for primary school (Nutbrown, 2008, p 125). Holt (1983) expounds expectations of readiness as delayed gratification and positions children as having to "be willing to learn useless and meaningless things on the faint chance that later they may be able to make use of some of them" (p 288). Similarly Saluja, Scott-Little and Clifford (2007) state that assessing readiness in young children is "theoretically, psychometrically and logistically difficult" (online). Therefore in conclusion, I echo Holt (1983) and add that:

*The human mind is a mystery. To a very large extent it will probably always be so. We will never get very far in education until we realize this and give up the delusion that we can know, measure and control what goes on in children's minds. To know one's own mind is difficult enough.*

— (Holt, 1983, p, 293)

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# Building Capacity in Aga Khan Education Services (AKES) Early Childhood Programmes: Using Effective Tools for Professional Development

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High quality early childhood programmes and monitoring of child development have been internationally recognized as strategies to promote overall child well being (UNESCO, 2000; UNICEF, 2009). The Aga Khan Education Services (AKES) has supported Early Childhood Development (ECD) initiatives for many years, and recognizes the critical long-term impact of quality ECD.

The AKES consists of over 160 early childhood programmes across a network of 10 countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Common among these ECD programmes is the lack of early childhood practitioners and teachers with minimum qualifications in early childhood care and education. In order to build capacity within ECD programmes, the AKES leadership have implemented programme evaluations, using the Global Guidelines Assessment (GGA) (ACEI, 2011), and provided training for leadership staff in the use of a developmental screening measure, the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3) (Squires et al, 2009). Both of these measures were proposed as potential professional development tools for increasing the knowledge, skills and competencies of early childhood staff in programmes serving children ages 12 months to 5 years of age.

A common feature of the GGA and ASQ-3 is that both tools are research based and designed for implementation globally (Hardin et al, 2013, Squires et al, 2009). Developed using the expertise of educators from around the world, the GGA consists of five programme content areas focusing on the environment, curriculum, educators and caregivers, partnerships with families, and children with special needs. This evidence-based tool supports quality standards for ECD programmes by supporting cross-country programmatic alignment and collaborations

through application of a common framework while still enabling contextual and culture relevance.

The ASQ-3, published by Brookes Publishing Company (2009), is a reliable set of questionnaires administered at 21 intervals of a child's development. It is designed to consider parental expectations such as family culture and values, environmental and biological factors (Squires et al, 2012). Each questionnaire is written at a 4th to 6th grade level and covers 5 developmental areas (communication, fine and gross motor skills, problem solving and personal-social skills) with a qualitative section for noting general health and sensory information (Ibid).

These two AKES-wide initiatives provide guidance for best practices in regular monitoring and evaluation of children and programmes. This allows for a cluster of interventions to be offered and relevant microsystems to work in synergy to provide accountable, high quality ECD programmes. The outcomes of these tools can be used to inform the decision-making process at different levels. A by-product of the tools is the opportunity to promote and provoke policy discussions, curriculum development, to guide early childhood educators to reflect on their programmes and practices and to monitor children's development to identify areas where additional support would be beneficial.

## The link between measuring tools and capacity building:

Research suggests that children's early development provides the foundation for life-long learning (UNESCO 2000, UNICEF, 2009). This is greatly influenced by opportunities children have to learn, the resources available and the interactions they have with others at home and in the community. Neuro-scientific research has indicated that the early years are a critical stage of human development (Kolb, 2009). The brain develops at a rapid pace in the first few years of life with billions of connections being made between neurons every second. Early childhood experiences influence brain architecture and functioning, as well as, a child's potential for success.

According to Ricoeur (2004), capacity is

established at the "intersection of the innate and the required" (p 1). While teachers and practitioners may have innate knowledge about child development, to be able to interpret observations of children in a meaningful way, there must also be technical skills supported by acquired knowledge. As practitioners acquire knowledge, they are better able to understand and incorporate observational results into practice to provide quality programmes and support children's development (Ricoeur, 2004). With increased knowledge about early childhood development, educators, practitioners and policy makers can give expression to the results of such measuring tools. The results can be analysed and used to inform their decision-making and teaching practices.

Ricoeur suggests that the capable human being has three basic competences, "the capacity to say, the capacity to act and the capacity to recount, to which [he adds] the imputability" (Ibid, p 1). In exercising these capacities, humans recognise that they are capable of action and responsible for their actions and for the welfare of others (Dauenhauer & Pellauer, 2011; Kaplan, 2008; Ricoeur, 2004). This results in the ability to make promises to commit to something and see it through (Ricoeur, 2004). For example, when educators are unskilled in observing and monitoring children, or in assessing quality indicators for programmes, these tasks become hollow obligations, leaving little room for educators to take initiative and thus the credibility of any results is significantly reduced. However, when stakeholders understand exactly what is being done, and why it's being done, they are better able to take responsibility to do so in an ethical manner.

Consequently, both the structure and the interaction on a personal and institutional level become crucial (Hoveid & Hoveid, 2009). For example, monitoring child development and evaluating teaching practices form part of an educator's role, however daily responsibilities of preparing the classroom environment and activities, interacting with children and supporting children's learning is largely dependent on their knowledge base. As their acquired knowledge increases, and they develop the capability to make meaning of the actions and bring about change to improve quality, this sense of responsibility

## THE ENVIRONMENT THE CHILD LIVES IN - THE MICROSYSYEM, MESOSYSYEM AND EXOSYSYEM

leads the 'capable human being' to make ethical choices in his care for and encounters with others (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005).

For instance, at AKES, when teachers interact with children, they are constantly making observations about children's interests, skills and development. This is based on their understanding of practice, what they have internalised about monitoring development and how to support the development of children at different stages. Teachers may provide activities with the motive of developing certain skills through various experiences at learning areas (Hedegaard et al, 2012). Additionally, as children participate in various activities, they are expected to meet the demands of these activities to achieve their developmental milestones (Fleer et al, 2009). As a result, the attainment of these milestones is a confirmation of the educational process, and is a benefit of teachers combining practical skills with knowledge.

