

Foundations for a Peaceful World

The Transformative Power of Early Childhood Education to Promote Peace and Social Cohesion



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Contents

Chapter	Title	Page
	Forewords	ii
	Acknowledgements	iv
	Introduction	1
1	Developing a culture of respecting difference with young children, their families and communities in Northern Ireland	5
2	Applying the Persona Doll Approach in Israel to promote shared life and respect for diversity in Early Childhood	17
3	Children as a bridge	37
4	Peacebuilding in Early Childhood: Vision, Challenges, and Hopes	45
5	The Early Years Media Initiative for Children Revised Toddler Module: Building Social-Emotional Resilience	63
6	A Journey from Children as Zone of Peace (CZOP) Campaign to Constitutional Rights to Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Nepal	81
7	Stories, Actions, and Aspirations: Efforts to help Palestinian children impacted by conflict	93
8	Active Development of Respect for Diversity from Early Years in Serbia and Western Balkans	105
9	Towards sustainable peace: Young children learning in the language spoken at home and surrounding communities in Tajikistan	117
10	Conclusion and Call to Action	127

Forewords

We are living in a critical Global Context marked by unprecedented threats to peace and security.

Today millions of families and their children find themselves trapped in situations of war, violent conflict, occupation and displacement exacerbated by climate change, natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2022, approximately 468 million children were living in conflict zones. Also, at the end of 2022 of the 108.4 million forcibly displaced people, an estimated 42.3 million were children.

These situations expose children to killing and maiming, violence, abduction, separation from their families and denial of humanitarian assistance leading to a crisis of care and learning.

Yes, it is the story of lost childhood!

What is more alarming and should concern us all is the lasting negative impact of deprivation and violence (physical and structural) on young children, eventually affecting our communities and societies.

The good news and hope is that the emerging science heralds a new era for peacebuilding

REFERENCES: Save the Children Report 2022, UNHCR 2023

We now know that the way in which we raise our children holds promise for promoting peace in the world. In 2022, nearly 500 million children—more than 1 out of every 6—lived in a conflict zone (Thierry, Brydon & Pearson 2023). Most of these children live in contexts of severe poverty and deprivation, lacking the foundations for good health, nutrition, cognitive, language, and socio-emotional development. This limits their potential and perpetuates intergenerational cycles of poverty and violence.

AÇEV's founding mission is to improve the lives of young children and families and we've spent 30 years working on evidence-based solutions to these complex challenges—and that journey continues. Indeed, the idea underlying the Early Childhood Peace Consortium took shape nearly a decade ago when AÇEV, in a concept paper, asked whether early childhood interventions

through the investment in Early Development of Young Children, as a path to building peaceful and cohesive societies.

In these critical times, unfortunately there is insufficient investment in the early years of life as a path to social transformation and violence prevention. Also the peacebuilding discourse failed to be inclusive and acknowledge the role of families, parents, mothers who toil every day to anchor

peace in their homes, which is the foundation of sustaining peace in societies.

This landmark and timely publication will not only enrich the science of peacebuilding but is a beacon of hope that elevates the role of parents and mothers in erecting building blocks of peace, raising their children to be the drivers of the culture of peace. The Early Childhood Peace Consortia wishes to express its gratitude to the authors, who bring to our attention Early Childhood Development programmes of proven value, to change the tide of violence and build a world of peace.

Rima Salah

Chair of the Early Childhood Peace Consortium (ECPC).

with families can play a role in peacebuilding. Today, growing evidence from the field confirms that hypothesis—interventions administered in this formative period can make a real and lasting difference for children and peace, today and tomorrow.

This publication, which showcases a diverse and dynamic group of leaders generating knowledge in challenging contexts around the world, reflects the vanguard of this important new movement for peace and we are very proud to support it. It will bring critical insights to broader international audiences with important implications for research, practice, and policy; foster new global collaborations predicated on evidence-based knowledge; and advance debates central to the field. Ultimately, it takes us a crucial step forward in achieving optimal positive impacts on childhood and peace.

We are deeply grateful to the authors—who are tirelessly fighting for the rights and interests of children at home and globally—for sharing their work; their challenges; their successes; and, most importantly, their hopes for a more peaceful world that we all share.

REFERENCES: Thierry, M., Brydon, A., and Pearson, M. (2023). Unprotected Special Edition: Analysis of funding for child protection in armed conflict in 2021 and 2022. London, United Kingdom: Save the Children

Together, we can break the cycle of violence and despair. And this publication helps point the way.

Ayşecan Özyeğin Oktay 2023,
President

AÇEV (The Mother Child Education Foundation, Istanbul, Türkiye)

The number of intrastate and international conflicts continue to increase, making conflict one of the most severe obstacles preventing the world community from achieving the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. While armed conflicts and crises affect people of all ages, young children are particularly susceptible to the effects of war. Tragically, as a direct result of increased conflict, the number of children living in conflict zones has been increasing since 2000, and there is a very high risk that these children may not reach their full developmental potential.

Early Years – the organisation for young children, was founded in Northern Ireland in 1965, ensuring that the subsequent history and development of the organisation is inextricably linked to the conflict that erupted in 1969. Our mission is to lead and innovate to ensure the provision of high quality, shared, early education and care services that support resilience for children, families and communities. Respect for difference, peacebuilding and reconciliation are at the heart of what we do. Over the last 25 years, we have looked internationally to share our story, learn from others and together build new knowledge and expertise in the field of early childhood and peacebuilding. We are founding members of the International Network on Peacebuilding with Young Children (INPB) and the Early Childhood Peace Consortium (ECPC) and are committed to developing best practice global outreach programmes and advocacy to ensure more children benefit from effective early childhood development services in these regions.

Over the last 20 years, I have been privileged to support the development of INPB, work with the authors and visit many of the countries and programmes featured in this book. The book provides outstanding global examples, illustrating that through intervening early, with proven multi-level ECD initiatives that engage with relevant stakeholders—including children, families and communities who are deemed marginalised and hard to reach—we can develop and deliver solutions that interrupt cycles of conflict. These programmes not only improve child outcomes, but also strengthen competencies in caregivers, and address stressors and conflict drivers in communities. With a new collaborative approach, we all have a moral responsibility to help build institutional capacities that will reduce structural violence and promote peace and reconciliation globally.

I commend the authors of this book as it shines a light on international best practice and amplifies the voice for the continued need for focus on early childhood and such critical services in regions experiencing—or emerging from—conflict

Pauline Walmsley

Chief Executive Officer

Early Years – the organisation for young children

Acknowledgements

We wish to honour our dear colleague Alejandro Acosta, former Director of Cinde, the lead organisation for promoting peacebuilding through early childhood education in Columbia and co-founding organisation for the International Networking Group on Peace Building with Young Children. Alejandro has laboured for decades in his own country while serving internationally as a mentor, thought leader and inspiration for the development and implementation of peacebuilding programmes across the globe. The work of CINDE in our 2007 book "From Conflict to Peace Building - The Power of Early Childhood Initiatives—Lessons From around the World" served as a guide for others to learn and follow. Alejandro drafted an updated chapter for this book, reporting on the progress and challenges of the past decade which, more than anything else, is a testament to the central importance of persistence, of holding a steady vision for the future, for the possibility and promise of peace, celebrating incremental progress, despite the inevitable setbacks. Unfortunately, Alejandro has been ill and unable to complete the chapter. We miss you deeply, dear friend, and we pray for your recovery and return to continue our work together.

Pauline Walmsley, Chief Executive Officer of Early Years - the organisation for young children in Northern Ireland is also a founding member of the International Network on Peace Building. She has played a significant role in the development of the Network and has led the implementation of the Media Initiative Respecting Difference Programme, and the Sharing From the Start Programme in Northern Ireland. Pauline had hoped to be a co-author of the Northern Ireland chapter that describes this work. However, Pauline has also been ill, and therefore not able to contribute at this time. We are delighted that Pauline is making great progress in her recovery and we look forward to her return to her central role on the International Network and the EARLY Childhood Peace Consortia.

Introduction



The aim of this book is to inspire and affirm your commitment to peacebuilding with young children by showcasing authentic voices from the International Networking Group on Peace Building with Young Children (here referred to as the INPB or the Network).

This book presents an array of voices and realities from regions impacted by conflict, each with a different way of thinking, shaped by the culture and experience of the authors. Expect to be challenged by some of these pieces—and yet our deepest hope is that you will experience a sense of connection with the people of even one of these countries, that you will share our belief in the principles of the INPB, and that you will affirm your commitment to support the work of the Network.

The INPB was formed in 2009, having evolved from the work initiated by the World Forum Foundation, Early Years, (formerly known as NIPPA), and CINDE through the International Working Group on Peace Building, a Working Group of the World Forum that was established in Belfast in 2003.

Since 2015 the Network has had a specific focus on supporting the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030) with a specific focus on Quality Education (Goal 4), Peace Justice and Strong Institutions (Goal 16) and strengthening Partnerships for implementation of the goals (Goal 17).

A significant output of the early work of the group was the publication of the book "From Conflict to Peace Building: The Power of Early Childhood Initiatives - Lessons from Around the World" (2007 Ed Connolly, Hayden and Levin). This publication outlined what research in 2007 told us about the impact of armed conflict on young children and the key issues this raised for early childhood educators working in such situations. The publication described the impact of conflict on children, families and communities in eight regions across the globe and the programmes that were being developed to support children and families impacted by conflict.

Since then, the Network has gone on to develop a Masters Programme in Applied Peacebuilding with Young Children and developed an International Toolkit for work with young children, teachers and families in regions experiencing or emerging from conflict. Early Years is a founding member of the Early Childhood Peace Consortium and together we advocate for a UN Resolution on Peacebuilding with Young Children. INPB members co-authored the ECPC background paper, Contributions of Early Childhood Development programming to sustainable peace and development, which describes concepts that simultaneously transform relationships and build social support networks capable of mitigating violent conflict risks. The Network has also initiated a reading group to strengthen research capacity in the network and engage with current research trends and new paradigms, and our approach to this book, inviting voices less constrained by structures that might suppress authenticity, is a reflection of that work.

Our most recent strategic plan in 2019-2024 recognises that while we have made a great deal of progress in our first decade, this period has also been marked by increased conflict and inequalities and, as such, in this book, we have focused on solutions that will disrupt cycles of violence, build strong foundations for sustainable development and social cohesion and promote a "culture of peace." Our objectives include the promotion of integrated early childhood development programmes as a key part of reconciliation processes in conflict and post conflict societies. We are developing evidence-informed and evidence-based programmatic interventions supporting reconciliation and child and family wellbeing. We study the impact of conflict on children, families and communities and use this knowledge for action to bring about positive, sustainable change.

The Network operates on a foundation of six principles, all of which are reflected in the reports from the member countries:

1. We are founded upon a child-centred, socio-ecological approach. Explore how Pomoc Deci in Serbia was able to promote partnership with parents, families, local communities, and service providers, paying attention to power relations, in the context of continuing societal conflicts resulting from the breakup of Yugoslavia, and addressing every detail from identity cards to government policies that impact programmatic implementation.
2. The Network applies a learning approach which attends to power and other relations, processes, and outcomes necessary for building peaceful and sustainable futures. Evaluate for yourself the research on a system of parallel reflective process in the Revised Toddler Module of the Media Initiative for Children in Northern Ireland, a responsive caregiving approach in which children are supported by parents, parents are supported by the toddler programme staff, staff have regular reflective support.
3. The Network advocates to support and improve the capacity of parents, educators and other relational agents and relevant service providers to promote the integral development of children, families, and communities, using information, scientific knowledge, people's experiences and wisdom in the design and development of programmes and projects. Analyse for yourself the debate in Tajikistan that led to the implementation of an effective multilingual Uzbek/Tajik learning approach.
4. The Network attends to power relations in building institutional capacity for good governance of social services and educational design and delivery. Examine how the Children as Zone of Peace campaign in Nepal has managed to restore child rights after an armed conflict in which the schools were commandeered as military posts, bringing a sense of safety and justice and combatting a range of abuses from sexual exploitation of children to corporal punishment.
5. The Network promotes the links between scientific knowledge, people's wisdom, and practical experiences to advocate for public policies and programmes. Experience the pain of children in Palestine and the efforts that led to the first pan-Arab conference on Early Childhood Development and Peace Building, addressing the impact of armed conflict and violence on young children, their families and communities, and the way in which societies can benefit from policies and programmes that build peaceful societies, social justice and sustainability.
6. The Network advocates and works to help countries to articulate their early childhood development and peace building policies. Imagine how you can replicate our colleagues in Lebanon, building an equitable, rights-based youth programme in the context of complex national circumstances that beg for general policies to promote sustainable political, cultural, social, economic, and environmental progress to ensure a good life and social justice for their citizens.

We invite you to see through the eyes of these authors, then join us in the concluding chapter and help us think about how our principles offer a substrate for growth of effective country and region-specific models for promoting peace building with young children. Join us in our efforts to bring to fruition the promise of the Network. We are at a critical stage in the development and sustainability of the Network. The International Networking Group on Peace Building with Young Children (INPB) must grow if we are to realise our promise. The decades of successful work in our many member nations are at stake. To continue and extend this work we need policy engagement and financial support so that we can launch the next phases of our work in the countries we serve and expand the Network to the many other countries and regions impacted by conflict.

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sustainable peace and development

Developing a culture of respecting difference with young children, their families and communities in Northern Ireland



Author:
Siobhan Fitzpatrick

Introduction

This chapter will describe how Early Years - the organisation for young children in Northern Ireland pioneered a culture of respect for difference with young children, their teachers and parents against the backdrop of a deeply divided society, scarred and traumatised by 30 years of conflict. The chapter will describe how, with support from a range of stakeholders, the organisation developed the Media Initiative Respecting Difference Curriculum (MIFC) and implemented this new approach across the Early Years sector in Northern Ireland, Ireland and beyond. The approach has been subjected to rigorous independent research and evaluation, including a large random control trial and a range of qualitative evaluations. The chapter will describe how using evidence helped influence and change early education policy in Northern Ireland. It will also highlight the challenges of implementation within a difficult political, policy and practice environment which includes the impact of Brexit, COVID, austerity and many periods of political uncertainty in Northern Ireland. The chapter will end with a summary of the organisation's hopes and plans for the future.

Dr Siobhan Fitzpatrick

Dr Siobhan Fitzpatrick is a founder member and Chairperson of the International Network on Peace Building with Young Children (INPB). She is also a founder member and vice chairperson of the Early Childhood Peace Consortia (ECPC). She was Chief Executive Officer for Early Years - the organisation for young children from 1989-2019 and currently works as a Senior Consultant for the Organisation, leading on international Early Childhood Development (ECD) and peacebuilding activities. She is an Advisory Board member of the Palestinian Child Institute and a member of the New Ireland Commission.

Developing a culture of respecting difference with young children, their families and communities in Northern Ireland

“All conflict is about difference, whether the difference is race, religion or nationality. Difference is an accident of birth and therefore should never be a source of hatred or conflict. The answer to difference is to respect it. Therein lies a most fundamental principle of peace—respect for diversity”

(John Hume Nobel Laureate Speech, 1998)

“Too long a sacrifice, can make a stone of the heart”.

(W.B. Yeats)

Background

Early Years - the organisation for young children (formerly known as NIPPA), was founded in 1965, with the aim of developing community-led preschool services across Northern Ireland. From the beginning, and specifically after the outbreak of conflict in 1969, the organisation was committed to a cross-community, non-sectarian approach, ensuring that the two main traditions at the time, Catholics and Protestants, had an opportunity for children to come together to play, and for parents to get to know each other through the development of community-led and managed services. Since the 1970's there has been a growth in cross-community-led preschool and parent and toddler groups, seeing the development of such services in every small parish across Northern Ireland. Against the backdrop of

“The Troubles” (the Northern Ireland conflict 1969-1994), these services provided a safe space for parents and children across the religious divide to get to know one another, despite the horror that was unfolding around them.

After the ceasefires in 1994, and with investment by the European Union in a Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (SEUPB, 2001), investment in early years was seen as one of the key vehicles for building the peace in Northern Ireland and the Southern Border counties in Republic of Ireland. This investment in young children and their families by the European Union continues to the present day and is an important recognition of the contribution of Early Childhood Programmes to sustainable peace and development.

A Challenge to the sector

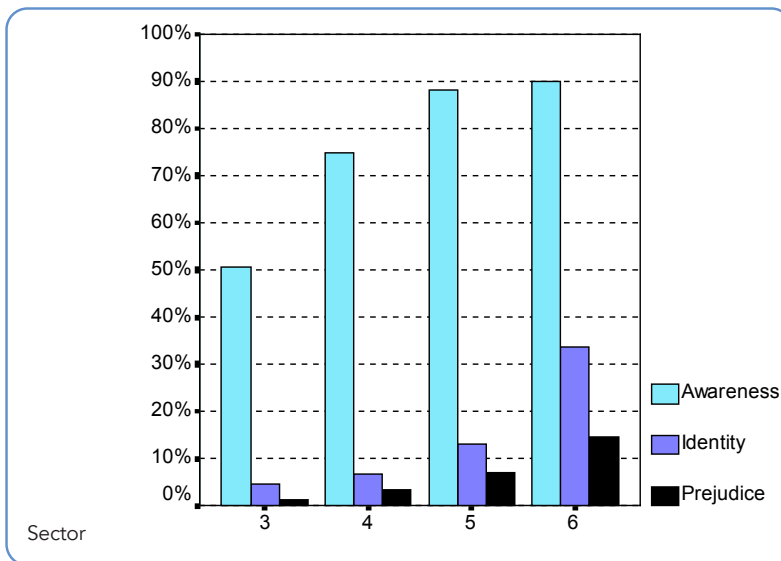
The signing of the 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement was a significant step forward in terms of taking the gun out of Irish politics. The Nationalist/Republican, Unionist /Loyalist Political parties and the paramilitaries agreed a complex and ambiguous set of arrangements that supported consensual, cross-community governance arrangements. There were three main strands to the agreement: the internal strand, relating to Northern Ireland, the east-west strand relating to the arrangements with the rest of the UK, and the north-south strand relating to arrangements with Ireland. The Good Friday agreement, with a focus on rights, social justice and reconciliation, presented a positive policy environment for the development of services for young children.

Given the long history of investment in high-quality, non-sectarian, evidence-informed early childhood services, Early Years was confident that services for young children could play an ever-increasing role in the quest for social cohesion and peacebuilding. However, in 2001 the publication of the research "Too Young to Notice?" (Connolly, 2002) was a wakeup call for the sector. The research presented the harsh reality that children, as young as three, in Northern Ireland were developing negative, prejudicial attitudes toward others and by the age of six, these attitudes were becoming embedded. The research also challenged prevailing views at the time, that young children were too young to notice the sectarian divisions that surrounded them.

A new approach

The research findings were a catalyst for the organisation to rethink its approach to dealing with issues of race, religion, ethnicity and identity. The organisation made the decision to take an explicit, intentional approach, from being a non-sectarian, to becoming an anti-sectarian organisation, and looked for help from outside to support a complete rethink of how services for young children and their families were delivered in a divided society. Around this time the organisation was approached by the Peace Initiatives Institute (PII) from Colorado, U.S.A. who wanted to contribute to the peacebuilding activities that were taking place at the time. PII facilitated the development of a multi-level stakeholder partnership, including media, academia, education partners and policymakers that worked collaboratively with Early Years to develop a new early years' programme. The programme became known as the Media Initiative Respecting Difference Programme. The programme aimed to develop a 'respecting difference' culture that celebrated

Table 1. Too Young to Notice? A challenge for the Early Years



the variety of differences in Northern Ireland society. While ethnic and religious differences had been at the heart of the conflict, there was a recognition of the need to celebrate other emerging differences on the basis of race, disability, gender and also promote an anti-bullying, respectful culture that would underpin relationships between children, parents, teachers and the wider community. It is important to recognise the critical role that PII played in supporting change in Northern Ireland. They were critical

in encouraging the use of media as part of any new programme development. They were also the first to the table in providing funding for programme development.

Without their initial seed funding, the multi-million-pound investment that followed may never have been realised. Another key and early funder at the time was the International Fund for Ireland, which funded the implementation of the programme in Northern Ireland and in all the southern border counties in the Republic of Ireland. The support from the International Fund for Ireland provided significant visibility and credibility to the MIFC programme and Early Years as an organisation.

During the period 2003-2010, Early Years, supported by the multi-agency stakeholder group and with wide consultation and participation from young children, parents, preschool teachers and local community activists, developed, piloted, implemented and evaluated the MIFC.

Programme Components

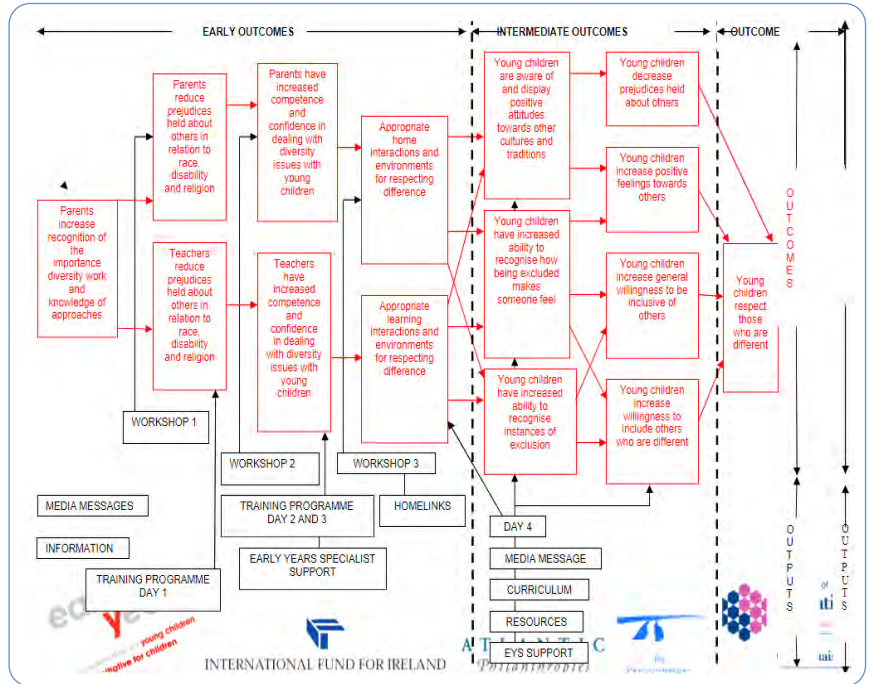
The new programme had several distinct components:

- The development of five new persona characters representing religious, physical disability, ethnic and race differences. These characters were developed as a result of consultation with young children, their parents and the wider community. The characters were named and provided with a specific community background representing difference within a Northern Ireland context.
- The development of five cartoon media messages reflecting instances of exclusion and inclusion. The media messages were played initially on National Television for three weeks at a time, three times per year. They were watched by children on their own and by parents and children together. The use of the media was critical in terms of creating community ownership for the programme.
- The development of a new curriculum and Service Design Manual, aimed at supporting preschool teachers to implement a new respecting difference approach in a culturally and contextually appropriate manner

- The development of new training programmes for preschool teachers and parents that was based on reflective techniques, helping teachers and parents reflect on their earliest experience of difference. This supported them to understand and respect the “other” within a Northern Ireland context and develop techniques and strategies to implement the programme within the classroom and home environment.
- The development of a range of new resources reflecting the cultural, religious, sporting and musical traditions within a divided society
- The development of capacity-building activities for management committees and school leaders so that they could support the development of anti-sectarian policies and strategies within their local services
- The support of an Early Years Specialist providing five hours per month of external mentoring to support early childhood services in implementing the programme to fidelity.

The development of the programme was influenced by the need to move away from a superficial approach to dealing with religious, race and ethnic issues. Traditionally in Northern Ireland early childhood programmes adopted a neutral approach to such issues, which in fact meant they were often ignored. We wanted to move away from approaches that supported limited contact for children from different religious, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds and were keen to create deep, meaningful and prolonged daily experiences for children, teachers and families. We were influenced by theorists on social cohesion that stressed the importance of building trust and respect for each other and a sense of belonging. Reference (Durkheim, Larsen, Putnam, Derman-Sparks, Pettigrew and Tropp).

Table 2. Early Years Theory of Change Mode



The programme was initially targeted for three- to five-year-old children, their parents and preschool teachers in Northern Ireland and the southern Border counties of the Republic of Ireland. As the programme developed, it was expanded for two to eight year-olds in full daycare settings and afterschool facilities. The programme was delivered every day in preschool settings over the course of the preschool year from September to the end of June.

Prior to implementation of the programme, staff were provided with three days of experiential training and additionally, with a Service Design Manual to support the daily delivery of the programme, and to support them in engaging with parents. The Service Design Manual encouraged integration of the MIFC with the national preschool curriculum. Parents were provided with termly parent workshops that introduced them to the new programme, encouraged them to reflect on their own experiences of difference and division and supported them with resources to implement the programme in the home environment.

Underpinning the development of the Programme was a Theory of Change/ Logical Framework approach that was developed during the pilot implementation phase.

Doing No Harm: a commitment to ongoing research and evaluation

Early Years was introducing a new approach within the Northern Ireland preschool curriculum, an approach that took an intentional, anti-sectarian, contextually appropriate focus to the issues that had caused enormous division within Northern Ireland society. Sport, music, cultural activities and flags were often symbols of division across Northern Ireland society. Yet, the new approach intentionally used these symbols of division to create a culture of respecting and understanding differences.

It was important therefore that evidence ensured that the approach was not further exacerbating the situation and creating even further divisions. A small pilot evaluation of the approach in 2003, involving ten preschool groups, five in the control group and 5 in the experimental group, was critical in spurring us on to continue with the development and implementation of the MIFC.

Table 3. Pilot Programme Results 2003. Do no harm.

- Quasi experimental design with 10 preschool settings
- Five received the programme, five were in a control group
- Measured children’s attitudes before and after the programme
- Ability to understand how being excluded made someone feel
- Ability to recognise instances of exclusion
- Willingness to play with others who were different

Between 2003 and 2010 Early Years continued to develop and implement the MIFC programme across the Early Years sector in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties in the Republic of Ireland. Each year over this period we worked with approximately 50 preschool settings, involving approximately 1000 children and their families in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. With the support of an Early Years Specialist, staff from the settings were trained, provided with a Service Design Manual and a new set of resources, including the five persona characters. Settings were supported to implement the Media Initiative Respecting Difference Programme on a daily basis and engage in regular parent support workshops so that the programme could be implemented by parents in the home environment. The five cartoon messages were shown on National Television for three weeks at a time, three times per year. The use of the media was an important strategy to create broad community ownership for the programme and became a useful tool for parents/grandparents to talk about the programme at home.

In 2010 with funding from the Atlantic Philanthropies, Early Years were able to commission Queens University Belfast, Stranmillis University College and the National Children’s Bureau (Northern Ireland) to carry out a large random control trial. The research involved 80 preschool groups, 1600 children and parents in Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland, coupled with several qualitative case studies. The results were a positive indication that the MIFC programme was having a significant impact in supporting young children’s social and emotional development and creating a culture of inclusion and respecting difference.

Table 4. Random Control Trial Results (2010) for children Key findings (with effect sizes):

- Increased socio-emotional development (+.34 to +.61).
- Increased cultural awareness (+.38 to +.7).
- Increased desire to join in with cultural activities (+.17 to +.27).
- Effects found are those above and beyond the effects associated with normal preschool provision.
- Effects were the same regardless of the characteristics of the children.
- Effects were the same regardless of the characteristics of the settings delivering the Media Initiative.

Table 5. Random Control Trial. Results for Teachers and Parents

Some potentially encouraging signs found re:

- Increased awareness of the need to do diversity work with young children.
- Increased confidence in their own ability to do this.
- However, for methodological reasons, none of these encouraging signs can be trusted without further research.

Table 6. Qualitative Case Studies. Perspectives of Key Stakeholders

- Practitioners valued the training, ongoing specialist support, curriculum and resources; felt the programme impacted positively on their own skills and confidence.
- Parents welcomed the programme; felt it presented an important opportunity for their children to learn about diversity and develop respect for others.
- Children were observed to find the resources and activities appealing; activities provided an important safe space for them to explore diversity issues.

Table 7. Qualitative Case Studies: Key Drivers of Successful Implementation

- Training for practitioners.
- Ongoing advice and support from Early Years Specialists.
- Variety and quality of resources and their integration across all elements of the setting's activities.
- Working effectively with parents.
- Effective and committed leadership within settings.

(Connolly, 2010)

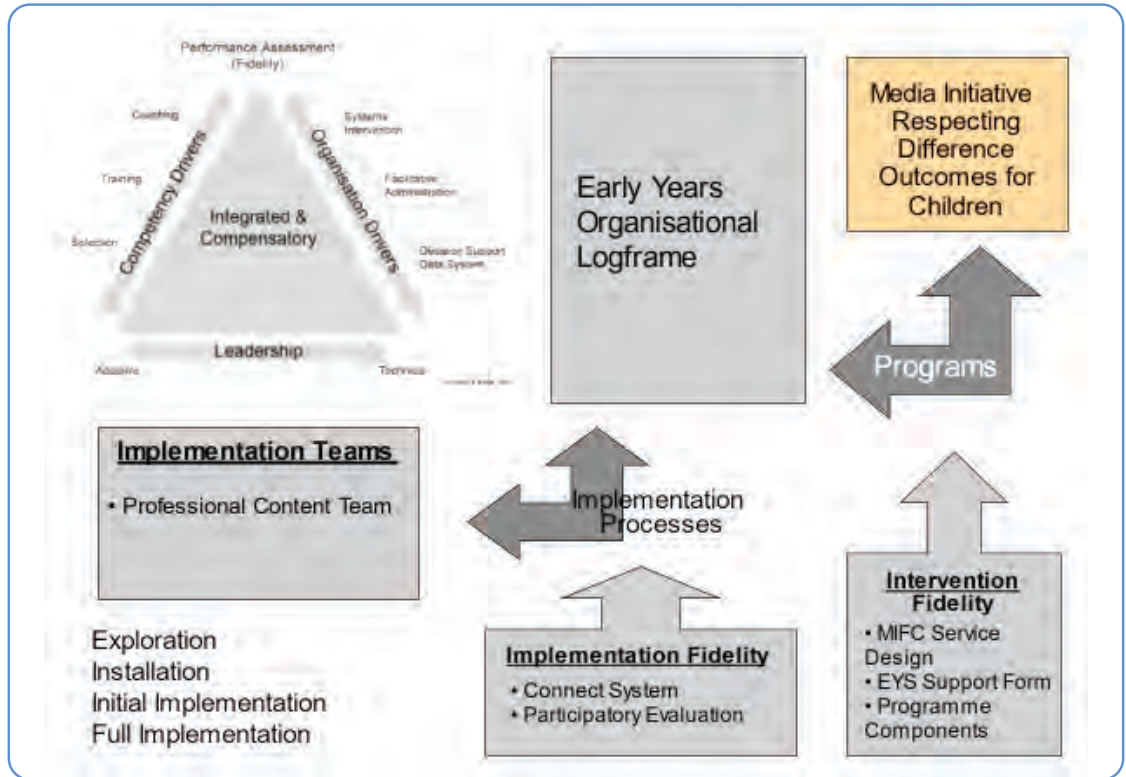
The positive results from the Random Control Trial and the Qualitative Case studies brought both political and funder attention to the innovative approach being implemented by Early Years. Over the next decade, investment for implementation and going to scale was provided by the Department of Education in Northern Ireland, the Children's Commission in Northern Ireland and the Office of the Ombudsman for Children in Ireland, the International Fund for Ireland, the European Union and Atlantic Philanthropies.

