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### Abstract

As our society moves from the Industrial Age in the eighteen hundreds to the Information Age in the twenty-first century, our educational paradigms have the opportunity to shift and transform to reflect and serve children, families and humanity more adequately, and authentically at this time. One of the main challenges of today's early childhood education and care (ECEC) is the pressing down of the "schooling" echelon to an earlier and quicker pace. Amid the need to succeed and achieve competitively, the rapid ingestion of information is creating a sensory overload for stressed and anxious children and parents globally, particularly in Hong Kong. Family relationships, the quality of family life, health and well-being, are challenged and sacrificed as a result of the "real-time-always on-always busy" mentality and schedule. This challenge is coupled with the demand on children to grow and develop faster than they are emotionally ready for in the world of academic performance and achievement test requirements. Fortunately these challenges also pose as opportunities for leaders and educators to finally slow down and awaken to the challenges by examining the past for wisdom and connect the dots to invent new solutions for the field of ECEC.

Firstly this thesis explores a new ECEC paradigm called *playschool* for early learners from zero to six, their parents and caregivers. The Evergreen Playschool pilot is implemented to successfully demonstrate the feasibility and benefits of unifying the *kindergarten*, *nursery* and *preschool* models into one seamless child-centered, psychosocial play-based framework to holistically educate children and families. Secondly it also explores the history of the kindergarten, nursery school and preschool models from the perspective of their creators and examines the new playschool model, in retrospect to earlier models, to provide a coherent and realistic solution to meet today's needs in childhood and parenting education.

*Playschool education* is a strategic paradigm both as a stand-alone model and as a complementary model for other education methods such as homeschooling. Playschool can benefit children, families and humanity most through the synergy of mindful and educated “teachers” including facilitators, parents, and caregivers. Playschool offers a powerful framework and approach for bringing life and breath to the heart of childhood education in the twenty-first century. At playschool, children play to learn and adults learn to play. Together we play for life.

Keywords: Kindergarten, nursery school, preschool, Waldorf, early childhood education and care, play-based education, emotional intelligence, multiple intelligence.

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

*In order to change an existing paradigm, you do not struggle to try and change the problematic model. You create a new model and make the old one obsolete.*

R. Buckminster Fuller

The word educate has its origin and Latin root in the sixteenth century words *educare* “bring up, rear” and *educere* “bring out, lead forth” (www.etymonline.com). Educators at heart know this, especially the inventors of the kindergarten, nursery school, and preschool for early childhood education and care (ECEC) in the 1800s and 1900s. In 1837 Frederick Froebel invents the *Kindergarten* in Germany before the Prussian War to provide a beautiful “children’s garden” for youngsters between ages four and six to play and learn before starting “school”. In 1914 Margaret and Rachel McMillan create the *Nursery School* in Industrial Age England to shelter, nurse, and educate street children from age eighteen months to seven years of age, and to train women to care for children more adequately. In 1962 David Weikart implements the *Preschool* in the United States during the Civil Rights Movement to educate poor African-American three and four year olds as part of a research experiment to boost their IQs. In 2010 the *Playschool* pilot is birthed in Digital Age Hong Kong to unify the “kinder,” “nursery” and “pre” schooling models. The new model and framework provide a child-centered, psychosocial playground for early learners from birth to six to explore, discover, create and express their multiple intelligence and for parents and caregivers to foster this divine intelligence through a child-parent co-learning relationship.

In educating our children our choice of word matters because the word we use – to think, to speak, and to act upon – energetically gives form to that word and empowers its manifestation.

The word *kinder, garden, nursery, pre* and *play* directly impacts how teachers relate to young children and what children imitate and learn from teachers. Education is a relational and reciprocal learning process. As we continue to move forward and evolve within our educational models, frameworks, systems, and paradigms in the twenty-first century, it is imperative that we stay humbly honest and true to the word we choose to use to reflect the method we apply to educate our children. The underlying modality of learning in the kindergarten, nursery and preschool models is *play*. Yet the models themselves do not contain the word “play” in them to represent this ingenious method to educate or educere. Evidences show that it is now timely to recognize and reflect this truth in a new model and paradigm for ECEC called *playschool* to playfully educate the family and humanity.

As enlightened educators, policy makers, and world leaders of the Golden Millennia, we are in a unique position to wisely “bring up” and “bring out” the best in our children, hence ourselves, without submitting to the need to “fill in” knowledge and measure that knowledge in order to prove our brilliance and worthiness as highly intelligent beings. As we move backward to connect the dots in order to move forward with greater wisdom and clarity we discover that it is timely for us to courageously shed the old and shift to embrace the new life and breath of childhood education through play, and in the name of play.

The purpose of this thesis is to introduce the concept of *playschool* as a new paradigm for ECEC in the twenty-first century. In doing so, chapter one of the literature review explores and reviews the original frameworks and learning approaches of the kindergarten, nursery school, and preschool. The Playschool model is also introduced. In chapter two, the Playschool pilot project is explored and a summary of the observational and empirical findings is shared and discussed. A look into Waldorf education to lead the playschool paradigm forward is also

explored. In chapter three parallel themes among the four models of “kinder,” “nursery,” “pre” and “play”, along with Waldorf education, are analyzed and discussed to clearly demonstrate why *playschool* stands out as the appropriate and necessary model for today and the future of childhood and parent education. In chapter four in the conclusion, this thesis and proposal calling for a new paradigm shift in ECEC offers an introduction and an initiation rather than a conclusion. Further observation, research, modeling, and funding to refine the Playschool framework are required. The optimism and feasibility of the playschool endeavor is well grounded. With coherent support and creative energy from the education, healthcare, and metaphysical science community together, we will offer playful, meaningful, and healthy learning experiences for our children, their families and humanity starting with *playschool education*.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

*If you are thinking a year ahead, plant a seed.*

*If you are thinking a decade ahead, plant a tree.*

*If you are thinking a century ahead, educate the people.*

4th Century Chinese Proverb

This chapter introduces a review of literature related to the thesis and include (1) An exploration of the creation of early childhood educational models of *kindergarten*, *nursery school* and *preschool* by Friedrich Froebel, Margaret McMillan and David Weikart, respectively in the nineteenth and twentieth century. (2) An introduction and exploration of *playschool* as a new early childhood education and care paradigm for the twenty-first century. In this section, original literatures published by Froebel, McMillan, and Weikart are primarily used.

### Froebel Kindergarten (1837 Germany)

*The union of family and school life is the indispensable requisite of education.*

Friedrich Froebel

The first Kindergarten is invented by German educational reformer Friedrich Wilhelm August Froebel (April 21, 1782 – June 21, 1852) in Germany in 1837. The Kindergarten is a playground for child education and development through the nature of toys, songs, movements, games, finger-plays, and craft activities. Holding the vision of children as beautiful flowers in a garden, Froebel is inspired to create a naturally conducive space (indoors and outdoors) to nourish children age four to six so they can thrive as creative and social beings. The unity of form, thus life, is the fundamental principle Froebel wants his kindergarteners to joyously explore in their everyday education and school life. To Froebel, all is connected and interconnected through the unity of relationships with nature and creation.

“The child's nature shows itself in life, love, and light; connection of the child by these three with Nature, humanity, and God (Froebel, 1895, p. 11). All rests in unity, all springs from unity, strives for and leads up to unity, and returns to unity at last. A man, it seems to me, would be well educated, when he has been trained to care for these relationships and to acknowledge them, to master them and to survey them” (Froebel 1889, p. 70).

Froebel's learning approach emphasizes the importance of a child-centered education including child observation, paying attention to the holistic health of the child, natural progression of the development of the child, and the mother-child relationship and the role of the mother as the child's first source of education. Children are naturally fostered through the unity and trinity of *mother-love, mother-song, and mother-play*. To this approach and endeavor, Froebel devotes his book *Mother-play and Nursery Songs: Poetry, Music and Pictures for the Noble Culture of Child Life* and a chapter in the book titled *Father's Cradle Song* as a guide for mothers (and fathers) to nurture their children through play in forms of games and songs at home. Children after all are flowers to be cared for with love so they can blossom like flowers in the children's garden.

“In the observant mother or nurse, and, above all, in the first genuine teacher... we cannot too strongly insist upon the thoughtful observation of children's plays – upon their nurture and development” (Froebel, 1895, p. 157, 26). “The entire health of the child is the first thing which is imposed on the attention of the mother and of all those who recognize it as a duty to take part in his education... to notice that each successive development must be already founded in the previous one, as this is a law of progression and development

in Nature as well as generally in life” (Froebel, 1902, p. 258, 309). “A mother cannot fail to teach others when her lips are full of such words and her heart is attuned to such music, indicating, as they do, her innermost feelings. The words *Faith, Love, Hope* or *Light, Love, Life*, are the types of her feelings and actions towards the child” (Froebel, 1888, p. 30-32).

The educational framework Froebel establishes nearly two centuries ago is rooted in the spirit of play; play as one of the essential building blocks that empowers education and promotes freedom and self-actualization. He believes education is the force that re-awakens children's inherent goodness and the opportunity for them to work through relationships. To synthesize and know the interconnectedness of universal laws to the physical world and oneself is the true wisdom of education. The greatest gift of the school is the lesson of self-work; to develop the child's impulse to creative activity and to strive to put abstract ideas into context and constructive framework.

“To stir up, to animate, to awaken, and to strengthen, the pleasure and power of the human being to labor uninterruptedly at his own education, has become and always remains the fundamental principle and aim of my educational work” (Froebel, 1889, p. 11). “By means of all this the whole life of nature and of man, the nature of all things, and above all that of man are clearly revealed to the child in the mirror of his plays” (Froebel 1902, p. 347). “Play is the highest phase of child development – of human development. Play is the purest, most spiritual activity of man at this stage. It gives, therefore, joy, freedom, contentment, inner and outer rest, peace with the world. It holds the sources of all that is good” (Froebel, 1887, p. 54-45). “An institution for self-

instruction, self-education, and self-cultivation of mankind, and therefore for individual cultivation of the same through play” (Froebel 1895, p. 6).

The original Kindergarten curriculum fosters the heart sense of young children by engaging them in gardening, caring for animals, attending to domestic tasks, singing and moving to songs, exploring geometric forms, and playing with dolls. These activities are the symbolic driving forces behind children's comprehension of the world – by internalizing personal experiences through the laws of regularity, symmetry, and harmony found in nature. Facilitated by an adult (mother, nurse, teacher) in a prepared environment, children begin to build connections from parts to the universal whole, moving from the concrete to the more abstract through perceptual development of the senses and the imagination.

“The real foundation, the starting point of human development, and thus of the child’s development, is the heart and emotions” (Froebel, 1895, p. 42). “So must also the first fostering and nourishment of the child’s soul life be in exact accord with the development of its bodily functions – especially with the development of the organs of sense” (Froebel, 1895, p. 63). “The importance of the vertical, the horizontal, and the rectangular is the first experience which the child gathers from building; then follow equilibrium, symmetry, and harmony” (Froebel 1887, p. 281-2).

