

Play and Resilience

A China-Africa Collaboration Project for Building a Peaceful and Sustainable Future

Rationale

During the first years of life, the brain has the potential to develop at an astounding pace that is never repeated. Children's early experiences literally shape their brain architecture and influence a broad range of skills, attitudes and learning capacities. That's why early childhood care and education, provided in a nurturing and safe environment, sets the foundation for children's future well-being and productivity, particularly for disadvantaged children.

However, more children than ever are forced to live through natural disasters, socio-economic inequities, conflict or acts of terrorism today. While humanitarian response and risk reduction is essential, *resilience* development offers a promising way to help children and families bounce back – not only from emergencies but also from serious life challenges – and thrive on. Early childhood is an important window of time for building resilience by developing positive attitudes, competencies and skills, such as self-regulation, empathy, confidence and responsibility.

Project Goal and Objectives

Goal: To enhance young children's resilience and potential to contribute to a peaceful and sustainable future

Specific objectives:

- i) *Awareness:* To raise awareness among parents, families and communities as well as policy makers about the importance of early childhood care and education and the value of play in building children's resilience
- ii) *Tools development:* To develop and disseminate practical and adaptable materials and tools to improve the quality of childcare and learning environment and processes
- iii) *Capacity development:* To train preschool and nursery administrators, teachers and caregivers in developing and implementing effective curriculum on resilience building through play
- iv) *Relationship:* To foster sustainable collaborative relationships for children among families, preschools and communities to continue this work beyond the project



7 Crucial C's of Resilience

What is emerging from 'resilience research' is that resilience results from a dynamic interaction between the individual's biology and social environment. The single most common factor for children who develop resilience is the presence of a strong, stable and supportive relationship with at least one adult.

In this project, we aim to help young children build '7 Crucial C's of resilience' proposed by Ginsburg and Jablow (2015).



Source: Ginsburg, K. R., and Jablow, M. M. (2015). *Building resilience in children and teens: Giving kids roots and wings* (3rd edition). Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics.

The Value of Play

Ginsburg and Jablow call play as 'childhood's inborn tool to build resilience'. Play, particularly free and explorative play, allows children to try out new and diverse strategies to solve problems and to promote both physical and emotional flexibility through trial and error. The more children play, the more competent they become in controlling over themselves and their environment. This way, children gain a sense of control with an accompanying sense of achievement and confidence; they also exercise imagination and creativity, connect and negotiate with others, and experience and learn to manage a range of emotions (Play Wales, 2015).

In many parts of the world, children are not allowed to play freely due to different reasons ranging from inadequate environment and facilities to children's highly scheduled 'free' time crammed with activities such as homework, sports, music, tutoring, etc. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds face particular obstacles that impede their right to play, and their parents may not have the knowledge, time and resources to engage their children in appropriate and stimulating play.

Expected Results of the Project

Impact: Young children in disadvantaged communities of rural China and sub-Saharan Africa are developing attitudes, competencies and skills relevant to resilience

Outcomes (behavioural changes)

- i) Parents' and families' increased awareness and practical skills to protect, care and educate their young children, particularly, the value of play
- ii) Teachers' effectiveness in facilitating young children's resilience development through play

Outputs (concrete deliverables)

- Multimedia Play and Resilience resource materials
- Parent/family guidebook on effective parenting practices, with focus on play and resilience
- Teacher training module on play and resilience (e.g. teacher training curriculum, pedagogical guide, resource materials)
- Teacher trainers, teachers, volunteers, school administrators, parents and families trained
- A policy brief
- A web portal on Play and Resilience

Strategy – Building the child's inner strengths and outside support

Resilience research also points to the importance of building both the child's inner strengths (e.g. self-control, thinking skills, confidence, positive outlook, responsibility and participation) and outside support (e.g. caring relationships, positive role models in families and communities, family and community resources). Therefore, the project will encompass three levels and focus not only on children but also on the agents in their immediate and broader environment:

- The Child: building '7 Crucial Cs' of resilience through play
- Micro level (the child's immediate environment): family and community outreach; early childhood teacher capacity development
- Macro level: policy-level advocacy



Activities

1. Development of project frameworks (Guidance note and M&E framework)
2. Planning for project implementation in rural China and sub-Saharan Africa with OMEP-China and UNESCO Regional Office for South Africa
3. Field implementation
 - a) Development of multimedia play materials and tools: compilation and documentation of existing good practices and resource materials; development of multimedia resource materials and demonstration play materials
 - b) Policy-level advocacy: preparation and dissemination of a policy brief
 - c) Family and community outreach: community consultations and needs assessment; identification of available resources in and outside the communities; development of parent/family guidebook on effective parenting practices with focus on play and resilience; community-based parent/family workshops on play and resilience
 - d) Teacher capacity development: development of a teacher training module; training of teacher trainers; in-service teacher training
 - e) Organization of play activities with children with ongoing support for parents and families through family visits and observation and mentoring of trained teachers/volunteers
4. Dissemination and China-Africa exchange of project experiences: Play and Resilience Symposia at the 2017 and 2018 OMEP World Conferences; Development of a web portal for the Play and Resilience project
5. Monitoring and Evaluation

Project Duration

- January 2017 to June 2019 (2.5 years)

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Donor Recognition

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- acknowledgements in publications, presentations, speeches, etc.
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*World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP)
in collaboration with Victoria Charitable Trust Fund*