Implementation and Going to Scale

From 2010 to date, Early Years has developed a systematic approach to both scaling up and implementation. This approach was adapted from the work of Richard Kohl in his book "Learning and Leading for Large Scale Change" (Kohl, 2007) and also from the International and Irish Implementation Science Organisations.

The approach involved developing a Scaling Up strategy, establishing a cross cutting internal Implementation Team led by the Chief Executive Officer. Externally, the organisation developed a detailed Advocacy and sensitisation strategy to convince key stakeholders to resource and support implementation and provide political, financial and institutional sustainability. It was important that the organisation could show the cost of the programme per beneficiary and the efficiency of such a programme in supporting a culture of peace. The support from key stakeholders such as the Education and Training Inspectorate was critical in ensuring credibility for the programme within the preschool curriculum. The organisation also developed a robust system for monitoring fidelity, adaptation and impact on outcomes, as the approach expanded across Ireland and globally. It is important to note that it took 10 years for the full implementation of the Programme.

Table 8. An implementation Strategy



Since its inception, the Media Initiative Respecting Difference Programme has been adapted and implemented in a range of local and global contexts. The programme has been successfully implemented and evaluated in the border counties in the Republic of Ireland, across Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo - and recently in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. It is hoped that the programme will be implemented in Palestine, Israel and Colombia in the near future.

The Media Initiative Respecting Difference Programme has also been a significant component in the new Shared Education Programme in Northern Ireland/Republic of Ireland, through the Sharing from the Start Project, funded by the European Union and the Departments of Education in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

The EU PEACE IV Programme aims 'To reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society through the promotion of reconciliation amongst all communities across Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland'. Shared Education is one of four Specific Objectives of PEACE IV.

Currently in Northern Ireland, the majority of children are educated separately and 30% of schools have either no catholic, or no protestant pupils. The Mainstreaming Shared Education Strategy, sponsored by the Department of Education in Northern Ireland, aims to ensure that Shared Education is embedded in partnership-working across religious and socio-economic divides, delivers educational benefits, and promotes a culture of inclusivity, respect and mutual understanding, contributing to community cohesion and good relations.

Early Years has undertaken extensive partnership work in developing and delivering cross border shared education initiatives under the Peace 1V Sharing from the Start Initiative. The work engaged with 120 preschool settings, 13,800 children and 270 educators to deliver meaningful, purposeful, and sustained activity to preschool children, their parents and teachers across the eligible areas.

An independent evaluation reported: (McCarthy, 2022)

Table 9.

- 94% of respondents 'strongly agreed' (48%) or 'agreed' (46%) that Shared Education has led to improved educational outcomes for participating children.
- 91% of respondents agreed children's communication skills had improved.
- 97% of respondents 'strongly agreed' (43%) or 'agreed' (54%) that the funding enhanced teaching and learning.
- 96% of respondents agreed that Shared Education had fostered cross-community co-operation.
- 94% of respondents agreed that their professional teaching skills and knowledge has improved due to their involvement in the Sharing From The Start Programme.

The Media Initiative Respecting Difference Curriculum was the key methodology used in supporting preschool settings implement the Sharing from the Start Shared Education Programme.

Conclusions and hopes for the future

The Media Initiative Respecting Difference Programme has been successfully delivered in Northern Ireland for the past 20 years. The successful implementation and ongoing development of the Programme has been possible because of the commitment and dedication of the countless Early Years staff working in community and statutory settings across the region. Despite many challenges they are at the forefront in developing and implementing an innovative approach to quality pre-school services that support social cohesion and reconciliation.

There have been many challenges over the years, mainly to do with uncertainty of funding mechanisms to ensure sustainability of the approach. The support from the European Union, through the Special European Programmes Body has been one constant source of support during the past 20 years. Without this, the programme would not have been able to implement and scale up. This type of long-term funding was a critical success factor.

As we write this chapter, at the end of the early months of 2023, the Northern Ireland Assembly has been collapsed for almost 12 months and indeed, since the Good Friday Agreement, the Assembly and Executive, the critical elements of Strand one of the Agreement, in terms of the internal relations within Northern Ireland, have only operated for approximately one third of the time that it could have. Many of the hopes and aspirations of the period between 1994 ceasefires, the signing of the Good Friday Agreement and the early days of the first power sharing Executive, have lost their optimism and sense of hope. The two main political parties who were the choreographers for the Good Friday Agreement - the Social Democratic and Labour Party, and the Ulster Unionist Party - are now minority political parties with politics being dominated by the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Fein. There has also been a significant shift to the middle ground, with

over 14% of the voting population supporting the Alliance Party in the May 2023 elections. Many of the Alliance voters are young in the 18-35 age group.

The decision by the UK Government to leave the European Union in the BREXIT Referendum of 2016, even though most voters in Northern Ireland voted to remain within Europe, has further damaged internal relations in Northern Ireland and has propelled the discussions about a possible United Ireland Referendum to a more central stage than it was even a decade ago.

The COVID pandemic, the austerity policies of the Conservative Party in UK, and the war in Ukraine have had a devastating effect on the cost of living and poverty levels in Northern Ireland. Children especially have borne the brunt, with ever increasing levels of child poverty and devastating cuts in public expenditure to services for children.

Yet, as we look back over the past 25 years since the signing of the Good Friday agreement, there have been many positive developments. As always, people are ahead of politicians, and parents, in particular, want a different life experience for their children. Parents are pushing the agenda in Shared and Integrated Education. The Media Initiative Respecting Difference Programme has certainly been one of the significant drivers supporting parents' ability and emotional readiness to advocate for such a significant shift in Educational Policy.

The Media Initiative Respecting Difference Programme is well embedded within the early year's curriculum. This has not happened overnight and is the result of dedicated commitment to implementation, evaluation and advocacy.

The organisation is looking forward to being involved in the new Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, Peace Plus Programme and further embedding Shared Education across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

At an international level, the organisation is keen to see further expansion of the Media Initiative Respecting Difference Programme in areas emerging from conflict.

We are committed to supporting the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030 (Doyle, 2014) and see our work as making an important contribution to the achievement of SDG Goal 4, Quality Education and SDG Goal 16 Peace and Prosperity. We look forward to continuing our international partnerships and collaborative efforts to make these goals a reality.

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Applying the Persona Doll Approach in Israel to promote shared life and respect for diversity in Early Childhood



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Introduction

Israeli children are impacted by tensions and divides within the Israeli-Jewish society, as well as by the ongoing violent conflict between Israel on the one side, and Palestinians and Arab countries, on the other. To create the foundation for a shared, anti-biased and just society, the Persona Doll Approach has been implemented in Israel's Early Childhood Education system. As a result, teachers discussed with children issues of identity, culture, and prejudice, which they had been silent about. Children demonstrated increase in attitudes and behaviours, necessary for peace building, e.g., empathy and caring. Thus, Early Childhood Education for a cohesive and peaceful society should take place already during conflicts, and not wait until all facilitating conditions exist and/or the conflict is resolved.

Professor Margalit Ziv

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In her research, teaching and social activism, she strives to promote Early Childhood Education that acknowledges and respects all forms of diversity. She focuses on topics related to conflicts and tensions within Israeli society, as well as between Israel and its neighboring Arab countries.

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Applying the Persona Doll Approach in Israel to promote shared life and respect for diversity in Early Childhood

Introduction

Rona, a five-year-old red haired mischievous girl lives on a kibbutz in the South of Israel. Nur, a curious and friendly five-year-old lives in a small village whose people practice the Muslim religion, close to Rona's kibbutz. Yet, Rona and Nur have never met. In fact, they are scared to visit each other's homes and to meet their families. They both have just celebrated, with their families, their favourite holidays—Rona celebrated Passover and Nur celebrated Id- Al Fitr. A few days later, there was a massive missile attack on the region in which Rona and Nur live. Both girls had to stay home, close to a sheltered place, could not go to school, and missed their friends. Nur was very scared by the loud noise of the missiles. Rona was anxious that she would get hurt by a missile. They wished it would be over soon and that there would be no more similar events. Neither Nur nor Rona understand why adults cannot find a solution to the fighting between them. In their kindergartens, children have lots of ways to resolve arguments and quarrels.

The stories of Rona and Nur are fictionalised stories about Israeli children. They are shared with kindergarten children by Persona Dolls (PDs), facilitated by teachers. PDs are childlike dolls made of cloth that are used in order to enable children to learn about, and respect diversity in divided societies, especially when children cannot meet each other in person (Nasie et al., 2021). This is especially important in countries like Israel, where children grow up in a context of ongoing violent conflict between Israel on the one side and Palestinians and Arab countries on the other (Bar-Tal et al., 2016).

As in many other countries, Israeli kindergarten teachers face a big challenge, to provide young children with the foundation of understanding and appreciating diversity, and becoming active partners in creating a just, shared society. This chapter will focus on the manner in which the Persona Dolls Approach (PDA) can assist Early Childhood (EC) teachers in addressing

this challenge. The chapter will first describe the Israeli context and then will present the principles of PDA and its implementation in Israel. Hopefully, the Israeli experience—its accomplishments, barriers and insights—will contribute to deepening understanding, questions, and debates regarding peace education in EC across contexts.

The Israeli Context

Israel was proclaimed the homeland of the Jewish people by the UN in 1948. Since then, Israel has been the only Democracy in the Middle East. The majority of the population (close to 10,000,000 citizens) is Jewish (74%) and additionally, Israeli Arabs are a sizable minority (21%). The two ethnic groups are distinguished by language, religion, culture, and residential locations. Within the Jewish population, 65% define themselves as secular (including traditional nonreligious), 25% as religious, and 10% as Orthodox religious. Within the Arab population, 93% are Muslims and 7% Christians (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2019a 2019b, 2019c).

The majority of the Jewish citizens are immigrants and their descendants, who arrived in Israel during the past hundred-plus years, from a wide variety of countries. They belong to four main subpopulations of immigrants: Jews of European and American origin (Ashkenazim); Jews of Asian and African origin (Sephardim); immigrants from the former republics of the Soviet Union who arrived after the downfall of the Soviet Union in 1989 (most of European origin), and Ethiopian immigrants who arrived in the late 1980s and early '90s. Among and within these groups, people differ in community traditions and beliefs, extent of religiosity, socioeconomic status, political orientation and more. The heterogonic nature of Israeli society contributes to its cultural richness but also causes social tensions and inequalities.

However, the main divide in Israel is between Jewish and Arab citizens and is due to the intractable Israeli-Arab-Palestinian conflict. The main dispute is about land that both peoples claim. Within the context of chronic violence and dispute, local violent events periodically occur (eg missile attacks launched on the South of Israel from 2000 until today and Israeli military action in Palestinian cities in the West Bank). Despite considerable losses, destruction, and suffering that both societies have incurred throughout the years, a peacebuilding process is still not in sight (Nasie et al. 2016).

A critical point in the conflict is the Israeli occupation of the West Bank (of the Jordan River) which began in 1967. In the war, Israeli forces captured Palestinian territories (then ruled by Jordan) and continue to control these territories to the present day. In 1993 a peace agreement, known as the Oslo Accords, was signed between the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the state of Israel. However, the agreement was flawed and resulted in increasing frustration and violence. Palestinian lands remain divided; Geographic barriers, separating the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, hinder movement, development, and institutional progress. Palestinian responses to the conflict range from efforts to build the institutions of state to actions to unseat the Jewish state through terrorist attacks. These have stoked Israeli concerns for civilian safety and typically result in military incursions, arrests, and demolition of the homes of those who participate in attacks, along with the construction of a separation wall within the West Bank (Schwartz & Wilf, 2020).

Over the years, Israel has been singled out and accused by the UN of violations of international human rights law in its administration of the occupied Palestinian territories. However, the UN also reports that admonitions to Israel are unbalanced, compared to other countries, such as Syria, North Korea, Iran and China which consistently ignore people's human rights (UN Watch, 2023).

Within the Israeli Jewish society, there are two main narratives regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: one narrative tends to acknowledge both parties' responsibility for the conflict. Accordingly, supporters of this narrative propose a bi-directional solution. The other narrative emphasises the unique biblical historical right of Jews to own the land. Thus, people who hold this narrative are less supportive of negotiations with Arab countries and Palestinians regarding the land (Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2009).

The current chapter was written in 2023, at a time of growing polarisation in Israeli society, due—to a large extent—to actions taken by Israel's governmental coalition. In November 2022, Elected Prime Minister Netanyahu formed the most far-right government in the country's history, with extremist ethno-nationalist politicians holding senior ministerial portfolios. The coalition announced a judicial reform agenda to strengthen political control of the judiciary. Opponents of the reform¹ are concerned that Israel will lose its fragile balance between democratic and Jewish religious values, institutions and processes. This, they argue, will result in deterioration in human rights and increased oppression of certain groups, eg women, LGBT and Palestinians. Protests against the reform include hundreds of thousands of people throughout the country who participate regularly, at least once a week, in non-violent demonstrations, calling for the prevention of a dictatorship in Israel (BBC News, 24.7.23). Upon the completion of writing this chapter, it is unclear what the long-term outcomes of this growing internal conflict will be and how it will affect Israel's social cohesion, economics, education and more.

1. The author of the chapter is an opponent of the reform.

The Israeli Education System and Children's Ingroup and Outgroup Attitudes

The Israeli education system, from preschool to the end of high school, is divided into four separate tracks: state education (secular), state religious, state Arab, and independent Orthodox-religious. In the state tracks, the Education Ministry's mandated core curriculum is obligatory. Yet, in the state religious schools, 40% of the teaching hours are devoted to religious studies. The State Arab schools operate in Arabic and include teaching of the Arabic language and Arab holidays and traditions (Government of Israel, 1953). The orthodox-religious schools are not under the proprietorship of the State of Israel or local authorities which enables them not to adhere to the Ministry's requirements. A notable exception of the separation between educational tracks is a handful of bilingual schools, committed to egalitarian Arab-Jewish mutual life, in which children from both ethnicities are exposed to an equal extent to both cultures' language, values, and customs and also learn and discuss more openly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. (Bekerman & Horenczyk, 2004).

Israel's intergroup tensions, its segregated education, and the longlasting violent conflict between Israel and its neighbouring Palestinian territories and Arab countries, are most likely responsible for the early emergence of specific interethnic biases (Nasie et al., 2021). At the age of five, Israeli secular and religious children already have biased attitudes toward each other. They show a preference for playing and interacting with members of their group and sitting close to them, commonly attribute positive traits to the ingroup and negative ones to the outgroup and empathise more with an ingroup than an outgroup member. The strongest biases are towards Ethiopian descendants and Arab children. (Ben-Eliezer, 2008).

Children's biases towards Ethiopian descendants may also be a manifestation of skin colour based discrimination, as documented among children from multiple countries (eg Kelly et al., 2005). Regarding children's attitudes towards Arab children, growing up in the context of an intractable, bloody, and lasting conflict, and specifically being exposed to ongoing and intense threat, arguably accelerates intergroup bias and the intensity of hostility regarding the rival (Bar-Tal et al., 2017). Already during early childhood, Jewish-Israeli children are exposed to the dominant discourse that propagates an ethos of conflict which maintains the negative image of the rival.

Given the multidimensional divisions within Israeli society, its segregated education and early emergence of negative intergroup attitudes, there is a need for age-appropriate educational programmes to alleviate children's biases. The PDA has been implemented in Israel, to address this challenge.

The Persona Doll Approach (PDA)

The PDA is an anti-bias, active learning approach for adults and children, which addresses prejudice, human rights issues, identity, values and diversity through story and dialogue. (Smith, 2009; Jesuvadian & Wright, 2011). PDs are lifelike dolls with a unique personality, cultural and social class backgrounds, family, likes and dislikes, interests, fears, and more (Smith, 2013). The PDs realistically represent children, their dilemmas, multiple experiences and feelings. Like friends, they visit the children in kindergarten and/or at home and share their life stories, which include both positive experiences and difficult issues. These touch human rights, social class difference, poverty, prejudice, racism and disability. Importantly, the PDs tell their stories from a child's perspective, anchored in children's everyday experiences. Children are encouraged to participate in discussion and in problem solving, related to the issues the PD raised (eg Al-Jubeh & Vitsou, 2021; Smith, 2013).

Kay Taus, a nursery school teacher in the US, in the 1950s, pioneered the concept of PDs to deal with the prejudice and racial expressions she observed among the primarily white children in her classroom. She created small cardboard dolls *“that are small friends who visit the children and share stories about what is happening in their lives...The dolls give children opportunities to think flexibly and critically and encourage their ability to problem solve and to develop empathy and a sense of fairness”* (in Smith, 2009).

Taus was followed by Babette Brown, an EC educator from South Africa who became a political exile in Britain in 1963 and the UK, founded the Early Years Trainers Anti Racist Network, focusing on PDA. PDA has become internationally known and is used in multiple countries in Africa, Australia (MacNaughton, 2001), Asia (eg Singapore, Turkey and Greece), Europe (eg Northern Ireland) and the US. For example, in South Africa PDA aims to unlearn all forms of prejudice, discrimination, oppression and inequality based on race, culture, faith, gender, language, disability, etc (Smith, 2013). In Australia, PDs are used to instill positive attitudes towards Indigenous Australians (2021), and in Greece to instill positive attitudes in Greek children towards Syrian refugees (Al-Jubeih & Vitsou, 2021).

PDA was introduced to the International Network of Peace Building in Early Childhood (INPB) in 2009 by the network's Northern Ireland members who belonged to Early Years – the organisation for young children. As described in detail in Dr. Fitzpatrick's chapter on Northern Ireland, Early Years: the organisation for young children in Northern Ireland constructed a programme that became known as the Media Initiative Respecting Difference Programme (MIFC) which aimed to develop a respecting difference culture that celebrated the variety of differences in Northern Ireland society. An innovative component of the programme was

the use of PDs. In 2003 five persona characters were developed to represent religious, physical disability, ethnic and race differences within the Northern Ireland context. The fully developed programme was successfully implemented in full day care settings and after-school facilities for children between two and eight years old. Since its inception, MIFC has been adapted and implemented in a range of local and global contexts. It has been successfully implemented and evaluated in the border counties in the Republic of Ireland, across Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo—and recently in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Implementing the PDA is systematic, yet flexible, and is anchored in the unique context in which they are used. It builds on storytelling traditions to promote inclusion, and address issues of prejudice and unfairness, alongside other topics that occupy children, such as adapting to a new school or sibling relationships. The process of designing and applying the PDA in a context-anchored manner involves several steps. The first step is deciding which PDs are most important to design and introduce to children, and then, creating the doll's persona and physical appearance. To ensure that the dolls' identity and persona are authentic, it is essential that this stage is led by people who belong to the sociocultural group which the PD represents, in consultation with EC professionals.

Next, prior to introducing the PDs to children, teachers participate in a capacity building course (eg Logue & Kim, 2011). The courses usually include reflection on participants' own cultural experiences and attitudes, exploring their motivation, needs and goals, discussing prejudice and other power relation issues in their context, learning about the guiding principles of PDA, and more. These courses have been shown to raise teachers' awareness regarding their own assumptions and attitudes

regarding diversity, as well as of the importance of the topic. Additionally, teachers have come to appreciate the potential of PDs to positively affect children's as well as parents' intergroup attitudes (Acar & Çetin, 2017; Fitzpatrick, this volume).

When introducing the PDs to children, the teacher has a central role in facilitating a meaningful process. The teacher should create an ambience in which children feel safe and intrigued to listen to the PDs' experiences, to share with the doll and their peers their own experiences, feelings, opinions, and questions on issues related to identity, fairness and more. The PD whispers to the teacher, and the teacher, in her regular tone, shares with the children what the PD tells her. PDs are not puppets, nor dolls that children play with in their dramatic play. Like children, they can join other children in various activities, such as singing, dancing, and playing (Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2022).

The sequence of sessions held by the teachers with the PDs is designed to gradually enable children to build a solid, early foundation of cultural knowledge, and of positive attitudes and behaviours in a diverse society. The PDs empower children to positively relate to various components of identity and wellbeing. These components include, among others, strengthening the sense of self identity; developing curiosity and knowledge about diverse sociocultural groups; developing positive attitudes towards diversity; developing a sense of justice and fairness; developing motivation and capacities to actively contribute to their community (Sheppard, 2021).

Implementing PDA in Israel

Implementing PDA in Israel includes several steps, integrating international guiding principles, while adjusting them to Israeli society. Importantly, the process is not unidirectional. Rather, each step provides important insights and understanding that enrich and assist in improving all implementation components. The main steps are hereby described.

Designing Israeli PDs

Rona and Nur, who were introduced at the beginning of the chapter, are not alone. They have five more PD friends who, like them, have childhood experiences that are similar to those of many kindergarten children and tell interesting stories about themselves, their families and their communities.

The Israeli NGO "Games for the Future" (G4F) (<https://www.g4f.co.il/>) designed seven Israeli PDs, four girls and three boys. G4F was established in 2017 to promote respect of diversity among young children and is now affiliated with A-Chord Center – Social Psychology for Social Change, at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The PDs are about 80 centimeters (about 2.62ft) tall and made of soft filled fabric (see Figure 1). They represent children from diverse socio-cultural groups in Israeli society, as follows: Gil a Jewish boy from a Sephardi background, Naomi a Jewish Orthodox religious girl, Noam a Jewish religious boy, Nur an Israeli Arab Muslim girl, Rona a Jewish secular girl, Shahar a Jewish Ethiopian descendant girl, and Tom a Jewish boy from former Soviet Union. Group affiliations are at the heart of the growing tensions within Israeli society. Yet, children are not exposed to any group labels. Rather, they "meet" each PD as an individual with multiple traits, varied childhood experiences and community traditions, beliefs etc.

Figure 1. The Israeli Persona Dolls



Left to right - Top row: Tom, Shachar, Naomi, Nur; Bottom row: Noam, Gil, Rona

Creation of each PD's persona, ie personality, experiences, sociocultural background and appearance was done by focus groups whose members represented the specific PD from their own sociocultural background. They were asked to design a persona that would best reflect a child from their community/group, whom they would like all Israeli children to meet and become friendly with. For example, the Association of Ethiopian Jews (<https://iaej.co.il/language/en/association-of-ethiopian-jews>) assumed a central role in constructing the persona of Shachar, the Israeli girl from the Ethiopian community. Similarly, Nur's persona was designed by social activists, educators, parents and others from the Israeli Arab society. The focus group members then discussed the personas they developed with the PDA initiators, experts from various disciplines (eg Education, Psychology, Children's Literature, and Media) and practitioners. Finally, the personas were approved by the members of

the focus groups. This participatory process ensured authentic, non-stereotypical personas and additionally, adapted the dolls and their stories to children, ages three to eight years old.

Initial assessment of the potential of PDA in Israel

At an early stage of implementation of PDA in Israel, an empirical study evaluated the effectiveness of structured "encounters" of Jewish-Israeli secular and religious children with PDs to improve their knowledge and attitudes regarding children from their ingroup and three outgroups (Nasie et. al, 2021). Ingroups were secular or religious Jews (respectively), and the outgroups were Ethiopian descendant Jews, and Israeli Arabs. Participants were 109 kindergartners who took part in a four-week intervention, in which experimenters introduced to them four PDs,

representing the different groups, and their stories. Children were exposed to each PD's individual and group characteristics, and to positive encounters between the dolls. These encounters were based on mutual interest domains of two or more of the PDs who met at places such as the zoo or the playground and collaborated in playful activities to accomplish a common goal. The main findings revealed a statistically significant increase in children's knowledge about the groups, and improvement in children's willingness to sit closer to Arab and Ethiopian descendant children in social events. Children were interested in each PD's family, hobbies etc and additionally, realised that beyond the differences between them, all PDs were Israelis, who live together. In some of the measures, however, there was no change, such as children's empathy towards outgroup children, and their willingness to invite them to their homes. The findings illuminate the potential of PDA for reducing prejudice and bias in young children. Yet, they point to the need for further exploration of the effect of a flexible program, facilitated by teachers, integrated in their everyday educational practice and accommodated to the children's and families' characteristics and interests.

Capacity building: Teachers' role and initial insights

Teachers assume a central role in implementing PDA. Thus, as internationally recognised, it is essential to conduct capacity-building courses for teachers. The courses in Israel are intensive (30 to 60 hours) and are delivered through teacher colleges (Kaye Academic College of Education in Beer Sheva, and David Yelling Academic College of Education in Jerusalem) and additionally in professional development courses of Israel's Ministry of Education for in-service teachers. The courses apply a participatory approach. Accordingly, central to the process is teachers' reflection and sharing of personal experiences, related to their sociocultural identity from their own perspective. Teaching and learning of the

guiding principles and pedagogy of PDA incorporates ongoing discussions of teachers' motivation, the context in which they work in, dilemmas and needs, insights, and any other topic they bring up.

Which PD do teachers choose to introduce first?

During the course, teachers choose the first PD they will present to the children. This decision is important because it determines the culture and community which children first encounter and sets the stage for future encounters with other PDs. Thus, to understand teachers' considerations in selecting the first PD for their classroom, we conducted in-depth interviews with 15 teachers.

Some teachers chose the first PD for reasons related to their personal identity. The experience of meeting with the seven PDs and the request to choose one of them immediately flooded these teachers with personal experiences of silencing, exclusion, discrimination and racism. The PD allowed them to express their muted identities. Their choice expressed the need to touch and perhaps also to heal a personal injury. For example, a teacher who is an immigrant from former Soviet Union chose Tom whose culture is similar to hers: *"When I heard about the project I immediately knew I wanted Tom...I remembered how I was bullied, cursed and boycotted at school because I'm Russian...I chose Tom because I wanted to remedy my childhood feelings"*.

Another reason that motivated teachers in choosing the first PD was the desire to empower a marginalised staff member in the kindergarten. For example, Nur, whose persona includes being part of a family that practices the Muslim religion provided Jenny with the painful realisation that she had treated Nasreen, the Palestinian teacher assistant, in a prejudiced manner. Nasreen, who lives in East Jerusalem is a resident of the State of Israel and has no citizenship. She wears a headscarf, so her religious ethnic identity is evident.

According to Jenny: *“When I first heard about Nur, I wanted her, because of Nasreen. Suddenly I realised that Nasreen was actually hidden. Her appearance does show her identity, but it is never discussed that she is Arab, that she is of a different religion, of other beliefs. She never spoke Arabic, we didn’t ask her about her holidays, not the good things, not the difficulties, nothing. She was in kindergarten without an identity. It’s as if we made her an Israeli Jew. She did Shabat reception ceremonies with us. I told the children about Hannukah (A Jewish holiday) and told them that a miracle can happen to anyone. And Nasreen said Inshalla (God’s will in Arabic). And suddenly when the dolls arrived, I said to myself there is concealment of this woman here. I made her Jewish!”*

Jenny, the Sephardic teacher who had been involved in multicultural education for many years, became aware of her blind spots regarding Nasreen. Consequently, she transformed the quality and nature of the collaboration and relationship between her and Nasreen. She provided Nasreen with opportunities to express her personality, knowledge, culture and more, in an egalitarian manner.

Other teachers chose a PD that could assist them in thoughtfully responding to negative attitudes that children expressed towards certain children who they regarded as affiliated with a group different than their own. For example, Chen chose Noam, the religious boy PD, because she noticed that in her secular kindergarten children expressed negative opinions about religious children. Children’s first encounter with Noam reflected their negative attitude, as she shares: *“when they saw Noam, they resented him because of his religious symbols...Shay said that Noam can’t be in our kindergarten because he has a kippa. David laughed at his strings (tassles) and Eli said let’s beat him because he is religious. I was actually quite shocked...I decided to sit with Shay, David and Eli and tell from Noam’s mouth that he is afraid to visit our kindergarten...”*

Last but not least, the choice of the first PD conveyed teachers’ desire to broaden the scope of PDA beyond the kindergarten, to the neighbourhood, the intra-Jewish society and to the Israeli society as a whole. For example, Michal, a teacher in Jerusalem “dared” to first introduce Nur, the Arab doll, to the children. Her choice stemmed from her humanistic belief in equality and civil justice, and she did so despite difficult circumstances: *“I chose the PD Nur - as an optimistic woman who believes in coexistence and respects every person...My goal is to present the Arabs in a respectful light, and to arouse curiosity among children. It’s not easy to talk about Arabs in kindergarten... And listen, when I already decided to bring Nur, rockets were fired to Jerusalem...I got into trouble...I thought that on the one hand it was a good opportunity to talk about things, to allay the fears and anxieties among the children. On the other hand, if I myself am in uncertainty and anxiety. How can I reliably convey the message that I really respect every person? After deliberating, I did not replace Nur. I told myself that I was speaking from the mouth of a five year old girl who does not always understand everything, and I could, if necessary, tell from her mouth that she was confused—like me.”*

Despite the escalation of tensions between Israel’s Jewish and Arab citizens, Michal decided to bring the PD Nur to the kindergarten. She felt that both she and Nur were confused and affected by the rampant violence, and confronted a complex situation, due to their social position as Arabs and Jews living in a context of violent conflict. Choosing Nur allowed Michal to plan an authentic conversation with the children about the Israeli-Arab conflict. Michal also understood that Nur’s inclusion in the kindergarten met the children’s needs. Precisely in the midst of a violent conflict, Nur could allow children to share concerns, fears, doubts and confusion.

In summary, teachers' discourse about their PD choices highlights their acknowledgement of different forms of intergroup bias and negative, prejudiced attitudes towards outgroups. Now, often for the first time, they are willing to address these issues and have the means to do so.

Which PD do teachers initially avoid? Alongside teachers' above-discussed courage, it is important to acknowledge teachers' avoidance of certain PDs. Rejecting to present a certain PD (or more than one) to children, exposes children to a partial and biased picture of Israeli society. Some teachers expressed a great difficulty in introducing a PD whom they perceived as opposing their values. For example, secular teachers expressed resentment of the Orthodox-religious PD, as Efrat explained: *"Since I was a child, I was educated to serve my country. The Hareidi people give nothing to the society, they only take and take...I cannot bring Naomi to my class"*. Efrat's personal experience and the values that her family conveyed to her as a child shaped her worldview and lead her to the decision not to introduce Naomi to the children she teaches.

Several teachers objected introducing Nur, the PD from the Muslim society, to the children, not wanting to deal with her identity as an Arab in the context of the Israeli-Arab conflict, as Aviva explains: *"The Arab girl...I could tell children about her music and the food she likes...But I don't want the children to identify with her. And if they ask me what I think about the conflict, I can't lie..."*

Other teachers did not want to introduce children to a PD whose identity could raise criticism and negative responses among parents. Lital, a teacher in a secular kindergarten, anticipated parents' objections to introducing Noam, the religious PD, to

the children: *"...Especially now, with all the tensions in society, parents will be angry if I bring Noam...Parents can blow things out of proportion...I don't want to put myself in the midst of the storm..."*

Teachers' reasoning of selecting and avoiding certain dolls reveals that exposure to the goals of the PDA deepened their awareness and understanding of the connection between the tensions in Israeli society and their reflection in the kindergarten. Issues such as identity and power relations, which had not been part of their educational discourse, entered it now. They are aware both of the PDs they feel comfortable with and of those they are not willing to expose children to. Their choices reflect the divisions in Israeli society and are troubling. Yet, teachers are also aware of their role as educators and are open to share and discuss their perceptions. Clearly, their choice of the first PD, as well as of the undesired PD will resonate in the manner by which they apply the PDA in their kindergarten. Thus, an ongoing reflective process is required. Often, teachers do change their initial stance in the course of applying the PDA and connecting to the dolls.