Froebel’s Kindergarten playthings include a series of play *gifts* (toys) such as yarn balls (with string) and wooden blocks (cube, sphere, cylinder) and *occupations* (activities) such as songs, movements, and fingerplays (drawing, folding, stick-laying, cutting, perforating, embroidering, braiding, weaving, stringing, beading, sanding, molding, and modeling) which are intended to introduce children to the threefold concept of the *Forms of Life, Forms of Knowledge*

and *Forms of Beauty* found in nature (Froebel, 1895, p. 175) as well as to develop the sense of hearing and speech. Forms of life are creations of things from the children's own world using pieces of the gift set. Forms of knowledge are mathematics and scientific properties learned from the gifts. Forms of beauty are designs created by using all the pieces in the gift set. While his innovative gifts appear scientific and logical on the surface the underlying value embedded in the gifts (God's Gifts according to Froebel) is profoundly aesthetic and spiritual in nature. The gifts' ability to operate individually separate and harmoniously together reflect the physical forms and geometric relationships of the natural world. Unlike the occupations which are unable to return to their original state after creation and manipulation, the gifts can return to their original shape and form. In the process of refining his Kindergarten Froebel invents numerous educational toys, songs, and fingerplays for children, and for mothers and nurses (Froebel, 1895, Froebel, 1902). See Appendix 1. Froebel's Gifts.

“If man comprehends fundamentally, and in all its relations, for example, the ball, the sphere, the cube (which are indeed really only one in three), as representative, as the norm and fundamental perception of all that occupies space, and of what is given and demanded thereby, he will thus become capable of recognizing, observing, and handling easily also all other things, even that which stands alone yet is the same in all its bearings and relations, for he learns to see the manifold in the single, plurality in unity, and vice versa” (Froebel 1895, p. 96-97). “And this so much the more as by using the gift in this way the hearing capacity of the child is generally wholly developed, and his speaking capacity begins to develop” (1895, p. 73).

Although the Prussian government orders all Froebel's Kindergartens to close in 1848, "by 1872 Kindergarten has become compulsory throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire for all children under six years of age, and instruction in the Froebel method is made obligatory for all students of normal schools and teacher training classes" (Brosterman, 1997). Outside of Germany, the seed of the Kindergarten is planted and bloomed most fervently in the United Kingdom and the United States with commitments from Froebel's followers and advocates such as Bertha Ronge, Margarethe Schurz, Elizabeth Peabody, and Susan Blow who lead the childhood education and well-being movement for children based on the Froebelian principles.

In Elizabeth Peabody's book and guide for teachers, she emphasizes that the Kindergarten (unlike the traditional school), "is children in society – a commonwealth of children – whose laws are all part and parcel of the Higher Law alone" (Peabody, 1877, p. 17) and describes the Kindergarten as an environment where children are "gently led over the threshold of learning by the seductive charm of music, flowers, games, pictures, and curious objects" (de Cos, 2001, p. 7). Three decades after Peabody establishes her first English speaking Kindergarten in Boston, Massachusetts in 1860, in 1892 Susan Blow (Mother of Kindergarten) cites the US Bureau of Education's census on the existence of 2,000 private kindergartens, 459 public kindergartens, 2,535 teachers, and 65,296 pupils (Blow, 1908, p. 8), with kindergartner training schools in every major US city (Cantor, 2013, p. 92). As part of the kindergarten curriculum in the US, Patty Smith Hill takes the initiative to combine the innovative (yet seen as rigid) Froebel Kindergarten with various educational, philosophical, and psychological approaches from G. Stanley Hall, John Dewey, and Francis Parker to help push kindergartens into a direction more compatible with the more progressive ideas of the time (Rudnitski, 1994, NAEYC).

“Although by 1918 the Froebelian emphasis on spontaneity in education and learning through play has largely been supplanted by doctrines of discipline and social control, the ideals of the early kindergarten movement are still relevant for students of social and cultural history, developmental psychology, and early childhood education” (Shapiro, 1983). “The man once called a fool by villagers would stand forever as the inventive father of wisdom for the early childhood profession” (Moore, 2002) and “the main thing for them is to seize the golden truths which underlie his errors and obscurities, and to learn not ‘for examination,’ but ‘for life,’ all that is to be learnt from the strenuous endeavor of a strenuous life” (White, 1907).

Today kindergarten is defined as: “(In Britain and Australia) an establishment where children below the age of compulsory education play and learn; a nursery school. (In North America) a class or school that prepares children, usually five- or six-year-olds, for the first year of formal education” (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>).

### **McMillan Nursery School (1914 England)**

*Educate every child as if he were your own.*

Rachel McMillan

*The kind of school planned in any given place must take account of the particular as well as the general needs of the children and mothers.*

Margaret McMillan

The Nursery School – “a school for children of the street to children of the home” – is created by Margaret (July 20, 1860 – March 27, 1931) and Rachel McMillan (March 25, 1859 – March 25, 1917) during the Industrial Revolution. The school is founded on the socialist ideals of health, hygiene, and education. The primary challenges at the time are two-folds in which young children experience health and education deficits as well as children not being nurtured by

women who understand child development from a social, emotional, or academic standpoint. This societal need provides the inspiration and impetus for the McMillan sisters to establish a safe shelter for children's education and for identifying potential high-risk health problems before children enter formal schooling.

“Thousands are in dire need of education or nurture in the first years. The fate of vast numbers of little children given over to all the dangers and horrors of the streets, and in homes where no real nurture is possible” (McMillan, 1919, p. 7). “The Nursery-School is a new departure, and is distinct in aim and method from all that went before” (1919, p. 12). “If properly equipped, would cut at the root of all this misery. It would bring up a race of children with new habits and new needs. It would open the eyes of mothers to things they have never glimpsed at all” (1919, p. 25).

In 1914, in accordance with their vision and ideal, the Open-Air Nursery School & Training Center in Deptford, near London opens its doors to poor children between the ages of eighteen months and seven years old. The educational environment offered to young children is safe, healthy, and enriching, supervised by devoted and well-trained nurse teachers. Here children are protected and nurtured while they learn valuable life lessons and experiences. The method for educating young children is much influenced by the prescriptive and reformative works of Édouard Séguin (Physiological School), Robert Owen (Infant School), and Friedrich Froebel (Kindergarten). In the nursery, children receive daily health inspection, nutritious meal, adequate rest, and outdoor learning and play.

“The Nursery-School garden is planned to meet the needs as well as the natural desires of young children” (McMillan, 1919, p. 44). “It should be

home life, not school life as we know it” (1919, p. 41). “It is important above all for the little child that the school should be beautiful, or at least that the effect of the classroom and its furnishings should be harmonious. Far more important that the teacher should be gentle and cultured, than that she should be able to teach him how to work sums or to spell words... such things do not sink into the mind (as does the color, and the voices, and the light, and the love around one)” (McMillan, 1900, p. 24).

After the death of Rachel McMillan on March 25, 1917 the Open-Air Nursery is renamed by Margaret as the Rachel McMillan Nursery. In September 1923, educational philosopher Rudolf Steiner describes his invitational visit to the McMillan’ nursery and teacher training center in Deptford as such:

“Margaret McMillan, in her strong, loving work, is living entirely in that spirit... She has there taken into her wonderful care three hundred children, aged between two and twelve, from the very poorest classes of the population. These children are dull in soul and asleep in spirit. They are taken in by the institute to be educated. And in individual classes may be seen human beings who as a result of the care they receive are spiritually active, happy in soul, moral and happy. It is just as satisfying to see these children playing as it is to see them learning, eating, and resting after meals. Adjoining this nursery institute is another house, a sanatorium for children of the ‘poorest’. Six thousand children pass through this sanatorium every year” (Villeneuve, 2009, p. 954).

The McMillans' early childhood education guiding principles include the need for nature, space, sense, play, movements, impressions, imitation, imagination, songs, music, arts, language, hygiene and moral training, and childhood itself. Children's learning is child-directed and facilitated by adults. The nurturing environment of the nursery focuses on developing the children's senses (particularly the lower senses of touch, taste smell) and emphasizes on teachers' attentive engagement with children. Educational materials are drawn from the natural environment such as the garden and the use of play gifts and occupations invented by Friedrich Froebel seventy years earlier. These activities engage children in understanding their world through creativity and insight as they begin to explore their interests naturally to achieve their soul's mastery. Mothers are also involved to learn ways on how to interact with and care for their children in a positive manner.

"Every teacher is a discoverer. Everyone is an inventor, an improver of methods, or he is a mere journey-man, not a master!" (McMillan, 1919, p. 14).

"All true education is, primarily, physiological. It is concerned, not with books" (McMillan, 1900, p. 35). "Children are educated mainly through impressions and movements" (1900, p. 8). "Thus even the classroom of young children ought to be a place where they can play. Massive movements of the child in play are educational, and it is through them that the brain is, as it were, got ready for any finer control" (1900, p. 32). "Imagination, which is the motor power in mind, is of course dominant during this period" (McMillan, 1907, p. 118). "The animism of early childhood is an embryonic form of imagination whence issues the aesthetic faculty. Through the exercise of this faculty in play, in art, in idol-making even the intellect is trained, and the moral

susceptibilities deepened and widened... It still pervades and illumines every field of human activity” (1904, p. 156-7).

Margaret McMillan’s foreseeing work is both intellectual and influential. In *Early Childhood* (1900), she raises the issue of the dire cost of mental effort by citing and illustrating the consequences of intense intellectual labor of students before, during and after mental work. To this effort, she offers an aesthetic approach to early childhood development in *Education Through the Imagination* (1904) by announcing that childhood is not only the golden age of the imagination where reason remains untrammelled but also a precious time when even rationality and theory themselves are all painted by childish imaginings. Steiner appreciates McMillan for her educational genius to penetrate the peculiarities of a child's mind and praises her “very remarkable book” as “a treasure-chamber of precious insights about a child's soul and educational instructions drawn from these insights.” In the book, “A chapter like ‘The Child as Artisan’ can only be read with deepest satisfaction,” he marvels (Villeneuve, 2009, p. 865). In *The Child and the State* (1911), she suggests for schools to offer a humane and broad education rather than as an institution to prepare children for unskilled, monotonous work. Her due diligence results in the English government’s sanctioning the McMillan’s Nursery as a nursery school for children and a teaching school for adults, where students earn a Froebel Certificate upon the completion of the teacher’s training.

“‘Learn by doing,’ said Froebel (McMillan, 1911, p. 9). Forty years ago people were much struck by Froebel's new teaching. ‘The normal child is active, not inactive: direct his activities.’ Today the psychologist says to us, ‘The normal child is attentive, not inattentive’ – only you must find out what he can attend to. And when you have discovered that, you will discover that

he is strangely insusceptible to fatigue” (McMillan, 1900, p. 175). “Nothing but mischief can attend the attempt to hurry him forward, and make him attempt what is beyond him. In play every young creature performs the movements natural to his age. And these movements are directed more or less by *will*” (1900, p. 27).

In the wake of England’s success with Nursery School in the early twentieth century, the nursery school movement finds its home in the United States. Many nursery schools and training centers in the US begin within the societal umbrella of education, home economics and social work, focusing on good health, hygiene, and education for children as well as homemaker and motherhood training for mothers. After studying at the Rachel McMillan Nursery and Teacher Training Center in London, Abigail Eliot takes her learning experiences and understanding back to the US to create the first nursery school for young children living in poverty. The Ruggles Street Nursery School and Training Center (RSN) opens in 1922 in Boston. While RSN recognizes the importance of physical health and well-being of the children the program focuses more on parent education by creating an intellectually stimulating, child-centric training environment. Many parents participating in the program eventually become teachers. RSN is later incorporated into Tufts and renamed the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Study at Tufts University. Similarly, after meeting and studying with Margaret McMillan, Edna Noble White returns to Boston to establish her own institute in the same year as RSN to provide young women homemaking and motherhood training as well as parental and prenatal education. While McMillan’s English ideal focuses on serving low-income, at-risk children, White’s American ideal recognizes both the value of nursery education for all children and the role early education plays on positively impacting society as a whole (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000, p. 21-25).