In order to develop teachers' skills, it is crucial for them to engage in continuous knowledge acquisition to support effective teaching and learning. This was recognised by several of the teachers who were interviewed during a recent research study at the Aga Khan Early Learning Centre, Dubai. As one teacher reflected, she does not have enough knowledge about early childhood development to be confident in interpreting her ASQ3 observations of children (Nazarali, 2014). All teachers interviewed agreed that simply using the ASQ3 was not enough. Regardless of their comfort level with the tool, and teaching experience, they clearly indicated that they would benefit from further training. Ricoeur's concept of the 'capable human being' requires teachers as individuals to be reflective and open-minded to enter into rational discourse and identify how they can be more effective as educators in their interactions with children (Hoveid & Hoveid, 2009).

### Cultural Considerations:

AKES ECD programmes serve over 22,000 children from diverse cultural backgrounds. It is essential that programme and child development measures are both culturally and contextually sensitive. According to Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of Human Development (1979), culture can influence the developmental expectations of parents as well as the type and quantity of opportunities that children are provided to practice their developing skills. Hence, it is important that these cultural influences are taken into consideration when evaluating ECD programme quality and interpreting the

results of developmental screening tools.

Based on Ricoeur's (2004) concept of the 'capable human being', when these tools were first introduced, AKES teachers and practitioners were required to engage in supervised and practical activities to help them understand what was required. This encouraged them to answer questions such as, "What information can I gather from these tools?", "Who is it that will be administering these tools?", and "How do I make sense of the outcomes and their impact on child development and programme quality?" This application phase can become problematic when educators and practitioners don't have the required knowledge and skills to adequately use the tools. For example recognising the influence of culture on children's development enhances teachers' ability to make meaning of information gathered and to use results effectively to support early childhood development. When teachers understand the purpose as well as the limitations of tools and measures, they are in a stronger position to take responsibility for their actions, their teaching practices and the impact on outcomes.

### Summary:

As the importance of developmental screening and programme evaluation in early childhood centres becomes more universally recognised, it seems prudent to consider how specific measures of best practice might influence the professional development of educators. Identifying children's developmental milestones and supporting them with appropriate learning activities at home and in high quality early childhood settings has been found to enhance their potential for success. Likewise, using a systematic method of evaluating programmes can support the decision-making process, validate funding requests and enhance the overall effectiveness of quality programmes. Through tools like the GGA and ASQ-3, AKES has been able to identify and prioritize areas for improvement. This has led to reflection of programme policies, curriculum practices and learning activities based on what children are ready for next. In order to be effective, practitioners and educators must continue to build their theoretical and practical knowledge and deeply engage with measurement tools that provide data to inform their practices.

### Recommendations:

Over the last three years, AKES has conducted on-going ECD leadership seminars to define and develop its monitoring and evaluation processes, develop curriculum principles and generate a roadmap for professional

development. AKES recognizes the need for continuous professional development for staff to maximize learning outcomes for children. Additionally, AKES recommends partnerships with parents and caregivers to further support high quality learning environments for children. With the use of tools such as the ASQ-3 and the GGA, both parent and teacher understanding of child development can be elevated to a level that promotes optimal development and life long learning for all children.

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# From Measurement to Action- Using programmatic assessments to promote 'Quality in ECD': Model Exemplars from Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, and U.A.E.

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The importance of improving the quality of early years programmes has been internationally recognised. The Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments (UNESCO, 2000) representing 164 countries contains six goals, the first of which is, "expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children" (UNESCO, 2000, p 8). The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) has been supporting Early Childhood Development (ECD) initiatives for many years, and recognizes this critical long-term impact of quality ECD. Aga Khan Education Services (AKES), an agency of the AKDN, supports 160 ECD programmes that serve approximately 22,000 children in the Middle East, Asia and East Africa.

Responding to the need for improving the quality of these early years programmes, AKES is institutionalizing a more systematic, evidence-informed improvement strategy through a Quality Assurance and Programme Evaluation system, including Self-Assessment of educators and caregivers using the ACEI Global Guidelines Assessment Tool (GGA), (ACEI, 2011).

The GGA was developed by the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP) and the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI 1999) by more than 80 professionals representing 27 countries" (Hardin et al, 2013, p2) for

implementation throughout the world for early care and education programmes, especially in the developing countries. GGA consists of five programme areas which are:

1. **Environment and Physical Space,**
2. **Curriculum Content and Pedagogy,**
3. **Early Childhood Educators and Caregivers,**
4. **Partnerships with Families and**
5. **Communities, and Young Children with Special Needs.**

The GGA supports quality standards for ECD programmes by lending itself to cross-country programmatic alignment through a common framework and collaborations, while still foregrounding contextual and cultural relevance. Beginning in 2014, AKES leaders trained early childhood educators to self-assess their programmes for children. The results have influenced the quality improvement process across different AKES ECD programmes.

This article presents how the use of programmatic assessments at AKES is informing, directing and supporting quality programmes, through using exemplars from diverse countries such as Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and the UAE.

## Theoretical Framework

Early child development is influenced by complex factors such as cultural background, institutional environments, family relationships and interactions. This includes the cultural context within which a child lives, government and school policies and community traditions. Informed by the work of sociocultural theorists, Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Lev Vygotsky (1978), AKES is implementing the use of the GGA to systematically evaluate their programmes with an evidence-informed improvement strategy to enhance the overall quality of their ECE programmes.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of Human Development (1979) describes the interrelated complex systems that have a reciprocal impact on children's learning environment and children's development. At the Microsystem layer, nearest to the child,

are relationships that directly impact the child including family, friends, peers, childcare centres, schools, teachers and community members. All of these have a shared impact on the child's belief system and behaviour. Although the child does not come into direct contact with components at the Macrosystem level (outermost layer of the system), the cultural context in which the child lives, government policies and community traditions influence the child's environment and have an albeit indirect reciprocal influence on his or her value system and behaviour.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggested that the outermost layer has a ripple effect on all other layers within the system. Teacher's belief systems are also influenced and developed by their own socio-cultural environments. When teachers' belief systems and cultural upbringing differ from the recommended practice, they may find it difficult to implement these practices. Consequently, even if there are opportunities for training and upgrading of skills, teachers might resist the change due to fear, habit or conflict with their own cultural upbringing and belief systems. Evidence-based tools, such as the GGA, are critical to identifying gaps, building capacity and improving professional standards. As each of the layers interact with each other, bridging these gaps leads to a more common understanding of the impact these interactions might have.