Applying the PDA in Israeli kindergartens: teacher's and children's engagement

In this section, I will first refer to the process that teachers lead. Recognising that the ultimate goal of PDA is to create within children a worldview that values pluralism and active participation in creating a just society, it will then elaborate on children's engagement in the process and changes they demonstrate in their knowledge, attitudes and behaviour.

The process that teachers lead and the main themes they address. Applying the PDA in Israeli kindergartens requires teachers to participate in a capacity building course, as mentioned above. During implementation,

they receive ongoing guidance and support, to meet their requests and needs and can also participate in a learning community and support groups with other teachers. Additionally, they have access to the G4F website which entails rich pedagogical materials and ideas, including those designed by teachers themselves. The majority of the teachers create their own stories for the PDs, in accord with real-time events that occurred in the kindergarten and/or in broader life circles of children.

In line with the guiding principles of the PDA and the flexibility it allows, teachers gradually introduce to the children, via the PDs, varied topics, while responding to issues that children raise. The PDs share with the children both positive and negative experiences. The sequence usually includes the PD first telling the children about her personal family and everyday life. Gradually, the PDs cultural and community become more salient. Throughout the process, the stories are about children's authentic experiences in which the sociocultural and prejudice issues are tied in a non stereotypical manner.

An example of an experience that is common to many children is the difficulty in adjusting to a new kindergarten. Nur's persona, as an Israeli Muslim girl (eg the mosque in the village), is at the background of her story: *Nur tells us that in the summer her family moved to a new little house at the other end of the village. Nur likes the new house because it is close to Grandma and Grandpa's house and to the big Mosque, but all her friends stayed at the previous kindergarten and only she moved to the new kindergarten. Nur says that she feels lonely. She doesn't know how to get involved with other children...Nur asks if you can advise her on how to make new friends".*

After becoming friendly with the PDs, they share with children stories that touch issues of discrimination and racism as in the story of Shahaar, a girl whose family come from Ethiopia: *"Shahaar's older brother Ofek came home from school in a bad mood. Even though grandma*

made injera with his favourite sauces, Ofek said he wasn't hungry...Ofek told Grandma that today at recess, Leon, a boy from his class, yelled at him to go back to Africa and Ofek yelled at him to go back to Russia... Grandma asked Ofek what he thought would happen if everyone in Israel returned to the land where their grandmothers came from... The teacher took the perspective of the PDs and genuinely cared about them and about the real children in the community.

Children's engagement in the process.

During the implementation of the PDA in their kindergarten, teachers observe and document children's engagement with the PDs and additionally, share their experiences either in writing, in face-to-face meetings and/or via social media. Their documentation and sharing are informative and rich. We will hereby highlight some important themes, referring to three components in the process which children go through: Knowledge, behaviour, and attitudes.

New knowledge and insights. One of the key factors contributing to the development of prejudice is lack of knowledge (Nasie and Diesendruck, 2020). Recognising the importance of providing children with knowledge that has the potential to unlearn prejudice and learn empathy, Nasie and Diesendruck explored what information Israeli children were interested in acquiring about in- and outgroup individuals, using pictures of children. They found first that children asked more questions about outgroup members than ingroup members. Their questions referred to four types of properties: Psychological characteristics (eg preferences, behaviours, and abilities), appearance (eg clothing, and facial expression), personal identity (eg name, age and hobbies), and social identity (referring to either family or social group membership). Hence, the PDA aims to build on children's curiosity by providing information about topics that interest them and a safe place to learn and communicate.

Indeed, teachers reported that children were curious both about the PDs' personal lives and about their cultural customs. Children initially asked the PDs about their families, their favourite colour, who helped them dress in the morning, etc. When children became more familiar with the PDs, they were also curious and interested in cultural experiences. For example, children asked the Muslim teacher assistant, whom the PD knew, about Ramadan, and they were very interested in what she told them. Together with Nur, they prepared traditional sweets for the teacher assistant to take home to her family. Importantly, through the PD, Jewish children come to understand that, like themselves, Nur is an Israeli child who has similar experience to their own and also celebrates the richness of her culture. Thus, the children can identify and sympathise with a friend who they had categorised as belonging to a group perceived as an enemy.

An important feature of the PDs is that they interact with children as equals and share stories and experiences from children's worlds. PDA does not encourage a strict didactic approach, in which the teacher is the central source of knowledge. Rather, it involves revealing the knowledge that each child has, partially from the traditions, customs and beliefs of her family and community. Teachers' sensitive facilitation enables meaningful learning, anchored in appreciation of diversity.

Children's attitudes towards children from diverse backgrounds. An important finding of Nasie and Diesendruck in their afore-mentioned study was that information provision had a positive effect on Jewish children's attitudes towards Arabs. Children's attitudes were more positive when all their questions about outgroup members were answered by an adult (rather than having none or part of their questions answered). Next, we will focus on expressions of children's attitudes during the process of interacting with PDs.

Initial resentment. When first encountering the PDs, some children withdrew from certain dolls and expressed negative attitudes towards them. For example, a child in a state-religious kindergarten responded to Rona, the secular PD, as follows: "I don't want her to come to our kindergarten. She isn't like us and does things that are not allowed". In discussing this response with the child, the teacher learned that he negatively regarded behaviours like watching TV and going to places by car on Shabbat. In the Jewish Israeli religious community, Shabbat is a day of prayers and rest, and many mundane actions are prohibited. Although the child's response does not represent the general attitudes of the religious community towards secular people, the teacher was struck by it: "*It never crossed my mind that children in my kindergarten can think this way. At home I couldn't stop crying and said to my husband: how did this happen? I am shocked...I am determined to continue bringing Rona to the kindergarten...*" The child's response motivated the teacher to open the children's eyes to a child to whom they may have been negatively exposed to outside kindergarten.

Deepening children's positive sense of self-identity. Research shows that people who belong to marginalised sociocultural groups tend to internalise a sense of their own status in society as weaker than others. Thus, in order to create the foundation for an egalitarian worldview in EC, it is crucial that all children feel a positive sense of their own socio-cultural identity (Erdemir, 2022). Israeli teachers were aware of the importance of this issue and had the PDs share with the children stories that addressed it. For example, Gil (the PD from a Sephardi background) proudly shared with the children his family's Shabbat songs that had not been part of the weekly Shabbat ceremony in kindergarten. Similarly, Tom (the PD whose family is from former Soviet Union) told the children about *Novi god* (New Year) which he celebrates with his family. As a result,

children in the kindergarten who shared the same custom, for the first time told their peers about their own related experiences.

Change in outgroup attitudes. A central goal of the PDA is to instill within children positive attitudes towards diversity in general, and especially towards outgroups that they might have—or develop—negative attitudes. The presence of the PDs in the kindergarten for full days during a long period of time in the course of the schoolyear, enabled an in-depth process of becoming familiar and friendly with the PDs. Some children changed their attitudes towards outgroups during this period. For example, children who initially avoided sitting next to Shahar (the girl whose family came from Ethiopia) and Nur (The Muslim PD), gradually got closer to them.

Yet, some children expressed resentment to certain PDs throughout the year, and the teachers had to keep mediating and facilitating interactions with them. Teachers' ongoing facilitation was crucial for deepening children's awareness of different PDs' experiences and worldviews and for encouraging empathy and egalitarian interactions.

Children's behaviours in their interactions with PDs. Obviously, the PDA aims to affect how children behave and interact with outgroup children, especially those who belong to marginalised sociocultural groups. Change in children's behaviour requires a prolonged, in-depth process (Nasie et al., 2021). Indeed, implementing PDA in Israel allowed ongoing and varied interactions of children with PDs, resulting in multiple manifestations of its effect on children's behaviour.

Becoming friends and playing together. Some children almost immediately connected and became friendly with the PD. Interestingly, among the first to do so were often children who experienced social difficulties with children in the kindergarten, as one mother shared with the teacher: *"The minute my daughter came home yesterday, I noticed*

that something was different. She seemed happier. And then she told me that she had a new friend..." For this girl, the PD served as a means to change her position in the social realm in kindergarten and to enhance her social skills.

Caring behaviours. Children were sensitive to the PDs' needs, hardships and challenges and helped them in varied manners. For example, during the COVID period, children were concerned that the PDs did not have a mask and asked the teacher to give them masks (See Figure 2). The PDs enabled children to express their caring nature towards friends in need. They did so spontaneously, without the teacher intervening.



Figure 2. The boy PD Gil wears a mask which the kindergarten children gave him

Collaborative behaviour. Frequently, a group of children collaboratively played with the PD or provided it with assistance. For example, in a dancing activity during circle time, two children held Tom's hands (the boy whose family is from former Soviet Union), one on each side, and the third child held his head so that it wouldn't tilt. In this manner, the four children (including Tom, the PD) danced together. Teachers who regard collaborative behaviour as an important goal of their educational practice, shared their satisfaction with the role which PDs can play in enhancing such behaviour among children.

Empathy and Activism. An important component of PDA is encouraging children to provide the PDs with ideas that can help them cope with difficulties and challenges (Verete et al., 2023). Thus, children's empathy towards the dolls serves as a lever to actively empower them. For example, children advised Naomi (the PD from an Orthodox-religious family) what she should do to feel more comfortable during her visit to a secular kindergarten. The teacher took the experience with Naomi a step forward and expanded it to activism in the community. Together with Naomi, the children prepared traditional little gifts for Purim (a Jewish holiday) and gave them as presents to both orthodox-religious and secular inhabitants in their polarised neighbourhood. The teacher conceived such activism as important in her role as an educational professional, and thus, served a model for the children and led in her kindergarten community activism.

Acknowledging and addressing barriers and challenges.

Despite the encouraging effects of PDA on Israeli children's knowledge, attitudes and behaviours regarding diversity, multiple barriers and challenges impede its application on a large, national scale that may have the potential of creating a transformational impact. Till today, approximately 150 teachers participated in PDA course, reaching close to 4500 children.

The Israeli context, as described at the beginning of the chapter, is characterised by an intractable conflict between Israel and its surrounding Palestinian authority and Arab countries and additionally, by growing divisions and tensions amongst socio-cultural groups within the Jewish society. Bar Tal & Rosen (2009) postulate that Israel does not meet the political-societal conditions, required for successful institutionalisation of peace education in schools, including EC settings. We now specifically point to barriers and challenges that should be acknowledged when reflecting on implementing PDA in Israeli kindergartens and in planning forward. We start with the most fundamental barrier—insufficient support by Israel's Ministry of Education (MOE)—followed by other, related issues.

Insufficient support from highest educational authority and need for a well-defined policy regarding anti-bias and peace education. In order to lead a significant, large-impact change in young children's sociocultural worldview and attitudes towards diversity, support from the highest educational authority, is needed (In Israel this is MOE) (Nasie et al., 2021). When this exists, it gives legitimacy to carry out the mission, creates the proper climate within the educational system, rallies the leaders of the educational system and provides teachers with an incentive to carry it out. Additionally, there is a need for a well-defined and decisive policy, which includes detailed planning of how to carry out socioculturally sensitive and anti-bias education. In Northern Ireland, for example, Educational for Mutual Understanding is compulsory in schools (Gelhager, 1998). In contrast, Israel's MOE scarcely acts to accomplish this goal, creating the need for searching alternative tracks to apply PDA.

Alternative tracks for implementing PDA Several tracks for teaching and implementing PDA in Israel have been identified thus far. First, adaptation of PDA to the Israeli context

was done by an NGO—Games for the Future (G4F)(<https://www.g4f.co.il>). G4F took responsibility for designing the PDs, establishing a professional instructional staff, designing curricular materials, reaching out to potential financial supporters and stakeholders, teaching the approach to teachers, and providing them with ongoing guidance. Since 2022, G4F is affiliated with the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

In addition to continuously attempting to work with the highest EC governmental authority, G4F approaches mid-level representatives of MOE, mainly regional teacher supervisors. Supervisors in Israel are autonomous in selecting some of the topics that in-service teachers learn, as part of their ongoing professional development. Till now a small number of supervisors chose to introduce PDA to teachers, and hopefully will serve as a model for others.

Approaching local municipalities is another manner for expanding PDA. In addition to the governmental budget, local municipalities have their own educational budget and have flexibility in deciding which priorities and topics they promote. Collaborating with a local municipality and kindergarten supervisors from the same locality who share the same goal has been especially fruitful.

Another track is teaching and applying PDA in teachers' colleges, as part of BE. D and ME. D curriculum. Colleges also have some autonomy in selecting curricular topics. PDA is currently taught and implemented in two teachers' colleges in Israel, and it is expected to significantly expand during 2024, thanks to collaborative relationships with additional teachers' colleges and universities. Collaborations with colleges and universities also assist in conducting research, which can provide important understandings and insights on PDA implementation. Despite the efforts and partial success in finding routes for implementing PDA in Israel, expanding the program and its impact is still a considerable challenge. Yet, PDA

implementation is growing slowly but steadily, thanks to professional individuals and organisations that recognise its importance and are interested in taking part in leading the change they believe in.

Challenges that teachers face in implementing the PDA in kindergartens.

Given the crucial role that teachers assume in delivering the PDA in kindergartens, it is important to understand their difficulties and challenges and to address them in a participatory manner. Teachers' motivation is crucial in deciding to learn about the PDA and implement it. Indeed, teachers who are committed to culturally sensitive education and, liberal, democratic values and to peace education choose to learn and implement the PDA in their kindergartens, lead the process in the Israeli EC educational system. However, teachers' intrinsic motivation, ie appreciating the importance of the topic and a desire to promote it, is necessary but not sufficient. The Israeli MOE, as manifested in policy papers and curriculum, and transmitted to teachers, via supervisors, prioritises different issues and messages that maintain the existing power relations in Israeli society. Teachers tend to adhere to MOE guidelines; changing the approach and practice, even of motivated teachers, requires reinforcing conditions (such as a supportive local municipality), that often cannot be met.

Thus, Israeli teachers have difficulty in integrating PDA in the compulsory curriculum and the multiple demands of MOE. PDA and antibias curriculum in general cannot be considered as a mere adjunct to an existing, unrelated curriculum (Acar & Cetin, 2017). It should be integrated within all aspects of curriculum and interactions within kindergarten (Gur-Ziv, 2014). As opposed to other countries (eg Australia and Northern Ireland), Israel's EC curriculum does not integrate anti-bias and peace education in official guidelines for teachers.

Challenges engaging parents in the process.

Israeli teachers and parents alike recognise the importance of dialogical communication between them to create a partnership that will benefit the teacher, the parents and, of course, the children (Addi-Raccah & Grinshtain, 2017)). Yet, building a relationship of trust and collaboration is often a challenge for both parties. Till now, Israeli teachers applied the PDA in kindergartens, focusing mainly on the process that they and the children experienced. They briefly informed the parents about the importance of the PDA and its main goals and principles but preferred at first not to engage them. As mentioned above, some teachers feared parents' response to certain PDs. Others felt more comfortable becoming familiar with the PDA themselves, before inviting parents to take an active role in the process. Some teachers thought that it was better to invest in the children, believing that they, in turn, would share their experiences with their parents and motivate them to get involved.

However, as could be expected, parents did not keep silent about integrating the PDA in their children's kindergarten. Indeed, some parents were resentful. For example, parents expressed anger towards a teacher who invited the children to celebrate Novi God with children whose families came from former Soviet Union, stating that this was not a Jewish holiday. The teacher explained to the parents the non-Christian nature and meaning of the holiday, which resulted in lessening their objection.

For the most part, however, parents responded positively. Children shared their kindergarten experiences with the PDs at home, and parents learned from them about some of the encounters and activities with the dolls. Parents were curious and wanted to know more. Some parents were surprised and happy that their own culture was present and celebrated in the kindergarten, often for the first time. Others saw the value of exposing children to diversity, and some acknowledged the potential of PDs to assist their children in addressing personal difficulties. In several kindergartens, parents asked to host the PD at home and were given the opportunity to do so.

Through their experiences, teachers gained important insights regarding collaborating with parents in implementing the PDA. They understood the importance of gradually exposing children and their families to the PDs, starting from those which were more easily accepted in the community the families belonged. Additionally, teachers felt more confident to inform parents about the PDA and engage them in the process, after successfully applying it.

Clearly, future implementation of the PDA in Israeli kindergartens should include participation of parents, in collaboration with teachers. In doing so, experience gained in other countries can be helpful. For example, in Northern Ireland, alongside teachers, parents participated in training programmes that resulted in their increased awareness of the need to do diversity work with young children. They also increased their confidence in their own ability to do this (See chapter written by Dr. Siobhan Fitzpatrick in this volume).

Lessons learned and Future Directions

Israeli children grow up in a conflicted, divided society. They are impacted by tensions and splits within the Israeli-Jewish society, as well as by the ongoing violent conflict between Israel and Palestinians and Arab countries. Addressing the harmful effects of this situation in the educational system requires developmentally appropriate, contextually anchored, socio-culturally sensitive and anti-prejudice education. This chapter has described an attempt to implement the PDA in Israel's EC system, to construct among children respect of diversity and a hopeful, inclusive worldview.

The Israeli experience has taught us important lessons and highlighted interesting insights: First, regarding teachers—in discussing the Israeli context, and in learning about and implementing the PDA, teachers expressed their awareness of and concern about sensitive sociocultural issues (eg equity, justice and human rights) in Israeli society. They deepened their understanding of their important role in addressing these topics with children. The PDs enabled them to talk with children about topics that they hadn't spoken about before introducing the dolls. Similar to children's experience, teachers authentically related to- and interacted with most (but not all) PDs. The PDs enabled the teacher to maintain her role as an adult who chooses the content the doll brings to kindergarten and facilitates the conversations and activities. At the same time, teachers talked from "within" the PD, remoting themselves from their didactic role. Furthermore, teachers said that taking the PDs' perspectives reduced their own biased attitudes. Thus, on the one hand, teachers' portrayal of the Israeli society is worrisome, but, on the other hand, their commitment to try and change children's experiences is encouraging and hopeful.

In parallel to the process that teachers experienced, children who participated in the process demonstrated openness and strengthening of positive stances towards diversity. Even in the context of an ongoing violent conflict and of increasing socio-cultural splits to which children are exposed, in their interactions with the PDs they were friendly, curious, empathic, and caring. Thus, children reassure us that they are not inherently hateful and biased. Rather, as Nelson Mandela taught us: *"No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."*

- Nelson Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom

For us, an important understanding that stems from the implementation of the PDA in Israel is that educational efforts towards education for a cohesive and peaceful society should not wait for all the facilitating conditions to exist (Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2009; Masarwah et al, 2022). In fact, we are currently in the process of expanding the PDA to Israeli Arab EC settings. Four new PDs are being developed (in addition to Nur, the existing, Muslim PD) in a participatory process. The implementation will obviously include capacity building of teachers, inclusion of parents, developing curricular materials and ongoing mutual learning and knowledge construction of all parties involved. Thus, the expanded Israeli PD array will consist of six Jewish PDs and five Arab dolls. This will enable all Israeli children to strengthen their own positive sense of identity, and to enhance their familiarity of- and respect towards diversity within and between their communities. Hopefully, the process will create the basic qualities which are needed for peace building and social cohesion.

The PDA has been shown to serve as a means for indirect education in EC towards shared life of diverse groups, which presently may be in conflict. Such education can focus on a variety of themes, such as identity, empathy, conflict resolution skills, ecological security, and activism. This conviction should drive future efforts in this vein in Israel and beyond. We, EC educational professionals, should take responsibility to provide children with experiences that create a non-threatening, secure and hopeful worldview; We should enable and encourage children to care and act towards bettering society, for people's individual and social wellbeing.

Finally, on a personal note - as an Israeli who dreads the possibility of Israel, my homeland, losing its democratic essence, I regard the PDA as an essential and hopeful vein to protect and strengthen democratic values in Israel's EC educational system and society in general.

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Children as a bridge



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Introduction

Keremet Koch (The Magic Journey) is a children's animated programme in the Kyrgyz language. The formative research conducted in 2011 confirmed that 98% of three to six year olds watch the programme, enjoy it, love the principal characters and want to emulate their behaviours.

The programme was found to be effective in helping children to learn; for modeling cognitive behaviors; for developing better letter recognition, reading skills, and language development; improving vocabulary; and getting ready for school. Keremet Koch exists in Kyrgyzstan to promote shared life and respect for all forms of diversity in Early Childhood.

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Children as a bridge

Context & Background

Kyrgyzstan is one of five Central Asian countries of the post Soviet Union. It is a landlocked country bordering with Kazakhstan on the northwest and north, by China on the east and south, and by Tajikistan and Uzbekistan on the south and west. Kyrgyzstan is a unitary secular republic and is the first of five Central Asian Republics that declared its independence on 31 August 1991 in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The ethnic composition of the region is very complex. Apart from the main ethnic groups (Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Tajik), there are over 80 ethnic minorities (Uighur, Tatar, Russian, Kazakh, Korean, Ukrainian and others). Central Asian ethnic and national identities were at least partly created by Soviet rule. During Stalin's regime, ethnicity served as a guiding principle, and as a result, Fergana Valley was divided into the three national republics of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan (Tishkov, 1997; Abashin, 2011). However, these countries had ethnically mixed populations in many areas, and the boundaries of ethnicity itself were very blurred. Thus, it is impossible to determine distinctly even the very names of Soviet nationalities, let alone their territorial boundaries (Tishkov, 1997:30-31). The Ferghana Valley extends into three Central Asian countries, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The Kyrgyz part of the Ferghana Valley makes up 40% of the area and 51% of the population of Kyrgyzstan.

With the demise of the Soviet Union, the independent countries of Central Asia started applying ethnographic primordialism in the quest for new identities, as well as in nationalist political discourse (Tishkov, 1997:7). Conflicts had been exacerbated by Soviet definitions

of ethnicity involving fixed and rigid sets of characteristics that are now taken as a given and widely asserted (Liu, 2011:12). Tensions between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz began to rise in the late Soviet period; competition over land and for political and economic influence eventually led to the 1990 Osh Riots (Liu, 2012:22, Tishkov, 1995).

In June 2005, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, former Prime Minister, won presidential elections and ruled Kyrgyzstan until his overthrow by popular revolution in April 2010. After the collapse of his regime and the inauguration of an interim government in 2010, Kyrgyz society lived in tension, intimidated by followers of Bakiyev, who said they would seek to cause unrest. At that time the authorities sought the support of the Uzbek population in the south, to help minimise the influence of the ousted southern Bakiyev clan. In May 2010, influential southern Uzbek politician Kadyrzhan Batyrov spoke to his voters and persuaded Uzbeks to take part in the political process. His speech was taken by some leaders in Kyrgyz society as a call for autonomy (Sikorskaya 2015). Local media in southern regions played an important role in the spread of provocative speeches of Uzbek leaders.

These speeches created negative public images of minorities; anxiety, anger and discontent spread by the media provoked ethnic negativity and created conditions for the growth of xenophobia—which then stoked the violence. In June 2010 the situation escalated into the largest armed conflict between Kyrgyz and Uzbek people residing in Osh and Jalalabad and in some Uzbek border districts.

Independent Kyrgyzstan faces another conflict - a border conflict with Tajikistan. Because the former Soviet Union created country borders without taking into account ethnic, political, economic, and cultural contexts, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have been disputing unsettled border issues for 31 years. In April 2021 and September 2022, military escalation brought instability that led to hostilities on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border. These events were followed by military activity that involved the use of heavy weapons which caused many civilian casualties, and also damage of property and infrastructure.

It is because of this history and context and the resulting attitudes and biases that it produced in society, that action had to be taken! We wanted to ensure that the next generation of children did not inherit damaging and hateful attitudes toward those who were different from them. The decision was made to introduce an educational programme for children in their early years that would prevent negative attitudes and prejudice. This chapter describes efforts in this vein. Thus, the main goal of the research was to evaluate the impact of The Magic Journey, an early childhood development programme which aimed to improve the attitude of children, parents and teachers towards inclusion and gender and ethnic diversity.

Methodology

The aim of the study was to provide high quality evidence of the impact of The Magic Journey. The study utilised an experimental design where The Magic Journey was delivered through 31 kindergartens over a period of 20 weeks. The attitudes of the children, teachers and parents were measured in relation to a number of key outcomes prior to the start of the programme, and again immediately after the delivery of the programme had concluded. Changes in attitudes over this time were measured and compared with changes measured in a control group of similar children, teachers and parents from 17 kindergartens that were not exposed to The Magic Journey.

Through this design, the study sought to assess whether the children, teachers and parents who were attending kindergartens that delivered The Magic Journey demonstrated more improvement in their attitudes towards gender and ethnic diversity compared to those attending kindergartens that did not deliver the programme.

A total number of 726 Children, 752 parents or caregivers and 96 teachers were recruited from 48 kindergartens in 12 districts across the two provinces of Batken and Issyk-Kul to take part in the study. Of the 48 kindergartens, 31 acted as the intervention group that delivered The Magic Journey program, and 17 acted as the control group.

The study was designed to assess the impact of The Magic Journey on the following outcomes:

Child Outcomes

- Socioemotional development
- Increased ability to recognise emotions in others
- Increased ability to recognise instances of exclusion
- Increased ability to recognise how being excluded makes someone feel
- Awareness of cultural symbols
- Increased ability to recognise the national Kyrgyz instrument, the Komuz
- Increased ability to recognise the Dutar
- Increased ability to recognise the Balalaika
- Increased desire to play the Komuz
- Increased desire to play instruments from a different nationality
- Inclusive behaviour
- Increased willingness to be inclusive of others in general
- Increased willingness to be inclusive of those who are different in terms of nationality
- Increased willingness to be inclusive of those who are different in terms of gender

Parent Outcomes

- Increased recognition of the importance of doing diversity work with young children
- Increased confidence in dealing with diversity issues with young children
- Improved parental engagement with children
- Increased importance of father involvement
- Increased positive attitudes towards gender
- Increased positive attitudes towards ethnic tolerance

Teacher Outcomes

- Increased recognition of the importance of doing diversity work with young children
- Increased confidence in dealing with diversity issues with young children
- Improved teacher engagement with children
- Increased importance of father involvement
- Increased positive attitudes towards gender
- Increased positive attitudes towards ethnic tolerance

Results

The pilot study showed promising signs of the potential impact on children’s ability to recognise emotions in others. Children were asked to identify several emotions - happy, sad, angry and scared, in two different tasks. The child was given the score 1 if they got the emotion correct and zero if it was incorrect. A mean score of correct emotions was calculated for the eight items ranging between zero and one. At post-test, the intervention group had a mean post-test score of 0.44 emotions correct (SD=0.19) compared with the control group who scored 0.39 emotions correct (0.18). The intervention group had a greater emotional recognition score compared with the control group however this difference was not statistically significant.

Focus group discussions carried out with fathers demonstrated their low engagement in children’s upbringing. These fathers expressed willingness to be engaged in learning a new early childhood development programme and were interested in supporting the implementation of the programme. They also recognised the importance of acquiring knowledge about the development of children in their early years.

Next, we assessed the impact of the programme on children’s willingness to be inclusive of children of a different gender. This was measured by showing the children a photo of a child of a different gender. For example, girls were shown a photo of a neutral boy and asked if they would like to play with him. A variable was created for a child’s willingness to be inclusive of a child of a different gender by subtracting the score for a neutral boy from the score for a neutral girl if a child was a boy. The same procedure was followed if a

child was a girl, except the score for a neutral girl would be subtracted from a neutral boy, producing a scale between -3 and 3. A score closer to zero indicated that a child tended to treat the neutral boy and girl similarly. However, larger negative scores indicated that a child tended to favour the neutral child of their own gender compared to the other. Similarly, larger positive scores indicated that they tended to favour the neutral child of the opposite gender. Figure 1 presents the results of this component.

Figure 1: The Effect of the Programme on the outcome “inclusive of children of a different gender” *

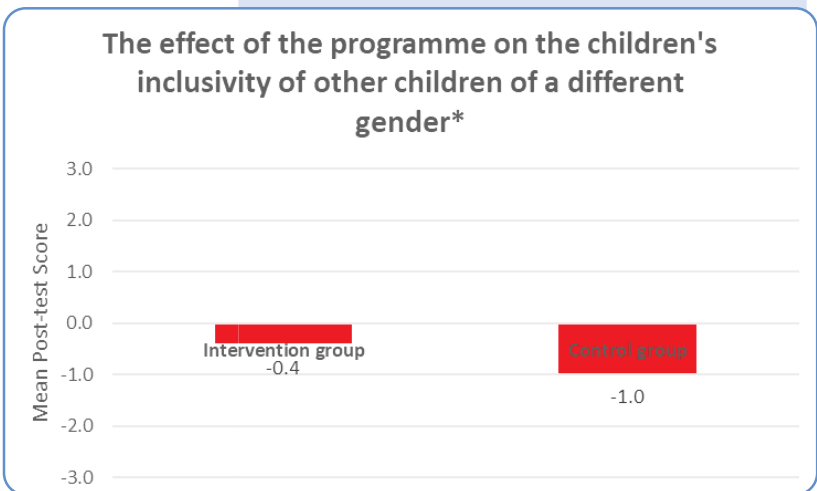


Figure 1 compares the average scores for the children in the intervention and control groups at post-test (controlling for pre-test differences and also controlling for gender and nationality). As can be seen, both groups had average scores, indicating that children tended to express a preference to play with a child of their own gender. However, it can also be seen that this preference had reduced for those in the intervention group who had participated in *The Magic Journey*. This difference in the average scores between the intervention and control groups was statistically significant ($p < .001$).

Additionally, these were promising signs of the potential impact on the children's ability to recognise instances of exclusion and to recognise how being excluded makes someone feel. Children were shown a photograph of a child who had been excluded and asked what they thought was happening in the photograph. A total of 96 (46%) of children in the intervention group at post-test recognised that the child was being excluded compared with 33 (36%) of the control group. Although a higher proportion of the intervention group recognised when a child was being excluded after participating in the intervention, when a multilevel logistic regression model was carried out controlling for pre-test differences, gender and ethnicity, the difference between the intervention and control group was not significant.

This was also the case for feelings of exclusion. A total of 72 children (39%) of the intervention group at post-test were able to recognise how being excluded would make someone feel compared with 22 (30%) of the control group. However, this difference was not statistically significant.

Summary

The findings of this pilot study are encouraging and provide some evidence that The Magic Journey is having a positive and measurable effect on the children's attitudes to gender and ethnic diversity. In particular, there is clear evidence that exposure to The Magic Journey is associated with increased willingness to be inclusive in general, with improved attitudes towards gender differences.

The pilot study also found promising signs of a possible positive impact on children's awareness of exclusion and how being excluded makes someone feel, as well as in their ability to recognise emotions in others. However, these findings were not statistically significant and thus need to be treated with caution. Further evidence is required, from a larger and more controlled trial, to verify these.

By contrast, no evidence was found in this present pilot study that The Magic Journey increased children's awareness of musical instruments associated with different ethnic groups or impacted their attitudes to ethnic differences. These findings would suggest that further emphasis needs to be placed on these factors in the delivery of The Magic Journey.

Finally, no significant differences were found between the intervention and control group on any parent or teacher outcomes. These findings may be due to the lower numbers of parents and teachers and the higher levels of missing data for these. The findings suggest the need for greater focus on recruiting teachers and parents and minimising missing data in the main study.

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Peacebuilding in Early Childhood: Vision, Challenges, and Hopes



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Introduction

This chapter will provide a general overview of the situation in Lebanon with respect to the socioeconomic situation as well as the prevalent conflicts and their impact on children's rights, with particular emphasis on early childhood. It will describe how conflict resolution and peacebuilding with young children was introduced in Lebanon and the role of the International Development and Empowerment Association (IDEA) NGO. Existing relevant programmes will be outlined including a needs assessment, challenges, and the way forward.