Hence, while the original nursery school's framework in which supervised learning and socialization and healthcare opportunities are provided to children in England, the US nursery schools are operated together by parents and teachers, with parents bearing the responsibility to assist in implementing the daily program. Families benefit from the program because it offers affordable childcare, opportunities to learn about child development and a sense of community and association. During the 1920s' and 1930s' nursery schools across the US gain momentum, as quickly as the growth and expansion of kindergartens, in efforts to meet the needs of young children's care and informal learning. A number of social settlements, public health centers, day hospitals and college home economics departments and psychology laboratories have nursery schools set up to train future homemakers and to serve as child research centers. These include Columbia, Cornell, and Johns Hopkins as well as the University of Chicago Cooperative Nursery School, Yale University's Clinic of Child Development, The Iowa Child Welfare Research Station, and the Merrill-Palmer Institute (Davis, 1927, p. 3-5, Feeney, Stephanie, Moravcik, Eva, Nolte, Sherry, Christensen, Doris, 2010).

“The educational ladder of the American public school is a tall one and a stout one but it does not reach the ground. It does not have a solid footing” says child development specialist, Dr. Arnold Gesell (Gesell, 1924, Liebovich, 2016). The nursery school movement in the US changes this landing field by extending that ladder to the ground (Liebovich, 2016). To further solidify this footing, in 1926 American educator Patty Smith Hill and a group of early educators set up the National Committee on Nursery Schools, now known as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). In the UK, the Nursery School Association (NSA) is formed in 1923, with Margaret McMillan as its first president. Since 1972 NSA is called the British Association of Early Childhood Education (BAECE).

Today, nursery school is defined as: “A school for young children, particularly those between the ages of three and five” (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>).

### **Perry Preschool (1962 United States)**

*What's the point of education: To do better on a test, or do better in life?*

David Schweinhart

The Perry Preschool Project, initiated by American psychologist David P. Weikart (August 26, 1931 – December 9, 2003) is “perhaps the most well-known of all HighScope research efforts,” (HighScope Educational Research Foundation) examining short- and long-term effects of a high quality early childhood education program. Findings from this forty year longitudinal research study have laid the foundation and model for today’s preschool program and curriculum worldwide.

The research experiment begins in 1962. At this time, reform is in the air and everything is changing in the United States. A new kind of school is in its incubation, with the spark coming from Weikart’s observation of the persistent academic failure and readiness of the students in the Ypsilanti school district in Michigan. Here many African-American students face the repetitive patterns of repeating grades, dropping out, and being assigned to special education. Weikart, a school psychologist and director of special education for the public schools, recognizes the fact that numerous African-American students not succeeding and achieving academically is not only an educational problem but also a socio-cultural one. Ypsilanti, near Detroit, is a racially segregated city with the poorest African-American neighborhoods in the 1960s and black students are likely labelled as unintelligent, unmotivated, and unchangeable. Weikart, however, holds a different perspective and believes positive change is possible and necessary for the livelihood of these students and their families. In an interview with American RadioWorks in

2003 about his research experiment, Weikart says, “the root to the Perry Project was in this notion that things were fundamentally wrong somehow and had to be fixed in some way” (American RadioWorks, 2003). Developmental psychologists and other experts caution his idea, suspiciously and critically arguing it could harm the children by putting too much work and expectation on them at such an early age. With funding at hand and a committee of elementary school principals and school superintendent in the Ypsilanti school district on board Weikart moves forward to design an intervention program (the first of its kind in academic training) for young children prior to entering kindergarten (American Radioworks, 2003, HighScope, Schweinhart, 2003).

In light of his goal, the question Weikart finds himself asking is “How could I affect these kids and help kids do better in school? What could we supply that is missing for these kids that aren't doing well?” (American RadioWorks, 2003). Terms such as cognitive, problem solving, or academic preparation were not mentioned. It was the lack of [these skills] that was defeating so many of the youth I was seeing as a school psychologist” (American Radioworks, 2003, HighScope, Weikart, 2004). Families who can afford early learning send their children to nursery school. But nursery school is concerned about hand-washing, toileting, eating food properly, coat buttoning, shoe-tying, learning to get along, and social play. Weikart’s ambition is grander in wanting to create a real school specifically for three- and four-year-olds with the aim to boost their IQ scores, hence academic intelligence and achievement over time. He wants the students to be “smart,” if not smarter so they could at least stay out of special education classes and to continue to stay in school thereafter. A number of these students in special education classes are not mentally impaired. So from this radical idea the big question to answer at the time is: Can preschool boost the IQ scores of poor African-American children and prove that they

could stay and succeed in school? (American Radioworks, 2003, HighScope). “Does preschool work?” (Weikart, 2004).

From the 1962 to 1967 the research experiment randomly examines one hundred twenty three African-American children, ages three and four, born into a family of low income, with parents not graduating from high school, and are at high risk of failing in school. Every child who participates in the study has IQ scores between seventy to eighty-five based on the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test. The score range defines the child as “borderline educable mentally impaired” (Schweinhart, 2003, p. 3).

“The mothers were beaming. They thought their children had been chosen. But in fact, it was totally random who ended up in the preschool because this whole project was set up as an experiment; an experiment to see whether preschool could help children do better. So it needed a study group that went to preschool and a control group that didn't. Study director David Weikart and his research team flipped a coin – literally – and half the children were in the preschool, the other half stayed home. I would do whatever we needed to do to prove that this many African-American children were not retarded,” Evelyn Moore, Perry Preschool Teacher (American RadioWorks and Hanford, 2009).

For two years, children from the Perry Preschool attend classes Monday through Friday for two and a half hours per day. The teachers are certified public school teachers with at least a bachelor's degree, and with certification in early childhood education and/or special education. The average child-teacher ratio is six-to-one. The Preschool education model for the classroom and home visits is an open framework of educational ideas and practices based on the natural development of young children (Hohmann and Weikart, 2002, Weikart, Rogers, Adcock and

McClelland, 1971). Drawing on Swiss clinical psychologist Jean Piaget's child development ideas that children are intentional learners, who learn best from activities that they plan, carry out and review themselves, the curriculum emphasizes active learning, in which the children engage in activities that involve decision-making, problem-solving, and self-direction. Teachers also make weekly home visit for one and a half hour to help the mother and child engage in the learning process and apply the school curriculum at home. Parents also participate in monthly small group meetings with other parents, with the program staff facilitating the process (American Radioworks, 2003, Schweinhart, 2003, p. 3). The real purpose of the home visits is to send a message to the families that:

“We are your children's teachers; we were their first teachers in school, and we think your kids are great. And we really want your kids to make it... The reason the kids weren't doing well is that their homes were not giving them the culture that they needed to succeed in school. The curriculum that we were supposed to follow for their parents was to bring a whole bunch of learning materials and show the parents how to support their children's cognitive development. So we'd sort of bring this big sack of stuff and the parents were supposed to watch us doing cognitive kind of one-on-one activities with the kids. This was a brand new idea, so we had to be inventive,” Louise Derman-Sparks, Perry Teacher (American RadioWorks and Hanford, 2009).

The teachers want to inspire the children – to let them know they are neither bad nor stupid and that they could achieve. To enhance the children's IQ scores the teachers focus on stimulating the brain through hands-on activities and play, as well as reading, writing stories, piecing puzzles, and playing matching and memory games. This is not a school where children

have to sit quietly and take directions from a teacher. Here teachers cook, paint, dance, dig in dirt, and get messy with children. They do projects and experiments and take lots of field trips together to the library, the fire station, the orchard, and the farm. Mothers sometimes come along on the trips too.

“It was always in the framework of children actively learning. The idea was to teach everything through play, because that’s what 3- and 4-year-olds do: They play. To an outsider it would have looked like a good part of the [day] was play. But it was play that was very carefully structured in terms of the materials we put in the environment and the interactions of the teachers with the children. We wanted them to do creative things,” Louise Derman-Sparks, Perry Teacher (American RadioWorks and Hanford, 2009, p. 9).

More importantly, the teachers focus on getting the children to talk as much and as often as possible. The traditional belief that children should be seen and not heard is a powerful yet debilitating parenting tool often used in these children’s homes run by a poor, single mother living in a tiny apartment with many children. Therefore, the teachers believe the use of language is the key to opening up the children’s minds and their potential by encouraging them to speak up and be heard.

“Many of these children were not raised in homes where language was encouraged. The children who were quiet and disciplined were considered smart in some ways. You know, ‘He’s a good child, he’s a quiet child.’ That’s how a lot of the Perry kids grew up,” Perry Teacher, Evelyn Moore (American RadioWorks, Hanford, 2009, p. 9).

After one year in preschool, the research findings show that the average IQ scores of children jump by fifteen points. “We were exhilarated by the results, and vindicated in our faith

that we could provide an effective intervention in the lives of poor children at risk of school failure,” recalls (Weikart, 2004). This significant increase is enough to keep many children out of special education, so the goal is initially achieved. The excitement about the research findings on preschool expands across the US. Much heightened expectation ensued that every poor young child should have access to preschool programs with features similar to those of the Perry Preschool program. A new generation of educators and activists embraces preschool as a way to help poor children and to fight poverty. The preschool program offers Americans the promise of making children smarter by raising IQ scores. In 1965 the US government launches Head Start, a free educational program for minority young children of low-income families (American RadioWorks and Hanford, 2009, p. 12-3).

Perry Preschool teacher Louise Derman-Sparks worries, however, that there is too much emphasis on just the IQ scores and tests. She feels the tests do not seem to do a very good job measuring what her students know.

“We had these puzzles that were called ‘go together’ puzzles you know, where you had like a Bingo card with six pictures and then you had separate picture cards and you were supposed to put what goes with each thing. And one of the children that I had kept putting a toothbrush on the refrigerator picture. Now on an IQ test, he would lose six months intelligence.”

But what Derman-Sparks learns from her home visit with the child is that in his household toothbrushes do go with refrigerators; his mother put them there to keep them away from cockroaches. “So what was actually on her part an act of resilience, hurt her son’s IQ” (American RadioWorks and Hanford, 2009).

In 1966 the Westinghouse Study of Head Start reports that by third grade at age seven or eight, the IQ scores of children participating in Head Start are no different from children not participating in the program; the initial IQ gains from preschool “fadeout” over time. The Perry research team in Ypsilanti experiences the same fadeout effect with their students as well. Despite their disappointment, the research team pursues with the study. In 1975, at age fourteen, the study surprisingly shows that over time while students’ IQs are not higher, thus not seemingly “smarter” than their peers, however they face fewer life problems compared to their peers such as getting in trouble less, less likely be put in special education, and do better on achievement tests in reading, writing, and math abilities. According to HighScope researcher Larry Schweinhart, one reason for improved achievement tests is that the preschool students are more motivated to finish their tests while their peers left blank questions or not even try. “I remember writing a little line in the front of the first report that I wrote,” says Schweinhart, “‘The most important thing you learn in a place is how hard to try’ and it struck me as I was looking at the data, that the kids who had had the preschool program experience were trying harder” (American RadioWorks and Hanford, 2009, p. 20).