Like Bronfenbrenner, Vygotsky (1978) suggested that socio-cultural factors play a critical role in the cognitive development of children and he advocated for social interaction and collaboration among children in the classroom and between the teacher and students. Vygotsky believed that learning first occurs through social interaction (interpsychological) prior to being internalized (intrapyschological). Therefore, providing children with opportunities to interact with people and peers from within and external to their own culture is essential to make connections between their own cultures and their new environments. As knowledge and development is constructed on an individual level, it is socially negotiated across a variety of processes and environments



(Bergin & Hardin, 2013). Therefore, the use of Evidence-based tools, such as the GGA is critical to evaluate programmes, identify gaps, build capacity, reflect on the results to improve professional standards and overall programme quality. The GGA is flexible enough to account for the individual and the local environment while factoring in the global perspective of what constitutes a quality early care and education programme (Bergin & Hardin, 2013). AKES used the GGA to evaluate these focus areas in ECD programmes in the UAE, Pakistan, India and Afghanistan to begin with.

### Methodology

Data were collected on three different occasions over a period of one year. Programme Coordinators from each country attended seminars to receive training on the GGA. Most evaluations were included as part of the training sessions, at the AKELC Dubai and at the Diamond Jubilee High School, Mumbai. Training was provided to programme evaluators on how to make objective observations and validate these

with examples. Different learning spaces and classrooms within the centres were observed and documentation was reviewed to evaluate the 5 programmatic areas of the GGA tool.

In analysing the results of the evaluation, ratings for each item were assigned a numerical value from 0 -5 with 0 indicating not available and 5 indicating excellent or always observed. This is then entered into the standard database based on evidence in the form of qualifying statements to justify the ratings.

For example, at Aga Khan Early Learning Centre (AKELC), Dubai, the centre was assessed by staff, management and by external ECD leaders. The results suggested that the qualitative evidence together with the item ratings provided an acceptable comparison, which could be used to prioritize programme goals. Moreover, the results provided an effective means of understanding the existing quality and strategies for improvement. Additionally, on each occasion it was found that although there was a diverse

set of evaluators assessing the programme, the ratings given to each of the items were generally consistent indicating strong reliability of the tool. The assessment results were used by AKELC leadership to set goals and to inform the decision-making process to improve programme quality. One of the goals centred on the area of partnerships with families, (Area 4 of the GGA). The centre has had regular parent-teacher conferences and workshops on child development and health related matters that encourage participation from the community. The programme evaluation, however, indicated that a possible improvement might be to create a more comprehensive parent programme that would be accessible to a variety of cultures and in multiple languages to deepen parental understanding of their role in their child's development. This would also benefit the child by providing parents with strategies to promote overall development. This led to the implementation of parenting programmes at the centre and the establishment of parent committees to co-ordinate special projects

for the children. Parents are now more involved in the decision-making process leading to improved partnerships between the programme and families.

Area 4 results also indicated a lack of parental involvement at a centre at AKES, Pakistan (AKES,P). A focus group discussion was held to understand parental perceptions about noticeable changes in the child's development. This led to quarterly seminars being offered to deepen parental awareness on relevant issues. In the rural centres of AKES, India (AKES,I), while GGA indicated a strong community and parent connection, the same is being used as a platform to further engage parents through relevant workshops to impact ECD at home better as well as increase quality of parental involvement at school by giving contributory time at school. At AKES, Afghanistan (AKES,A), GGA results in Area 4 indicated that the parents and communities were not sufficiently involved in the ECD centres, children's progress reports were not shared with the parents and communities and key information about the curriculum was not shared with parents resulting in a mismatch between parent expectations and the curriculum objectives. This led to the introduction of various activities to increase parent and community involvement.

Across all 4 geographies, there was a need for evidence informed Professional Development, especially since ECD qualifications and the skillset of educators has limitations and there is a lack of common standards for quality ECD. This too has been met by a common assessment tool in the form of GGA. GGA as a programmatic assessment tool, is also being used to guide the set up of new centres in most of the AKES geographies. Additionally, it has provided a common language and understanding, which when data informed, has allowed ECD leadership and professionals to communicate, negotiate and prioritise the focus for improvements.

## Key Findings

Research has shown that standardised assessments have several advantages. They have clearly defined administrative standards, they are relatively inexpensive and they can be translated into a variety of languages (ACEI, 2011). Furthermore, as educators, administrators and policy makers engage with evidence-based tools, they learn about quality improvement standards and become active partners in the process.

Through the evaluation process, there are opportunities for all stakeholders to enter into rational dialogue with the 'other' through meaningful examples in the form of observations, text, symbols and experiences to set quality improvement goals for their programmes (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). This builds capacity and leads to the recognition that all of these interrelationships within the ecological system influence the quality of a programme. Consequently, both the structure and the interactions between the stakeholders become critical in achieving programmatic goals (Hoveid & Hoveid, 2009).

At AKES, the GGA tool has been introduced in a variety of countries to inform strategic planning initiatives to enhance programme quality. As evaluators engaged with this evidence-based tool, indicators of quality standards were internalised leading to a deeper understanding of best practices in quality programmes (Ricoeur, 2004). Consequently, a sense of responsibility has been adopted. Further more, this has enabled programmes to exercise the ethic of care and ethics of an encounter when interacting with different layers of the ecological system of human development that is based on the best interests of the child (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005).