The chapter highlights that there are existing structures, partnerships and technical expertise and resources locally, regionally and internationally that could be built upon to pursue the work in early childhood and peacebuilding.

Lina Hamaoui

Lina Hamaoui has completed a Masters degree from the American University of Beirut and continued her studies in Canada and the USA in both formal and informal degrees and certificates. She is a prominent consultant in Lebanon and the MENA region and has over 32 years of advanced experience in human rights, peacebuilding and community development. As a children's rights advocate with special interest in early childhood development and peacebuilding, Ms. Hamaoui founded the International Development and Empowerment Association—IDEA, a Lebanese NGO with special focus on children from birth to 18 years of age as well as caregivers, communities and policy makers.

Peacebuilding in Early Childhood: Vision, Challenges, and Hopes

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ANECD	Arab Network on Early Childhood Development
AUB	American University of Beirut
CAS	Central Administration of Statistics
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECPC	Early Childhood Peace Consortium
ERW	Explosive remnants of War
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GoL	Government of Lebanon
HCC	Higher Council for Childhood
IDEA	International Development and Empowerment Association
INPB	International Network on Peace Building with Young Children
MEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
MOPH	Ministry of Public Health
MOSA	Ministry of Social Affairs
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMACC	UN Mine Action Coordination Centre
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
WFP	World Food Programme

It is a challenge to instate peace and a bigger challenge to sustain it...

Abstract

This chapter will provide a general overview of the situation in Lebanon with respect to the socioeconomic as well as the prevalent conflicts and their impact on children's rights, with particular emphasis on Early Childhood. Furthermore, it will describe how conflict resolution and peacebuilding with young children was introduced in Lebanon and the role of the International Development and Empowerment Association (IDEA), NGO. Existing relevant programmes will be outlined including a needs assessment, challenges and the way forward.

Introduction

Lebanon is located along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea and is bordered on the north and east by Syria, and by the Occupied Palestinian Territories in the south, with a surface area of 10,452 square kilometres. The main cities are distributed along the seacoast and the capital is Beirut. Mountains align the inland and eastern part of the country, and in between these ranges lies the Bekaa Valley, a fertile agricultural area. Lebanon is a Mediterranean country with moderate weather.

Demography

Lebanon is the only UN member state that has not conducted a population census since the end of World War II. The sensitivity and politicisation of demographic statistics hinders a uniform and official demographic analysis of the country. The only population census made was under the French mandate in 1932 that found Christian Maronites to constitute the largest demographic group, followed by Sunni Muslims and then Shiite Muslims. Prior to the Syrian Crisis, in 2011 Lebanon was home to 4.2 million people, out of which 1.3 million were below the age of 18 and 322,000 below the age of 5. In the population, 95%

are Arab and 5% are Armenian or from another ethnic group. Additionally, a study by the Central Administration of Statistics (CAS) published in 2013, based on the 2009 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), showed that children between birth and 17 years represent just under one third of the total population, amounting to 31%. Younger children, those between birth and four years old, represented 5% while the older children, aged five to 17 years, represented 26%.

Since 1948, and up until the Syrian Crisis, 425,000 Palestinian refugees were registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the official body mandated to provide basic services to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon's camps. The latest study conducted by the American University of Beirut (AUB) estimated that 260,000-280,000 refugees were residing in Lebanon in 2010, most of them in the camps, half of them under the age of 25. The Palestinian refugee population in Lebanon is estimated to be young, with more than 45% of refugees under the age of 18.

Before the Syrian Crisis, more than 80% of the 9,000 refugees and asylum seekers registered with the UNHCR were from Iraq. In addition, there are reports that 80,000 stateless persons (among them Kurds, Bedouins, and those that were unregistered at birth, including children born out of wedlock) reside in Lebanon. It is estimated that there are 758,000 international migrants, out of which nearly half are women, mainly domestic workers. As illustrated by the numbers above, accurate demographic statistics in Lebanon are scarce and existing statistics should be understood as approximations (Save the Children, Hamaoui, 2016).

The Syrian Crisis - influx of displaced

The Syrian Crisis significantly affected the demographic profile of the country. The population of Lebanon is now one fifth Syrian (27 Syrians per 100 Lebanese), rendering it the highest per capita hosting country in the world when accounting for its previous refugee populations.

The Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (2022-2023) indicates that as of October 2021, the Government of Lebanon (GoL) estimates that the country hosts 1.5 million Syrians who have fled the conflict in Syria, including 844,056 refugees registered with UNHCR, along with 257,000 Palestinian refugees. These populations live across all governorates in Lebanon (Government of Lebanon 2022).

The Syrian conflict at large has challenged the already delicate societal and inter-communal balance in Lebanon. Overcrowding, saturation of basic services and competition for jobs are among the root causes for social tensions between host and refugee communities. Maintaining and promoting greater social cohesion is important to reduce the negative social and economic impacts of this crisis (The world Bank, 2013).

Latest demographic data indicates that the total population size is 5,490,000 people, with a population under five years old at 420,000. (UNICEF Lebanon, 2023)

Political and Security Situation (War and Conflicts)

Lebanon is a parliamentary democratic republic, with three branches of government: the legislative, executive, and judicial. The political system in Lebanon is based on a division of power between Lebanon's various religious groups, or sects. There are 18 officially recognised religious sects that can more generally be categorised as Muslim or Christian.

Lebanon has a long history of civil conflict involving its competing religious and ethnic factions. These factions include the Maronite Christian minority, who are often in conflict with the Muslim majority. The Muslims are themselves divided between the Sunni Muslim majority and the Shiite Muslim minority. The Druze people in the southern mountains forms another distinct faction.

Ever since Lebanon emerged as an independent state in 1943, its history has been marked by sectarian strife, political divides, and unstable relations with neighbouring countries—all of which have driven the country into conflict at different points in time. While many of these issues remain unresolved (and continue to be critical drivers of conflict), recent events in Lebanon have reshaped these long-term social fissures and created new ones. These include the economic crisis, the Beirut port explosion and Covid-19 pandemic.

The country has repeatedly suffered from extended governance vacuums and remains dominated by a corrupt system that is increasingly unable to provide even the basic functions of governance, let alone implement much needed reforms.

Given that the roots of historic conflicts have been left unaddressed, civil war grievances are resurfacing and tolerance towards "the other" is decreasing. Protests and other acts of popular anger are increasingly taking on sectarian overtones as people retreat to their confessional identity. The security situation in Lebanon has been deteriorating since the end of the Civil War in 1990.

The Lebanese Civil War which lasted from 13 April 1975 until 13 October 1990, was a multifaceted armed conflict in Lebanon which resulted in nearly 200,000 fatalities and the exodus of nearly one million people from the country. The domestic belligerents of the war

included various armed groups with Maronite Christian, Sunni Muslim, Shia Muslim and Druze affiliations, and the external parties included Syria, Israel, and a multinational force comprising France, Italy and the United States. The war concluded with the Taif Agreement which altered the representational balance of the various religious groups while calling for the disarmament of the militias.

Constant disturbances and armed conflict such as political assassinations (most notably the 2005 assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri), the 2006 Lebanon-Israel War and the 2007 Lebanese Army-Nahr El Bared Militia clash represented serious threats to the aspired stability in Lebanon. However, the security situation in Lebanon deteriorated in 2014 in ways the country had not previously experienced. Two principal factors played a role here: first, the spillover violence from the Syrian conflict, and second, the abrogation of democratic institutions in the wake of parliament's failure to elect a president until the end of 2016. There has also been a resurgence of sectarian violence in Lebanon, with numerous reports of bombings, assassinations, and isolated battles between the army and sub-state militias. The Syrian Civil War and its domestic impact has furthered the polarisation of Lebanese politics.

Following the massive explosion in the port area of Beirut in August 2020, Lebanese citizens increasingly blamed the ruling political class for this disaster. Protests broke out, including a takeover of the foreign ministry building, among other government facilities. The situation puts the Lebanese government in a difficult position as it struggles to deal with this crisis. Police and security forces battled the protesters with tear gas and rubber bullets, as the situation worsened.

Ongoing Israel wars and conflicts targeting Lebanon

Lebanon has experienced a prolonged period of conflict, including Israeli aggressions, wars, and occupation, which continue to impact the country. The consequences of these events have been particularly harsh on children, who have been deprived of their rights as a result of Israeli attacks on people and infrastructure throughout Lebanon, especially in the Southern and Western Bekaa regions.

War crimes and massacres have occurred repeatedly, often targeting innocent civilians. Israel has been known to employ internationally prohibited weapons, such as phosphorus, chemical, nail, and cluster bombs, as well as vacuum bombs, with the intention of causing significant harm to the civilian population, including children.

Tragically, Israeli air raids have resulted in the loss of life and disfigurement of children, widespread destruction, and instilled fear and anxiety among the younger generation. Moreover, children's rights have frequently been violated, as their homes are targeted and they are subjected to daily bombardment, thus endangering their lives.

As a consequence of these actions, children have experienced immense human and material losses, displacement, and internal migration, all of which have had a detrimental impact on their survival, overall development, and ability to live securely within stable families.

Israel has shown disregard for international conventions and laws that aim to protect civilians on both sides of the conflict.

The 1996 Qana Massacre

“Operation Grapes of Wrath” offensive that kills more than 200 people in Lebanon. On 18 April, 1996 Israeli forces fired artillery shells at a UN compound in Qana, a village in southern Lebanon. Around 800 had taken shelter at the compound which was clearly marked on Israeli maps. In the strikes 106 were killed, of whom half were children, and 120 were injured, including four UN workers. Although Israel claimed it did not know that civilians had taken shelter in the UN compound, video evidence refuted this narrative. The UN believed that Israel acted deliberately (Jegic, 2020).

During the Israeli occupation, children in the occupied territories were coerced into joining the armed forces of the South Lebanon Army (SLA), a Lebanese militia group formed and funded by Israel, and representing its executive arm in Lebanon, depriving children of their personal freedom, including the freedom to move between different regions within their country (Lebanese Republic, 2005).

In 2000, Israel was compelled to withdraw from southern Lebanon after 22 years of occupation, with the exception of the areas known as “Sheba Farms” and “Kafr Shouba Mounts.” However, even after the withdrawal, Israel continued to launch attacks on Lebanese territories. These attacks mainly involved numerous air violations that caused panic and fear among children, resulting in psychological trauma and instability. Over time, these effects progressed and manifested as confused and disruptive behaviour within their communities.

Additionally, maritime attacks had a paralyzing impact on Lebanon’s economy and tourism sector. These attacks frequently led to the diversion of commercial and tourist activities to other countries, causing significant disruption in Lebanon (Lebanese Republic, 2005).

July 2006 Aggression

Lebanon suffered the deadliest military attacks by the Israeli army, as a result of the aggression of July 2006. This action was a violation of international conventions and norms of protection of civilians in general and children in particular, and a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and human rights.

The war that lasted 33 days resulted in considerable loss of life. According to the estimates of the High Relief Commission, about 1,308 persons were martyred, including 249 children more than 60 of whom were under five years of age. About 4,830 persons were injured, including 908 children; it should be noted that most of the injuries were serious and caused severe deformities and burns.

Israeli aggression was relatively short, but its swiftness was very intense, and violations of the rights of children exceeded those of any previous hostility. The following events were documented as war crimes against children:

- The Marwaheen massacre: on 15 July 2006 the Israeli army deliberately targeted a convoy of civilians displaced from their homes. The outcome of this assault was 21 dead, including 14 children.
- The Qana massacre: this was a deliberate attack by the Israeli military on a civilian building where more than 28 civilians were killed, including 16 children, many with disabilities.
- The assault on the Chiyah building: a deliberate air strike by the Israeli air forces killed 31 civilians, including 18 children.
- On July 23, Israeli warplanes attacked ambulances that were clearly flying Red Cross flags. Although the Israeli forces issued an ultimatum to civilians to leave with their children, they did not give them any guarantee of safe passage and many were attacked while on the roads, including children (the massacre of displaced families from the town of Mansuri).
- The experience of children during aggression may include direct involvement in watching victims (that is, if they are not victims themselves), forced displacement and migration, insecurity, exposure to extreme violence, physical injury, loss of a family member—if not all of them—which affect the child and his ability to recover (Lebanese Republic, 2015).

Ongoing threats to civilians and children - Landmines and Unexploded Bombs

Decades of civil and external conflicts have left Lebanon with an extensive legacy of landmine and cluster bomb contamination. According to military sources, landmines were emplaced in Lebanon between 1975 and 1990. Most of the parties who participated in the war used landmines to consolidate their defensive position along demarcation lines, which have moved many times. Following the end of the conflict in 1990, the Lebanese armed forces began to address the threat caused by mines.

According to the military, the majority of known and identified minefields has been cleared between 1990 and 1998. In May 2000 after the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon, Israel handed the landmine maps to UNIFIL, which has transferred the maps to the government of Lebanon. The coverage and accuracy of these maps are still controversial. While information on the landmine and Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) problem in South Lebanon remains incomplete, it is estimated that 150,000 landmines are spread across the country (Wie, UNDP, 2016).

The most substantial permanent harm done by Israel is the random dissemination of hundreds of thousands of landmines in the heart of the Lebanese agricultural lands and prairies, on both sides of roads and even meters away from houses, schools and other facilities where children could play and have recreational zones. An unlimited number of minefields with unknown locations as well as many disseminated cluster bombs and unexploded missiles within inhabited areas represent a constant threat to civilians and children.

The UN Mine Action Coordination Centre (UNMACC) in Lebanon estimates that about one million unexploded cluster bombs remain in and around villages across south Lebanon. According to the UN, 90% of the cluster bombs were fired in the last three days of the 2006 conflict, after the ceasefire

had already been agreed. To date the Israeli authorities have failed to provide maps of the exact areas targeted by their forces when using cluster bombs. Without those maps, demining experts face an arduous and perilous task, and relief and reconstruction efforts are hampered. Meanwhile, Lebanon remains a deadly minefield for adult and child alike. Their small size and shape—some deceptively like tennis balls, others like large torch batteries—make them particularly difficult to detect and attractive to children (Amnesty International, 2006).

During the aggression of July 2006, there were frightening estimates of the quantity and spread of unexploded explosives, including landmines, cluster bombs and ammunition, in the populated areas. Within a single month following the end of the aggression, there were 30 child victims of these mines, including wounded and martyrs. According to the estimates of the Ministry of National Defence Army Command the total number of children who were victims of unexploded mines and ammunition stands at 88 (11 martyrs and 77 wounded); Locating unexploded mines and ammunition is still ongoing. (Lebanese Republic, 2015)

The total number of mine/Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) casualties in Lebanon recorded from 1975 to December 2014 was 3,723 mine/ERW casualties (905 killed; 2,818 injured). Of these casualties, over 80% were male and less than 20% were female; 27% were children. Of the casualties, 87% are survivors and 13% were killed by cluster munitions (Government of Lebanon, 2013).

In 2022 the Lebanese and Israeli governments agreed to a US-brokered deal demarcating the maritime boundary, calling it historic. The deal opens the way to offshore oil and gas exploration and defuses a potential source of conflict.

However, the situation on the Lebanese southern border remains volatile and sensitive with the constant risk of escalation of tensions.

An emerging Lebanese–Syrian conflict

The presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and their return to Syria is becoming a serious issue and an emergent conflict. Lebanese officials do not refer to the Syrians in their territories as refugees but rather as displaced persons. Lebanon seeks to position itself as “no country of asylum”, as stipulated in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2003. The phrase has, in recent years, been repeated in many political and humanitarian settings relating to refugees (Jammyr, 2016).

From 1976 until 2005, Lebanon was under Syrian occupation. The last Syrian troops left the country on 26 April 2005. Lebanese officials have politicised the issue of the Syrian refugees’ return amid political divisions over the war in Syria. Thousands of Syrians have left Lebanon since 2017 as part of a so-called “voluntary repatriation programme”, organised by the Lebanese General Security and Syrian authorities in Damascus, who claim that Syria is safe for their return. But rights organisations have criticised the move, saying that Syrians are being forcibly deported back to the war-torn country, where their lives are at risk.

Calls for their return have significantly increased after the 2019 economic collapse, as many blame the refugees for being behind the country’s economic, social and security failures. Their presence is perceived by some Lebanese groups as a major demographic, economic and security issue, even more so as the country suffers through a serious socioeconomic crisis. (*L’orient le Jour*, 2023). There is a growing grudge against Syrian refugees relating to refugees benefiting from cash assistance, support and relatively better living conditions than the poor Lebanese.

In December 2022, the Lebanese Prime Minister called on the UN to help authorities secure a safe return for Syrian refugees to their homeland as the situation has stabilised in Syria (*L’orient le Jour*, 2022). Tensions

escalated in 2023, with increasing public demands for the return of Syrians to their country, given that there are safe zones in Syria and a great number of Syrians are able to go back and forth during holidays, and as such cannot be considered as refugees. Various anti-Syrian campaigns were launched in April 2023 asking for deportation.

The General Federation of Trade Unions in Lebanon announced a “national campaign to liberate Lebanon from the Syrian demographic occupation,” calling on authorities to organise their return to their areas in Syria. Various municipalities instated restrictive measures on Syrians relating to employment, rent and movement: Some asked the Syrians to leave certain villages. In the Baalbeck-Hermel governorate in eastern Lebanon, the governor asked the Lebanese State Security to crack down on commercial shops in the governorate employing undocumented Syrians and dispense of them (*Al Monitor*, 2023).

Lebanon’s authorities have deported more than 50 Syrians back to Syria. Lebanese Army and security officials said that Lebanon’s army intelligence unit has recently intensified its raids against undocumented Syrians across the country. “The army’s detention centres are full,” the army official explained. “So, the army had to take this measure and place them outside Lebanese borders.” In parallel, the Lebanese government initiated some regulatory measures, starting by undertaking a survey of the existing Syrian refugees due to UNHCR refusal to submit its relevant database to the government.

In May 2023 the Minister of Social Affairs called for a “reversal” of the UN refugee agency’s recent move to grant US dollar cash aid to Syrian refugees in Lebanon, which he called a “mistaken decision” and a “crime against Lebanon”. He also called for refugees to receive the payment of aid upon their return to Syria to encourage such returns. The United Nations had suspended its “dual currency” (Lebanese and US Dollars

concurrently) mechanism for the provision of all cash assistance to refugees in Lebanon and adopted US Dollars exclusively, starting June 2023. The issue remains unresolved.

Economy

For nearly three years, Lebanon has been assailed by the most devastating, multi-pronged crisis in its modern history, a crisis that the World Bank has ranked as within the world's top three most severe economic crises since the mid 19th century (World Bank, 2021). The unfolding economic and financial crisis that started in October 2019 has been further exacerbated by the dual economic impact of the COVID-19 outbreak, and the massive Port of Beirut explosion in August 2020. Of the three crises, the economic crisis has had by far the largest (and most persistent) negative impact.

Lebanon is almost three years into an economic and financial crisis that is among the worst the world has seen. Real GDP is estimated to have declined by 10.5% in 2021, on the back of a 21.4% contraction in 2020 as policymakers have still not agreed on a plan to address the collapse of the country's development model. The exchange rate continued to deteriorate sharply in 2021, keeping inflation rates in triple digits. The share of the Lebanese population under the national poverty line is estimated to have risen by 9.1 percentage points (pp) by end-2021.

Lebanon has witnessed a dramatic collapse in basic services, driven by depleting FX reserves. Subject to extraordinarily high uncertainty, real GDP was projected to contract by a further 6.5% in 2022 under the assumptions of continued inadequate macro policy responses and a minimum level of stability on the political and security scenes. The severe economic and political crisis has led to widespread poverty, collapsing public services, and growing community tensions. The situation has been worsened by a global food and fuel crisis. The Lebanese pound's depreciation and hyperinflation have significantly reduced people's purchasing power.

"In March 2021, 78% of the Lebanese population (three million people) was estimated to be in poverty," the World Bank report said. This is a significant increase from the 55 % reported to be living below the poverty line in a similar report published in 2020 (UNOCHA, 2021).

The deteriorating economic situation has prompted a spike in unemployment and food insecurity; according to UN ESCWA, 82% of households in Lebanon live in multidimensional poverty, whereas 40% are classified as suffering from extreme multidimensional poverty. Until recently, poverty was measured solely by individual or household income levels in relation to specific money-metric poverty lines. With the progress of research and the more frequent availability of adequate surveys, the concept of poverty expanded to consider various aspects of living conditions. Consequently, a new concept of poverty has come to light, which includes various aspects of deprivation, not limited to material dimensions. It has become known as multidimensional poverty and is measured by multidimensional poverty indices (ESCWA, 2021).

Lebanon has been added to the list of hunger hotspot countries in 2023. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) both warn that acute food insecurity is likely to deteriorate further in 18 hunger hotspots – comprising a total of 22 countries – during the outlook period from June to November 2023 (FAO, WFP, 2023).

In a country that hosts the highest number of refugees per capita, the economic crisis and increasingly difficult living situation have further exacerbated existing Syrian-Lebanese tensions, as Lebanese grow more protective of the limited resources available in the country. The European Union (EU) co-funded needs assessment shows that all population groups struggle to cover their basic needs, particularly food and health care.

Access to health care has been drastically reduced due to financial barriers and shortages of medicines and supplies. A brain drain of health staff is ongoing while power cuts leave hospitals running at half capacity, admitting critical cases only. Public services were already struggling before the economic crisis. Now, they are on the brink of collapse, reaching emergency thresholds.

Syrian refugee families in informal settlements and collective shelters often live in deplorable, substandard conditions. Six out of 10 school-aged migrants and Syrian refugees are out of school, while over 10% of Lebanese children have dropped out (European Commission, 2023).

New UNICEF data and findings reveal just how profoundly children's lives have been devastated by Lebanon's massive crisis. The crisis plunged children across the country into poverty, affecting their health, welfare and education, shattering their hopes and breaking down family relationships. Three years of economic crisis, compounded by COVID-19, the 2020 Beirut Port explosions and political instability have left all families living in Lebanon struggling to survive, with severe consequences for children. Soaring prices and widespread unemployment have plunged numerous families into multidimensional poverty a concept that considers not simply income levels but a wide range of deprivations limiting their ability to provide for their children's basic needs.

A UNICEF study, "Multidimensional Child Poverty in Lebanon: A Qualitative Overview", found that much of the progress Lebanon had made towards achieving children's rights—as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)—has been eroded by the economic crisis, and to a lesser extent, by the COVID-19 pandemic. It shows that children's rights to health, welfare, protection and education, as well as their right to play, have all been severely affected. Rising tensions further fuelled by polarisation within and between communities have led to an increase in

violence, including within homes and schools. At present, various children's rights are being infringed, the latter is being exacerbated by relevant failed government policies (UNICEF Lebanon, 2022).

On an educational level, the academic year was interrupted for two months in 2023, due to teachers' strikes in public sector schools, whereby demanding salaries increase. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) was not able to promptly address teachers' strikes. On the other hand, and although for Syrian children education funds are available for the afternoon study shift at the public schools, the ministry of education opted to close the schools altogether to prevent conflicts that would ensue by depriving the Lebanese students of education. As mentioned previously, tensions are escalating between Lebanese and Syrians, stemming from competition over the limited resources in the midst of the economic crisis.

In March 2023 public schools reopened only after UNICEF disbursed 13.7 million to public schools, whereby financially supporting the MEHE. This allowed the reopening of 1074 public schools, including 342 afternoon shifts and 450,000 students going back to school, saving the academic year. However, such support is not sustainable and hence, the MEHE needs to find alternative strategies to address the root causes of the problems (UNICEF Lebanon, 2023).

In the health sector, due to the economic situation, there is a vast difference between what the National Social Security Fund is covering and what is being charged by health care providers and hospital. Recently, the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) stopped subsidising medications and infant milk. The majority of families are deprived of health and medical care, and the costs of medication and milk are escalating.

Early Childhood and Peacebuilding

Background

The International Development and Empowerment Association-IDEA (FIKRA) is a Lebanese NGO, established in Lebanon at the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities in 2010 by the Ministerial Decision No: 1893. IDEA aims at the realisation of human rights with special focus on children rights. It is guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and related principles, namely Life Survival and Development, Non-Discrimination, The Best Interests of the Child and Child Participation with a voice in society.

IDEA founders are advocates for children's rights, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and have been active prior to establishment to the present date. Furthermore, participation of the founding members in the late nineties, in the Summer Peacebuilding Institute at the Eastern Mennonite University in the USA, was a positive contributing factor to the initiation of activities and programmes linking children's rights and peacebuilding. This contribution was accompanied by the Early Childhood Virtual University at Victoria University funded by the World Bank and UNICEF.

Peace Building Programs for Children

In a country emerging from civil war and severely impacted by ongoing conflicts and divisions, the first initiatives by NGOs targeted mainly adults and were focused on capacity building and some reconciliation activities. The latter were challenging for the implementing organisations, given that the topic of peacebuilding is sensitive, as it could imply peace with the country's external enemy and not local peacebuilding. Consequently, most programmes were adapted in such a way so that peacebuilding was incorporated as a sub-component in other programmes.

As organisations acquired experience in the field of peacebuilding, they realised that to be effective it is crucial to include children in their programmes and started targeting youth,

including those below the age of 18. However, the focus was, and still is, centred on older age groups, whereas early childhood age group was excluded. This could be attributed to the general distorted perception of early childhood, namely that young children cannot assimilate such activities and their respective role is minimal. Thus, over the years the early childhood phase, especially below five years of age, didn't receive the needed attention.

In principle, no government authority can fully embrace this field on its own. In Lebanon, there is no unified policy for Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), but rather components of it are divided in the mandates of the MOPH, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA), the Higher Council for Childhood (HCC), and the MEHE. The current ECCD system is fragmented and does not address the multiple interdependent needs of children in this age group (birth to eight years). This translated into fragmented programmes per sector that are not linked due to a lack of clarity on overall leadership and definition of responsibilities between the different concerned ministries.

It must be noted that the HCC has been working through a specialised committee which is working on elaborating a strategy for ECCD. In fact, a first draft was discussed and commented on by various national stakeholders in 2015. The activities of the committee were halted until 2023. In May 2023, the HCC launched the work of a national ECCD technical working group comprising national stakeholders, as well as the Arab Network on Early Childhood Development (ANECD) to re-launch the subcommittee activities and update and endorse the national strategy.

In Lebanon, ECCD is still not given sufficient attention and is not widely understood or successfully managed by duty-bearers. There is no unified policy for ECCD, but rather components of it are divided into the mandates of different ministries. The current ECCD system is fragmented and does not address the multiple interdependent needs

of children in this age group (birth to eight years). For example, Lebanon does not provide statutory entitlement or private sector for childcare services. Furthermore, in the education system, early childhood is marginalised, while basic education which starts at six years of age is given more weight.

While MEHE is taking care of Early Childhood Education (ECE) for children above three years of age in daycare, the latter is not compulsory. Moreover, a clear institutional framework for ECE is still lacking for children below three years old. Decree No. 4876 regulates nurseries, and the Ministry of Public Health is the main authority responsible for children under three years of age. Nonetheless, public nurseries are operated by MOSA. MOSA's nurseries target mostly poor, vulnerable, and marginalised communities. Most nurseries are provided by the private sector. The predominance of the expensive private sector as the main provider of nursery and kindergarten care undermines accessibility and affordability.

Existing and Potential Resources

Existing Resources

Building on the above and taking into consideration the prevailing context and bottlenecks and available funding, IDEA founders decided to pursue the work with children (birth to 18), their parents and policy makers on children's rights, and incorporate peacebuilding, conflict resolution, tolerance and non-violence components.

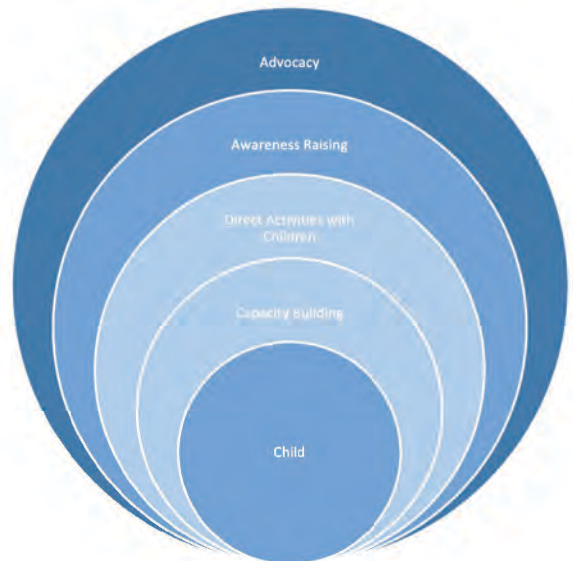
Moreover, specific programmes targeting young children were initiated, aiming at promoting early childhood development and making visible the role of early childhood development as a space for reconciliation and peace, in line with the network's objective. The topics varied, including children's participation, recreational activities/ educational project involvement of children in armed conflict, juvenile justice, and restorative justice.

The approach and methodology that was adopted and standardised encompassed the child rights-based approach and child rights-based programming. In addition to research and rapid assessment conducted by children themselves, peer to peer approach and development of small scale projects that target children. Funding was provided by several donors, including UNICEF, UNDEF, European Union.

As for the projects outreach; they were national, covering geographically all of the Lebanese Governorates through the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA), Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Schools.

The target groups included children themselves in the older age groups (13-17 years), workers with children and parents, and several duty-bearers; parents of the targeted children involved, and at-large and government policy makers.

The adopted methods relied on four pillars, namely; capacity building, awareness raising, advocacy, implementation of direct activities with children and pilot projects as detailed hereafter.



Capacity Building

Capacity building through training of trainers (TOTs) was key in all the programmes aiming at building the capacity to train others whereby effectuating a snowball sustainable process. Capacity building enabled workers to work with children, parents, and communities, as well as policymakers.

All capacity building was coupled with the development of training materials and manuals to be used beyond the timeframe of the projects and programmes. In fact, some produced materials fed into the International Toolkit Manual for practitioners (International Networking Group on Peace Building with Young Children) working with young children and families in regions experiencing or emerging from conflict.

As a result of the capacity building, a national core team of 30 trainers and facilitators was formed and is readily available to pursue the work. Training core teams of at least 30 facilitators should be an ongoing annual process allowing the capacity building of existing and new entrants to the field of childhood.

Direct Activities with Children

Trained trainers and facilitators with acquired skills implement a wide array of activities with children, including training on children's rights, conflict resolution, non-violence, non-discrimination, and recreation based on the developed training manuals. Activities include interactive exercises and play.

Given the scarcity of baselines and limited research due to lack of funding, monitoring and evaluation was crucial in all programmes, and was adapted to generate baseline information including pre and post evaluations. Generated information was used to further guide and improve the projects and programmes.

Awareness Raising

Similarly, trained workers organise awareness raising sessions for parents, encompassing various topics like the CRC, ECD, and conflict resolution. Parents are organised into groups and participate in children's activities, community mobilisation as well as advocacy campaigns. Many materials were produced to support awareness campaigns like pamphlets, posters, and banners, among others. In addition, social media was used to enhance the campaigns.

Advocacy

Advocacy is a component that cuts across all programmes, aimed at changing national policy. We are pursuing advocacy through partnerships with the public sector, national conferences, meetings with policymakers and mobilisation of members of the parliament, and media activities. Custom made materials have been developed and disseminated. These materials cover the ratification of the UNCRC protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, advocating to raise the age of criminal responsibility from seven to 12 years of age, restorative justice and alternative measures to imprisonment, inclusion of recreational/educational activities for children in the educational curricula.