At age nineteen, research findings show that among students attending the Preschool, sixty-six percent graduate from high school, compared with forty-five percent of those not attending. Also, the students participating in the study are five times less likely to be law-breakers compared to those who are not selected to participate in the study. Eight years later, at age twenty-seven, research findings show that the experiment yields public benefits of \$105,324 per participant, a total cost benefit ratio of 7 to 1, with participants on average earning higher incomes, more likely to own their own homes, and less likely to be on welfare. In educational performance seventy-one percent of the participants receive a high school General Education

Development (GED) certification versus fifty-four percent of the non-participants (Schweinhart, 2003, p. 5). By age forty, research findings show big differences between the two study groups. Preschool participants are doing much better in life where they are more likely to be employed, making more money, owning homes, cars and savings accounts, less likely to use social services, and getting arrested and be involved with crime. Students in the study earns on average, \$5,500 per year more than non-participants (\$20,800 versus \$15,300). Preschool students are twice as likely to have positive relationships with their families and the men are more involved in raising their children. One participant has a Ph.D.

The research concludes that: “In constant 2000 dollars discounted at 3%, the economic return to society of the Perry Preschool program was \$244,812 per participant on an investment of \$15,166 per participant. High-quality preschool programs for young children living in poverty contribute to their intellectual and social development in childhood and their school success, economic performance, and reduced commission of crime in adulthood.” Every child should be able to go to preschool. Preschool should be a new grade in school, just like kindergarten (Schweinhart, L. J., Montie, J., Xiang, Z., Barnett, W. S., Belfield, C. R., Nores, M, 2005). See Appendix 2. Major Findings: High/Scope Perry Preschool Study at 40 (Figures 1-2).

In addition to the enthusiasm from educators and activists, preschool receives much attention from business leaders, economists, and philanthropists alike. With the disappointing effect of fadeout, the conversation about preschool becomes less about test scores and more about the bottom line in economic dollars-and-cents. Businessmen and politicians like the logic of preschool because it is more cost-effective to prevent problems than to fix them. At the time these stern supporters want hard data and evidence to support funding and investment. Ultimately, researchers want to know what kind of money can a society save through preschool

education and investment. Steven Barnett, economist and director of the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) calculates the costs and benefits of the Perry Preschool Project with correlations to earnings, education, welfare and government assistance, and crime. “What we found was that the economic value of investing in a very expensive preschool program was much, much higher than the cost of the program... If you can take a bite out of crime, that matters a lot... Special education doubles the cost of a child’s education,” says Barnett. (American RadioWorks and Hanford, 2009, p. 23-4). Arthur Rolnick, Senior Vice-President and Research Director of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, delivers to policy makers and venture capitalists about his published work citing that “if properly funded and managed, investment in early childhood development (ECD) yields an extraordinary return, far exceeding the return on most investments, private or public.” He refers to the Perry Preschool Project producing a very high rate of return of sixteen percent on investment to taxpayers, outperforming the investment made in the stock market (Rolnick, 2003, p. 7). “Moral arguments are not enough. To survive, every good idea needs an economic argument,” Rolnick says (American RadioWorks and Hanford, 2009, p. 25).

Nobel Prize economist James Heckman finds the fundamental paradox of the Perry Study interestingly worthwhile to investigate. In wanting to understand the question why Preschoolers are not necessarily smarter but do better in school and not more educated but do better in life, Heckman teams up with developmental psychologists and neuroscientists to find the true economic theory of intelligence and education level. He discovers that noncognitive skills are important success indicators. Perry students do not become smarter in the way everyone hopes but the Preschool experience may affect the development of their personalities. Going to the Perry Preschool opens them up, gives them confidence and a willingness to try things that their

peers do not have the opportunity to do. These children are changed by their experience; the kids got a little more out of it – perhaps that little more makes all the difference (Heckman, 2006, 414-15).

The Perry Study group “may be the most powerfully influential group in the recent history of social science,” says David Ellwood, Dean at Harvard Kennedy School of Government. The initial success impacts public policy to help launch Head Start. The Perry Preschool research study is also noteworthy because it sparks interest for public spending on early childhood programs based on an economic investment in a society's future rather than on the advocacy of social justice (Waldfoegel, 2007). “It's about giving them a hand up early rather than a hand out later,” says Dudley Goodlette, a Republican lawmaker.

“It’s really important for children to like school and do well, from the beginning. That’s why preschool matters so much. It can help children get off to a good start in terms of what they need to know in kindergarten, and it can introduce them to school in a positive way. Children should play and have fun in preschool, and they should learn a lot. That’s what happened at the Perry Preschool. And it changed the children’s lives,” Larry Schweinhart, Perry Researcher (Hanford, 2009, p. 26).

Van Loggins, the coach at Ypsilanti High School who lives in the Perry neighborhood, interviews all of the Perry Preschool participants over the span of twenty five years, first at nineteen, again at twenty-seven, and then at forty, keeping a track record of ninety-seven percent of the surviving group. “I've interviewed people on the streets, in cars, in airports, dope houses, and with a gun stuck in my face,” he says. Van Loggins admits he does not think the students remember much about the Perry Preschool although some mention about the teachers. “And

what they really remember – who was teaching it. You would hear certain names come up, of a teacher that they really liked, and they took that with them” (American RadioWorks and Hanford, 2009, p. 51). In his memoir, David (Weikart, 2004, p. 67) writes about the teacher:

“The HighScope approach would draw upon child development theory such as Piaget's, but the application of theory had to be tempered by advice from experienced classroom teachers. Thus today, the HighScope curriculum is an amalgam of related developmental theories hammered into usefulness by decades of teacher experiences in the classroom and on home visits. I continue to believe that the use of theory, even well-documented theory, must be tempered by the real-world wisdom of experienced staff. I have never regretted this decision nor questioned the results. When I see our approach being used throughout the United States and in over 20 countries by a wide range of ethnic, religious, and language groups, I see its broad accessibility as support for my decision to listen carefully to the teachers.”

Today, preschool is defined as: “Relating to the time before a child is old enough to go to school” (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>).

### **Evergreen Playschool (2010 Hong Kong)**

*As children in the playschool grow, deep knowing in their spirits show.*

Robin Giang

Evergreen Playschool pilot study is a non-profit project initiated in Hong Kong in August 2010 under the Cosmo Kids organization. The project grows out of the vision and mission to create an organic play space for children and their parents and caregivers to *play*; play to learn and learn to play, and even play to heal naturally. The unified framework of playschool is

intended to offer children from zero to six the opportunity to develop organically at their own pace and rhythm before starting formal schooling. Details of the Evergreen Playschool case study are discussed in Chapter 3.

Today, playschool is defined as: “Playgroup” (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>).

A proposed definition: “A learning playground that leads children, usually five- or six-year-olds, toward the first year of formal education.”

### **Chapter 3. Playschool Case Study**

This chapter discusses the Playschool pilot case study and the result findings are shared and summarized. An initiation for Waldorf education (Rudolf Steiner) to lead the playschool movement is also explored.

#### **Methodology**

The Playschool pilot study is based on action research aimed to establish a new paradigm to simplify the overlapping complexity of the current early childhood models, with their respective terminologies and grade structures. A case study is used to demonstrate the feasibility of the new approach with developmental changes in patterns and results observed and described, with empirical evidence shown, over time. The case study research is independent of the historical research for the kindergarten, nursery school, and preschool. The former is research from August 2010 to August 2016 and the latter is from January to August 2016. The pilot is implemented before the historical research begins. Students and student groupings are based on random enrolment numbers during the specific phase of the pilot study.

#### **Background**

Hong Kong's early childhood education, regulated by the Education Bureau, begins with the pre-nursery program for children two to three years old where they attend classes independently, five days a week for three hour a day. From the age of three to five, children enter kindergarten, broken down to K1 (lower), K2, and K3 (upper) or preschool five days a week, attending either a half day or full day program. Performance Indicators and Quality Assurance Inspection for kindergarten and preschool programs are monitored by the Education Bureau.

The Hong Kong education system is academic and achievement focused. The academic oriented curriculum and schedule give children little time to play. Even when children "play",

play is skewed to achieve a specific learning outcome. Play for fun is believed to be a waste of time because nothing is learned and achieved in the process. This problem is endemic to the entire educational enterprise, starting with kindergarten and preschool. The emphasis on strict attention to rules, procedure, and rote memorization has extended even to babies to “prepare” for future academic demands. Children as young as three months are put into structured playgroups to start developing cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills. Some playgroup and preschool programs use flashcards and factsheets to imprint “knowledge” into children mechanically. Obedience and good behavior is the commanding order. Parents themselves begin drilling their toddlers on vocabularies, numbers, letters, and other items usually encountered on pre-nursery and kindergarten interview entrance exams, well before the minds of infants and toddlers are ready to appreciate and integrate this knowledge. The pressure parents feel to secure places in prestigious schools by the time a child reaches primary school at age five or six, induces them to push their children to be “successful” interviewers and test takers at ever younger ages, reaching down even into infancy. This education mentality continues throughout the preschool and primary school years with children’s schedules lined up and packed with “learning activities” from piano and ballet lessons to foreign language and math classes six to seven days a week, from morning to evening. This path for success is viewed as most extreme although not uncommon. Because the road to a good education is important and long, it must therefore begin early; the earlier the better for the proper “training”. From this perspective the magic and joy of play to bring out children’s learning interests and highest potential is far from ever being achieved at the local education level.

“One of the biggest misnomers of play is focused on the ‘what’ rather than on the ‘how’. How children play is interactive and reciprocative. How children

learn is balanced between the synergy of the directive and non-directive; doing is important and so is resting. In the child's world of play, infinite intelligence is revealed when one knows how to "see". Only from the lens of nonjudgment and empathy can one begin to co-create with the divine intelligence already existing in the child," Playschool Lead Facilitator.

Reputable registered establishments such as "Tutor Time International Nursery and Kindergarten," "Woodland Junior Academy," and "KinderU" provide playgroup, preschool and kindergarten curriculums for early learners. Many "big" names and different models exist to offer the same single service: To educate children through *play*.

The name "Playschool" is birthed as an educational paradigm to authentically reflect what children want, need, and do naturally during their development and learning process: *Play*. The purpose of Playschool is threefold: First is to provide an alternative ECEC framework with the names and respective grades of "nursery school," "preschool," and "kindergarten" collapsed and unified into one single framework and model. Second is to implement the framework organically and incrementally based on the children's readiness and parental feedback. Third is to use the observational findings, including parents' feedback from the pilot project to advance the *playschool education* paradigm to become a global initiative and paradigm change in the twenty-first century.

### **Framework**

The education framework of Playschool is a three-pronged approach based on theoretical principles from the field of human development, psychology, and sociology. The framework is a balance in educational aims of *educare* (bring up or rear) and *educere* (bring out or lead). In the area of (1) *teacher and child development*, Rudolf Steiner's approach to human development and

Erik Erikson's approach to psychosocial development of the child are applied. The combination of these two approaches is harmoniously complimentary for developing the senses of the child and the faculties of the "teacher" as well as for developing the child-parent relationship in the first five years of childhood, focusing on the three developmental stages of trust, autonomy, and initiative. For (2) *child observation and disposition*, Howard Gardner's multiple intelligence and Virginia Axline's child-centered, non-directive, reflective-language approaches are applied. These two supplementary approaches help to facilitate the understanding and developing of the full creative expression of the child through the child's play, interest, and talent exhibited through the child's bodily/kinesthetic, existential, interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic, logic-mathematical, musical, naturalistic, pedagogical, and spatial preferences and inclinations. The child's own divine intelligence is often reflected in one or a combination of these intelligences without the need for manipulated intervention. Reverence for the child's true nature and divine intelligence, gifts, and talents is the precursor for understanding childhood education, growth and development, and full potential. For (3) *child-parent relationship* a dyadical learning process is applied. Fostering a two-way emotional, co-learning relationship between the child and mother is a core component of the Playschool paradigm. In the framework, the parent is the child's first teacher. Also, the reciprocal relationship is one in which the parent and child are both the teacher and the student. Respectful and empathic communication is practiced in conjunction with mindfulness and awareness. The motto is "I can – you can" and the image is one of the child and the parent, like two evergreen trees standing tall next to each other in strength and flexibility, with roots deeply and firmly grounded to nature and trunks and branches stretching upward to the cosmos.