## Limitations

The GGA has been designed using the expertise of educators from more than 27 nations to ensure that it is applicable for global programmes and provides agreed upon indicators to measure programme quality. However, several of the 76 indicators can be interpreted differently based on individual perceptions and cultural backgrounds. In addition, items can be left blank when evaluators are unclear about how to rank them or find themselves in unfamiliar environments. Therefore, standardization of training using this evaluation tool is crucial to developing a common understanding of the quality indicators.

## Conclusion

As the need to improve the quality of early years programmes has been internationally recognised, AKES has benefitted from the use of a reliable tool such as the GGA to support its existing programmes and to implement strategies for improvement in diverse countries such as Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and the UAE. The GGA has been a valuable tool to identify areas for professional development for ECE professionals working

in international programmes. The exemplars have proven to be critical to setting specific yearly improvement goals for ECD programmes based on the five programme areas of the GGA. On-going evaluations have enabled AKES to ensure that it is on the path to achieving quality standards in its ECD programmes and meeting its goals for continuous improvement. Evidence-based tools are instrumental in systematically monitoring programme quality, identifying gaps, building teacher capacity and improving professional standards.

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# The Impact of Parents' Education on Parenting and Pedagogy on Child's Development and Learning

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## Introduction

It is widely recognized that parents' involvement and quality support are crucial to the holistic development of the young children and their academic success. Parenting in the early years requires parents to offer both care and learning opportunities for their children; referred to in the paper as parenting and pedagogical activities both of which are important for a child's development and learning.

The early childhood years are considered to consist of the years from conception to age 8. This age can be broadly divided into two stages - first under five years (0-5, preschool years), and five to 8 years (early grade school or primary years). During a child's first five years of life, parenting is critical for the development of important social and cognitive outcomes in children. The child's first relationships are critical for the establishment of competences- cognitive, social-emotional, and self-regulatory skills – and as such, set the stage for lifelong adaptation and functioning. The interactions and experiences that children have in the home and family setting provide a framework for how the child will interpret his or her world and give meaning to cultural-framed events.

In this age range, parents play a vital role as primary caregivers, and as the first teachers/educators in their children's development and learning. Furthermore, during the school years (5+ and ahead), especially in early grade years parent play an important role in supporting the learning offered to children in the school environment and this pedagogical role played by parents remains important

Parents and the home environment have a very significant influence on the child's participation and performance in education. A veteran teacher (Downey, 2015) shared her reflection on the basis of her experience that when parents are aware, encouraging and involved, children do better and have a positive attitude to school. The teacher alone cannot effectively educate students if parents do not prioritize education and provide support in the home. Parents must prioritize their roles and responsibilities in the education of their children to assist teachers in their quest to provide quality education to students. Teachers simply cannot do it alone. Downey also noted that "I see the positive effects of strong parental involvement on the educational outcomes of children. Conversely, I see the negative effects of parents who do not make education a priority" (Downey, 2015, p.1).

In the early childhood age range, in Bangladesh parents are expected to support their children's learning without having received parent education or training. Some organizations, (from the government, non-government and domestic/international voluntary sectors) offer parent support (education) programs which focus on the early stimulation, child care and development, and play based learning support at home. Early stimulation focuses on language and play stimulation, and health nutrition messages for mothers with children up to age 3. Other parenting programs for parents with children 3-6 years, focus on creating a home based early learning support (i.e. emergent math, emergent literacy and other development). The organizations have sets of sessions on each issue which are facilitated by community level volunteers/mothers.

In contrast, during the early primary school years, children are required to study at home doing homework. In this case, parents play responsibility role as home teachers, tutors or second teachers

/ educators. To fulfil this role well parents need pedagogical knowledge however most parents have little or no training or education to help them. It is likely that those parents with some pedagogical knowledge would perform this role more effectively than those with none but this has not been previously demonstrated. The aim of this study is investigate how parents' education in relation to pedagogy impacts on their pedagogical support of their children at home.

## Methods

The study uses a case study approach and selected four pairs of parents whose children were between the ages of 3 and 5 to be the 4 case studies. Parents were purposively chosen to reflect both parents who had an understanding of pedagogy and parents who did not.

Parental interactions, behaviour with their children, parenting styles and their family environment and children's developmental and educational situation were observed and data were collected on a regular basis. Observational data was recorded in separate notebooks for each family. Observations were undertaken each fortnight and targeted routine family activities. In addition, I recorded discussions with the family that covered the child's behavioral, developmental, and learning situations.. Parental behaviours relating to the researcher's judgement of personality traits and parenting style were recorded. Children's school performance was determined from their regular school papers and assessment sheets

The data were analyzed to explore and understand the interrelationship between the parents with education and those without education on parenting and pedagogy. Themes relating to the researcher's understanding of parenting styles, personality traits, interactions, family activities were identified within each case study family. Children's development and

school performance were then linked to the relevant case study.

## Findings and Discussions

The overall findings revealed parental education related to parenting and pedagogy impacts on children's development and learning. Parental personality, parenting style (both as defined by the researcher) and their knowledge of parenting and pedagogy are associated with their parenting behavior and interaction with children during care and teaching-learning.

Observations show that without parent education/training parental interactions with children tend to be based on their own experiences as children. These interactions tend not to be developmentally and pedagogically appropriate for children. Parental personality traits tended to influence the manner parents interacted with their children. Some parents were withdrawn or did not show warmth towards their children and these children tended to demonstrate less successful learning behaviours. In contrast, parents who had education/training related to parenting tended to respond to their children in a manner that reflected their understanding of development theories. These interactions tended to be developmentally and pedagogically appropriate for children.

Interaction among parents using the authoritarian parenting style is identified by high levels of control and high demands of the child, coupled with low levels of nurturance (as defined by Nixon & Halpenny, 2010). We observed these parents and their child engaging in what appeared to be tugs of war situations. This led to high levels of stress in the family and this was reflected in less interaction, quarrels, and a distant relationship between parent and child.