Selected Success Story

One successful method we have adopted serves multiple purposes (Capacity building, Awareness, Advocacy). This method supports older children to assess children's needs including those of young children in a peer-to-peer process. The method was developed by IDEA in the context of an UNDEF funded project, Democratic and Empowerment Processes for Youth-cohesion and social stability (DEEP-CSS) and implemented in partnership with the permanent peace movement NGO. This led to the design and implementation of small-scale projects benefitting children, including young children.

The project's overall development goal

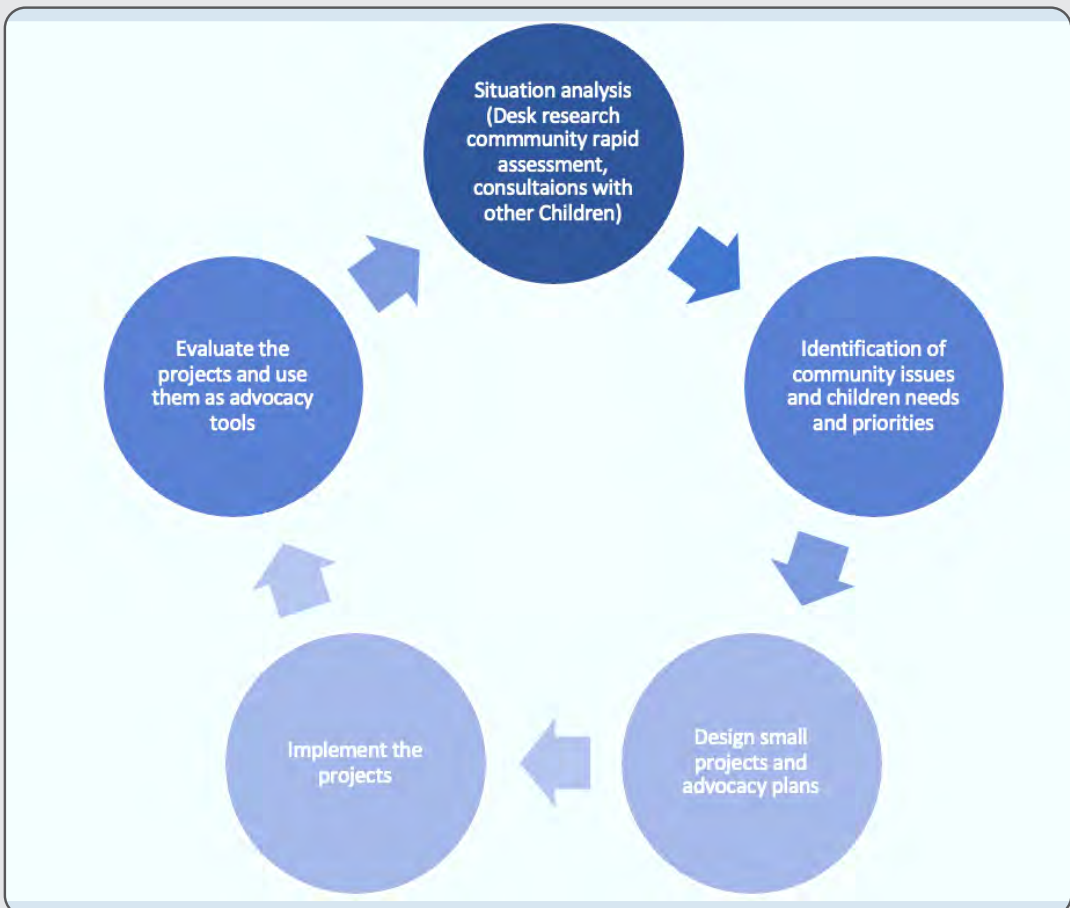
Increased social cohesion and social stability among Lebanese and non-Lebanese youth.

The project objectives

- 1: To create a facilitating environment for youth participation in democratic processes and provide opportunities for youth participation in public life.
- 2: To establish frameworks for ongoing youth advocacy in line with local and national youth priorities.

The method relies on the rights-based approach and capacity building of youth for undertaking child rights-based programming, starting with situation analysis to implementation and evaluation.

Specific tools for each phase were developed, enabling children to undertake a stepwise process in the programme cycle.



Design and implementation in Hermel-Raas Baalbek

Applying the adopted methods and approaches listed above, a group of facilitators coming from Hermel and Raas Baalbek participated in the TOTs. It is to be noted that Hermel and Raas Baalbek are regions with a history of religious tensions. Subsequently, the facilitators mobilised youth from the two respective regions and trained and supported them throughout the DEEP-CSS project. The youth jointly undertook a community rapid assessment and proposed several small projects that addressed local priorities. One of the selected projects related to recreational activities for young children, including children with special needs, their parents and caretakers, coming from the two regions.

The objectives of the project were promoting the right of children to participation, inclusion and non-discrimination and indirectly, social cohesion, whereby bringing together participants from the two areas. Youth in Hermel and Ras Baalbek designed and implemented a pilot project with young children, including children with special needs. The youth implemented joint recreational and educational activities.

Qualitative evaluation included child outcomes and showed that the project achieved its objectives; It resulted in increased cohesion between youth, parents and facilitators coming from two conflicting communities, as well as initiating the implementation of inclusive activities for children with special needs. This consequently instated a culture of participation and acceptance. Participants were recommended to replicate the project on a wider scale.

Potential Resources

In spite of the complex context in Lebanon, the erosion of effectuated achievements relating to children's rights, and the shunting of funding to other priorities due to the economic crisis, there are existing structures, partnerships and technical expertise and resources that could be built upon to pursue the work in early childhood peacebuilding. We mention from the public sector line ministries especially MOSA, MEHE, MOPH, the Higher and its sub-committee on ECD and working group, the Centre for Educational Research and Development, and the parliamentary committee on the rights of the child.

There are also a multitude of NGO networks relating to children's rights and peacebuilding respectively that could be mobilised. Moreover, several international and regional organisations, including UN agencies and International NGOs, have a particular interest in ECCD and have been supporting the country with programmes and funding. These include UNICEF, the EU, the World Bank, and Save the Children. Added to this are regional and international networks such as the Arab Network on Early Childhood Development (ANECD), the International Network on Peace Building with Young Children (INPB), and the Early Childhood Peace Consortium (ECPC).

Substantial achievements were effectuated through INPB on the international level that could be replicated in Lebanon. We mention, among others, adaptation and implementation of the "international toolkit manual for practitioners working with young children and families in regions experiencing or emerging from conflict". In addition to initiating a Masters programme on early childhood and peacebuilding, similar to the one executed at Ulster University. Additionally, policy and action research is necessary to guide planning and generate information to validate and strengthen advocacy measures.

Conclusions

Given the prevailing context and challenges, it is clear that an instigator is needed, a person or group that will reactivate and coordinate existing and potential structures and capacities, in order to plan and implement future actions related to peacebuilding in early childhood.

A core fund needs to be mobilised to initiate and support a national partnership encompassing all relevant stakeholders, leading to the development of a workable strategy and action plan. It is noteworthy that given the deterioration of the ECD sector, an additional multipronged initiative should be triggered addressing the shortfalls in ECD, while concurrently including peacebuilding measures.

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The Early Years Media Initiative for Children Revised Toddler Module: Building Social-Emotional Resilience



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Introduction

This chapter describes our scalable child-centred, socio-ecological programme to teach responsive caregiving to toddler staff who then implement the programme with children—and teach families these same approaches. We talk about our use of ongoing reflective support to the staff who then support parents and other caregivers to improve the capacity of all the adults to help children develop the skills needed to withstand the stresses of intergenerational conflict, and problem solve to build peaceful and sustainable futures. Our controlled trial demonstrated marked improvements in children’s social-emotional functioning, and decreased stress amongst staff and parents. We are now scaling the programme with plans for expansion nationwide and internationally.

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The Early Years Media Initiative for Children Revised Toddler Module: Building Social-Emotional Resilience

Programme content

The programme includes a 2.5-hour staff training session at the beginning of the academic year, covering 12 topics and using 12 micro training videos. The 12 videos total 30 minutes and the staff use the videos to convey the same ideas to parents. The curriculum is summarised on a one-page set of 12 cartoon panels that can be taped to a cabinet or refrigerator at home and in the classroom as a reference and reminder. The 12 topics include:

Section one:

Managing upset

1. The scenario: children under stress can grow up to be sad or angry, impeding their ability to engage in productive problem solving, eroding social cohesion, and creating a context for continued sectarian conflict.
2. Discussion of the usual reasons why children become dysregulated, using a mnemonic device 'HALT' (Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired) as a convenient tool to remember to think through those reasons rather than reacting to the surface behaviour. Hungry includes any kind of bodily discomfort or pain; Angry includes a range of frustrations; Lonely includes the range of difficulties from sadness to depression, to anxiety; Tired includes all the reasons why a child might be exhausted due to emotional, family, or community stress.
3. Culture begins before birth: infants are exposed to aspects of culture while still in the womb and they are born already knowing about their cultural group, and the importance of supporting family cultural identity.

4. Managing tantrums: training on two techniques utilising co-regulation for responding to upset children that build empathic connections. These involve the adult helping the child to become calmer and more able to participate in problem solving to figure out together why the child is having difficulty, and then addressing the difficulty.

Section two:

Building Problem Solving Resilience

5. Overview of the linkage between helping the child manage upset to allow her to build her skills for problem solving and how this leads to building a better, more peaceful society.
6. Wait: how to observe and assess a child as you begin to build resilience.
7. Join: How to connect with a child in a manner that gives you the ability to help them grow emotionally.
8. Build: How to engage in a meaningful flow of interaction and play that helps a child become a resilient, confident problem solver.

Section three:

Reflective Process – taking time to think and problem solve

Reflective Process helps the staff address challenges in supporting a child and their family by offering time to talk about the problems, their own reactions to these difficulties, and to think about ideas to address those problems. (Shamoon-Shanok, 2009). The characteristics of reflective process include the qualities a person brings to interactions with others, such as regulated, interested, emotionally engaged, authentic, and respectful. The back-and-forth interactions between the early

childhood professional and the staff is meant to model and experience a way of being that allows for skill development through affective interactive exchanges (Veloni, 2017). To accomplish this, the staff meet once a month during the year to talk about their work with the children. These meetings are facilitated by colleagues who have training in providing reflective support with a caring attitude, are genuine, non-authoritarian, and promote trust (Johnston & Brinamne 2012).

9. What not to do (1): Avoiding harsh treatment of others when trying to support them.
10. What not to do (2): Avoiding support that is often experienced as less than authentic.
11. What to do: Authentic, active (brave) listening. Brave means learning to tolerate difficult emotions that come up and committing to work together to try out solutions to problems.
12. The bigger picture: parallel reflective process from consultants to staff to parents to children. The programme is founded on the idea that we need to have a parallel support structure of staff supporting the responsive care of their children, and the staff themselves having the responsive support from colleagues.

These ideas become part of an everyday style of responsive caregiving. In the original Media Initiative for Children, the programme uses persona dolls from multiple cultural and social groups in the community with preschool children, to help the children and their families learn about and increase acceptance of people from those other groups. There are stories about the dolls depicting their backgrounds and television commercials utilising the characters in everyday situations and problems that preschool children face. In

the revised toddler module, the programme utilises persona dolls in developmentally meaningful ways for toddlers eg as peers helping to soothe when a child is upset to give the child the experience of cross-cultural empathy or joining in play-based interactions to build the child's experience and comfort playing with 'members' of other cultural communities.

Over the course of the academic year, the staff attend monthly reflective process groups led by either consultants or by selected staff members who have been trained in reflective process.

Programme monitoring involves measuring a minimum of ten percent of children to look at their social-emotional health, capacity for empathy, relationships with parents and caregivers, and parent and staff stress.

Inputs of the Revised Toddler Module

The inputs for the Revised Toddler Module include the identified communities that can benefit from early childhood programmes and the process of staff development and oversight, which includes research and monitoring elements. The programme is designed to be implemented in the context of any existing childcare facility with minimal additional cost in time. The programme may save additional time and money because it leads to better regulated children who are more able to engage in everyday problem solving and which helps them to be more efficient and effective in everyday child and family function.

Activities of the Revised Toddler Module

The activities for the Revised Toddler Module include regular reflective support and training for staff, regular reflective support and modeling for parents by staff at drop off, pick up and in scheduled meetings during the course of the academic year. The team also conducts periodic outcomes monitoring.

Outputs of the Revised Toddler Module

The outputs for the Revised Toddler Module include monthly reflective meetings for staff over the academic term, weekly informal communication in the context of drop off and pick up, as well as periodic formal check-in meetings for parents with staff over the academic term. The staff also collect data on parent and staff experience and stress, staff and/or parent responsiveness, and child empathy and social-emotional function at the beginning and end of the academic year.

Outcomes of the Revised Toddler Module

The outcomes for the Revised Toddler Module include staff learning to seek and utilise reflective support for themselves, build on their use of responsive caregiving with children, experience less stress, and utilise reflective support and model responsive caregiving for parents. Parents will learn to seek and utilise reflective support for themselves, experience less stress, and use more reflective and responsive caregiving with their children. Children will become accustomed to and learn to utilise reflective and responsive caregiving from staff and parents, become more able to self-regulate (fewer behavioural challenges), become more empathic and more able in social-emotional problem-solving, ie resilience. The ultimate goal of the programme is that staff, parents, and children will have an increased acceptance of and appreciation of cultural and community diversity and differences. This can happen as a result of strengthening the resilience and empathy of the children, the responsiveness and problem solving of staff and parents, and the impact of using persona dolls.

Programme Development of the Revised Toddler Module of the Media Initiative for Children

Between 2014 and 2018, the team focused on programme development. The Early Years organisation and development team translated the DIR (Developmental, Individual differences, Relationship-based) model by Greenspan and Wieder (2006) into an Early

Childhood Education (ECE) programme. The organisation designed the programme to integrate into existing programmes. The programme included training for the ECE staff and reflective process meetings with the training team and ECE programme staff. The organisation also included a system of parallel reflective processes for the training team and the ECE programme staff.

Pilot Study

In 2019, the research team conducted a pilot study to determine whether the programme was feasible, acceptable, measurable, and promising. The study involved training staff for 2.5 hours daily for three days, and training parents for 30 minutes daily for three days. The study measured changes in staff responsiveness, parent and staff stress, child empathy, child regulation, and social-emotional development. The study showed the programme as feasible, acceptable, measurable, and very promising, with a steep increase in mastery of functional, and emotional developmental capacities in a group of 11 children aged 30-42 months.

Controlled Trials

Between 2019 and 2022, the research team attempted three rounds of year-long controlled trials to test whether the programme was effective. We first revised staff stress scales based on feedback to make them more relevant to staff, improved video and data collection using videographers when needed, and adding structured checklists to ensure better completion of data-gathering tasks. The trials were conducted in three annual phases, with the first starting in 2019. The trials involved staff training, parent training, and monthly reflective process groups for the test group as well as data collection for both the test and control groups. The test group consisted of children from the Rainbow SureStart toddler programme, and the control group came from the Splash SureStart toddler programme. SureStart programmes are publicly funded enrichment programmes for children from families from socioeconomically distressed communities. The ages of children

and parents, family incomes, and levels of education were comparable between the Rainbow and Splash groups. The first trial was difficult to initiate on time due to the organisational challenges of conducting a larger-scale, real-time research study with young children and their families. This trial was further impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the focus of the research team pivoted to supporting families through the stress of lockdowns and illness. For the second trial in 2020–2021 the team revised the materials to allow for remote parent training by producing micro-videos of the programme principles. This trial was still difficult to complete in a satisfactory manner due to the stresses of the continuing pandemic. The third trial from 2021–2022 was far more successful and formed the basis for our data analysis.

Data Analysis as of May 2023

The data in the third and most complete trial showed that the groups were comparable in terms of the ages of children, parents, family income, education of parents, and mix of community identities. We again used the Social Emotional Growth Chart (SEGC) to measure the children's progress. The SEGC showed that the children in the control group of 36 improved along the usual curve, and parents rated the children in mastery levels. The data showed that the children in the test programme, ie where the staff were trained and received the reflective process support meetings, began along the usual curve; however, much like in the pilot study, their social-emotional function improved at a statistically and clinically greater rate than the usual curve.

Controlled Trial Data

The SEGC is an adult report (parent and staff in this controlled trial) composed of a sensory processing section and eight distinct developmentally sequenced capacities (stages 1, 2, 3, 4a, 4b, 5a, 5b, 6). Sensory processing refers to the ability of the child to tolerate and respond to sensory information in the context of interactions. The social-

emotional capacities include being calm and regulated, emotionally connected with another person in the moment, able to communicate back and forth with another person in a meaningful way, able to use a flow of back-and-forth communication in problem solving and play, use of symbolic thinking in communication, and logical bridging of ideas in social communication, play, and learning. For our SEGC data, we analysed two separate outcomes: 1) SEGC total scores and 2) SEGC sensory processing scores.

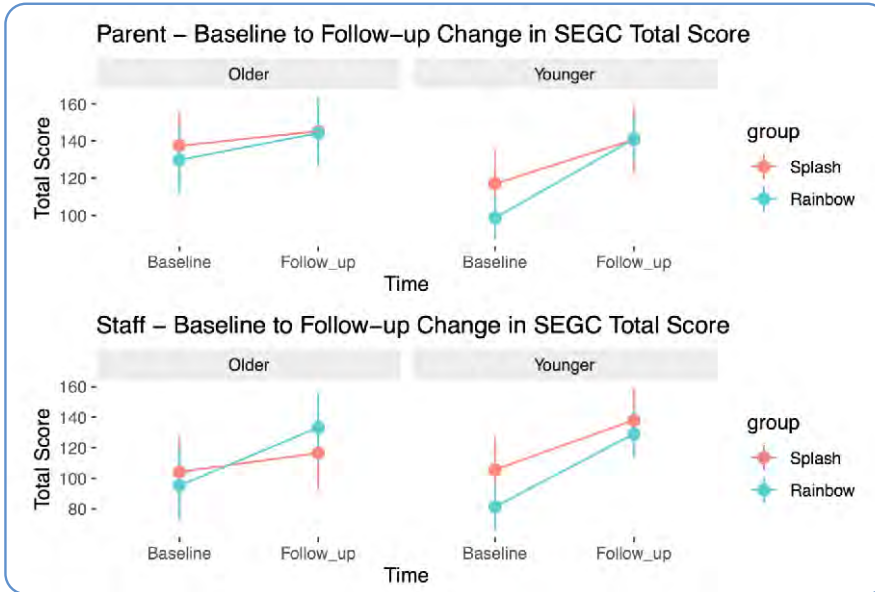
1) SEGC Total scores

The SEGC total scores are calculated by taking the sum of all completed sections from the sensory processing section to the last completed stage based on each child's age. Since the completion of a particular SEGC stage is contingent on a child's age, a handful of children in Rainbow (test) and Splash (control group) SureStart programmes were less than the age of 31 months at baseline, and therefore were not able to complete the final stage of the SEGC. All children at follow-up were able to complete the entirety of the SEGC, being that they were all either 31 months old or older. We decided to stratify our data based on whether each participant was old enough to complete all of the SEGC stages at baseline. This stratification was performed because children younger than 31 months old will have smaller total scores at baseline due to the fact that they were not old enough to complete the entire SEGC, making these participants more likely to have larger differences in total scores from baseline to follow-up just by virtue of being able to complete the entirety of the SEGC at follow-up. Ultimately, we decided to split our dataset for the parent and staff analyses of change in SEGC total scores from baseline to follow-up:

- 1) Older Groups = Children with ages greater than or equal to 31 months at baseline
- 2) Younger Groups = Children with ages less than 31 months at baseline

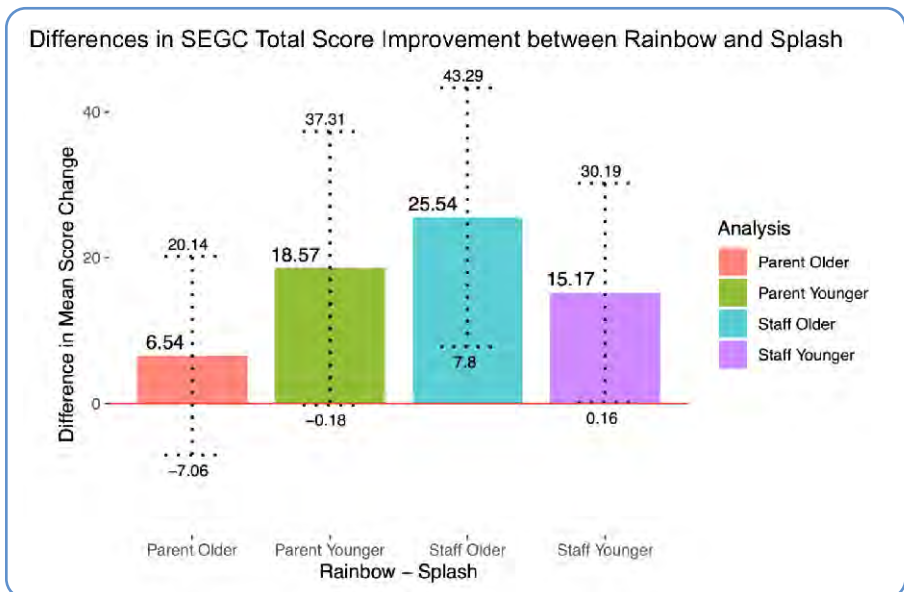
We compared baseline-to-follow-up changes in SEGC total scores between Rainbow and Splash to answer the question “Did Rainbow improve more than Splash?”.

The line graph below shows the change in parent and staff-reported SEGC total scores from baseline to follow-up.



Essentially, we analysed the differences in slopes of the lines representing Rainbow’s improvement and the lines representing Splash’s improvement to see if Rainbow had greater total score increases from baseline to follow-up.

Below are our findings after controlling for the child’s age at baseline and gender:



Parent Assessors

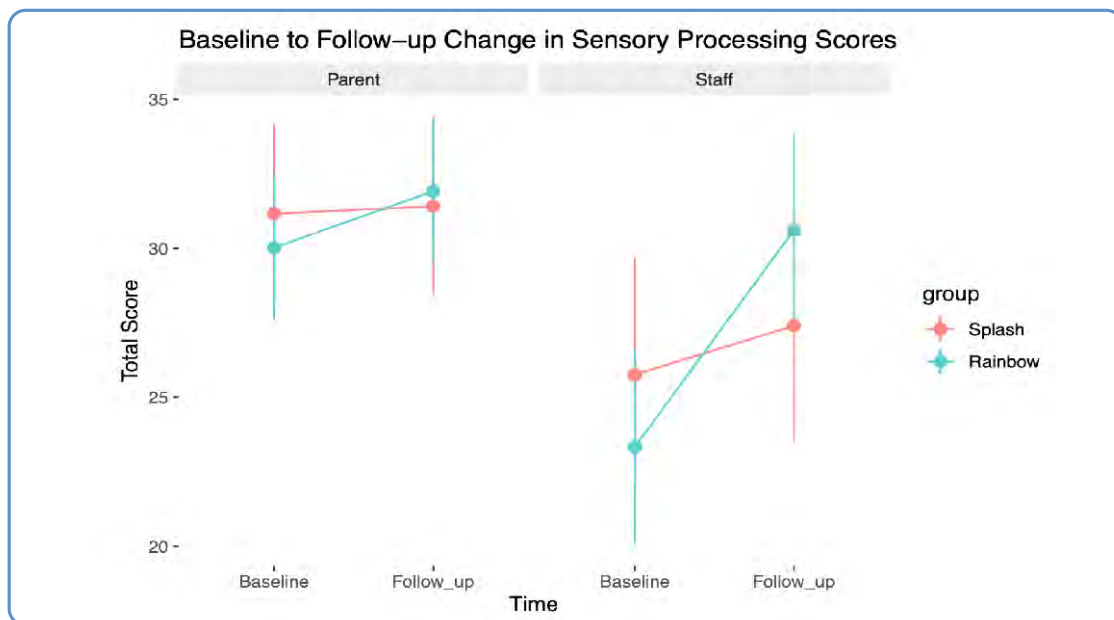
For the older and younger children, there were no significant differences between Rainbow (older: n = 17; younger: n = 19) and Splash (older: n = 16; younger: n = 8) in terms of improvement in SEGC total score from baseline to follow-up. However, both older and younger children in Rainbow showed greater improvement in SEGC total scores compared to their counterparts in Splash. On average, older children in Rainbow had a 6.54 (95% CI = -7.059, 20.14) greater improvement in total score compared to that of the older children in Splash between baseline and follow-up. Younger children in Rainbow also had an 18.56 (95% CI = -0.177, 37.308) greater improvement in total score than that of younger children in Splash between baseline and follow-up, and this finding was just shy of being statistically significant with a p-value of 0.052.

Staff Assessors

For the staff assessors, both the older and younger groups of children in Rainbow (older: n = 17; younger: n = 19) improved significantly more than their counterparts in Splash (older: n = 15; younger: n = 10). On average, the older Rainbow children had a 25.54 (95% CI = 7.796, 43.286; p = 0.006) greater improvement in total score compared to that of the older children in Splash between baseline and follow-up. In addition, younger children in Rainbow also had a 15.17 (95% CI = 0.156, 30.192; p = 0.048) greater improvement in total score than that of younger children in Splash between baseline and follow-up.

2) Sensory Processing

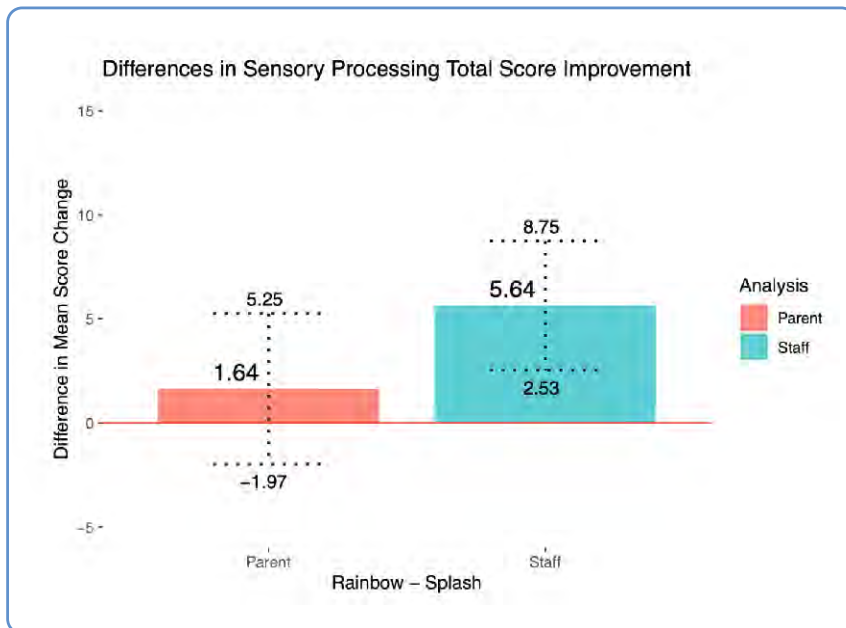
We did the same type of analysis to compare Rainbow (parents & staff: n = 36) and Splash (parents: n = 24; staff: n = 25) improvement in sensory processing scores from baseline to follow-up. The only difference is that the sensory processing section of the SEGC is not age-dependent, meaning that we were able to include all of the children in Rainbow and Splash without needing to stratify the data into age groupings.



Here are our results from the sensory processing score analysis after controlling for the child’s baseline age and sex:

Parents: There was no significant difference in reported sensory processing score improvement between Rainbow and Splash. Yet, there was a nonsignificant trend favouring greater reported improvement in the Rainbow group, compared to Splash.

Staff: Children in Rainbow showed a significantly greater improvement in sensory processing scores from baseline to follow-up. On average, children in Rainbow had a sensory processing score improvement of 5.64 (95% CI = 2.53, 8.75; $p = 0.001$) points greater than that of Splash.



Stress Scale Analysis for Parents and Staff

To analyse the stress scales, positive items (e.g., “I am happy with . . . ” or “I enjoy my . . . ”) were negated so that higher scores equate to higher stress levels.

Parents: After controlling for baseline stress scores, parents of children at Rainbow SureStart ($n = 35$) had significantly lower total stress scale scores at follow-up compared to that of Splash ($n = 25$). At follow-up, the difference between the mean stress scale total scores for Rainbow minus Splash was -4.79 (95% CI = -7.85, -1.73; $p = 0.003$), indicating that parents in Rainbow had significantly lower stress at follow-up compared to parents in Splash.

Staff: Similarly, after controlling for baseline stress scores, staff at Rainbow SureStart ($n = 7$) had significantly lower total stress scale scores at follow-up compared to that of Splash ($n = 9$). At follow-up, the difference between the mean stress scale total scores for Rainbow minus Splash was -7.84 (95% CI = -9.40, -6.28; $p < 0.001$), indicating that staff in Rainbow had significantly lower stress at follow-up compared with staff in Splash.

The bar graph below represents the difference in stress scale total scores between Rainbow and Splash at follow-up. The numbers present on top of the 95% confidence interval bars show the value of the lower confidence level not overlapping with zero, thus showing that, at follow-up, the estimated mean difference in stress scale total scores between Rainbow and Splash is not equal to zero.



Data analysis for the controlled trial is ongoing, focused on video samples of the interactions between children and staff at the beginning and end of the 2021-2022 academic year at Rainbow and Splash SureStart programmes. The additional findings are pending, including measurement of staff responsiveness and staff-child dyadic interactions. These will have implications for extending the scale up to embed video measurement into the scaled programme of parent and caregiver-child interactions. This would offer a more definitive assessment of the impact on child social-emotional growth and resilience as well as providing more feedback for parents and other caregivers to support their developmentally strengthening and resilience building relationships with their children.

Scale up

During the 2022-2023 academic year, we scaled the programme to nearly triple its size from the initial 36-child capacity to 91 children and families, with planned expansion to nearly double again in the coming year. The research team monitoring the outcomes for a portion of these children will check that their outcomes are similar to those in the pilot and controlled

trials. The research team is also developing training of trainers' programmes for increasing the capacity for reflective support and staff training. We anticipate using innovative technology in the form of app-based video coding to gather more precise outcome data on the impact of the programme on parent-child relationships and social-emotional development.

Impacts of the Revised Toddler Module

The impacts of the Revised Toddler Module include staff and parents improving their skills and ability to collaborate in using responsive caregiving to support the development of their children. Better resilience will impact the children's overall health and mental health as they grow into adulthood and have children of their own. The expectation is that communities receiving the programme will have a greater capacity for current and future sustainable inclusion, collaboration, and peace. Further research will help to clarify whether these long-term impacts are achieved. The programme is implemented in the context of any existing childcare facility with minimal additional cost in time and potentially saving time and costs because it leads to more efficient and effective child and family function. The

number of children and families impacted is easily scalable, limited only by the capacity of the research-management team in time for training and implementation.

What are the lessons to date?

The programme has evolved over the period from Pilot phase to Random Control Trial. This item will consider the lessons learnt in two aspects: research development phase and programme implementation no longer linked to research trials.

It needs to be acknowledged that the participants have provided the information which has allowed the programme to be developed to this current point. It has reached a degree of agreement that it is meeting the needs of the communities it has been delivered in during the period September 2022 to June 2023.

Research Development phase

During the phase March 2019 to June 2022 the programme was gathering data from families, staff and the children linked to the impact of the programme on social-emotional development with a specific focus on emotions and behavioural responses.

The research team during this period addressed several emerging elements relating to:

- the logistics of implementing the programme requirements
- utilising the programme for two-year-olds without requesting additional time or additional workload from the staff and families
- building the knowledge of the staff and how to show evidence of impact
- how to engage families in the programme

The following issues were identified during this phase which were then either amended, replaced or removed.