The learning approach is focused on wellness education, giving much emphasis on the development of emotional and social intelligence. In play, joy and excitement is ignited and this positive emotion naturally feeds the well-being of the inner guidance and immune system. At the playground, creative and self-healing powers are heightened during the non-directive, reflective language play process, with agreed boundaries enforced to provide children a sense of safety and trust. The ability to fully embellish in play without judgment is the most precious gift for the human spirit. Much of the development and learning process occurs from playing with natural toys like wooden blocks, dolls (house), clay, masks, music, and puppets as well as engaging in creative activities such as art, dance and movement, sandplay, storytelling, roleplay, waterplay, and visualization – all of which are available in the playrooms.

### **Implementation**

The Playschool pilot – under the Cosmo Kids organization – has five phases from August 2010 to June 2017. Each phase develops and progresses naturally based on children's readiness and parental feedback. In each phase, each study group has two facilitators and an average of six children. Each phase has one to three groups of children age zero to six. Children between zero and three are in one group and children between three and six are in another group. The Lead Facilitator is a University postgraduate and certified in Waldorf early childhood education, play therapy, behavioral assessments and trained in family constellations and holistic medicine. The Assistant Facilitator is a University graduate with interest in children and child development. The Lead Facilitator is present throughout the five phases, but different Assistant Facilitators are present in each phase. The project is operated in a child development and learning center located in a commercial premise within a residential high-rise building in the Mid-Levels district of Hong Kong.

In Phase One (“freeplay” phase from August 2010 to February 2011), the indoor playground is opened for mixed ages for unstructured freeplay. Sessions are held Monday to Friday from 10AM to 11AM. The fee of HK\$70 is charged per session (including one child and one adult). There are ten children in the group; the youngest child is a newborn and the oldest child is two and half years old. The average age is sixteen months. Mothers, fathers, and caregivers (mainly expatriate families) arrive with their child or children once or twice a week. The play session is peaceful and harmonious. The children play with natural toys and eat healthy snacks, the parents relax and socialize, and the facilitators observe and engage mindfully. Six months into Phase One, a few parents suggest more structure to the freeplay session. Suggestions and feedback are evaluated and subsequently incorporated in the next phase.

In Phase Two (“playgroup” phase from March 2011 to June 2014), schedule, structure, routine, and activities are implemented. The playground is transformed into a Waldorf early childhood environment in 2012. Both local and expatriate families join the program. In Group A the children come accompanied by an adult (mother, father, or caregiver) two days per week in a one hour session. In Group B children come accompanied three days per week in a one and a half hour session. Children in Group A and B are between one and three years old and each group has six children, with two facilitators. In Group C children age three to six come independently two days per week in a one and half hour session. Group C has six children who are already attending local or international kindergartens and preschools and come to the Playschool for additional “learning” through play. The session duration is increased to reflect the children’s growth and developmental needs. Group A’s session has two intervals (one and two) and Group B and C’s sessions have four intervals (one to four) with breathe-in and breathe-out rhythms applied to the flow of each interval. The first interval consists of songs and movements

in the “garden.” The second interval is imaginative, creative, and social play in the “library” and “studio.” The third interval is tidy up, wash up, and snacktime. The fourth interval is sensory artistic play activities including painting, clay, fingerplay, and stories. Because this phase of the project is relatively long, the children’s tendencies, preferences, and personality traits are clearly observable over time. In this phase child development theories and practices are introduced to parents and caregivers to support the children’s growth. In the summer of 2014 Group B and C children leave Playschool to attend “pre-schools.” At this time, mothers of two year olds from Group A inquire about the possibility of offering an independent program for their children in the coming fall term. The request is evaluated and a new program is created and implemented to meet the needs of children and their families in the next phase. At the end of this phase, the feedback are positive and helpful to indicate that the pilot project is moving in the right direction in providing child development and parent education.

Mother 1: “Finding the right preschool or playgroup for our son was a task my husband and I took seriously. As parents, we believe that one of the best things we could do for our son was to put him in a pre-school that would “SEE” and support him. Cosmo Kids’ calming and welcoming environment truly provided emotional, social, and intellectual benefits for our son and us as parents. The diversity and understanding of children, with always open communication channels for parents, is unparalleled. Ms. Robin made our son feel special whilst providing him with skills through play in a thoughtful and supportive manner.”

In Phase Three (“pre-nursery” phase from September 2014 to June 2015), the schedule is further extended into a full five-day-week program from 8:30AM to 11:30AM with outdoor play.

The children come to the Playschool independently without an accompanied adult. This group of six children is independent and confident. All of them are Phase Two students with enrollment period of more than a year at Playschool so they are familiar with the environment, routines, and facilitators. The children can talk comfortably and carry a two-way conversation with the facilitators. There are four intervals like in Phase Two. The first interval is outdoor play, held at a public park nearby to the Playschool. The children, parents or caregivers, and facilitators meet at the park every morning to physically climb, swing, slide, jump, and run for thirty minutes before coming to class. Intervals two to four have similar rhythms to those in Phase Two held indoor where children engage in hands-on artistic play activities and engage in imaginative, creative, and social play. In this phase there is more focused on the children's emotional and learning experiences. Developmental milestones are also tracked and discussed with parents.

In Phase Four ("child-parent" phase from June 2015 to June 2016), the program strongly emphasizes on the child and parent relationship. Each week, the six children come with their mothers for two hours from 9:30AM to 11:30AM. The schedule and intervals are similar to that in Phase Two.

Father 1: "At Cosmo Kids, the goals are not about performance but how parents can build a better understanding and relationship with any child, join in the process, and educate each other along the way. Playschool is about family and what father, mother, and child can learn about each other.

Teachers encourage us to play not only with our own child but also with other children in class, which we enjoyed a lot. Naturally we learned a lot about children's personality, their developmental stages, and how to address

behaviors as children discover new skills. Sending our son to Playschool made us better as a family and as parents.”

In Phase Five (“preschool / kindergarten” phase from January 2017 to June 2017), six parents from Phase Four already indicate that they wish to enroll their children in the Playschool for their preschool and kindergarten education in the upcoming winter term, starting at age three. This is a monumental phase for Playschool because not only is it perceived as a “pre-school” but also as a bilingual English and Chinese preschool program. The bilingual program is requested by the parents. The program is three hours long, from 9AM to 12PM. The program intervals are similar to Phase Three with outdoor play, indoor play, sensory experiences, and emotional and social development. For this older group of children, monthly field trips and parent education sessions are added to the program. This is the last and final phase of the Playschool Project. In June 2017 the project is successfully introduced and implemented as a child-centered, psychosocial play-based playschool platform for children from birth to six, based on organic development and incremental changes that meet the needs of children and their families.

“We are very happy that our vision and goal is achieved, thanks to our children and the parents and caregivers who believe in the value of play and who are always one step ahead of us, graciously pulling Playschool forward with their own aspiration and inspiration. To lead is to follow and serve and we have done so joyfully. We look forward to seeing “playschool” become a fully recognized ECEC model by the Education Bureau in Hong Kong and other education regulating bodies around the world in the near future,”

Playschool Lead Facilitator.

## **Results**

In 2013 the Playschool pilot under the Cosmo Kids organization is voted as “*The Top Three Best Early Learning and Playgroup in Hong Kong.*” The survey is conducted online by the *The List* magazine. Another major achievement is attaining wellness and well-being. One of the practicing principles at Playschool is that wellness prevails when everyone is happy in their play, for happiness is natural medicine and an energizer for the immune system. Children, parents, caregivers, and facilitators are mostly healthy in class, with the rate of absence due to illnesses is less than five percent throughout the six years of operation from Phase One to Four. Also, not one single hand-foot-and-mouth disease outbreak is recorded to date; this is a common occurrence at playgroups and preschools. By the end of Phase Four, observational and empirical findings also show the following benefits and success of the Playschool pilot study.

### **The Best Learning Playground with Happy, Creative, and Expressive Children**

Children are genuinely happy. They often come to class smiling, they enjoy their freedom to play during class and they are usually reluctant to leave when class is finished. Parents and nannies also find the learning environment calm yet engaging.

Mother 1: “I think the school’s ambiance and culture influence a child’s development and behavior. I have noticed this in my son because he is very comfortable and is willing to take initiatives and explore to try new things. The environment has helped him to become more vocal and confident about expressing his preferences and to learn to empathize and care for his friends, toys and family. There has been a remarkable progress in his intellectual development, too.”

Mother 2: “Playgroup was the best class our daughter has attended. I think her, myself, and my helper had the opportunity to truly understand how play-

based education affects our kid. We were explained during class how and why certain behaviors are developed and how to deal with them. This taught us how to observe and handle our kid in our daily life which is so valuable and definitely something that we hadn't come across in any other classes we had attended in Hong Kong. I strongly believe in comparison to a traditional local educated kid, our daughter was allowed the freedom to think for herself and to understand and deal with her own feelings, and most importantly how to be happy.”

Mother 3: “Before joining Cosmo Kids, we sent our son to other different playgroups, but they did not last long as he ended up not liking them because some were overcrowded or too structured, which did not stimulate his curious character. So we did not expect too much of Playschool. When I brought him there the first time, I felt very comfortable just like being in my own home. It was never crowded and very individually focused, which is very unique in Hong Kong. We are very happy that our child had a chance to learn at Playschool. It's the best Playgroup / preschool in Hong Kong.”

Mother 4: “After moving here, we tried a few different playgroups when my eldest daughter was 11 months old. I was surprised how the playgroups were expecting babies and toddlers to do arts and crafts, and I would witness helpers and mothers tear paper, force hands into paint and onto paper, and how babies and toddlers participating would stare vacantly at the walls during this process. The kids did not want to decorate their art, they wanted to submerge their hands into the beads, glitter or sand, or throw the materials.

Kids were being taught that discipline comes before learning. At the same playgroups, children were forced to sit during circle time, often crying and protesting. The children who had been there longer simply complied, vacantly, going through the motions, but not learning during the process. This vacant style of “learning” is a theme for Hong Kong's test-based curriculum, where flash cards are used, yet the information is not stored in long term memory. The intrinsic desire to learn is absent, and the desire to be #1 prevails. After trying many different programs (Woodlands, Union Church, Tutor Time, Elite Starz), I found Cosmo Kids and I was immediately drawn to the program. Kids are free to explore and they are often questioned about their choices. This initiates a conversation with the child or children regarding their thoughts, emotions, motives, feelings, and how their behavior could affect another child (or children) within the group. Babies and toddlers are not forced to comply, but instead, they are given the option to participate or explore, and after exploring they often participate. Playschool is one of the few learning environments in Hong Kong that offer a real play-based learning environment where children can learn at their own pace and, and have fun during the learning process.”

Mother 5: “Since attending Playschool our son has become more confident and outgoing. Most importantly he enjoys himself and has fun and is always excited when it is time to leave for “school”.

**Intelligence Brought Forth in the Exploring and Discovering Play Experience**

The children are emotionally, socially, and physically resilient. They are independent and curious learners who are eager to share their feelings and find creative solutions to the obstacles they encounter.