Parent education makes a difference in the way parents interact with, and teach their children. In one case study, a parent who felt s/he was not able to change his/her parenting style due to his/her temperament, tried to look for alternative strategies to offer children pedagogical support. In this case the authoritarian spouse chose to withdraw from offering pedagogical support

and sought help from the partner.. Parent education had made this parent aware of what was needed, and enabled the family to find a way to support their child's learning in a way that was most appropriate for them. As a consequence of this we observed a reduction in their child's behavioral problems which led to improved academic performance.

In Bangladesh children's academic performance is considered very important and parents often begin school readiness activities at home. Sometimes this focus leads to an exclusive focus on academic activities to the exclusion of other, equally important areas. These home-based initiatives start very early and most the parents will provide an alphabet book, to teach their children the ABC . Parents begin rote learning practice with young children and often use harsh voices and threatening behavior to enforce memorization: a stressful situation for children.

One of the sample parents who had education on parenting and pedagogy said: "my child is looked after partially by his grandparents during my working time. Besides, as we live in a combined family atmosphere with my in laws, my child gets the care of his grandparents. But, they are not aware of proper and positive parenting and pedagogy. So, they mistreat and do somethings not fit with child development approaches and pedagogies as I know." This parent's message emphasise the importance of sharing knowledge with extended family around pedagogy and provide a reminder that .it is necessary to consider extended family members when examining children's life and learning experiences.

We found in the Bangladesh context, parents bear a great responsibility on their shoulders. The parents do not only take care of their children, they are also expected to teach their child at home. Many of them are not aware of how best to enact their parenting and pedagogical roles. The quality of their child rearing and pedagogical practice can be improved if they are offered child development and teaching-learning theories in a parent education programme and are supported to enact good/best practices. For this

reason, they should get a well designed parent education on parenting and pedagogy. This qualitative study indicates that the parent education keeps our children safe from negative parenting and wrong teaching by their parents at home and could impact positively on a child's development and learning process.

## Concluding Remarks

Commonly, we emphasize on the age range in ECD is 0 to 5/6 years. But we should give our attention fully to ECD age range 0 to 8 years, focusing early grade or early primary level as significant for laying foundation for children's development and learning respectively where parents and the home environment is vital. Even though, if our children are to maximize their potential from schooling they will need the full support of their parents (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Besides, parents' contribution to child's home education with correct method still less included or missing in our parent education or parenting programmes. Therefore, it is essential to include the pedagogy in parent education for the sake of mitigating early grade problems when many children drop out due to lack of parents' pedagogical knowledge and practices. Letting the child proper development and learning from parents and family members at home, and providing parent education on pedagogy along with parenting, we should provide holistic support in terms of parenting care and pedagogical needs. It is clear from the study on engaging pedagogy with parent education has many positive effects / impact on child development and learning.

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## Impacting Young Children's Development in Indonesia through "Lonto Leok" Contextual Collaborative Approach

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### Background

Education for young children in Indonesia has been improving rapidly in the past five years. The Ministry of Education and Culture of Republic of Indonesia (2013) reported that the national ECD's enrollment rate for children aged 3-6 years in Indonesia has increased significantly, from 44.7% in 2010 to 63% in 2013. However, the UNICEF Report on Education and Early Childhood Development in Indonesia (2012) showed that the access to and quality

of ECD services was still highly unequal. In 2009, the proportion of urban children attending some form of ECD program was twice that of rural children. Furthermore, the report stated that the quality of ECD services also needs improvement. There is no regulatory framework for monitoring quality. The numbers and quality of staff are inadequate, and the distribution favors the city. Preparatory training of staff is short, and financial incentives are limited. According to UNESCO (2013), the most pressing problems in regard to ECD programs in Indonesia are the following: limited coverage and access, low participation particularly among the poor and "high-risk" children, generally low quality of ECD services. Moreover, parental awareness on the importance of ECD is also still low. This situation prevents young children from having a safe, stable and nurturing environment they need to reach their full potential; children are surviving, but not thriving.

### World Vision Indonesia: Manggarai District, NTT Province

World Vision Indonesia (WVI) operates in many areas in Indonesia where communities are experiencing similar challenges as mentioned above. One of the communities that WVI supports is located at Manggarai District, Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) province. When assessing for local potentials, WVI noticed the existence of a small teachers' learning group called Gugus Pocolikang that was routinely conducting a meeting. This learning group consists of 17 ECD centers accommodating ECD from Ruteng and Rahong Utara sub-districts. The group has a regular meeting in increasing their knowledge and skills to facilitate ECD children. Through that group, several main issues on ECD in that area were discovered: the lack of capacity building opportunities for the teachers, the

lack of financial resources to support the development and operation of the learning centers, and the unavailability of quality learning center in the area that serves as a successful model to be replicated. Most learning centers was still implementing the traditional one-way teaching method and corporal punishment practice. Meanwhile, the lack of engagement with parents has contributed to the low awareness and to the low support from parents towards the improvement of young children's development in the area. In 2014, supported by World Vision Korea, WVI initiated Creative Project, a one-year project that aimed to boost the improvement of ECD quality in Manggarai through an innovative contextual approach.

### Local solutions to tackle local problems: Lonto Leok Approach

One of the fundamental values that were stated by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is the recognition that children are best understood in the context of their family, culture, and society (NAEYC, 1997). Wink and Putney (2002) described that the social cultural theory viewed learning as socially and culturally mediated. Moreover, children's culture and language is essential to educational planning, instruction, and assessment (Ladson-Billings 1999). Consequently, teachers need to implement curriculum and instructional practices that are culturally sensitive and relative to the child's experience in order to enhance children's learning.