Data gathering

The timeline for baseline data was altered to reflect the personalised context of the SureStart.

Initially the Revised Toddler Module required families to complete the forms whilst attending an in person 30-minute training session over 3 consecutive sessions.

The reasoning for this approach was to ensure that there were familiar staff from the SureStart on hand to support parents with completing the forms. This worked well for the initial Pilot group but became problematic as the programme moved to a much larger Random Controlled Trial phase. This phase highlighted the unique delivery of services the SureStarts utilise within their own service delivery models.

At the same time, Covid-19 interrupted the service delivery of the SureStarts and impacted on the type of support provided for data form completion. The learning from this experience was the recognition that the SureStart settings were capable of collecting and providing the data but the manner in which this was achieved could be left to the individual SureStart, as long as they worked within clear guidelines. Amending this expectation of the programme respects the unique service delivery model which each SureStart site develops to reflect the current needs of each cohort of families and children.

Settings have their own autonomous and contextualised methods of family engagement which gives them ownership of building the relational aspect of the Revised Toddler Module programme. In this way the programme acknowledges the nature of each setting, recognises its capacity to conduct this aspect of data gathering, and provides the flexibility for settings to determine the way this will be completed.

Training for parents

Initially the programme design required parents to attend, in person, 30 minutes of training over 3 subsequent sessions. These were planned to be delivered straight after the children were entered into the SureStart programme two-year-old sessions. The initial pilot, which included 12 families, was very positive in attendance numbers and the level of engagement by the participants.

As the programme moved into the Random Control Trial phase where the family numbers increased over two different SureStart projects, parent training became challenging. The team was not able to conduct in-person training over three consecutive sessions as this did not align to the needs of the families of these cohorts. They were unable to commit to attending sessions at drop-off. The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic provided an opportunity for this element to be altered. The move to using video as the method for delivering the parental training proved to be a positive alteration for the overall programme. As a result, three training videos were created for parents to access at their own leisure which would be followed up by staff during their normal parental engagement points.

The learning from this challenge is that this type of media has given SureStart settings and parents the autonomy to achieve training input which reflects their individual cohort needs. This method allows parents the opportunity to access unlimited viewing of the training material thus increasing knowledge and confidence of the programme. It also means that parents can easily share content with other family members, enabling a wider circle of informed adults around the child.

Specific vocabulary used within the training programme

Part of the training programme pays attention to the history of Northern Ireland, how this affects communities' past and present, the impact of this legacy and how the programme addresses transgenerational trauma for communities through an ECD project.

The use of the word "conflict" was consciously used within the information and consent forms to indicate the aim of working toward more peaceful social outcomes over the long term as the toddlers grow into adulthood.

As an outcome, a range of responses from participating parents and staff during both the research phase and programme implementation were acknowledged.

During the research phase, the use of the word conflict produced a strong emotional response in a small group of parents. The dialogue with parents following this response identified a number of points such as:

- Northern Ireland is no longer in conflict
- Northern Ireland did not experience conflict
- discomfort in talking about what conflict means
- learned behaviour to not discuss a controversial topic.

As a result, the programme has removed the word conflict from its information sheet but continues to address the issue through the training material. This is not to avoid the issue but to recognise that people and communities have ranging responses to the written word demonstrating significant effect for some participants.

The programme wishes to support the building of positive relationships between family and setting and the use of the word seemed to raise barriers to that happening at the outset.

As a consequence of this experience, the programme has moved the sensitive subject to within the training where it can be framed within relationship dialogue. This has proved to have engagement of an educational type of response and support more productive integration of the emotions that are tied to the conflict.

The programme does not avoid the responsibility for addressing the subject of conflict. In fact, staff have requested further input on this subject, wishing to develop the following:

- confidence in starting conversations of this sensitive nature
- educating themselves on the impact that conflict brings to person, community and a workforce in a relational model of service
- building their own personal skills when dealing with a perceived controversial matter.

Regarding the families, one of the guiding principles of the programme is the necessity for establishing strong, trusting relationships between the family and staff members. This will then allow for further opportunities to address the matter within authentic relational moments which have the potential to enable people and communities to connect with the subject, reducing anxiety and dysregulation.

Staff member development

A fundamental aspect of the programme is to develop the skills and knowledge of the staff members to understand how to better manage and respond to the actions and responses from very young children, linked to emotions.

The aim is to provide training which helps the staff members to be knowledgeable and skillful in understanding the uniqueness of what it is like to be two years old. Thus, building informed connections supporting co-regulation and fully appreciating the importance of their role not only in that moment but within the journey to self-regulation for the child.

A key element to achieving this outcome with staff is the regular implementation of reflective process sessions. These sessions are designed to be facilitated by a nominated participant who is known to the staff member and has established trust with the group. The participants bring a concern or conundrum relating to a child's behaviour, learning development or family engagement for collective problem-solving.

As a result of implementing the programme, the SureStart Project managers commented on the improved quality and depth of dialogue by staff around child and family needs.

The key findings are:

- Thinking is now more holistic and explores the reasons behind behaviours. This is evidence of the application of training on a day-to-day basis within the practice
- Conversations are richer in depth of thinking with improved confidence to talk to a range of child development professionals as well as parents
- Thinking has moved to a robust implementation of a Benefit Model Approach, ie where the positives of the child and/or situation are acknowledged before any areas of concern are considered
- Improved collaboration and sharing of good practice within and across teams
- Opportunities to have exposure to others' viewpoints, enabling awareness and acceptance of different opinions and suggestions
- Improved confidence when interacting with parents about their child's needs which is based on sound knowledge and understanding, supported through the training and reflective sessions
- Improved staff member confidence and independence to appropriately manage big emotions by very young children, enabling a suitable environment which encourages age-appropriate development
- Improved understanding of how to build authentic relationships, empowering co-regulation and self-regulation.

As a result of the multiyear efforts of the research team, the programme has considered how to provide training for facilitators at little or no cost, with the outcome of building the capacity of the staff team to take this role. The programme continues to develop in this area.

Challenges and Next Steps

There is now empirical evidence which identifies that the RTM-MIFC programme has the capacity to develop into a reliable programme that can be utilised within any childcare programme, addressing the needs of two-year-olds.

However, getting to this point has not been without challenge. The following description recognises the current status of the programme, and what needs must be addressed to produce a fully funded well-resourced programme.

Developing a local multi-disciplinary team to support staff member reflective sessions across Northern Ireland

Part of the success of the reflective sessions have been the inclusion of a range of expertise which has included:

- Child Psychiatrist
- Pediatric Occupational Therapist
- Media Psychologist
- Occupational Therapist/PhD in Infant and Early Childhood Development
- Mental Health Clinician & PhD Candidate in Infant and Early Childhood Development
- Occupational Therapist
- Early Years Teacher

This has enabled the group to hear from different disciplines, which has enhanced the quality of the problem-solving dialogue, whilst providing confidence for the staff that the input and outcomes are based on sound judgement and contribution.

The challenge for this issue is exploring opportunities for funding and professional input which will enable the programme to build its capacity to reach more settings, support staff member professional development, and establish the longevity of the support through Reflective Process sessions.

Employing a team of trainers to increase programme implementation across Northern Ireland and beyond

Consideration must be given to enabling this programme to achieve more than the current capacity of the team. The term “scale up” is used in this instance to explain the expansion of the programme to reach more settings, families, and staff.

An initial consideration when addressing scale up is to develop and determine a team of trainers to increase programme implementation across Northern Ireland and establish its fidelity. Also, we want to consider a scale up plan which will connect team capacity with increasing numbers of settings and the capacity for funding to allow this programme to be implemented.

Addressing legacy and language associated with conflict

As mentioned previously, the programme does not evade its responsibility relating to tackling this sensitive issue but acknowledges the difficulty it poses for all participants. The challenges faced in addressing this matter are complex. The next steps are to ensure there is a mechanism for every trainer to handle this matter with sound knowledge, keen awareness, confidence and skill.

It must be acknowledged that there will always be work within the peacebuilding arena. This element of the programme must not stand still or even look back, but forge ahead to support the ability of all members of a society to enter into dialogue and learning.

Continual development of employing multi-media as a method to engage programme participants and enrich assessment

The programme has adapted its training delivery model for parents and families from in-person to video because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The programme continues to review the use of media as both a training and a recording tool. The programme initially required that staff video children on entry and at exit (10-minute clips) so their interactions could be assessed by the research team. Now as the programme is considering expansion to additional childcare settings, it is beyond the capacity of the current research team to monitor even 10% of the children participating.

Currently there is a consideration about how this could be accomplished:

1. training staff to code their own videos using an IOS app
2. training parents to use videos of their own children and to code what they see using the same app
3. the confidentiality of videos and other data is a continuing consideration, particularly related to cyber security.

Conclusion

The Revised Toddler Module of the Early Years Media Initiative for Children is an innovative programme that focuses on improving the social-emotional resilience and problem-solving of young children, preparing them for a future of more enduring and productive social cohesion.

Contributors:

We wish to acknowledge the many years of dedicated work by our research and implementation team, without which this programme would not be possible. Each of the contributors listed below performed critical tasks directly related to the programme and this chapter.

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A Journey from Children as Zone of Peace (CZOP) Campaign to Constitutional Rights to Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Nepal



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Introduction

This chapter presents an account of the major disastrous events that took place over the last two decades in Nepal including a ten-year long armed conflict, royal massacre, big political change from monarchy to a democratic federal republic system, massive earthquakes, the Covid-19 pandemic, global warming and climate change, and the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war. It presents examples of how Nepal has tried its best to keep children away from the armed conflict and protect them during difficult times. It also talks about how ECD is included as a fundamental right of young children in Nepal's Constitution, 2015.

Professor Kishor Shrestha, Ph.D

Professor Kishor Shrestha, Ph.D. in early childhood education, is the Chairperson of the Alliance for Early Childhood Development Nepal (AECDN), a civil society organisation that provides a platform for sharing ideas, experiences, and evidence among all early childhood stakeholders and focuses on undertaking coordinated actions to support and change the lives of young children in Nepal. He was a Professor at Tribhuvan University, Nepal from 1983 to 2016. He is a member of the International Network on Peacebuilding for Young Children (INPB). Since 2017 he has been working as a member of the Board of Directors of the World Forum Foundation, USA.

A Journey from Children as Zone of Peace (CZOP) Campaign to Constitutional Rights to Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Nepal

This chapter tells the story of efforts made by the network of organisations working in the field of early childhood development in Nepal (Government bodies, UN agencies, NGOs, INGOs, Universities, and private sector) in implementing the Children as Zone of Peace (CZOP) campaign during the conflict situation and guaranteeing the rights to early childhood development in the post-conflict situation.

The chapter captures the experiences gained in the formation of the ECD network, implementing CZOP as a major strand to protect children from the harmful effects of armed conflict and additionally, to continue their learning and development. The coalition between the political parties/parliamentarians and advocates of early childhood development acted for guaranteeing rights to early childhood development as a fundamental right of every child in Nepal.

The chapter critically reviews and analyses the efforts made, challenges faced, and achievements made, from the situation of armed conflict to this day, in mitigating the adverse effects of armed conflict on young children. It also presents an account of the efforts and achievements made regarding the delivery of early childhood development services from the period of armed conflict to date.

Background

Nepal is a landlocked country situated between the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China and India. It has tremendous geographic and sociocultural diversity that includes mainly ethnicities of Brahmin-Chhetri, Magars and Newars representing Tibeto-Burmans and Indo-Aryan groups. The country spans an area of 147,181 square kms and is noted for varied climatic conditions, natural vegetation, soil, water and forest resources. A population of over 29.1 million people represents several castes and ethnic backgrounds. Children below age six comprise more than 18% of the population (CBS, 2021). The country has remained poor in many development indicators, compared to other countries in the South Asia region. Despite being economically poor, living on subsistence level, deprived of basic services, people, in general, are considered peace-loving and easy-going.

Nepal has gone through a big political upheaval in the last 17 years. It was a Hindu kingdom ruled by a monarchy for over 250 years, but took a turn when the country went through a big political movement in 2006. In 2008, the newly elected Constituent Assembly declared Nepal a Federal Democratic Republic, abolishing the traditional monarchy.

The country has experienced several incidents that impacted people's wellbeing during the last 17 years. The ten year long armed conflict from 1996 to 2006 claimed over 17,000 lives. Two massive earthquakes - one on 25 April 2015 with 7.8 magnitude, and another on 12 May 2015 measuring 7.3 magnitude, caused massive casualties to human life and destruction of physical infrastructures and historical monuments. The earthquakes claimed over 9000 lives, injured over 30,000

people, destroyed half a million houses, over 600 historical monuments and more than 7,500 school buildings.

In 2020, the country was badly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Until now the virus has claimed over 12,000 human lives, and it has not yet been fully controlled. However, the vaccines received from different countries and under COVAX have helped to control the pandemic a great deal. Covid-19 has resulted in a significant decrease in spending for education, childcare and other development agenda. It has also caused a huge loss of learning among school-aged children.

Global warming and climate change have resulted in some unprecedented natural disasters, like torrential heavy rainfall in some parts and drought in other parts. Seasonal life-threatening diseases like dengue fever, widespread even in mountainous regions, which earlier used to be seen sporadically in terai/plain areas, adjoining to the border with Indian territories. The rapid melting of snow in the mountains has turned the snowy mountains into black, rocky slopes. This significantly reduced the inflow of tourists, which has resulted in a decrease in the family income among those who were involved in local small businesses, like homestay, lodges and restaurants in the mountainous regions. This, in turn, has a direct impact on families' spending on childcare, education, health and nutrition.

In recent years, the Russia-Ukraine war has again crippled the country's economy. As a result of the war, the availability of daily commodities has been scarce, and the price of most of the daily consumables has tripled, making the lives of the middle-income earners and poor even harder. All these incidents have a direct adverse effect on health, nutrition, care, protection and education of children in Nepal.

The instability in Nepal is reflected in the fact that in the last 15 years there have been 17 governments. In 2015 the new constitution of Nepal was promulgated. Yet, the country remained unstable and couldn't progress as anticipated.

Armed conflict from 1996 to 2006

The current section will elaborate on the ten year long armed conflict earlier, that Nepal underwent from 1996 to 2006. During the conflict, gross human rights violations were reported on a widespread and systematic scale by both the warring faction and government forces. To overthrow the monarchy and to establish a democratic federal republic system, one of the hardline left-wing political parties, Nepal Communist Party Maoist, waged war against the rule of the king and the then political system, by forming its own armed force, known as Maoist People's Liberation Army (PLA).

Over 17 thousand people were killed during the conflict, among them many who were considered innocent people, not involved in the conflict. This included extrajudicial killings by the government forces, sexual violence and torture by warring groups, as well as by the government forces. The conflict came to an end with a negotiation between the then right-wing, led government, and the warring faction, the Maoist party.

This time the government was formed by elected members of parliament under the constitutional monarchy. A peace accord was signed by the Prime Minister on behalf of the government side, and Chairperson of the Maoist party. In January 2007 the UN Security Council established the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), a special political mission to support the peace process.

During this period, in 2001, a dramatic bloodshed took place in Nepal, known as the Royal Massacre. A shooting spree in the Royal palace killed nine members of the royal family, including the King, Queen, Crown

Prince, Prince, Princess and other royal family members. This event has, to a large extent, weakened the stronghold of the monarch in the political sphere and loosened the people's faith in the traditional monarchy.

Current situation of peace and reconciliation

As previously mentioned, the governments formed so far have not been stable. Although each government was formed for a period of five years, they hardly survived a year. The process of peace and reconciliation has not yet been completed. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was formed following the incidence of grave violence during the armed conflict by both sides, with the following aims: to create an environment conducive for sustainable peace and reconciliation; to provide for reparation to the victims; to provide recommendations for legal actions against those who were involved in serious offences/crimes (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Nepal. trc.gov.np/en/ retrieved 09/05/2023). However, even after 17 years of comprehensive peace accord, the process of peace and reconciliation has not yet been settled. The peace accord pointed out that the peace and reconciliation process could be completed within six months from the day of signing. However, the efforts were sadly, all in vain. According to the Government, the number of missing people due to the conflict is still over 1000.

There are thousands of people who were injured and are still in need of medical support. Many people whose property was illegally captured or who have lost their property have not yet received it back, nor have they received any compensation.

Armed conflict and Children as Zone of Peace (CZOP) campaign in Nepal

Like in any other conflict and war anywhere in the world, during the period of armed conflict in Nepal, the lives of children were severely affected. The severity of the impact was much higher among children living in remote and rural areas.

During the armed conflict, many schools were used as shelters and meeting venues by the government forces as well as warring factions, severely affecting the teaching and learning activities. It was in this context, the civil society organisations working in the field of child protection, child rights and early childhood protection formed a coalition known as Children as Zone of Peace (CZOP) campaign. The main goal of the campaign was to keep children away from the conflict and stop using them in any kind of activities related to armed conflict.

The campaign soon became a national movement, which was guided by the major international human rights organisations and has involved advocating to - and monitoring - all the parties involved in the armed conflict in Nepal (SC/Norway, 2006).



Ten resolutions of the “Children as a Zone of Peace” campaign

1. Declare educational institutions as zones of peace and do not use school premises as venues for any sort of political activities.
2. Declare a ceasefire on children-specific occasions such as children’s day, education day, international child rights day, and during the health camp, etc.
3. Do not obstruct the fundamental services meant for children such as education, health and vaccine, food, etc.
4. Protect vehicles carrying children. Do not attack school and public buses used for commuting children.
5. Do not create problems for the programmes and activities in which children are participating.
6. Do not produce and put materials such as news, pictures, and rolling images in the mass media that affect children’s psychology.
7. Respect the rights of children and do not discriminate between them on the basis of the political affiliation of their parents.
8. Give preferences to children’s need for relief, rehabilitation, and assistance.
9. Do not obstruct the flow of humanitarian aid agency services to the children.
10. Include peace education in the school curriculum and develop a culture of peace.

*Source: World Forum Foundation and NIPPA -
The Early Years Organisation. (2007).*

The ten-point resolution of the campaign was instrumental in keeping children away from armed conflict. Before the formation of CZOP in 2001 it was recorded that the PLA had used many school buildings and premises as their parade grounds or shelters. A high level of atrocities involved the abduction of children to use as child soldiers, in some cases, and capturing of school aged children for indoctrination to Maoist philosophy (Shrestha, K. in From Conflict to Peace Building, 2007). Similarly, abduction of children was also recorded by the Government forces, suspected of being recruited as child soldiers or being used as informants by the rebels. Many children lost their lives in crossfires and mine/bomb blasts. All these incidents adversely affected the regular teaching and learning activities of the schools, as well as emotional wellbeing of children. The effect of the conflict was even higher for many children who were directly affected—those who lost family members and witnessed the traumatic incidents.

To counteract this situation, many organisations including; UNICEF Nepal, Save the Children Alliance, Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre (CWIN), and Seto Gurans National Child Development Services joined hands.

Current situation of CZOP

The change in the political system and conflict situation in the country has also instigated the CZOP to modify its working modality and focus area. It emerged as a movement for the advocacy of the rights of the child during the armed conflict. The initial loose coalition started in 2001, was formally registered as a non-governmental organisation (network) in 2016. Now, it has 71 member organisations working for ensuring child rights, representing all seven Provinces of the country. Furthermore, the National Human Rights Commission and UNICEF Nepal are its observer members. In the post-conflict situation, especially since 2012 onwards, it has geared its focus on the

protection and promotion of child rights, ending the prevailing practice of corporal punishment to children at home and school, child marriage, child labour, and all sorts of child abuse and exploitation.

CZOP's current activities focus on five major themes. They are Policy Advocacy, Child Protection, Schools/Children as Zones of Peace and Protection (SZOP/CZOP), Institutional Development and Child Rights Governance (CRG). In recent years, it has been partnering with different stakeholders to reduce discrimination against children, especially on child marriage and sexual exploitation, and working with the National Human Rights Commission to address rights-based issues. It is robustly engaging with the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens (MoWCSC), other ministries at federal level, and parliamentary committees at federal and provincial levels, to adopt policy and programme measures in course of protecting and promoting child rights.

Its major activities include first advocacy for the protection and promotion of children's basic rights during, and after conflict or emergency situations. Additionally, efforts are made to forge collective actions to ensure children as zones of peace through evidence-based policy and advocacy programmes. It has been successful in lobbying the major political parties to consider Children as a Zone of Peace and include issues related to child protection in their election manifestos. It has been continuously pleading with the political parties to refrain from encouraging children to engage in party-led political activities like political rallies, mass gatherings, holding placards, banners, and movements. It has also been proactively engaged in ensuring support and relief from the Government and civil society to the victims/surviving children affected by conflict. As a result of its continuous efforts, the Government of Nepal in its Children Act promulgated in 2019 (2075 BS), included the use of children in political protest and campaign as a crime against children (Children Act, 2019 /2075BS).

Recently, the Government of Nepal has tabled a bill in parliament to address the demand from families who have lost their loved ones, or those whose family members are still missing. CZOP has reviewed the bill and demanded that the Government properly address the atrocities committed against the children during the armed conflict (Retrieved: czopnepal.org).

Overview of achievements from armed conflict to date

The period of armed conflict has taught us some important lessons. It has taught us how civil society organisations can remain non-aligned and independent in conflict and post-conflict situations. It has taught us how important it is to form teams and networks among organisations and individuals who have similar agendas and goals. Most importantly, it has taught us that it is possible to mitigate—to a large extent—the effects of conflict on young children, if we remain independent—not taking any side—and if we continue to work as a team and persistently advocate for the rights of the child. The contributions made by the CZOP National Campaign have already been discussed above. This section presents an account of the four major networks and their contribution in promoting early childhood development during conflict and post-conflict situations. It also presents a picture of the progress made in delivering early childhood services to young children over the last twenty years in Nepal.

Formation of ECD Caucus and its contribution

Over the last 16 years following the end of the armed conflict, various prominent ECD networks have been formed. The most powerful and unique was the formation of ECD Caucus - a network of parliamentarians representing all the major political parties. Initially, the organisations were actively involved in running CZOP organised workshops and consultative meetings with the Parliamentarians, to draw their attention to the importance and issues of early childhood

development. This then led to the formation of the ECD Caucus.

As an academic, researcher and advocate of ECD working with Tribhuvan University, the author of this paper had the opportunity to discuss Early Childhood issues with over half of the 601 Constitutional Assembly members. All the members were elected by the people. The author is proud in his capacity to convince the Constitutional Assembly members to give priority to ECD while framing the new constitution, known as the Constitution of Nepal, 2015. This is the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic system of Nepal.

While taking part in workshops and consultative meetings, the author used several international research-based facts and findings on the meaning and importance of giving priority to ECD (Carneiro, 2003). In addition, the author presented the national level research findings that revealed how exposure to ECD has improved children's enrolment in Grade 1/formal school and better student outcomes in early primary grades (CERID, 1998). From the outset of the formation of the ECD Caucus, the author has been working as a member of the expert group it formed. Creating a coalition between the political parties/parliamentarians and advocates of early childhood development, proved to be effective in promoting ECD in Nepal.

Establishment and contribution of Alliance for ECD Nepal (AECDN)

This network was formally established in 2017, with an aim to bring together experts, policy makers and practitioners, to explore and promote holistic development of all young children, and consequently improve early childhood care and education in Nepal. It is a professional membership organisation that provides a platform for sharing ideas, experiences and evidence among all stakeholders. It focuses on undertaking coordinated action to support and promote

both access and quality of early childhood in the country. It has 22 organisational members and 246 individual members. It is also a member organisation of the World Forum on Early Care and Education/World Forum Foundation, USA and Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC), Singapore. It is a certified charity organisation of Charities Aide Foundation (CAF) America.

In recent years, the alliance has developed a Guidebook on the Implementation of ECD programme activities at the Local Level in partnership with the Department of Education/Ministry of Education and Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development/Government of Nepal. The guidebook was printed, and hard copies were widely distributed to all 753 municipalities and seven provinces. It has also worked closely with the National Planning Commission of Government of Nepal in developing a National Early Childhood Development Strategy 2020–2030. Currently, it is working with ARNEC on developing the capacity of the local government officials in implementing integrated ECD programmes focusing on activating a multi-sectoral approach.

Formation and contribution of ECD Consortium

A consortium of ECD organisations was formed by Alliance for Early Childhood Development Nepal (AECDN) in 2018. Initially it aimed to support the National Planning Commission in developing the National Early Childhood Development Strategy above mentioned. Since its initiation the consortium has expanded and now includes more members from development partners such as Aasman Nepal, AECDN, Divya Ankur, Plan International, Save the Children, Seto Gurans National Child Development Services, UNICEF, USAID, WFP, WHO, World Bank, World Education, and World Vision.

The ECD Consortium is becoming a platform to discuss pertinent issues and develop a consensus, before taking on new initiatives. It is also playing a role in coordinating the activities of different organisations in supporting the government to implement the National Early Childhood Strategy 2020-2030.

Constitutional Rights for ECD

One of the major achievements made regarding care, education and development of young children in Nepal is the provision of constitutional rights to ECD. Children's right to health, nutrition, education and care have been guaranteed by the Constitution of Nepal (2015). The Constitution ensures affirmative action to secure children's equitable access to ECD programmes through the following provisions:

- Every child shall have the right to education, health care, nurturing, appropriate upbringing, sports, recreation and overall personality development from family and the State.
- Every child shall have the right to Early Childhood Development and child participation. (Article 39)

(<http://www.mofa.gov.np/the-constitution-of-nepal>)

As stipulated in the National Early Childhood Development Strategy 2020-2030, the three tiers of the government—Federal, Provincial and Local level governments—have started taking responsibility to ensure the constitutional rights of every child to have early childhood development services.

Development of the National Early Childhood Development Strategy 2020–2030 is an important achievement. This has been a major guiding document for all three tiers of government. Based on the guidelines and strategies mentioned in this document, six out of seven provinces have already developed provincial ECD plans. Similarly, the process of developing Local Government (LG) level ECD plans are underway in many municipalities. Under the Federal administrative system, the authority to develop necessary policies, plans and programmes based on the local needs, and implement the programmes, have been devolved to local governments.

The Government of Nepal, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology as stipulated in the Eighth Amendment of Education Act (2016), made ECD a part of basic education and included one-year ECED under its education structure. This is one of the biggest achievements in ensuring the rights of every child to have ECD services. The Local Government Operation Act, 2017, which was promulgated based on the provision of the new constitution delegated to local governments authority of formulating, implementing, monitoring, evaluating and regulating policies, laws, standards and plans related to basic and secondary education including ECED. There are 753 LGs comprising 460 Rural Municipalities and 293 Urban Municipalities (6 Metropolitans, 11 Sub-Metropolitans, 276 Municipalities) in the current federal structure.

LGs are receiving grants from the Federal government and respective Provincial governments to implement ECD programmes. On top of the grants received from provincial and federal governments, some local governments have begun generating funds for ECD at the local level.

Progress in the delivery of ECD services in the last 20 years

Despite many adverse incidents and situations, as discussed above, over the last 20 years Nepal has made unprecedented progress in the delivery of early childhood services to young children. There has been a considerable increase in access to ECD services for a large number of children. According to the Flash report, published in 2022 by the Government of Nepal, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, there is a total of 36,498 ECD/ Pre-Primary Class (PPCs) targeted to children aged 48 to 59 months old. Out of this 30,450 (83.4%) are in school-affiliated and community-based ECED/PPCs, supported by federal, provincial, and local government; 6048 (16.6%) are being run by the private sector (CEHRD, 2022). The ECD/PPCs are fully funded by the federal government and are free of charge for all children. In contrast, the privately run centres depend on the fees collected from the parents.

The Gross Enrolment Rate of children in ECED was 89.68% and the Net Enrolment Rate* was 69.0% in 2020-2021. Similarly, 74.85 percent of Grade 1 students were enrolled with ECED/PPC experiences in the 2020/21 academic year (Ibid). In Nepal, various ministries, national and international non-governmental organisations (I/NGOs), UN agencies—UNESCO and UNICEF—and the private sector, are involved in the implementation of ECD programs. A school nutrition programme that includes a free midday meal is provided to all children attending ECD programme and Grades 1 to 5 of the community schools.

The Government of Nepal has recently launched a “School nurse programme”. Under this scheme, a qualified health worker/nurse is appointed in each school, including ECED centres, for providing necessary health services to the students. Health and nutrition related programmes are being undertaken mainly by the Ministry of Health and Population. Similarly, programmes for the safety and protection of children, including programmes for abandoned and orphaned children, are being looked after by the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen.

*“The net enrollment rate excludes overage and underage students and more accurately captures the system’s coverage and internal efficiency. Differences between the gross enrollment ratio and the net enrollment rate show the incidence of overage and underage enrollments”. (World Bank 2020).

Summary and conclusion

Nepal has experienced major disastrous events in the last 20 years, including a ten-year long armed conflict, the royal massacre, massive earthquakes, big political change from monarchy to republic system, the Covid 19 pandemic, global warming, climate change, and a high inflation rate of daily consumables due to the Russia-Ukraine war. Despite all these adversities, Nepal has taken several steps to counteract the adverse situation and continued to support children in their learning and development. "Children as a Zone of Peace" campaign provides an excellent illustration of the power and influence that organisations can bring to bear when they work together and advocate on behalf of children and families. To this date, many affirmative actions have been undertaken which are expected to have a lasting effect on the lives of young children in Nepal. Formation of, and the active role played by ECD Caucus, in advocating the constituent assembly members to consider ECD as a fundamental right of every child in the Constitution of Nepal 2015 was a remarkable achievement made during this period. The formation of networks amongst professionals, the government, and I/NGOs has proved a successful strategy in responding to the needs of children affected by violence, natural disasters and other incidents.

Photos courtesy: Seto Gurans National Child Development services, Nepal.

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Stories, Actions, and Aspirations: Efforts to help Palestinian children impacted by conflict



Author:
Dr. Ali Shaar

Introduction

In writing a chapter about children and war in my country, I take the stand of a Palestinian father, ECD practitioner and that of a child advocate. Within this capacity, I write to affirm my commitment to the cause of peace for all children—Israeli and Palestinian—and make the declaration that ALL children should be protected, loved—and not killed.

My chapter constitutes a call to the international community to open their eyes to atrocities perpetrated against children, and work harder to preserve and protect children from all countries. In my chapter, I write about how long lasting occupation and recurrent exposure to violence undermines the wellbeing of Palestinian children, especially the youngest. The stories of children from my country illustrate how children continue to be victims of political decisions that are beyond their influence or control.

Dr Ali Shaar

Ali Shaar is a Palestinian physician from Nablus, who studied Medicine in Czechoslovakia, where he learned about WWII and associated human tragedies including the holocaust. Back in Palestine, he worked in community health programmes and developed his qualifications through a master's programme in health promotion from Norway. Through witnessing firsthand, the impact of war on children in his country, Dr. Shaar developed the passion and desire to work for the cause of protecting all children from war and conflict by engaging with the International Network on Peacebuilding for Young Children (INPB) and the Early Childhood Peace Consortium.

Stories, Actions, and Aspirations: Efforts to Help Palestinian children impacted by Conflict

Foreward:

“While we acknowledge and appreciate the efforts made to advance child rights in the world, region and Palestine, we realise that the work is not finished, and much more is needed to create a better future for all children” (Salah, 2019).

In this chapter, article or testimony, I do not envisage providing academic evidence about the impact of war on communities and on children in particular. Rather, in line with the stories from across the border and everywhere in the world, the intention is to make the voice of the children of my country heard.