Mother 1: “At this age they need to see their school as their second home, where they get to explore, express, play, be happy, and learn through the process of fun and experience.”

Mother 2: “In my personal experience, friends, teachers and pediatricians have been amazed with my children's ability to describe their emotions and their understanding of the big picture.”

Mother 3: “Although it is a play-based class, the kids get to learn how to communicate, solve problems, and manage emotions through interactions with other children. Our son learnt lots of social manners through Playschool.”

Mother 4: “We feel that our son benefited a lot from his time at Cosmo Kids. Allowing him to have the opportunity to explore rather than being forced to follow set examples, learning through singing and play, and giving him the space to lead his own interests are particular aspects that I found very beneficial to his learning. I think at the early stage of childhood, children need to be encouraged to play so that they can establish their self-confidence, creativity, and interests which are essential qualities for life long development.”

Mother 5: “We are thrilled to see his fascination, interest, and curiosity being fulfilled in and outside of playschool, while the program continues to educate us adults as to what kind of individual he is, and how to follow his lead in order to maximize his full potential.”

### **Building a Positive Life-Long Child and Parent Relationship**

Parents and caregivers relate more respectfully and cooperatively with their children. They are more informed and aware about child development and human development principles, which they practice at playschool and at home.

Mother 1: “As I am a first time mother I have lots of questions, expectations, and unconscious behaviors. At Playschool, I learn to give my son choices and responsibilities to build his self-esteem. With Ms. Robin’s guidance, I am pretty confident that trust with my son is building well and we are having a good relationship.”

Mother 2: “When problems occur, Ms Robin always takes time to explain with reasons. She has a great gift to understand each child's character. Her patience is amazing with each child. I often remain in the classroom to observe the class and learn a lot from her about child minding and playing with kids. My husband is also a big fan of Playschool! He visited the school a few times to see the classes and he was amazed to see how Ms Robin interacts with children.”

Mother 3: “I think it is crucial that parents and caregivers be educated and guided in tandem to have the best effect on children. It would be counter-effective if parents and/or caregivers do not follow along with the methods taught in class, outside of class. The play-based, EQ-centered methods is much more effective when applied consistently at school and at home.”

Mother 4: “I, along with my husband have noticed a positive and calming

change in our son since attending Playschool. We are grateful that he has this opportunity and a teacher who can understand his needs.”

### **Development of the Whole Child and Parent with Playschool Education**

The term “playschool” education is now recognized by parents, especially Playschool participants, as a new alternative education possibility that is organically wholesome, progressive, and smart. Consistently Playschool children show a high level of quality and capacity for communication, imagination, connection, memorization, and initiation – all of which help children build strong, healthy relationships with the world.

Mother 1: “Our daughter has been attending Cosmo Kids for approximately 18 months since she was around 8 months old. When enrolling my daughter, I intentionally chose a playgroup that encouraged play and natural learning over any kind of strict teaching or lesson style approach. Even at such a young age, I thought it was more important for her to be around and engaging with other children her age so she would develop the right kind of social skills I believe are essential in today's society. In the 18 months of attending Playschool she has noticeably grown in several key areas. Her language skills and vocabulary are strong. We often wonder where she learns all the words she is capable of saying. I would consider her quite advanced in comparison to some other children I have been around. My husband and I are able to have small conversations with her about what she has done or who she has been playing with. She asks many, many questions and is very inquisitive about everything. She has also developed strong memory skills and recalls the words in books, the endings, and the rhythms and rhymes of the story or

poem. Her social skills and ability to play with others have also come along nicely, and she is learning to engage well with others. Her personal independence is another trait that grows stronger. She does not require another person around her to be able to play; she can entertain herself. She is learning and getting on much better at playing well with other children, not always insisting that everything belongs to her. She is also developing strong relationships with other children and has a number of close friends that she enjoys sharing toys and playing games with. I have also noticed that during her play she has now introduced role play and mimics scenarios from the home or outside such as making the dinner, going to the shops, or having a picnic. These small games make me believe that she understands the world around her and she is beginning to piece things together to form a bigger picture of life in general, for example, we go to the shops to buy food and then we cook the food. I feel that she is not only learning but also understanding, and as she grows up it is this skill that is by far more important to me than her ability to recall facts. I want my daughter to be well rounded and understand meanings beyond what she reads in a book. I want her to have common sense and social sense, to understand right and wrong, and be able to make well rounded decisions. I believe that having exposed her to an environment of natural play and learning is the right way to encourage this. In my profession, I interview far too many well educated and highly qualified graduates in Hong Kong who I have noticed are unable to deliver the basic requirements and social skills required in a professional

environment. I have always put this down to the amount of time they have spent in a classroom and not learning the essential life skills required to be successful in one's career and in society. I whole-heartedly support the work of Playschool and will continue to send my daughter there until the time comes where she starts school."

Mother 2: "My daughter has attended Playschool for six months and I have seen enormous positive changes in her during this period. One of the things I observe from class is how interactive it is. Children can speak any time; there is no expectation of being quiet even if it is during story time or circle time activity. Class teachers always make sure the children are heard, their questions responded to, and their feelings known. This open, play-based approach is vastly different from other classroom we have been to, where the structure is stricter and children are expected to only talk during free play and recess time. I believe Playschool's approach is more suitable for young children who should be allowed to freely express themselves and just be kids. This is the main reason I enroll my daughter here – to boost her language and social skills. I am very happy with the results I see from these past six months. From saying only a few words when she started at 2.2 years old, she is now speaking full sentences, with rather complex grammar structures and thoughtful expressions. She is able to express her feelings well and frequently – thanks to the teachers' emphasis on communicating emotions and dealing with conflicts. She is a happy, confident, and loving toddler, with lots of empathy for other people. There has been an enormous shift for her in all

fronts: Language, social, and emotional growth, and I credit this to her attendance in Playschool. The results have quieted any doubt I have about the school's "relaxed" method. A friend of mine, who is a child development specialist, recently met my daughter and confirmed with me that she was much more advanced than her peers in language and social skills! Another thing I think Playschool does very well is teaching us parents how to bring out the best in our children. Throughout the class, we are able to observe and discuss with class teachers how we should interact with our children, respond to their emotional needs, deal with difficult situations, and most of all, to just be calm and watch them play. I find that I have changed a lot in my thinking and approach in parenting: I have become calmer, less self-conscious about not being the "perfect" parent, less obsessed about what textbook methods I need to follow, and when I should "intervene." Instead I have learned to just stand back and observe. This in turn has had positive effects on my daughter's well-being and development. Even though she attends Playschool only twice a week, the influence goes beyond the classroom, which makes her progress more prominent. Playschool's approach to early education should be applied to more schools in Hong Kong. The competitiveness of Hong Kong's education environment makes it very hard for parents to resist the more ambitious and structured models for pre-schools. But it has been proven to me at Playschool that children at this tender age thrive best when they are left to just be themselves, play to their hearts' content, and express

themselves fully emotionally and socially, rather than learning to read and count early.”

### **Waldorf and Playschool Education**

In moving the playschool paradigm forward Waldorf education can play an instrumental role in making playschool education a “true education” for children. By nature the Waldorf kindergarten is a playschool because of its emphasis on a holistic learning approach through play and the importance of the teacher’s relationship with the student. Also, Waldorf education is only beginning now to provide ECEC programs for early learners before kindergarten age. Waldorf education is created by Rudolf Steiner in 1919 in Stuttgart, Germany, and it is highly successful in providing education for humanity, starting with the child. Speaking at an educational conference in April 1924, Steiner discusses the necessity for knowledge of the whole human being and the human race for a genuine education.

“We must raise children in what belongs to *humanity*, and it must take root in them” (Steiner, 1996, p. 83). “All education and all teaching must spring from the fountain of real knowledge of the human being... consists equally of knowledge of the human body, the human soul, and the human spirit” (Steiner, 1997, p. 17). “It is not as necessary that people take up a scientific study of memory, will, and intelligence” (1997, p. 51).

The true art of education for playschool education starts with humanistic relationships – the direct relationship between the teacher and the student. The parent is the child’s first teacher, so inner development of the teacher is essential to inspire every parent to be the teacher who is an “artist” and a psychologist who can “read the child.” Parent education plays a pivotal role in the development of the human being.

“In our capacity as teachers, the relationship between our human soul as teacher and the child’s human soul must be much more conscious so that we have a formative effect on the child. We also must become aware of our own teacher’s soul so that we experience what is necessary to establish the right mood, the right teaching artistry, and the right empathy with the child’s soul” (Steiner, 1997, p. 18-19).

In each and every child’s soul, and the inner child’s soul of the teacher (facilitator, parent, caregiver), there exists a natural inclination for play and playfulness. Playschool education offers children and their parents and caregivers the experience to live out and play out this truth.

“A spiritual scientist would recommend that a child play. It is best for the child if we allow play to be individually oriented, since that creates inner strength” (Steiner, 1996, p. 86-7). “When we think in this way, life flows into our interactions with children; education very obviously becomes a part of that life through our interactions with them. Education, therefore, is not something we work at in isolated activities, but something lived. Children develop in the right way in their growth to adulthood only when education is lived with children and not forced on them” (Steiner, 1997, p. 79). “We must recognize interests lying within the child’s *character* and the *direction of intelligence*” (1996, p. 79). “The interests will live in the *strength* of the child’s desires” (1996, p. 81).

At Playschool, development of the child’s senses is important because the nature of play for children happens naturally via the human senses and sense impressions. Steiner emphasizes that before the change of teeth (in his time at around seven and today at around six) the child is

still a “sense organ,” with the body, soul, and spirit existing as a unified whole and is governed by the lower sensory perceptions of hearing, vision, taste, smell, and touch. Therefore, every external stimulation to the sensory organ directly impacts the child’s internal organs including the circulatory, digestive, and metabolic processes. From this perspective, organic, imaginative, non-directive play nourishes the sensory organ and sustains the child’s “life force,” so that physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual developments and wholeness can continue to take form until after the change of teeth, which is when primary education begins. Happy and healthy children with a playschool education have a high potential to grow to become happy and healthy adults.

“The rule of thumb for all relationships in early education must be this:

Whether in perception, feeling, or thought, whatever we do around children must be done in such a way that it may be allowed to continue vibrating their souls,” (Steiner, 1997, p. 40) “a genuine teaching method based on real life in education” (1997, p. 86).

Steiner’s real life education and teaching is exemplified by his presence – his aura.

Margaret McMillan describes Steiner during his visit to her Nursery School in England in 1923 and her subsequent visit to the Waldorf school in Dornach, Switzerland below:

“He walked from shelter to shelter, and wherever he went the children welcomed him. He looked on at their work like a companion. To the students he spoke only a few halting words. To the other guests almost nothing. Yet no other visitor ever left so powerful an influence. Later we saw him at Dornach, surrounded by adoring crowds who had come from every European country... to hear his words. Impressive as was that sight, it was far less imposing than

his mere presence – the presence of a worn man, humble and gentle as only those can be who have won his secret” (Uhrmacher, 1995, p. 397).

In summary, ideals of the Industrial Revolution toward more progress, bigger development, and greater wealth are less relevant today even though the clinging on to them still feels uncomfortably necessary. However, to truly be free to take flight in the twenty-first century, priorities for children must be reconsidered and reexamined. Because the real life in education exists within us, not outside of us; the impression is in our presence (to educere, to bring out) and in our example as a role model (to educare, to bring up). The meditative tradition is to ask ourselves in the presence of children: Is my word, action, behavior, and attitude worthy of imitation? Playschool embraces and applies this meditative tradition fully, as does Waldorf education.