Through a close collaboration with the community, government and other partners, WVI and Gugus Pocolikang developed what's called the Lonto Leok approach. Lonto Leok (Manggarai language) means "sitting in a circle." This approach adopts the existing evidence-based learning model such as BCCT (Beyond Circle and Center), and integrates it with the local context. The Lonto Leok approach takes the Manggarai children's characteristic, language, culture, and context into consideration when developing the curriculum; incorporated in it are the usage of mother-tongue language as medium of instruction, character building based on the local wisdom, learning through cultural based activities, and nutrition support using local food materials. Furthermore, this approach aims to change the previous traditional one-way teaching approach into a more dynamic child-centered one; children are challenged to think, reflect, and express

their opinions and interests when "sitting in a circle," as well as when doing individual activities. It tries to promote children's active participation in shaping their own learning. Rushton and Larkins (2001) described the results of various studies which indicated children actively engaged in learner-centered environments scored higher on measures of creativity (Hyson et al., 1990), had better receptive verbal skills (Dunn et al., 1994), and were more confident in their cognitive abilities (Spodek, 1993).

Lonto Leok approach was developed in three different ECD models that fit the context in the area, such as Saint Mary Immaculata "medium size" ECD, Mother Giuditta "small size" ECD, and Nterlango "home based" ECD. Those ECDs become a Center of Learning for about 14 other ECDs in Gugus Pocolikang. Some of the teacher trainings held to support the implementation of Lonto Leok approach were: understanding Manggarai children's development, BCCT training, building a positive teacher-student interaction, class management, contextual curriculum & learning, local material development, and building a stimulating and nurturing environment for young children. In total 40 teachers and headmasters have been trained according to their roles. Eight out of 17 ECD have now already applied the Lonto Leok approach after the first year of project implementation.

### The Impact

Through a Focused Group Discussion (FGD) that was conducted by World Vision Indonesia (2015) and its partners with 12 teachers, representing 7 out of 17 ECD centers in Manggarai, it was revealed that Lonto Leok approach has significantly increased teachers' capacity in delivering effective contextual teaching-learning process. Moreover, this project has also contributed to the increased children's attendance in those centers. This positive result is due to the better learning environment provided by the teachers for children, and also due to the improved parental support on their children's education. In total, number of parents in St. Maria Immaculata Kuwu is 68 parents while in Mother Guiditha is 38 parents. World Vision Indonesia's Creative Project Evaluation Report in 2015 showed that 100% parents from ECD St. Maria Immaculata have shown contribution in the form of money and materials to further developed the center. While almost 50% of the parents in Mother Guiditha ECD

center also showed similar contributions. The operation of those ECD centers are also supported through community based Income Generating Activities (IGA). Percentage of parents' involvement in ECD activities held by the centers such as parental meeting, graduation event, and nutrition garden, were 63.2% for St. Maria Immaculata Kuwu 58.3% for Mother Guidita ECD Center. It was a significant increase compared to the parents' involvement before the Lonto Leok approach.

The evaluation report also showed that 100% of children in St. Maria Immaculata Kuwu ECD center are on track in their development; physical, social-emotional, cognitive, and moral-spiritual. Furthermore, 66.7% of class A children (3-4 years old) in Mother Guiditha ECD center, and 100% in class B (5-6 years old) are developmentally on track. Finally, 88% of children in the Nterlango home-based center are developmentally on track. Even though there's no baseline data, there are many parents who stated that they could see their children's positive changes through the Lonto Leok approach (WVI, 2015).

This project has also contributed to the improvement of the local government's support towards the development of ECD in the area (WVI, 2015). The Education District Office has committed to allocate more budgets towards ECD teacher's capacity building. Together with WVI, the Manggarai Education District Office has conducted four trainings in the past year for 103 headmasters (36 males and 67 females) from 100 ECD centers. The next training planned to be held this year will involve 141 teachers, 19 males and 122 females from 141 ECD centers across Manggarai District. Moreover, learning from Lento Leok approach, the government has also changed their training methodology, from theoretical one directional to a more practical and participatory approach (WVI, 2015).

### Conclusion

The goal for WVI's Creative Project is for young children in the area to be cared for in a loving and safe family and community environment, with safe places to play. In conclusion, one year after its implementation (2014-2015), this effort has showed some positive results: (1) children expressed better interest in attending the learning centers and better enjoyment with the new approach, (2) increased ECD enrollment rate due to improved parental awareness and support to their young children's development, (3) improved



teacher's skills in providing positive, nurturing and stimulating environment, (4) better financial situation of the ECD centers due to the IGA and partners' supports, and (5) improved numbers of children who showed that they are developmentally on track according to their age. Finally, better support from the local government and community has enhanced the potential for sustainable impacts. Encouraged by the positive changes shown above, the government and local leaders have increased the local budget allocation for teacher trainings and ECD improvement in that area. WVI realized that to bring sustainable positive impacts on young child's development, one can't take a child out of his/her context. The success factor of this project implementation is due to taking into consideration on how the environment children live in significantly influences their development, and that different parts of a

children's ecological system have to work together in order to support children to reach their full potential.

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# Community of Practice in Early Childhood Development: The society and culture – The macrosystem

By:

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## Summary

ChildFund India believes that cross-learning among early childhood development (ECD) professionals, and strengthening ECD professionals is one of the key milestones for the success of any ECD program. This paper discusses ChildFund's virtual community of practice on ECD that facilitates the sharing of collective knowledge and encourages coordinated efforts to enhance implementation of ECD programmes. Characteristics of the Community of Practice in Early Childhood Development (COP-ECD) model that enhance capacity building, knowledge management, and organisational learning are discussed as are possible benefits and recommendations to enhance the functioning of COP-ECD.

## Background

Communities of Practice (COPs) have become increasingly influential in recent times in both academia and praxis (Anthony, Rosman, Eze & Gan, 2009). COPs are "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). The concept and theory of COP was first coined by Wenger and Lave in the early 1990's. The idea is rooted in the concept of "the community of inquiry," and "principle of learning through occupation" (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). The COP approach enables practitioners take collective responsibility for managing the knowledge they need and provides a social context for their work (Wenger, 1998).