By writing the story of this place and those living in it, I have all the interest, bias and intention to have their faces, voices and history crafted in the minds of those who are making policies of war and giving orders to open fire on the other side. It is my greatest intention to have them stop looking at the death of a child as another number to add to the list.

Every child has a face, a story, a dream, and a future within a family and community. The loss of a child means the loss of all of this and does not merely add a name to a long and unending list of those lost to a fight they were not part of, nor were they consulted on.

The history and geography of Palestine

Historical Palestine is made up of the country on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea bordering Jordan from the west, Lebanon from the south, Syria from the southwest and Egypt from the north east.

As a consequence of the Balfour Declaration (Balfour, 1917), and after the end of the British mandate in the country in 1947, Palestine witnessed a series of colonial occupation acts, 1948 being the first and hardest on the Palestinian population. This attack resulted in massive, forced displacement of half of the population to other areas in Palestine and

surrounding Arab countries, symbolising what is being called An-Nakba (disaster), followed by the establishment of the state of Israel.

The second attack on 5 June 1967 resulted in the occupation of the West Bank of the Jordan River, east Jerusalem and Gaza, resulting in displacement of the additional proportion of Palestinian people to surrounding Arab countries. Territories occupied in June 1967 have become the subject for negotiations about the settlement of the Palestinian issue, guided by the UN resolutions 242 and 338.

These resolutions formed the basis for the peace agreement signed between the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and the state of Israel in what is known as the Oslo agreement in 1993. The area of West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem is therefore the geographic area subject to discussion in this report.

The period after the Oslo agreement has been characterised by instability, affecting the Palestinians in the following ways:

- Oslo Accords and obligations set for the parties to operate have not been fulfilled. Therefore, no progress has been achieved over the geography, sovereignty or state building with sustained division of the Palestinian lands into three areas (A, B, and C)¹. Geographical separation between West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem persists and forms a physical barrier to movement, development and institutional building. The construction of the separation wall on the land of West Bank continued to aggravate separation and challenges the development and freedom of movement of Palestinians within the West Bank area.
- The period after Oslo witnessed massive unilateral acts slowly compromising the potential for the creation of a viable Palestinian state. Settlement expansion,

¹ According to Oslo accords, the Palestinian territories have been divided into areas A, B and C symbolising gradual withdrawal of the occupation authorities that should have been completed in 1998 (five years after signing the accords).

land confiscation and annexation has increased, affecting every aspect of Palestinian life, including development, education, health and economy.

- Closure over Gaza has persisted for the last 17 years and has significantly aggravated the already dire living and service conditions for the 2.1 million Palestinians in Gaza.

The chapter on Palestine will have three sections:

- 1 Stories from the place
- 2 Actions to help
- 3 Aspirations for the future

Stories from the place

Palestinian children live under occupation, and their lives have been affected by this for over 75 years. Furthermore, children living in zones with military activities and in proximity to settlements face a harder reality, threatening their right to live, play, and have access to education and health services, the basics on the list of child rights.

A 12-year-old child in Gaza will have lived through 6 major wars—if still alive, will demonstrate high levels of depression, PTSD symptoms (Save the Children, 2022) and develop a gloomy picture of the meaning of happiness and hope for the future (DCI, 2020). The impact of occupation on the lives of children in Palestine has different forms. The next section will describe the direct impact of children who are victims of military action or settler violence.

A snapshot into child reality

In this section, and through only a few stories from West Bank and Gaza, I will try to tell the story of Palestinian children caught in conflict. Media has been extensive in printing pictures and news about the situation of war and counting the numbers, but has failed to show

the faces, stories and lost dreams behind every child who lost their life in the war. Continued occupation and series of wars are showing that the story is not yet finished, and more children are to be lost if the violence continues.

Ali Dawabsheh - Doma village



This story was told by Ali's uncle (Naser Dawabsheh) in an interview held on 26th June 2023:

"On 15 July 2015, my wife and Riham (Ali's mother) stayed awake talking, long into the summer night. Riham gave Ali his milk bottle and at 1230 the two ladies separated and went to sleep. 30 minutes later, my father woke me up to tell me that a huge fire was coming out of my brother's house. The flames were five meters higher than the house roof and whilst running there, I came across two burning people, who I later learned were my brother and his wife.

We could not get to the room where Ali slept at first. It took two attempts because of extensive fire inside, but when we could, we found a totally burned baby and a damaged bottle of milk. Eventually, the story emerged that 17 settlers attacked the house with highly fulminant materials, causing the burning and death of Ali, his father and mother.

Ali's brother Ahmed, five years old at the time, survived, but until this day is undergoing treatment for complications resulting from the severe burns sustained on the night of the accident".

Children of the Baker family, Gaza

Testimony of Mahmoud Daher²

"For many Palestinians living in Gaza, July is usually the month for school vacation, and the majority of the population will be on the beach enjoying the summer with their children, especially with the lack of electricity to operate fans or air conditioning at home. For my family, July 2014 was particularly horrible for those of us who had nightmares from 2012 and 2009. In my capacity as the head of the WHO office in Gaza, I would spend my days visiting hospitals and meeting with health partners to coordinate responses to the situation.

On 16 July 2014, I was at Shifa hospital most of the day, working with colleagues in the ministry of health to run the health emergency coordination room. I went around the hospital and saw influxes of injured or dead bodies who arrived at the emergency room. The scenes were dramatic, people arriving without limbs, burnt young children held in the arms of their parents or neighbours.

At 5pm I arrived home, my wife Wafaa was very distressed and crying. Mahmoud, it was horrible, she said. There were children playing over there—she pointed out the window to the beautiful yellow sands of the beach. I saw them, they were playing with joy, and all of a sudden, a shell from the sea was launched on them, she told me. She thought it was a shell from the warship far out to sea there. The children ran to find a secure place in the barrels which were on the beach, but another shell followed them immediately. I saw four children laying over there, it was horrible. They were just kids playing there. She started to cry. I could not hold myself back either and we almost collapsed, both crying.

Ahed, Ismail, Zakarya and Mohammad Baker were four children the same age as my youngest daughter and son, Maha and Amjad. They were at that time between nine and 11 years old. My daughter is now finishing her undergraduate degree in Medicine at Zagazig University in Egypt, and my son is in his second year of Economy at the University of East Anglia. The children of the Baker family could have now been going to do similar studies".

War on Gaza, May 2021

The 2021 attack on Gaza left 66 children dead and demonstrated one of the hardest attacks on civilians, in what was called the use of exaggerated power against civilian areas. Under the title (They Were Only Children) Mona El-Naggar, Adam Rasgon and Mona Boshnaq describe the toll on children caused by the attack on Gaza in May 2021 during which 67 children were killed (New York Times, 2021).

"When asked to describe how they felt, many parents answered with the simple statement 'It's God's will', their voice often reduced to a whisper, the words conveying resignation. They said their children had wanted to be doctors, artists and leaders" (New York Times, 2021).



Zaid Talbani, 4 years and his sister Miriam Talbani, 2 years

2. Senior program officer in Gaza for an international agency at the time of war

As the children of Gaza got used to constant Israeli violations of international and humanitarian conventions, they got accustomed to writing their wills under aerial bombing. Zeina Ahmed al-Dhabous wrote a touching letter to her mother during the 2021 assault on Gaza, expressing her fears, and asking to be buried next to her wearing her Eid holiday outfit.

Another child, Haya wrote a will during the latest Israeli assault:

"Hello, I am Haya. I will write my will now. My money (80 shekels): 45 shekels for Mama, 5 for Zeina, 5 for Hashem, 5 for grandma, 5 for Aunt Heba, 5 for Aunt Mariam, 5 for Uncle Abboud, and 5 for Aunt Sara. My toys and all my stuff go to my friends Zeina, Rima, Menna, Amal and my sister. My clothes go to my cousins and if there is anything left, donate it. Donate my shoes to the poor and needy... after washing them, of course. My accessories are to go to my cousins, Sarah, and my aunt's daughter, Heba".

Furthermore, ten-year-old Layan Mdoukh left a farewell video the day before she was killed, in which she prayed to God to protect her, alongside her family, and other people. The list of such children goes on (ECDAN, 2023).



Mohammed al-Tamimi
Nabi Saleh village

Mohammed al-Tamimi was two years old when he was shot and killed by Israeli forces. He was sitting on his father's lap during a military raid of Ramallah city in Palestine. The Israeli military investigation of this incident concluded that the use of fire and

the conduct of the military group was not justified and inappropriate, and the case was closed (Makan, 2023).

In 2022, 58 children were killed during military operations; 150 children are detained in Israeli prisons, including 17 children who are under administrative detention (PCBS, 2023).

Direct exposure to adversities linked to loss of a close relative or caregiver

2.3% of children in Palestine are orphans (had lost one or both parents) with 2.0% in the West Bank and 2.7% in Gaza Strip, according to the data for the year 2019 (PCBS, 2023). Loss of one or both parents results in deepening the poverty under which children live. More than 22,000 children are caught in child labour due to poverty, disruption of family structures and school dropout (MARSAD, 2023).

Indirect exposure through compromised access to basic services (ECD, education, healthcare and play)

Many factors contribute to the deprivation and vulnerability of children in Palestine. Assessment of child rights has shown that children living in area C, in Bedouin communities, and those in the south Hebron area, have limited access to education, early childhood service, health care and play facilities (Shaar & Adeeb, 2021). This deprivation is highly linked to restricted movement and development forced by the Israeli authorities.

Actions to help

In the middle of a massive, chronic and recurrent crisis, governmental, non-governmental and international agencies working in the field are trying to cope and bring some hope to affected children. In many cases, interventions occur at the time of acute crisis. First aid measures are implemented to alleviate acute suffering usually within a family, neighborhood or community context. First aid interventions, while successful, do not result in long-term healing or resilience building.

The recurrent nature of the crisis allows for repeated exposure and hence, deepening old wounds and opening new ones.

Community level interventions are accompanied by higher level and longer-term trials to improve coping, support healing and build resilience. Some interventions address policy levels and advocacy towards child protection, but all of these have not yielded significant impact on the lives of children and their families. However, it is important to highlight them so we can build on them for scaling up and pressuring political decisions towards preserving children caught in conflict.

Below is a description of key interventions:

First conference on ECD and peace building

In November 2019, the first ECD conference was held at Al-Najah National University in Nablus under the theme “children, hope and peace” and formed an important event addressing the impact of the crisis on children. The conference was held in a city living under occupation, which has been hosting representatives of the Muslim, Christian and Jewish religions living in peace for hundreds of years. A diverse group of global professionals in the area of neuroscience, early childhood and peace building presented the advancement in the area of ECD and presented the value of peace in supporting a health growth of children. The declaration of the conference name as Nablus³ was a highlight, as it came out of a city living under occupation and from a University that is dedicated to open dialogue for a peaceful and prosperous future of children.

3. Final declaration coming out of Nablus conference affirming commitment to preserve and defend the rights of children caught in conflict

Gaza community mental health program (GCMHP) work

The work of Gaza community mental health program has been a safety valve for the children of Gaza. Their structured activities represent a continuum of care that tries to address mental health issues arising from the crisis. Their approach can be summarised as follows:

1. At the level of Preparedness:

Gaza Community Mental Health Programme (GCMHP) trains (on an annual basis) more than 200 mental health professionals working in the Mental Health Psycho-Social Support (MHPSS) sector either at governmental or non governmental institutions. These professionals are trained in the provision of Psychological First Aid (PFA), basic counseling techniques and on the detection and referral of cases in need of further support.

2. During the Crisis:

Due to restrictions of movement and lack of safety, mobile numbers of GCMHP staff are announced to the public and people can get support from MHPSS clinicians. A toll-free helpline is activated to receive calls from those seeking help. Media outlets, social media, and mobile text messages are sent to the social media and media outlets to initiate broadcasting advice to people on how to manage stress, especially amongst children.

3. After the crisis ends:

Mobile teams of one man and one woman, trained in the provision of PFA, counseling, case detection and referrals, start visiting affected houses, hospitals, and neighbourhoods. The teams distribute children’s kits that include toys and some stationery.

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psychologists are made available in the most affected areas through operating in small community based organisations (CBOs). Usually, there are five CBOs in order to enhance accessibility, combat stigma, and reach children in their neighbourhoods.

The GCMHP multidisciplinary teams are also available at the three Community Mental Health Centres. The centres operate as clinics where children can receive the necessary assessment and management. Management could include play therapy, art therapy, psychodrama, or Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) based on age and diagnosis. In severe cases, medication can be used. The therapy plan involves parents.

Awareness raising campaigns continue to educate people on the impact of trauma and how to deal with its repercussions. Therapists also receive bi-weekly stress management support and care for themselves as caregivers upon returning to work.

All the work is coordinated with the main stakeholders.

Here are descriptions of four initiatives covering a range of responses to the needs of Palestinian children impacted by the conflict.

1. Palestinian child Institute (PCI) work with Jordan Valley children



Children in the Jordan Valley are exposed to a different form of child rights violations. Living in a border area between Palestine and Jordan, within area C and in remote, hard to reach communities, deprives them of easy access to schools, play areas, or health services when needed.

These communities are not allowed to build homes or service outlets and whilst water is readily available in the area, Palestinian families are not allowed to have access to it—water is rather diverted to Israeli settlements. Hard living conditions, and difficult access to education and play makes childhood in these areas a concept without content.

The PCI developed a manual for outreach child activities using play as a structured approach to support mental wellbeing of children affected by isolation and lack of

services. It uses the manual to implement open days for children in marginalised areas with focus on the Jordan valley area, where the need is vast.

2. Nurturing care framework in crisis (Nablus, 2021)

In November 2021, the PCI hosted the first regional workshop on the nurturing care framework in countries affected by crisis. For Palestine, it shaped the way towards addressing health, education, protection, psychosocial and environmental needs, for children affected by conflict.

The workshop, and plan stemming from it, articulated key strategic conclusive remarks:

- ECD has long been a priority area nationally for Palestine according to the report generated, but the quality of services provided has suffered as a result of the sectoral fragmentation and misalignment.
- There are a number of cross-sectoral bodies that aim to develop, promote, and implement ECD policies in Palestine, including the National Council for Early Childhood Development (NCECD) and the Palestinian Early Childhood Development Network.
- While it is important to address ECD through holistic approaches, nurturing care framework is a practical concept to enable responding to the needs of children in crisis situations.
- For the particular situation in Palestine, protection and psychosocial support to children stand as key strategies to enhance resilience and improve children and families' ability to cope within the prevailing and recurrent crisis.

3. Child rights assessment and project

Within a planning process to respond to child rights in Palestine, Botnar Foundation funded a qualitative assessment of child rights in the country, as perceived by children and parents. Diverse groups of children were consulted, accommodating the diversities present in the country in relation to religion, place of residence, refugee status, and disability (Child Rights in Palestine, 2021).

The assessment found that children, parents, and key informants recognise the importance of children's rights to daily life of the Palestinian children. However, they identified different issues that affect children's rights. First, all participants mentioned the Israeli occupation as a key factor affecting child rights in different ways, the detention of children in Israeli jails being one of them.

Economic factors associated with the high level of unemployment and poverty stand as another important factor. This group thinks that rich children have more access to claim their rights, and, therefore, poor children might not have the same level of access.

The third issue related to cultural and social norms which define children as "owned" objects, who need instruction and discipline rules from an adult. Often adults' perception of children reflects stereotyping based on gender and disability.

Acknowledging the distressing factors regarding child rights in Palestine, the consultation team identified a high level of awareness of children's rights among children and other stakeholders.

4. World Bank MHPSS interventions (MHPSS, 2023)

As of 2007, the Gaza Strip has been subjected to five massive wars and military operations, resulting in thousands of deaths, a high number of wounded, and massive forced displacement. Strict closure of the Gaza Strip, and restriction of mobility of people and goods from—and into—Gaza resulted in a major deterioration of living conditions, high unemployment and poverty.

The health system in Gaza has been severely affected by the military operations and closures. Shortage in medical supplies, equipment and physical infrastructure has been the result of constrained access to goods and materials. Restricted movement of people has resulted in deprivation of access to care, especially for those in need of treatment outside the strip and limited the opportunities of health workers to receive the much-needed training and qualification upgrades to cope with the increased demand on services.

Mental health in the Gaza Strip has been a critically hit area. Direct and indirect exposure to traumatizing events has been massive and has affected almost all of the two million inhabitants. The five wars launched over Gaza have caused a condition of repeated exposure and hence, deepened the negative effect of war on the mental health of the population.

The recent war on Gaza raised the need for urgent intervention to care for people in need of psychosocial and mental health interventions, and also the need for upgrading the capacity of mental health, and psychosocial human resources. It has also raised the need for effective preventive and resilience building interventions to help people deal with stress, and enable families to have early and effective care for their children in need.

Through funding made available to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, the World Bank is supporting capacity building programmes in the area of mental health and psychosocial support. The programme is geared towards building the capacity of providers and caregivers to respond to adversities in times of acute crisis, but also build resilience and positive coping in children and families in a sustainable manner.

Aspiration for the future

Within the INPB and ECPC

The Early Childhood Peace Consortium (ECPC) and the International Network on Peace Building for young children (INPB) form a platform for international early childhood professionals from around the globe. Founded based on working for a better future for children and benefiting from the experience in Northern Ireland and other countries, both ECPC and INPB aim to prevent the direct and indirect impact of war on children.

With strong research, programmes, and advocacy initiatives, they stand as credible advocacy entities on behalf of all children. As they are building partnerships and evidence about the impact of war and occupation on the lives of children, they should continue their effort to reach policymakers and continuously inform and warn about crimes affecting children.

In their reach out to UN high ranking entities and persons, the ECPC and INPB should continue to bring to their attention the necessary change of policies in favour of a better future for all children in the region, and foster a fair resolution of the Palestinian problem.

ECPC and INPB members should work within their networks to make policymakers in their respective countries aware and informed of the impact of war on children and build a coalition of people and organisations towards saving children in times of war. In Palestine, this is critically important due to the nature of exposure and the long time of unsolved conflict.

Within the UN

Within the frameworks of United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and of humanitarian human rights resolutions, the UN should be encouraged to take a stand on preserving the lives of children in the region. The long lasting occupation and consequent negative impact on the lives of children in Palestine and Israel should prompt the UN to act within its responsibility and power to preserve children's lives and rights on both sides.

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Active Development of Respect for Diversity from Early Years in Serbia and Western Balkans



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Introduction

The chapter shows how the inspiration from one project for young children (Media Initiative) in one divided society (Northern Ireland) developed into a strategic approach in the Pomoc Deci organisation's work with children and adults in another divided society—Serbia and Western Balkans. It describes the path taken from one project, through the development of a four-year programme, its implementation and evaluation results, contributing to the overall new approach to programmes for children and young people of all ages, in the active development of respect for diversity in Serbia. The chapter also points out some of the strategic decisions taken and shows the conclusions based on almost 15 years of experience in developing programmes for the active development of respect for all differences among children and young people.

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Ljiljana Vasic lives in Belgrade, Serbia and has been leading Pomoc Deci (Children and Youth Support Organisation) for almost 20 years. For the last 15 years, Ljiljana also represents the organisation in the International Network on Peacebuilding for Young Children (INPB). Whilst holding an MSc in Education Policies, she has been trying to develop, implement and manage programmes for the development of respect for diversity with children from early years to their adult lives both in formal and non-formal education settings in Serbia, Western Balkans and internationally. She is actively involved in the efforts in this field also through membership and participation in the work of Eurochild – a European network and Mediterranean Children's Movement.

Active Development of Respect for Diversity from Early Years in Serbia and Western Balkans

“Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding... Our task must be to free ourselves from our prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all humanity and the whole of nature in its beauty.” Albert Einstein

Abstract

This chapter will show how the inspiration from one project for young children (Media Initiative) in one divided society (Northern Ireland) developed into a strategic approach in the Pomoc Deci organisation’s work with children and adults in another divided society—Serbia and Western Balkans. It will describe the path taken from one project, through the development of a four-year programme, its implementation and evaluation results, to the overall new approach for all the programmes for children and young people of all ages, in active development of respect for diversity in Serbia. The chapter will also point out some of the strategic decisions taken and will show the conclusions based on almost 15 years of developing programmes for the active development of respect for all differences among children and young people.

Background—the collapse of Yugoslavia and the challenges it created in Serbia

Serbia was part of a joint country (Kingdom of Serbians, Croats and Slovenians, Kingdom of Yugoslavia and Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia - SFRY) from 1918 to 1991, and its population was the largest among the constituents of the State (the last census data - held in 1991 in SFRY - showed that in Serbia alone, there were 9,791,500 inhabitants, out of 23,528,230 people in the whole State. The number of Serbian nationality people stood at 8,526,870). However, they did not live within Serbia only, so during the civil war (1991-1999), 750,000 refugees from Croatia, Bosnia

& Herzegovina and Kosovo & Metohija arrived in Serbia. Only around 50,000 returned to their original homes following the conflict.

Serbia was always a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society where different minority groups lived in different areas. In some places, they were a majority population, mostly close to the borders. In some towns close to the Hungarian border almost 95% of the population have been Hungarians; Close to Bulgarian borders the same percentage would be a Bulgarian ethnic group; In the south the Albanian population would make up the majority population at local level.

In total, there are 26 ethnic minorities living in Serbia. For eight of them, the whole education system, from Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) to University level, could be attended in the minorities’ mother tongue, with Serbian language being taught as a foreign language.

The migrations during the civil war, and the war itself, with all its consequences, brought about huge polarisation among the ethnic and religious groups in Serbia. Three-quarters of a million people fled, or were made to leave their homes, in other former Republics of Yugoslavia. Serious segregation and animosity developed between these groups. The main divisions were between the Serbian and Croatian populations in the north and Albanian and Serbian populations in the south of Serbia. In addition, people arriving as refugees and internally displaced people also came with habits, styles of life, dialect, accent, and way of speaking the language from their own environment. Thus, frequently, they and their children were also not accepted by the local population. They were perceived as those who were “taking away” the little resources local communities had, under international sanctions imposed on Serbia during this period.

The challenge of bringing together these different groups was exasperated by the political decisions that did not allow the refugees and internally displaced people to get valid documents in Serbia—citizenship and ID cards. Therefore, they could not get regular employment, but were only recipients of social welfare. Over the years, this additionally caused friction between the “local” population on the one hand and refugees and internally displaced people on the other. The local population perceived the newcomers as a “burden” to their socioeconomic situation, already precarious due to the decline of the economy and sanctions.

Two more events marked this period: first, a change in the law on Preschool Education which prescribed one year of mandatory preparatory preschool programmes for all children, five and a half and six and a half years of age. This meant that all the Roma children who had never attended any organised nursery or kindergarten group joined the mandatory preparatory preschool programmes, often coming with no routine, social skills, or language. The other event was the introduction of Inclusive Education regulations which prioritised kindergarten and preschool groups that included all children, regardless of the type of disability that they may have. Given the already existing divisions based on the ethnic, religious, economic and language background, these changes were difficult to implement—especially children with multiple differences.

Pomoc Deci – Children and Youth Support Organisation

Pomoc Deci – Children and Youth Support Organisation (as its official name is in the English language) was founded in Serbia in 2004. Its mission is to create an environment of hope and respect for children and youth, where they have opportunities to achieve their full potential, and additionally, to provide children, youth, parents, and communities with practical tools for positive change. From the first days of operation until now, the organisation has been developing and

implementing various programmes for social inclusion through education, activism of children, and capacity building for children, their parents and teachers. In doing so, the organisation has been closely cooperating with kindergartens, preschools, schools, and other NGOs in the country, at European and global levels.

Our first projects aimed to empower young Roma children to integrate into the education system, especially in south of Serbia where Roma families speak only Roma language at home and their children have no Serbian language knowledge and skills when they are supposed to start their education. Since they were not attending any non-mandatory kindergarten or preschool prior to the first grade, they also lacked social skills, routine and all other elements needed for successful adaptation into school life.

In 2005, after the first contact with Early Years – the organisation for young children (NIPPA at the time), we found many common challenges and issues that we were both tackling – in Serbia, with the integration of Roma children, in Northern Ireland, with the Travellers. This brought about our partnership and the first joint activities. Trainers who were involved in the projects with Travellers’ children and families came to Serbia to train our volunteers, assistants and teachers, to share the experience and lessons learnt.

At the time, Media Initiative was already underway in Northern Ireland, so getting familiar with this initiative through discussions led to the development of initial training for the kindergarten and preschool teachers in using Persona Dolls and other tools to discuss emotions, differences and opportunities for acceptance of diversity among young children and significant adults around them (parents and teachers) in Serbia.

These actions, and many other supporting activities of Pomoc Deci, have led to several international awards for the best social inclusion programmes in south-east Europe and globally (ERSTE Foundation Award in

2009, Alcuin runner-up Award in 2017, one of 300 World Best Practices on Sustainability and Innovation for the 5th edition of the Global Entrepres Awards and 5Gcitizens International Congress in 2021).

Active development of respect for differences has become our overarching theme in everything we do, be it with very young children, their parents and teachers, with young people or other civil society organisations.

Over time, the organisation has developed different programmes for the prevention and overcoming of prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination based on various types of differences with varied age groups of children and young people, starting from early years to young adulthood, and also with their significant adults.

New approach: active development of respect for differences in Serbia

Inspired by the Media Initiative programme in Northern Ireland and subsequent joint work on the development of the International Toolkit for the Development of Respect for Diversity with Young Children within the International Network for Peace Building with young children (INPB), Pomoc Deci analysed the situation in Serbia. We analysed available resources and approaches to peace building, respect for diversity and work with young children in this respect. We saw that most of the programmes available were developed for older children or teenagers, that those programmes were “dropped” down on those who were asked to just implement them, copied from other parts of the world. Most of the work was just project based, without sufficient thought about measures to sustain them within the communities into which they were implemented. So, we developed a new approach and new strategies for Serbia, and decided to start working accordingly with young children, their kindergarten and preschool teachers and parents. The core components and steps of our approach and process are hereby described.

Respect, not Tolerance

We were not going to use the term “tolerance” and would not promote it. We wanted to develop children’s understanding that differences exist everywhere and that they enrich the world, so they should be accepted and respected. Tolerance does not imply either understanding or accepting the facts. On the contrary, it implies being quiet and not reacting to what irritates a person or being able to deal with something unpleasant or annoying (as the word is defined in the Cambridge English Dictionary). Rather, we were aiming for conscious acceptance and respect for everyone.

Working with each child, whether a newcomer or already part of the group

Almost all traditional programmes for social inclusion of children, related to ethnicity, religion, different abilities, or socioeconomic background in Serbia, used to focus on the integration of these children in the majority group. They focused on the incoming child’s preparation to deal with the group into which he/she is coming. They were “preparing” a child entering a group (a “different” one) to integrate and find their way in the group.

We were convinced through both experience and knowledge that we needed to concentrate on each individual child – newcomers, as well as those already in the group. We aimed to develop understanding, acceptance and respect for another child – pointing out that each child is different in some way, but what matters is what similarities a child can find with another child at an individual level. At a group level, we also believed that it is the majority group that needs to be prepared to understand and accept the newcomers (not the other way round), focussing on the similarities whilst respecting the differences.

Cascading system of training

In a triangle family–child–early years setting, our strategy was to focus on the practitioners first, to build a strong group of future trainers. They could then work both with fellow preschool/kindergarten teachers and with parents, whilst they also work directly with children daily. This would enable us to reach as many settings, families and children as possible. The practitioners are the ones respected by both families and children for their knowledge, skills and care for children. They are the ones both children and adults turn to for help, advice and guidance.

Therefore, we chose to adopt a cascading system of training to reach as many settings, teachers, children and families as possible, but also in order to develop ownership and responsibility for taking the acquired knowledge and skills further to other colleagues among the trained practitioners. Developing a group of future trainers would serve as the basis for them to prepare and hold further training within their settings for their peers. Our further mentoring and support would focus on assisting the nuclear trainers to organise and conduct training for fellow teachers from other settings, municipalities and regions throughout the country. At the third level, those among the trained at secondary level who felt like engaging in further peer training and who showed capacity to do so, were then supported to become local focal points and local trainers.

Starting with (self)-assessment of attitudes and opinions of each teacher

To prepare the teachers for the process of transformation of their attitudes, opinions and behaviour on one side, to boost their self-confidence to change any negative attitudes and opinions among children and their parents on the other side, and to provide ourselves with the baseline data, we introduced the (self)-assessment tools and instruments. They were a litmus test for assessing the attitudes

and opinions of each teacher towards and about differences (ethnicity, religious, disabilities or socioeconomic background of children and their families). It was important to also assess the level of teachers' awareness about whether, and how much, children at the age of three notice differences in another child and whether it influences children's behaviour in the group. Individual semi-structured interviews were held with each teacher.

This approach provides us with data and input for adaptation of the training material later. It also has proven to be an eye-opener for many teachers, opening them up to a change in their own practice.

Parents reflect on their attitudes and opinions

We also needed to know what messages young children get about diversity at home, ie how much parents are aware that children notice differences in other children and that that can influence their behaviour towards other children. Additionally, we assessed how confident parents felt to change any negative attitudes towards difference already adopted by their child(ren).

For this purpose, individual semi-structured interviews were held with parents of the children in the kindergartens and preschool institutions where we were interviewing teachers. This was proving to be an important step towards attracting parents' attention to the ways they talk about differences. It also deepened their understanding of the level of their influence on children through everything they say to them or in their presence.

This step also encouraged parents to start discussing diversity related issues that they would not feel confident talking about otherwise, either in parental groups or with teachers.

Sharing the results with teachers and parents to show them where they are—and starting from there

The prevailing practice of NGOs is to use the results of assessments only for the organisational purposes related to the development of training, research or dissemination of the programme results. In contrary, we shared the results of the assessment of the teachers' and parents' attitudes and opinions about diversity with them first.

This approach proved to be very important in ensuring real interest from both teachers and parents to learn more about various topics related to the theme, reflect more on their own practices and to gain confidence to change both their own ways of thinking and their messages for children.

Interactive training for teachers as future trainers of other teachers

Although teachers in Serbia are well qualified (the minimum level of education required for preschool teachers is a post-secondary three-year college diploma in early years education), the content of their initial education does not reflect the most recent research and findings. Therefore, our approach included both teaching theoretical foundations and practical training. The contents, which were delivered in an interactive way, enabled the teachers to actively participate in the learning process and practice. They could use different practices in their everyday work whilst always putting the child at the centre of their focus.

The content of the training included both developmental aspects of children and behaviour at different stages, along with ways for responding to children's behaviours in different situations. The teachers received feedback not only from the trainers but also from peers. This approach increased their

skills of observation and giving constructive feedback to colleagues – something they were not used to in the traditional lecture-giving and receiving type of training. As a result, teachers gained not only knowledge and skills, but also the confidence needed to deliver their own future training to peers.

Piloting varied toolkits

Most teachers in Serbia are used to situations in which they are given just one set of tools and activities and are shown only one way of implementing them. Thus, we deliberately created a bit of confusion at first, by introducing three different toolkits and asking them to try them out in different situations. We asked them to try out different ways of approaching feelings of being excluded and include these in the play and group, different ways of tackling varied abilities and personal responsibility of each child for the peers in the group.

We provided mentoring support, organised discussion groups and enough room for them to voice their opinions on the effectiveness of different activities in their own environments. We provided them with feedback during the piloting process so that they gained both confidence and trust to openly discuss each element of the toolkits they had at their disposal.

This approach also taught them not to copy-paste any resource given to them. Rather, they were encouraged to use them as a starting point for the development of their own material, based on—and inspired by—the available material, adapted for the situation and environment at hand. It provided us, at the organisation, with practical knowledge about what works best in the Serbian context.