## Chapter 4. Analysis and Discussion

*Before we can receive the unbiased truth about anything, we have to be ready to ignore what we would like to be true. Before we can receive the entire truth about anything, we have to love it.*

Ann Davies

This chapter analyzes and discusses why the playschool paradigm is suited for ECEC in the twenty-first century by: (1) Examining the parallel themes among the original kindergarten, nursery school, and preschool models to show that the Froebel, McMillan, Wiekart, and Steiner's teacher's essence is being lived out and played out in the Playschool paradigm today; (2) Affirming that the word and term *Playschool* is sensible, relevant, and necessary as the new paradigm now; (3) Demonstrating that the heart of intelligence is divine intelligence and current education needs to be "smarter" through the power of emotion, intuition, and intention; (4) Showing the lifelong health benefits of play; (5) Going back to the basics of educare and educere for ECEC; (6) Exploring and moving Playschool forward.

### Parallel Themes from Past to Present

Builders of the education models shown in Table 1 below are master craftsmen of structure, boundaries, and foundation, committed to the ethics and principles of sustainability in building an eco-friendly, child-centered playground. The builders are strong and comfortable in their own authority, inspired by the spirit to work in harmony with nature's resources. The builders are also the gardeners who embody and honor the gift of abundance of Mother Earth and the rhythmic flow of the Cosmos. As architects of civilization, the builders create models and systems that enable children to blossom and families to work together, sharing resources and creating a supportive, sustainable community for humanity.

Table 1: Summary of shared principles and approaches

	Kindergarten (Froebel) 1837	Nursery (McMillan) 1914	Preschool (Weikart) 1962	Playschool (Giang) 2010	Waldorf (Steiner) 1919
Play	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
Imagination	⊙	⊙		⊙	⊙
Movement	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
Nature	⊙	⊙		⊙	⊙
Senses	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
Teacher	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
Spirit (the)	⊙	⊙		⊙	⊙

Table 1 above provides a summary of the principles and approaches the Froebel Kindergarten, McMillan Nursery School, Weikart Preschool, Playschool, and Waldorf education have in common. The theme of *play* is used and applied in all five models. Through the magic of play and the gift of “playthings”, songs, and activities children learn to self-direct. Each of the creators witnesses play in children as the highest phase of child development and human development. The interaction of play gives rise to the feelings of joy, contentment, freedom, and rest. In the play process, *movement* creates energy – energy that powers the mind and the inner

strength of the will. The enlivened mind and will together fuels the *imagination* which flushes out the infinite creative intelligence residing in the child. Learning by doing and learning by imitating are the most natural ways children connect to their inner and outer world. The secret to learning is more of how something is taught and less of what is taught. The learning retention rate through active learning – teaching others and the application of knowledge – is ninety percent versus passive learning – listening to lectures is only five percent effective (National Training Laboratories Institute for Applied Behavioral Science, NTL Institute). See Appendix 3. The Learning Pyramid. The spirit of the *teacher* lives with the children to bring forth their unique gifts and talents and to bring them up through the teacher's inspired examples. Through the communion with *nature*, which is the divinity and unity of all of creation, the child's ingenuitive *senses* are nurtured embryonically during early childhood. Innocence and grace, imbedded in play, ultimately give rise to form whereby the dancer becomes the dance, musician the notes, writer the story, painter the canvas, and creator the creation.

According to The American Academy of Pediatrics (2009) by age five, the “growth and development” in children are to include physical appearance and growth, movement, hand and finger skills, language development, cognitive development, social development, and emotional development. The “basic care” of children to include feeding and nutrition, beyond toilet training, bed-wetting, sleeping, discipline, preparing for kindergarten, traveling with preschooler, hearing, vision, immunization alert, and safety check.

### **The Word “Play” Matters**

When Froebel, McMillan, Wiekart, and Giang choose the word *Kindergarten*, *Nursery School*, *Preschool*, and *Playschool* for their creation, the act is one of deliberate creation, not randomness. Even the name *Waldorf* comes from the “Waldorf-Astoria” cigarette factory in

Stuttgart, Germany where Steiner is asked by the factory owner to establish a school for the children of the factory's employees. In each case, the word they use is a soul expression for which they have in mind for the children they wish to serve within the time and space of their own existence, given the opportunity provided to them. Newberg & Waldmen (2014) affirms in their recent research and book, "Words Can Change Your Brain" that "A single word has the power to influence the expression of genes."

The reality is, Froebel's garden for children is less common today than two centuries ago. In cities like Hong Kong and other major cosmopolitan cities around the world, land and space are precious and expensive. Many kindergartens are situated inside commercial buildings and shopping complexes with no garden or playground at all. Highgate House, Garden House, and Forest School, all Waldorf schools in Hong Kong, operate within shopping complexes. As for nursery schools, children's health inspections, diet, and child labor protection are no longer the primary function of a nursery school and curriculum. The word nursery school is synonymous with kindergarten and preschool in different parts of the world today. Is this necessary, if not confusing? The word "pre" before the word "school" highly suggests early "schooling" and academic preparation and training for children. Even if play is imparted in the curriculum it is a mean to an academic end rather than for play to be in the highest interest and wellness of the child. *Play* therefore is the equivocal word choice that best suits the child's soul essence in her need and want for play as the highest expression of her ingenuity and prodigy.

Within a continuum of time and space, the most appropriate solution always arises to meet the challenges and needs of that time. In the nineteenth and twentieth century, the education and well-being movement for children takes hold during a time of war, segregation, and social unrest. The emergence of kinder-garden, nursery, and pre- education to meet the needs of

children then is timely and appropriate. Now in the twenty-first century, children in modern day Germany, England, United States, and Hong Kong have ample opportunities to receive quality healthcare and even early childhood education. At this time of technological advances and greater push for academic performance and standardized testing, there are more demands on children to grow up and become miniature adults quickly. As a result children have less time to enjoy the full years of childhood before the change of teeth to play and have fun and to nurture their sense organ for their own future well-being.

For the “inattentive,” “hyperactive,” and “anxious” child living in an academic-achievement driven, Pokémon frenzy catching world, playschool is timely appropriate and necessary now, especially in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong local educational system is known for its high-pressure workload and score-oriented examinations. According to local English newspaper South China Morning Post [in August 2016], a survey of ten thousand students in early 2016 reveals that over half of secondary school students show signs of depression. Since the start of the last academic year, twenty-two students, including an eleven-year-old, are reported to commit suicide due to academic related pressures and anxieties. “I don’t want my son to spend two hours on homework every day, without any life. The local system is all about homework and examination,” says Mr. Cheng in an interview (Lau, 2016). And as the “Pokémon Go” mania sweeps the “smartphone-obsessed” city last month, the Chinese army garrison warns people searching for Pikachu and other virtual monsters to stay off their restricted premises (AFP-JIJI, 2016). Similar widespread warnings are given by authorities around the world after reports of “players” suffering from death, injury, and crime. Playing video games on the computer and digital devices is the new type of “play” for Generation Z (the “Millennial Generation” after 2000), as well as for Generations X and Y, with far less health benefits than

the traditional human relational play. According to Market research firm Newzoo, the global gaming market is worth nearly one billion US dollars in 2016, up nearly nine percent from last year. Forty-seven percent of the market value comes from the Asia/Pacific region, with China as the largest consumer of video games, accounting for a quarter of all global game revenues. 2016 is also expected to be the first year that mobile overtakes PCs and consoles in the gaming industry (Newzoo, 2016).

Amid the dynamics of the perpetual school pressure and sensory stimulation, natural play is more important than ever before for children's overall well-being. The New York Times article titled "A Silicon Valley School That Doesn't Compute" is well received by early educators and parents alike. The article highlights why the chief technology officer of eBay and executives of Silicon Valley giants like Google, Apple, Yahoo, Intel, Microsoft, and Hewlett-Packard all send their children to the non-tech Waldorf School of the Peninsula located in Silicon Valley. One executive says with pen and paper he could monitor his son's progress over the years, while another notes the value of engagement through human contact with teachers and peers rather than with computers. Paul Thomas, a former teacher and an associate professor of education at Furman University, who has written twelve books about public educational methods, believes that "a spare approach to technology in the classroom will always benefit learning. Teaching is a human experience. Technology is a distraction when we need literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking" (Richtel, 2011).

Finland, currently rated number one academically, is a country with an education model that encourages happy life-long learning, starting in early childhood. Finnish children do not receive formal academic training until the age of seven. Before then many children attend daycare where they play games, sing songs, and have conversations. Nature, fresh air, and

physical activity are considered the engines of learning in a country that secures a mandatory fifteen-minute outdoor freeplay break every hour of every day for “schoolchildren”. Finnish teachers hold master's degree in education with specialization in research and classroom practice. Student assessments are done through direct observation and quizzes rather than standardized tests. William Doyle, a Fulbright scholar and a visiting lecturer on media and education at the University of Eastern Finland for the 2015-2016 semester, describes the Finnish education model as such: “In class, children are allowed to have fun, giggle, and daydream from time to time. Finns put into practice the cultural mantras I heard over and over: “Let children be children, the work of a child is to play, and children learn best through play.” Finland delivers on a national public scale highly qualified, highly respected and highly professionalized teachers who conduct personalized one-on-one instruction, manageable class sizes, a rich, developmentally correct curriculum, regular physical activity, little or no low-quality standardized tests and the toxic stress and wasted time and energy that accompanies them; daily assessments by teachers, and a classroom atmosphere of safety, collaboration, warmth, and respect for children as cherished individuals.” A Chinese student-teacher studying in Finland tells Doyle, “In Chinese schools, you feel like you're in the military. Here, you feel like you're part of a really nice family.” Another Finnish childhood education professor admits to him that “Our mission as adults is to protect our children from politicians” and “her message is clear: Educators are the ultimate authorities on education, not bureaucrats and not technology vendors” (Doyle, 2016).

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states “That every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. That member governments shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and

artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.” International Play Association (IPA) is established in 1961 with fifty countries as member to promote the well-being of children and children’s rights. Playright Children’s Play Association (Playright) in Hong Kong is founded to promote quality play and the provision of adequate inclusive play resources throughout the community. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) in the United States, founded in 1946, is one of the largest education associations in the world, with one hundred and forty thousand members, including superintendents, supervisors, principals, teachers, professors, and school board members from nearly one hundred and thirty countries. It repeatedly stresses the importance of child-centered and play-based learning education to engage students’ intrinsic motivation for learning. Comparatively speaking, “When we are motivated by goals that have deep meaning, by dreams that need completion, by pure love that needs expressing, then we truly live life,” says Greg Anderson, founder of Cancer Recovery Foundation. Metaphorically speaking, “I think we need to take back our language. I want to call my organic carrots ‘carrots’ and let [other farmers] call theirs a chemical carrot. And they can list all of the ingredients that they used instead of me having to be certified. The burden is on us to prove something. Let them prove that they used only 30 chemicals instead of 50 to product an apple,” says organic farmer, Mary Jane Butters.

In summary, *play* is the most organic and ingenious way for children to grow and develop wholesomely, like apples. Play is engagement – it is human connection and relation. Play does not require computers, devices, or gadgets. Play does not need to be sanctioned or certified because it is naturally free as a human right, as a child’s right. Learning in early childhood is insensible and incomprehensible without the modality of play – free play – as a motor and

motivation for life. If all of the information and research given to date is valid about the gargantuan support for authentic play-based learning then *playschool education* deserves the appropriate name and term in the early childhood education and care framework as a new working paradigm.