## Community of Practice on Early Childhood Development (COP-ECD)

The current National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) policy of India, prioritises strengthening the capacity of ECD professionals and improving the quality of ECD services. In this light, the Centre of Learning and Excellence for Childhood Development (CLECD) unit of ChildFund India has initiated the Community of Practice (COP) approach amongst grass-root ECD practitioners from 49 local partners spread over 14 states of the country. The COP operates through an e-group where the grass-root level ECD practitioners (primarily Programme Coordinators) share their field practices and challenges. The primary goal of the COP-ECD is to gain knowledge of field practices, help develop a culture of sharing & learning, and promote a more coordinated set of actions by practitioners. A total three COP-ECD sessions have been conducted so far and recorded nearly 93% participation. A reward and recognition mechanism is part of the COP-ECD to encourage and sustain active participation. All COP members will soon receive a certificate of participation. In addition, three active COP members and one outstanding member have been identified for the star community member award and community ambassador award respectively.

## Capturing field practices

The COP revealed various field practices implemented by local partners last year such as Positive Deviance Hearth (PD Hearth), Kitchen Garden, Akshaya Patra, Strengthening Community Ownership and Home-based as well as Centre-based Early Childhood Education and Stimulation. Out of the 52 partners, 8 were implementing the PD Hearth programme where mothers of

malnourished infants and young children were encouraged to cook nutritious food using locally available resources. Across these 8 partners, approximately, 1408 PD hearth sessions were held and a total of 3800 families were trained to create kitchen gardens and grow and use nutritious vegetables and fruits for children. One of the local partners had linked the kitchen garden with income generation opportunities.

Many of the 168 ECD centres, known as "balwadi centres" fully supported by ChildFund India, are model centres. For example, four balwadi centres were decorated, monitored and managed by the local community members; one local partner had initiated the concept of Akshaya Patra - a community bucket where community members regularly donate foodstuff such as vegetables, fruits or grains to the "balwadi centre." These foodstuffs were used for preparing nutritious meals for children (three to six years) attending the "balwadi centre." Almost 24 "balwadi centres" have been handed over to local Government and the COP are providing technical support to about 1400 Government run ECD centres (known as "Anganwadi centres") across 14 States in India.

Community engagement is a key strategy of ChildFund India's programmatic approach. Despite COP-ECD involvement, few local partners have successfully established community level structures for monitoring ECD programmes, nor designed home-based early childhood education programmes catering to the need of infants and young children from birth to 3 years of age group. However, nearly 14 "Bal Vikas Samiti" (Child Well-being Committees) in the field regularly review & monitor ECD programme activities and generate awareness of early childhood care and development in the community. In addition, three local partners are implementing home-based education programmes through trained community volunteers and care-takers.

# The Community of Practice on Early Childhood Development: A Framework



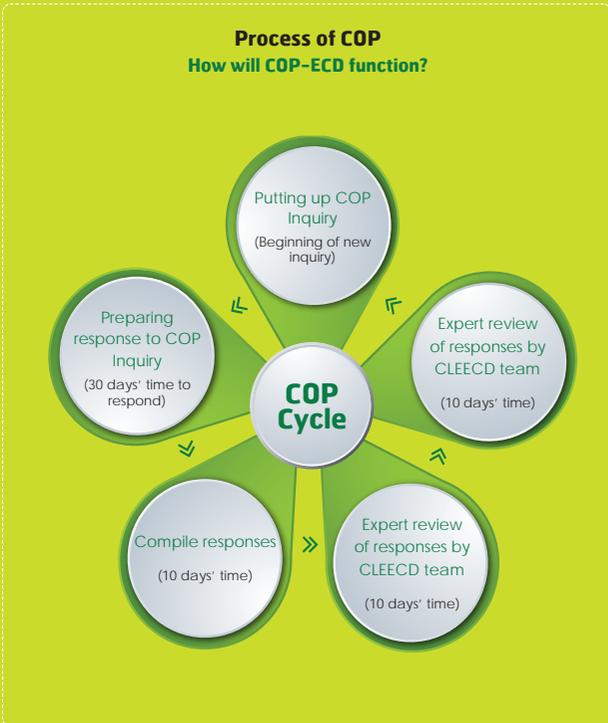
**Community of Practice (COP)**  
**What is COP?**  
 A community of practice (COP) is a group of people who share practices, experiences, challenges and local solutions to program challenges on a regular basis.

**Purpose of COP-ECD**  
**Why to establish COP-ECD?**  
 COP is to share knowledge, program challenge, and innovative practices to enhance effectiveness of existing ECD program, build knowledge asset representing best practice and bring collective knowledge around ECD.

**Key Terminology**  
**What are the key terms should we know?**  
**Themes**  
 Themes are broad areas of inquiry where key program challenges, practices, solutions that need to share and discuss in the group.

**Community**  
 Program Coordinators-Life Stage1 (Infants and Young Children) from local partners/area and zonal offices who implement ECD program activities and are aware of field practices.

**Practice**  
 The body of knowledge such as innovative practices, success stories, program challenges, program tools/methods and innovative ideas that can be implemented within four domains.



**COP Themes**  
**What are the themes/areas for discussion?**

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4
<b>Early Childhood Development Interventions</b> [Sharing interventions under Life Stage1 (Infants and Young Children) programs]	<b>Community Engagement</b> [Community participation, building capacity of community and their contribution to enhance program]	<b>Collaboration and Networking</b> [Strategies to bring Government services to the community, establish dialogue between community and Government etc.]	<b>Program Innovation</b> [New ideas or process that is either proposed to solve the problem or successfully addressed the problem]

- Determinants of successful COP**  
**How we can make it a success?**
- | Role of Community Members  | Role of COP-ECD Moderator   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address the inquiry in details</li> <li>Consistent participation</li> <li>Constructive feedback on COP process</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effective coordination</li> <li>Provide expert's guidance</li> <li>Promote coordinated actions and innovation</li> </ul> |



### COP-ECD: An alternate learning model

The COP-ECD offers an alternate model of learning with the aim of developing the strategic capabilities of grass root practitioners, and improving their knowledge management and organisational learning.