Teachers learn to (self) monitor and evaluate their actions and activities

Throughout the process of piloting various toolkits, our approach included training teachers to monitor and evaluate their own actions and activities. This approach empowered them for action research and self-reflection in their daily activities. As supporting material, we developed guidelines for teachers for action research in ECEC settings to determine the characteristics of- and address the exact challenges and specifics of any individual preschool group. This enabled adapting and introducing specific activities for the active development of respect for diversity among children and in work with parents. In the process of going through the cycles of implementation and self-monitoring, they became their own monitors.

Building a community of trainers and learners
For sustainability reasons and to ensure continuous improvement in work on the development of respect for diversity in young children, we built a community of training and learning among teachers, both within an individual preschool and among all the participants in the project.

The approach meant building on the knowledge constructed in the group, based on the teachers' experiences, self-reflection, monitoring and evaluation of the effects of their work with children. We created an environment in which our trainers (a nuclear team of trainers that we developed along with some local trainers), as well as all the teachers, were equipped with knowledge, skills and attitudes to become a source of knowledge for learners.

Consequently, the participants in this group were capable and willing to be co-authors of the national guidelines for early years practitioners about the active development of respect for diversity among young children in Serbia.

The process was based on the concrete country's profile, experience during implementation, best practice examples and following the child-rights approach from the International Toolkit for Peacebuilding with young children.

Evaluation

In addition to documenting key events in the above-mentioned process and conducting ongoing reflection, we conducted a quantitative pre- and post-evaluation. We assessed changes in attitudes, opinions, confidence, and behaviour among all three groups—parents, teachers and children. We also investigated the level of understanding among teachers and parents of how much young children notice differences in others and themselves and their levels of self-confidence in their own capacity to influence children’s attitudes and opinions.

The changes in awareness of teachers and parents of how much young children notice differences are presented in Table 1.

As the table shows, the programme brought about statistically significant changes in the perception of teachers about the extent to which children notice differences in others (marked in red). The analysis of the data shows that about 30 percent of about 600 surveyed kindergarten/preschool teachers initially had thought that young children never or rarely notice differences in others. After the implementation of the programme, less than 14 percent of them kept this opinion, whilst about 14.5 more percent of the surveyed teachers understood that children notice differences all the time.

The changes in parents’ responses were not significant.

Table 1: To what extent do you think that young children tend to notice differences in others?

ANSWER	PARENTS		TEACHERS	
	PRE %	POST %	PRE %	POST %
Not at all	8.8	7.6	13.0	5.6
Rarely	12.4	12.1	17.4	8.3
Sometimes	32.3	34.5	26.1	30.6
Frequently	27.2	28.3	41.3	38.9
All the time	19.3	17.5	2.2	16.7

Table 2 presents the results regarding the perceptions of both parents and teachers of the children’s tendency to exclude children who they perceive as different from themselves. As the table shows, during the learning process, both parents and teachers understood that this tendency exists among young children.

Specifically, in the pre-pilot survey, almost 60% of the teachers thought that children never or rarely exclude other children from play or sharing toys. In the post-pilot survey,

around 35% of them kept this opinion, whilst around 24% of them changed their attitude and acknowledged that young children exclude other children in play or sharing toys. Furthermore, teachers came to realise that exclusion stems from negative perceptions of differences among children. This realisation motivated them to learn more and work with both parents and children to foster acceptance and respect of differences among children.

Table 2: To what extent do you think that young children tend to exclude other children because they are different from themselves?

ANSWER	PARENTS		TEACHERS	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
	%	%	%	%
Not at all	22.4	14.3	21.7	13.9
Rarely	25.4	25.6	37.0	19.4
Sometimes	27.5	33.2	23.9	47.4
Frequently	18.1	19.3	17.4	19.4
All the time	6.6	7.6	0	0

Impact: national guidelines and development of new programmes in Pomoc Deci

An important outcome of the evaluation was the acknowledgment from the Ministry of Education of their long-term need to work on this issue. The programme served as the basis for the National Guide for active development of respect for diversity which was recognised as one of the needed resources for all kindergarten and preschool teachers.

The National Agency for Improvement in Education accredited our training programme for active development of respect for diversity in early years within in-service professional development requirements for kindergarten and preschool teachers. Thus, each preschool/kindergarten teacher who completed the training and showed evidence of appropriately implementing it in the six-month period after the training, would receive points towards licensing or re-licensing for

work in early years settings. Since the project's conclusion at the end of 2016, Pomoc Deci has provided training and support for teachers on an ongoing basis.

A long-term impact of the programme for the Pomoc Deci organisation itself has been the expansion of the programme for the active development of respect for diversity among school children, as well as young people. Based on the principles of our approach ie a child-rights and human-rights perspective, peer education and horizontal learning methods, the organisation has developed several training programmes, guides and toolkits that have been used in all the projects. In addition, the organisation has developed specific programmes for supporting parents directly.

These specific programmes assist in self-assessing one's own (un)conscious bias, prejudice and stereotypes and how to overcome them. The programmes support parents, older children and young people in the understanding of differences in themselves and others, to accept these differences and respect them.

Conclusions and hopes for future

It has been more than 15 years since Pomoc Deci first introduced the initiative for the active development of respect for differences in Serbia. And, it has been more than a decade since the EU funded project enabled a comprehensive development of the tools, materials, guides and training programmes. Furthermore, during this period, the international instruments for assessing the attitudes, opinions and self-confidence of teachers and parents to consciously work on the active development of respect for diversity in Serbia were adapted in Serbia.

To date, the political situation in Serbia and the region has threatened to develop and strengthen polarisations in society- politically, ethnically, and socioeconomically. Constant political tensions, especially in south Serbia, in the areas close to Kosovo and Metohija, affect all citizens, especially children and young people, and bring about a lot of violence, including armed incidents. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the consequences of lockdowns have been also visible in children's lack of social and networking skills, adults' distancing and operating in closed circles.

The active development of respect for differences and all types of diversity proves to be of essential importance and is very welcomed by teachers, children, and young people in Serbia. Through the years, more than 80 teachers and almost 100 young people have been trained, mentored, and supported regularly to train their peers and colleagues. We hope to achieve a critical mass of trainers who could reach out to every kindergarten, preschool, primary and secondary school in the future. For lasting peace and stability in Serbia and the Western Balkan region, it is of crucial importance that the young children of today—and the future—understand and embrace differences and develop respect for all their peers and all people in the society around them.

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Towards sustainable Peace: Young children learning in the language spoken at home and surrounding communities in Tajikistan



Author:
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Introduction

“One of the reasons that many children from ethnic minorities perform relatively poorly in school is that they are often taught in a language they struggle to comprehend. Language is a process that is interwoven into a cultural context and social interactions between children, and the larger society, when they play outside, at home and at school. Hence, from an inclusion perspective, the first priority of good language policy for many countries, specifically for Tajikistan, is to practice bi/multilingual education by including speakers of minority languages—Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Russian—in education. This will allow parents to choose the language of their child’s elementary education where feasible, and help them to learn other languages.”

Eraj Sodatsayrov

In his role as an Education Specialist for UNICEF Tajikistan, Eraj has been responsible for managing the quality output since 2018. He plays a key role in bringing innovation to the development and preparation of education programmes. In his previous job as Academic Director for Aga Khan Education Services, Eraj provided professional guidance and operational support throughout all stages of programming to facilitate the management and delivery of results on strengthening the religious education system. He aims to help improve learning outcomes and to promote access to quality secondary education.

Towards sustainable Peace: Young children learning in the language spoken at home and surrounding communities in Tajikistan

The central role of primary language in learning has now been firmly recognised, not only as a subject in the curriculum, but also as the medium through which all subjects are taught and learned. The simple act of singing, talking, and conversation while playing with a child in a familiar language contributes effectively to the holistic development of their brain, leading to greater engagement with other children and learning results. Not only the intellectual development of the child, but also the formation of their character, emotions and personality as a whole depends directly on daily meaningful conversations, dialogue and speech. Valuing speech and conversation not only for academic purposes but for psychological, social and emotional development is paramount. This chapter tries to argue that all children acquire strong foundation skills in literacy and numeracy based on their mother tongue from the early years. The findings are based on the positive experiences of a UNICEF multilingual and mother tongue based early childhood development (ECD)¹ pre-school programme piloted in the Sughd region of Tajikistan.

Since independence, postcolonial Central Asian countries as newly developing nations have imposed necessary modifications for language implementation in teaching and learning, emphasising primarily on the national languages while retaining some links with the Russian language for economical benefits (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). In order to further solidify national identities, multilingualism or plurilingualism was regarded as a hindrance, so the focus was exclusively on the state languages. Although article 2 of the Tajik Constitution defines Tajik and Russian as the official languages of Tajikistan, the Russian language is generally presented as the language of interethnic communication.

The right to use one's mother tongue is also guaranteed to all nationalities and people who live in Tajikistan (Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan, 1994).

However, in post-colonial Central Asia the dominant language in a society was presented to children of minority languages and families as normative, desired and privileged—having a high status. Unfortunately, children have been encouraged to learn using a less familiar language on the assumption that they will manage later learning better. For many of these minority language children, learning in an unfamiliar language gives the option to 'sink or swim', mostly resulting in poor learning outcomes for many (Felton 1999, p.863). Within this context, UNICEF and its partners have been supporting the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) to find solutions to the problem of language diversity in learning in post-colonial Tajikistan.

UNICEF tries to promote mother tongue based early childhood education as a fundamental right of all children. UNICEF references to article 30 of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which encourages regional languages to be recognised and integrated into the education system for children to achieve better learning outcomes in their early years. Delivering early childhood education in a child's mother tongue is a way to achieve equity of educational opportunities and achieve Education for All—a global action to meet the basic learning needs of all children².

1. Early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Tajikistan is a part of early childhood development (ECD), focusing primarily on child developmental services provided through education and care arrangements for children from birth to compulsory schooling, regardless of setting, funding, opening hours, or programme.

2. The World Declaration on Education for All and its companion Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs, adopted by the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, March 1990), have proved useful guides for governments, international organizations, educators, and development professionals in designing and carrying out policies and strategies to improve basic education services.

Brief context

Tajikistan is ethnically diverse—as it has been for centuries—but more than four-fifths of the population are ethnically Tajik and speak a form of Persian or Dari language (called Tajik). According to Encyclopedia Britannica, on the basis of language, customs, and other traits, the Tajiks can be subdivided into a number of distinct groups and languages. The Pamiri Tajiks within the Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous region include minority peoples speaking Wakhī, Shughnī, Rōshānī, Khufī, Yāzgulāmī, Ishkashimī, and Bartangī—all Iranian languages apart from Kyrgyz, present at the east of Pamir and belong to Turkish languages.

Another distinct group is formed by the Yaghnābīs, direct descendants of the ancient Sogdians, who live in the Zeravshan River basin. The second largest ethnic minority are the Uzbeks who mostly reside in the North of Tajikistan. The country's other ethnic groups include Russians, Tatars, Kyrgyz, Ukrainians, Germans, Jews, and Armenians.

The Sughd region of Tajikistan is in the northwest of the country and shares a border with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Minority groups are mostly Uzbek, often living in discrete communities in border areas. Other minority groups in the region include Kyrgyz and Russian natives. The proportion of different nationalities living in the Sughd region reflects that of the nation as a whole, approximately 84% are Tajik, 14% Uzbek and less than 1% are Kyrgyz and Russian (Population and Housing Census of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2010).

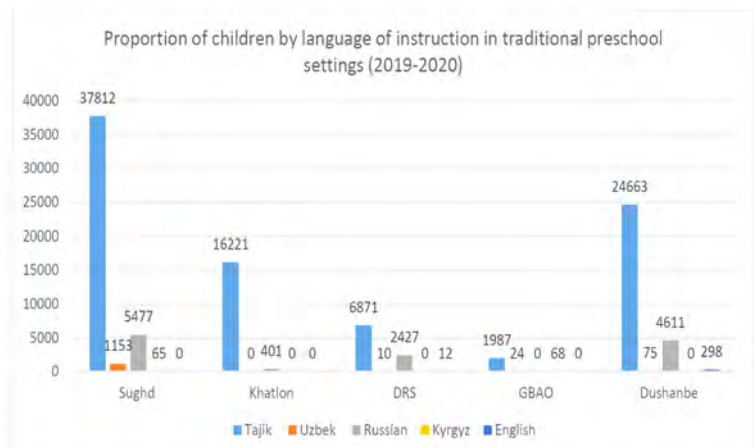
Tajikistan also has a long history of conflict in the years since independence in 1991, including a violent civil war, from 1992-1997. The country has experienced sporadic outbreaks and escalations of conflict in the Sughd region

which borders neighbouring Kyrgyzstan (Toktomushev, 2018). Direct violence associated with conflict has been exacerbating existing inequities and negatively impacting access to health care, nutrition, adequate shelter, and education which ultimately leads to poorer outcomes for children (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997) and creates a cycle of disadvantage and marginalisation of minorities (Abrams & Killen, 2014).

Why is a better approach to school language needed?

According to Education Management and Information System (EMIS) data for 2019-2020, as an example, out of 13,645 Uzbek children who attend traditional preschools, only 1262 enjoy learning in Uzbek (Figure 1). It means that 12,383 Uzbek children must go to a preschool setting where the language of instruction is Tajik or Russian. The data shown demonstrates that the number of children at settings where the language of instruction is Russian has grown to 12,916. Data shows that Uzbek parents often consider the language's long-term usability in order to support their children. Russian language is a powerful tool of individual choice for better career opportunities, as well as a means of communication in the ethnically mixed regions of Central Asia and beyond (Alok Kumar, 2011).

Figure 1: Proportion of children by language of instruction in traditional preschool settings



Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA)³ results demonstrated that only 39% of grade 2 Tajik speaking children taught in the Tajik language met or exceeded the standard. Only 26% of Uzbek speaking children from schools that switched from Uzbek to Tajik language met or exceeded the standards. It clearly demonstrates the challenges of instruction, language and learning results. Uzbek children are “sinking” as they try to learn better just because the language of instruction is not familiar to them even though they are learning in Tajik language for the second year. Simply, Uzbek speaking children learning in Tajik language are struggling to do well.

The same study demonstrated that for both Oral Reading Fluency and Reading Comprehension, Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBO) had the highest proportion of students who exceeded the standard despite the fact that their mother tongue is different from Tajik. The fact is that teaching is predominantly organised in two languages; Tajik language alongside Shughni language. This approach and teaching strategy enabled students to have high quality learning outcomes, outperforming other regions.

Implementing a multilingual approach in Tajikistan is about bridging languages for learning

A growing body of evidence indicates that a pedagogically inclusive and enabling environment in early childhood education can contribute to better learning outcomes. Studies explain that environmental influences play a significant role in brain development. A stimulating, inclusive and enabling environment, where reading, singing, talking, and playing with a child happens in a familiar language, can contribute to the holistic development of a child's brain and further acceptance of surrounding diversity

(Landry 2005; Ackah-Jnr et al. 2020; McCain, et al., 2002). Child development involves not only intellectual development but also the formation of character, emotions, and personality as a whole; all of which are influenced by speech (Vygotsky, 1997). It means that children may think differently depending on the language environment that they experience. Consequently, one may seem to have different personality characteristics and values related to different languages that they may speak.

Children who speak and learn in their mother tongue obviously do not struggle to acquire proficiency in the different languages of instruction, resulting in better early literacy and numeracy outcomes (Pinnock, 2010). A lack of proficiency in the mother tongue, and language of instruction prevents the Tajikistan education system from having better learning outcomes for those whose language is not Tajik. According to Save the Children (2009), acquiring multilingual and mother-tongue-based programmes for early years is the only effective and inclusive approach for teaching and learning. It is about bridging several languages in the learning process to enable a child to engage and feel safe (Malone, 2010). It ensures that children learn languages on a continuum, from the most familiar mother tongue which surrounds them from birth to the least familiar languages they might need to succeed. As children get more confident in a topic, a further second language around that topic is gradually introduced, and children are encouraged to use this new language through learning activities (Save the Children, 2009).

Without more explicit bridging between languages, it is likely that minority children will not develop the skills they need to do well in Tajik schools, and not all children will develop the skills they need in Russian and other languages. A shift to a multilingual mother tongue-based early childhood education would result in considerable

3. Findings of the combined Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), Early Grade Math Assessment (EGMA), Social Emotional Learning (SEL), and Snapshot of School Management Effectiveness (SSME) study conducted at the end of the school year in 2022. The USAID Learn Together activity in Tajikistan. Baseline results for Reading, Mathematics, and Social-Emotional Learning - 2022.

cost-saving and as a result, mother tongue instruction will produce better mastery of the official language. Multilingual programmes can enhance children’s self-confidence and self-esteem if they are able to communicate their thoughts in their own language and are perceived positively. There is evidence that learning many languages and cultures from early childhood has a positive impact to children’s social and emotional development, and helps to reduce behavioural problems later in life (Sunar, Kagitcibasi, Leckman, and et al, 2013). Evidence also shows that well designed programmes can help children feel more willing to play with others (including those different from themselves), and have a better ability to understand how being excluded makes one feel, as well as being able to recognise instances of exclusion without prompting.

To respond to learning challenges of children of minority languages in Tajikistan, UNICEF developed an Early Childhood Education programme implementing a multilingual and mother-tongue-based teaching and learning approach for early childhood programmes. The Early Childhood Education programme with multilingual and mother-tongue-based teaching and learning approach in Tajikistan

started from 2018. The programme was adapted from an ECD programme originally developed in Northern Ireland by Early Years, named the Media Initiative for Children:

Respecting Differences Programme—MIFC (see Connolly et al., 2006) and was designed to improve the education situation for children speaking minority languages.

This work was undertaken in partnership with UNICEF and supported by Early Years, as part of a joint cross-border project with neighbouring Kyrgyzstan. The development of the ECE programmes was funded by the UK Government Conflict Stability and Security Fund (CSSF), designed to target areas that have historically been deprived of social services and to address issues of inequality in conflict-prone territories in both countries. The programme comprises a specifically designed series of a child-friendly, age-appropriate and educational television animation programme “Magic Box” and promoted crucial ECE messages to ensure that young children in Tajikistan learn about healthy nutrition, literacy and numeracy, equality, inclusiveness, tolerance for diversity, peace, safety, creativity and many other early childhood development



Figure 2.
From the Magic Box TV series - Episode 28. Representing children of different ethnicities and linguistic background at ECE Centre.

topics to develop their cognitive and non-cognitive skills on inclusive society, peacebuilding, self-protection and wellbeing.

The series of animations and 20 story book titles, are currently being used by many teachers and children, and are reached through a Learning Passport⁴ that is a flexible, customisable, digital learning platform.

The Magic Box TV series, initially developed in Tajik, was later translated into different minority languages, five of which are aimed at promoting respect for diversity of languages and cultures. Three characters are from a Kyrgyz TV series (Keremet Koch; Magic Journey), along with three Tajik characters featuring in the animations. The animations also feature two characters with a disability: a boy with a visual impairment and a girl with a physical impairment. The aim was to create quality learning resources that includes having appropriate pedagogical strategies and contextual multilingual teaching and learning materials (TLMs) used to ensure children learning.

UNICEF continues to focus on supporting teachers through the Republican Inservice Teacher Training Institute (RITTI) to capacitate teachers with a particular focus on the recognition and acceptance of mother tongue-based education for early years. The project significantly considers the role of multilingual TLMs (such as textbooks, workbooks, audio and video resources and pieces of cardboard) and interaction in different languages ensuring quality early childhood education. While building the capacity of the teachers, there were meetings organised with 600 parents of the pilot districts to raise awareness of the diversity of cultures and languages, the role of language in the social development of children, issues of strengthening the mother tongue and learning the state language, peaceful life and education.

The multilingual mother tongue education programme supported 64 ECE centres where Uzbek and Kyrgyz children are enrolled. This approach demonstrated the importance of strengthening the native language for learning at early years and the second language/state language, when children master it. ECE centres became a starting point for creating demand and expanding services in the field of targeted multilingual mother tongue education and learning approaches at other levels of education. The vision is that in the long run this would contribute to the creation of inclusive education, the construction of additional aspects for improving learning outcomes, greater social cohesion and greater opportunities for the transition from training, to employment of ECE teachers and integration in the society.

UNICEF in Tajikistan administered a study to measure the effectiveness and impact of its multilingual mother tongue education programme. The study was supported by LINKS (the NIHR Global Health Research Group on Early Childhood Development for Peacebuilding), led by Ulster University and Queen's University Belfast.⁵ "The baseline research collected information from 643 preschool children and their parents and teachers and included data on their attitudes and perceptions in relation to socio-ethnic and linguistic differences in their communities and overall acceptance of community members of diverse social and cultural backgrounds." The results of this study allowed an opportunity for dialogue, at the level of education policy, on the necessary measures to provide children with educational services in their native language and to establish an effective approach for learning the state language

4. Learning Passport (<https://tomaktabi.tj/>). A new solution designed to close the learning gap, the Magic Box is a tech platform enabling high quality, flexible learning. The Magic Box platform is developed in collaboration between UNICEF, Microsoft and The University of Cambridge to address the challenges faced by over 890,000 children aged 3 to 6 years old in Tajikistan to access continued, quality education due to limited face-to-face early childhood services and low coverage countrywide.

5. This research has been funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) (Project Ref: 16/137/85) using UK aid from the UK Government to support global health research. It is also supported by UNICEF. The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NIHR or the UK Department of Health and Social Care or UNICEF

in the conditions of ethnic diversity. The research developed more understanding about attitudes and perception among children, their parents/caregivers and ECE teachers, in relation to socio-ethnic and linguistic differences in their communities and overall acceptance of community members of diverse social and cultural background.

Based on the emerging findings of the baseline study, the feelings, reactions, and attitudes of teachers to the implementation of multilingual education (MLE) from Uzbek speaking teachers are very favourable. Here is an example: An Uzbek teacher from J.Rasulov district thinks that:

“simultaneously teaching in Uzbek and Tajik languages helped the pupils to engage in the classroom with peers and learn better. I very much appreciate the effort of the school administration in implementing the multilingual mother tongue-based programme to ensure that Uzbek children are important.”

It is evident that during early years, teaching concepts and ideas in an unfamiliar language hugely disconnects children from the learning process and discourages them from engaging further. Teachers who do not speak the language of their students, may presume that students are slow or unable to learn because they have trouble understanding the lessons. Without the support of teachers in the use of familiar language, children will find it very difficult to cope or thrive in the classroom when they move up to other grades. This is evident from the following example:

“My son Ahliddin was in the ECE programme during the 2018–2019 academic year and he successfully started his primary school at local school - I can see he speaks more Tajik now with me, though we are Uzbek by ethnicity. He improved his communication skills” – says Madina, a mother of two sons from Jabbor Rasulov district with majority Uzbek ethnic minorities.

The purpose of the ECE programme based on mother tongue multilingual education was to help all children gain the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to be successful in school. But the result of the study demonstrated that students only achieve those competencies if they can understand the language their teachers use in the classroom. This explains why so many children in minority language communities fail to learn the basics of literacy and numeracy at ECE centres. UNESCO explains the effect of mother tongue multilingual education (MLE):

“The language used in teaching is of central importance for enhancing learning. It is necessary to bridge home and school experiences by using the children’s mother tongue(s) as the medium of learning and teaching in the school. This helps children to develop necessary tools and literacy skills in order to move forward and acquire another language”. (UNESCO, 2007, p. 19).

At the time of writing, the full report of the baseline study is being finalised and will be published shortly. Alongside the very positive responses of participants in the ECE programme as illustrated through the qualitative comments above, the main baseline study includes substantial quantitative data from the sample of 643 preschool children that provides clear evidence that the children of this age are already developing an awareness and forming attitudes regarding the socio-ethnic and linguistic differences that surround them.

Moreover, and through the LINKS study, a further large-scale evaluation was undertaken on the impact of the ECE programme during 2019-2020. This evaluation involved 80 preschools (40 that delivered the programme and 40 that acted as a control group) and gathered data from 1,600 preschool children and their parents and teachers. Unfortunately, the evaluation was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and the national lockdown that took place in Tajikistan and across the world. However, it was possible to complete data

collection for this evaluation and, at the time of writing, the LINKS research team, in collaboration with researchers in Tajikistan, are in the process of analysing the data from this evaluation. It is hoped that the findings will also be available and published before the end of 2023. Full details of all the reports will be available, when available, on the LINKS project website at: www.ulster.ac.uk/links

Conclusion

In Tajikistan, children are still expected to understand and use the Tajik language for learning, starting from the first day of school, even though minority language children do not use it at home. As an example, Uzbek speaking children, learning in Tajik as the language of instruction, demonstrated low achievement. Without understanding the language children are not able to use the words and sentences to build new knowledge. EGRA results for GBAO demonstrated that children can master learning competences if they are systematically helped by teachers to use their mother languages starting from early years until primary years. This is because learning to use and understand the language helps to learn different subjects.

UNICEF Tajikistan supports the government of Tajikistan to improve childhood development and ensure nurturing care, which requires the support of government officials and policymakers who need to identify gaps and priority areas for intervention and develop sustainable and cost-effective action plans.

UNICEF also recognises that the obstacles to children’s learning are not the ‘fault’ of the language they speak at home, but rather the inability of the system to include all children in learning. UNICEF focuses on the entire education system, rather than isolated education projects, to improve (and where necessary, transform), education policies, provision, inclusion, and quality, for better learning outcomes.

Building on its strong and trusted relationships with governments, UNICEF influences education policy to include minority languages in education systems for greater education inclusion. UNICEF is working closely with the Ministry of Education and Science to advocate strengthening evidence-based policy reform towards the language of instruction, focusing on the findings and results of this learning.



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Conclusion and Call to Action



Even a cursory glance at this publication makes plain the broad diversity of lived experiences from a collection of countries impacted by armed conflict. We hope that you also appreciate the shared values of each member of the network permeating these pieces. While the chapters depict entirely different realities, sometimes regarding the same regional conflict, every author and every programme represents an effort to protect and defend the rights of young children to grow up in a safer and more peaceful world.

Inequality is on the rise globally. International conflict is also increasing. Conflicts impact people of all ages, but women and children are particularly vulnerable to violence and neglect. That impact is magnified by the increased stress children and parents experience when adapting to the realities of war and displacement as well as conflicts within their societies that substantially disrupt their daily lives. Exposure to these adversities at an early age can cause children to experience “toxic stress”, which is associated with a broad range of negative life outcomes, including major emotional and behavioural problems. Hundreds of millions of children are now at great risk of not reaching their full developmental potential and perpetuating cycles of violence and marginalisation, affecting not just this generation but those to come.

In such periods of disparity and unrest, it is vital to invest in solutions that will disrupt cycles of violence, build strong foundations for sustainable development and social cohesion, and promote a “culture of peace”.

ECD services do just that. Early childhood is the most formative period of human life—who the child will become in adulthood is deeply influenced by the child’s environment during this time. This is why the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have taken into account early childhood development specifically, for the first time, through target 4.2 - “By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and preprimary education so that they are ready for primary education.” By intervening early and engaging with children’s families, ECD services offer a unique opportunity to make a cost-effective and sustainable impact, promoting protection and resilience to toxic stress and disrupting intergenerational cycles of poverty and violence.

But ECD services cannot succeed in a silo. Their implementation must be strategic, multi-level, and focused not just on the child alone, but on the whole ecosystem which surrounds young children. Adequate funding, integrated support, and public/private sector coordination is necessary for families, caregivers, their communities, and broader institutions to provide a nurturing care framework - good health, adequate nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving and opportunities for education including anti-bias and anti-prejudice education.

- 250 million children under age five, presently living in low- and middle-income countries, are at great risk of not reaching their full developmental potential.
- In 2022, approximately 468 million children (more than 1 out of 6) were living in a conflict zone. This constitutes a 2.8% increase from 2021. 1.7 billion children (68%, or more than two out of three children) were living in a country affected by conflict and 250 million children lived in high intensity conflict countries.
- Children are disproportionately impacted by poverty and war, exposing them to toxic stress that limits their potential and perpetuates intergenerational cycles of poverty and violence.
- ECD services offer a unique opportunity to make a cost-effective and sustainable impact that disrupts these cycles of violence, builds strong foundations for sustainable development and social cohesion, and promotes a “culture of peace”.
- To succeed, ECD services must be strategic, integrated, and multi-level and adequately funded, supported, and focused on all of the child’s contexts, including caregivers, family, community, and institutions.

ECD services have been shown to lead to lower rates of violence in the home and greater social cohesion in communities. They can promote healthy neurobiology, foster resilience in children and instill values and behaviours that can reduce violence and promote peace over the long term. ECD is thus critical to promoting peaceful societies (UNSDG 16)¹. Comprehensive ECD services strengthen competencies in caregivers,

address stressors and conflict drivers in the community, and build institutional capacities to reduce structural violence.

Children protected from toxic stress, and who have a strong early bond with their caregivers, are more likely to have improved social functioning, self-regulation, and resilience to stress later in life. ECD services contribute to social cohesion by intentionally instilling norms of respect for differences and intergroup cooperation skills in children and caregivers at the individual level, and by creating community oriented ECD services that bring together children and families from different backgrounds. Numerous longitudinal studies have shown that participation in quality ECD services is associated with improved health, wellbeing, education, employment, and income, as well as reduced violence and criminal behaviours in adulthood. There remains a need for additional operational and interventional research and implementation services, especially in regions experiencing conflict or crisis or those that are emerging from it.

The programmes described in this book represent the best of current practice. Our approach strives to give voice to the diversity of authentic realities that are necessary for all of us to understand the problems of Peacebuilding. Our approach focuses on young children because early childhood is the key to building resilient, problem-solving citizens, who can bring social cohesion. You may have read about the use of persona dolls in Israel to bring together disparate communities. And you joined the Magic Journey in Kyrgyzstan with its successful pilot programme with promising impact on children’s attitudes about gender and ethnic diversity. All the programmes in this book have drawn inspiration from decades of research, development and implementation in Northern Ireland and Columbia. All of the programmes in this volume represent hope, hard work, commitment, and perseverance.

1. *Id.*

However, commitment, perseverance, hard work, and hope alone cannot achieve outcomes. It is impossible to pursue peace without the resources to drive these programmes. You are reading this because you desire a better world for our children and future generations. You support peacebuilding. Conflict is fickle and there are never guarantees for success. However, the failure to provide the necessary resources for programmes is a guarantee of their failure.

To accelerate achievement of the UNSDG 4 (Quality Education) and UNSDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), we are asking for:

1. Recognition: An UNGA Resolution on Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Peacebuilding which recognises ECPC as the leading organisation in promoting peace, social cohesion, and social justice via ECD
2. Support for Policy and Advocacy: Robust public and private sector partnerships, coordination to promote and operationalise public policy reforms that contribute to peacebuilding and reduction of violence through ECD.
3. Support for Research: Support for new research on the impact of ECD services on children, families, and communities, especially in countries experiencing crisis and conflict, and increased investments and advocacy for the research and development of local ECD services.
4. Support for ECD services: Support for local and global peacebuilding efforts (utilising the infrastructure of the International Network on Peace Building with Young Children) to focus on the implementation and scaling up of comprehensive ECD services that foster a culture of respect for difference and promote social cohesion so we can reach at least 100 million children.
5. Partnerships and Collaborations: Support from key civil society, private sector, institutional, and governmental actors to forge partnerships to expand ECD services and interventions and disseminate knowledge about ECD and peacebuilding internationally.

Your support is critical to the expansion and implementation of these programmes.

Join us.

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Foundations for a Peaceful World

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to promote Peace and Social Cohesion



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