### COP-ECD for developing strategic capabilities of grass root practitioners

COP-ECD is an effective tool for assessing practitioners' knowledge of ECD programmes and their understanding of gaps in programme implementation and using this to design training to fill the knowledge gap using examples from the field as a learning resource. Based on the training needs assessment, all COP members were trained to function as master trainers. Furthermore, each COP-ECD session's data was shared as "COP-ECD Updates" with COP members, providing unique learning resources. The CLECD has formulated COP-ECD guidelines for the effective execution for the COP-ECD.

### COP-ECD for knowledge management and organisational learning

The most significant knowledge management challenge is how to collect, organize, transfer, share and apply knowledge. This is particularly difficult when organizations implement programmes in different geographic locations based on local needs. According to Roberts (2006) COP has emerged as a key domain in the realm of knowledge about programme design, planning and implementation. The COP has become an important method of knowledge management to advance an organisation's intellectual capital by enhancing knowledge exchange and promoting continuous organizational learning (Mittendorff et al. 2006). The COP-ECD provides effective mechanisms for systematically accessing, organizing, sharing, and integrating new knowledge around ECD practices. This knowledge can be a resource for developing programme strategies, and for organisational decision-making around

modification strategies for ineffective programme or scaling up of successful programmes. The COP-ECD is also effective tool for identifying programmes operated by partner organizations which can be developed as model programmes and programme demonstration sites.

### Benefits of COP-ECD

The purpose of the COP-ECD is not to teach novices but to build on the cumulative knowledge of members and bring their practice to a new level, thus advancing ECD programmes.

### Organization

For an organization implementing an ECD programme, the COP-ECD generates a body of common knowledge, practices, and approaches; aids participatory programme strategy development; builds core capabilities and knowledge competencies of the grass-root programme team; diffuses best-practices more rapidly; improves programme communication between organization and practitioners; cross-fertilize ideas; and increases opportunities for innovation (Allee, 2000).

### Community members

Benefits for COP community members include building connections between practitioners across organizational and geographic boundaries and opportunities to learn from each other; generating common understanding around programme and its strategies; empowering community with know-hows (new knowledge) and show-hows (best-practice models); aiding retention of knowledge when participants leave; and increasing access to expertise.

### Limitations of COP-ECD

The COP-ECD approach is not without challenges and limitations. First, organizing and compiling COP-ECD data is time-consuming task. Secondly, there is a language barrier that can limit sharing knowledge. The COP-ECD operates in English. Considering the geographical as well language diversity found in the areas covered by the COP-ECD, many COP members find it difficult to share their experiences and field practices due to this language barrier. Third, sustaining members' interest and active participation for a long time is a challenge. Lastly, encouraging voluntary

participation and sharing real field experiences is a challenge. Since COP-ECD is a part of organizational initiative, a sense of mandatory participation and fear of being judged might be unavoidable for community members.

### Conclusions

The COP-ECD acts as a forum for practitioners across organizational and geographic boundaries to exchange knowledge, practices, experiences, challenges and local wisdom as solutions. It is a positive strategy to encourage grass root programme teams to share and learn from each others' expertise, build team capacity, and use collective knowledge to strengthen ECD programming and implementation.

### Recommendations

The COP should be part of a national ECD strategy where all organisations offering ECD programmes are able to participate. Adding to the online delivery model, it is suggested that face-to-face interactions in the form of seminars or workshops may help to empower grass-root level practitioners to share field experiences and best practices with larger audiences, particularly external stakeholders. ECD experts can be invited to moderate and compile relevant COP inquiries, which would enhance the quality of the COP process. Establishing a national level COP of ECD professionals can be valuable.

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# ARNEC CONNECTIONS

Working Together for Early Childhood

## ARNEC Connections No. 9, 2015

### Theme

The transformative power of Early Childhood Development (ECD) for equitable development

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*The Breakfast Programme in an iLEAD Community  
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## UNDERSTANDING OUR NETWORK

*“ARNEC works towards a vision in which the developmental potential of the young child is realised with support from families, communities and states in all member countries in the Asia-Pacific region.”*

The Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) is established to build strong partnerships across sectors and different disciplines, organisations, agencies and institutions in the Asia-Pacific region to advance the priority on and investment in early childhood.

## MISSION AND ACTION PILLARS

ARNEC works to ensure the rights of every child to optimal holistic development. To achieve this aim, ARNEC implements programmes in the following activity areas (Action Pillars):

**Advocacy for Policy Change:** Support national partners and members in their assessment and review of national early childhood policies, frameworks and implementation, and facilitate the exchange of models and tools from other contexts.

**Knowledge Generation:** Facilitate the continuous analysis and synthesis of regional ECD evidence and research, identify priority areas for further learning, and support strategic research activities.

**Information Management and Dissemination:** Provide a platform for ECD professionals to share information and resources, ensuring these are easily accessible to all.

**Capacity Building:** Provide opportunities for professional development and learning related to ECD through strategic ARNEC events, external outlets, and strengthen national networks through targeted technical support.

**Partnership Building:** Build external partnerships and coalitions to create a supportive environment to leverage resources for ECD and ARNEC’s capacity to fulfil its mission.

ARNEC is guided by 15 Steering Committee members made up of early childhood experts from the Asia-Pacific region who provides direction for the planning and development of the Network and its activities.

The Network is supported by the following organisations: UNICEF East Asia Pacific Regional Office, UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Plan International, Open Society Foundations, Save the Children and Childfund International.

## WHO ARE OUR MEMBERS?

Our members are individuals in the field of early childhood who are concerned with young children and families of Asia and the Pacific. The Network’s strengths draws upon the support of our members who are experts in health, education, nutrition, social welfare, human development, social research or policy, sociology, or anthropology. Becoming an active ARNEC member means you are able to contribute your knowledge and share with others your experiences.

Friends of ARNEC, or institutional memberships, are also available and receive additional benefits such as the eligibility to enter into joint activities with ARNEC and be featured on our website.

Interested individuals or organisations may find out more information about the ARNEC membership categories on

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