### **The Heart of Intelligence**

Howard Gardner, the Harvard psychologist who theorizes the concept of Multiple Intelligence (MI) sees the flow of MI as the healthiest way to teach children, motivating them from inside rather than by threat or promise of reward. At the same time, Gardner “has long maintained that MI cannot be an educational goal in itself. Educational goals, value judgments, must emerge from discussions and debates among responsible leaders and citizens. Once goals have been laid out, the question then arises: How and in what ways, can MI ideas aid in the achievement of these goals?” (Davis, K., Christodoulou, J., Seider, S., Gardner, H., p. 30). In collaboration with psychologist and Emotional Intelligence (EQ) theorist Dan Goleman, Gardner suggests to him that, “We should use kids’ positive states to draw them into learning in the domains where they can develop competencies. Flow is an internal state that signifies a kid is engaged in a task that’s right. You have to find something you like and stick to it. But you learn at your best when you have something you care about and you can get pleasure from being engaged in” (Goleman, 1996, p. 94). The view is that when children are in the flow of their own learning, they are more likely to take on new challenges. The flow of mastering any skills or forms of knowledge ideally happens naturally. The initial passion in which the child is drawn to things that spontaneously engage her, and she loves, is the seed for high levels of potentiality.

“Pursuing flow through learning is a more humane, natural, and very likely more effective way to marshal emotions in the service of education” (Goleman, 1995, p. 107).

Drawing on brain and behavioral research he shows the factors such as self-awareness, self-discipline, and empathy all add up to a different way of being “smart”. “Channeling emotions toward a productive end is a master aptitude. Whether it be in controlling impulse and putting off gratification, regulating moods so they facilitate rather than impede thinking, motivating ourselves to persist and try, try again in the face of setbacks, or finding ways to enter flow and so perform more effectively – all bespeak the power of emotion to guide effective effort” (Goleman, 1995, p. 108).

In addition to *emotional intelligence*, there is *intuitive intelligence*. Over the last twenty-five years, HeartMath Institute has studied the human capacity to self-regulate thoughts, emotions, and behavior and developed a variety of techniques and technology to facilitate this process. In “The Intuitive Heart” HeartMath suggests that “another factor that should be considered in decision-making and self-regulation, one we’ve all experienced, perhaps without being fully aware of it, is *intuition*. There is fascinating research that is beginning to uncover the nature and functioning of intuition, or what researchers refer to as *intuitive intelligence*” (McCraty & Childre, 2014, p. 1). In all stages of play at Playschool, “intelligence” of all kinds is observed in the play process from emotion and social to intuitive and divine. Often, the rewards of genius in creative ferment are the minutes and hours of concentration it takes to solve the puzzles and riddles that artful plays entail.

“Out of the experience of authentic, mutually empathetic interactions, we acquire the “feeling-thinking” understanding of ourselves and others that gives us a sense of a “knowledgeable” basis for action” (Miller & Stiver 1997, p. 36). “What we're coming to learn is that traits of young children like openness to experience, lack of shyness, some agreeableness even, will make the child much more ready to explore the environment. The act of exploration

builds skills; it creates mental capacities, it gives you facts. It's a dynamic process; the desire to learn, the drive, can't really be separated from learning itself, the process of becoming capable and intelligent," confirms Nobel laureate Jim Heckman (Hanford, 2006).

### **Play for Life**

Every culture in the world has singing, dancing, and storytelling as an embodiment of play to which we all have access to. Play promotes good health and it can be a life-long therapeutic companion by providing a person with a strong feeling of resonance, response, participation, mutuality, and healing. "As psychological growth occurs in our interplay with others, we believe, our notions of who we are – and who other people are – are formed. Relationships that are mutually empathetic and give us the means and motivation to act – connections that lead us to more knowledge, that make us feel worthwhile and eager for more connections, that help problematic situations resolve into solutions" (Miller & Stiver 1997, p. 40). In *Maps to Ecstasy*, Gabrielle Roth, creator of the 5Rhythms dynamic movement practice known for "igniting creativity, connection, and community" says, "Movement isn't only meditation; it's also medicine that heals the split between our minds and hearts, bodies, and soul. Movement as medicine gives us a way to dynamically transform all that inertia into energy and, ultimately, ecstasy" (Roth & Loudon, 1998, p. 2). In the same light, cultural anthropologist Angeles Arrien says, "In many shamanic societies, if you came to a medicine person complaining of being disheartened, dispirited, or depressed, they would ask one of four questions. When did you stop dancing? When did you stop singing? When did you stop being enchanted by stories? When did you stop finding comfort in the sweet territory of silence?" (Roth, 1998, Foreword, p. 15). At Playschool, children, parents, and caregivers move, dance, sing, tell stories, and play in moments of blissful silence, without the need to talk, achieve, or prove anything. And the health quality

shows in children and adults: They are calmer, less aggressive, and less ill. In general, the more growth-promoting interplays and interactions exist, the better the foundational base of psychological resources are to help children and adults manage emotional difficulties and conflicting relationships.

### **Back to Basics**

The City and Country nursery school in New York Greenwich Village in 1914 is described by a student there during his childhood years: “In my time, there were no grades, no tests, no homework, the classes are known as groups, from the ‘2s’ to the ‘13s’. The little ones still learn by playing with blocks, a method of early education pretty much invented by Caroline Pratt” (Nadelson, 2014). However, after the time of the Perry Preschool, the simple natural process in child education and development is drowned and lost.

In “The Intuitive Parent: Why the Best thing for Your Child is You”, professor Stephen Camarata at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine encourages parents to wake up to the fact that the push to educate children increasingly more complex concepts at earlier ages than they are ready for often fails and is counterproductive. Drawing on research, case studies, and his clinical experiences, Camarata argues for a return to instinct-driven parenting: “Intuitive parenting emphasizes focusing on your child, enjoying the moment, and reacting naturally to whatever the baby (toddler, young child) is doing. It’s a style of parenting that allows you to concentrate on being a learning partner rather than a taskmaster or uber-teacher, and helps you to resist the panic that comes with thinking that there are other things or more things you should be teaching your child at a given moment” (Camarata, 2015, p.3).

Before the turn of this century, the human genome is consistently put under the microscope for scientific scrutiny. In the name of neuroscience, knowledge outweighs wisdom

and validity and numeric indicators become the life and breath of academic research towards attaining “higher knowledge”. Every now and then new “groundbreaking” studies surface but are no more earth shattering than what is previously known yet requires scientific “evidence” to substantiate the “facts.” Breakthrough research such as “Harvard yoga scientists find proof of meditation benefit” (2013), Science says art will make your kids better thinkers (and nicer people) (2014), The key to creativity may be in imagining the details (2015), “When teachers take a breath, students can bloom” (2016) and “Scientists say child’s play helps build a better brain” (2014) all seem sensible yet far from being a “breakthrough.” In fact, the trend seems to increasingly show that science for a while now is not the forerunner of leading edge knowledge but a follower of the human spirit and the human experience. Even the Perry Preschool project concludes after forty years of research that the role of the teacher in the student’s achievement and success is paramount – a fact Froebel, McMillan and Steiner and other educators recognize as a truth more than a century ago. But there is hope. In a *Humans of New York* interview on June 14, 2014 the interviewer asks a random New Yorker about his work and advice he wishes to give to people:

NR: “I’m a neuroscience researcher.”

HONY: “If you could give one piece of advice to a large group of people, what would it be?”

NR: “Listen to your inner voice.”

HONY: “You’re a scientist. Isn’t ‘inner voice’ a spiritual term?”

NR: “Bullshit! You’ll hear scientists talking about following their inner voice as much as you’d hear a musician or a priest.”

HONY: “So how do you know which of your thoughts are your true inner voice?”

NR: “All of them are! The question is – how much weight do you give them? How much authority do you give your own thoughts? Are you taking them seriously? Or are you sitting in front of the damn tube letting other people tell you what to think?”

In his #1 New York Times bestseller “All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten,” Fulghum says that “Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate school mountain, but there in the sandpile at Sunday School. These are the things I learned. The Kindergarten Credo is not kid stuff. It is not ‘simple’. It is ‘elemental’” – the kindergarten of “how to live and what to do and how to be” (Fulghum, 1986, p. 2). In the Credo, Fulghum mentions these as some of the elementary yet far-reaching and long-lasting values learned in childhood: Share, play fair, don’t hit, clean up, say sorry, wash hands, flush, take a nap and look. “The underlying theme in all of my writing is transformation – a yearning for integrity so strong that it leads to the kind of change that alters one’s life and the lives of others. I am trying very hard to live my way into the truth of my stories (Fulghum, 1986, p. 218).

Like Fulghum, all five educators listed in the Table 1 above live out their truths through their own examples and transformative works. Their works congruently and unanimously show the role of the mother as the child’s first teacher and point of contact for education is quintessential. Froebel calls this the unity and trinity “mother-love, mother-song and mother-play” in his book “Mother-play and Nursery Songs” which is written for mothers to use with their children at home. Similarly, McMillan calls for the hiring of nurse teachers and the training of teachers and mothers at her Nursery School & Training Center to serve more children more

maternally. Weikart also prides himself in the careful listening of his female teacher-peers who go and conduct home visits with their students' mothers and grandmothers. Finally, Steiner writes and lectures fervently about the "teacher's artistry" worthy of imitation, and Giang facilitating live case studies and best practices in class to support mother-child education and their relationships with their children. More often than not the transformation comes through the relearning than the learning process itself with mothers (and fathers) becoming more aware of their children and about themselves, and about each other.

As parenthood becomes a real "profession," parents of young children are interested at child-study classes to help them prepare for this profession. At the same time, school teachers realize they need to know much more about the emotional and physical well-being of children. In educating the child, earlier is not necessarily better. In fact mindful observation and attention and natural and empathetic responses are the magic of childhood experiences that lead to intelligent, curious, and confident adults. To "train and mold" children to resemble the image of parents to be productive workers through rote preservation and memorization of knowledge is an outdated mentality and attitude. Rather, to truly educate – to bring up and rear – children is to respectfully reflect to them our highest values through our own soul essence and exemplars of traditions and ancestral wisdom. To "prepare and train" children to be solution providers is to best teach them to focus on the solution rather than on the problem. To truly educere – to bring out and lead – children to question, think, and create is to allow them the breadth and space to face and interface with the unknown and enjoy the magical discovery of the unfolding. Because in human affairs, with mastery of aesthetic and cultural patterns honed by time and honored by tradition, the task of the soul is to recognize its own divine genius and to bring forth that ingenuity to all of its creation and interrelation. This mastery and soul recognition – the intuition – is an invaluable

resource for children to gain early on, instead of memorizing dead facts. A child's creativity and spirituality are closely aligned. "The creativity of the child is the inner driving force for spiritual realization: A seeking for wholeness" (Mashedor, 1994, p. 167). "There is so much we can do as caregivers to promote creativity in our little ones. First, let your imagination run wild. Let it follow the child's lead. Turn to the child for direction" (Barnes, 1996, p. 44). This is especially important in today's world when tuning to the frequency of the WiFi is more appealing than tapping into the biorhythms of mother nature or the rhythmic beat of our own heart. So by educating our children to cling to what is true and balanced, their true inner freedom is attained for their infinite creation and manifestation of higher worlds for their future.

### **Play On**

The next logical step in forwarding the Playschool paradigm is to review the organizational structures and the ways in which ECEC decisions are made in Hong Kong and elsewhere in the world. In doing so, the goal is to use current stakeholder perceptions of ECEC to determine new goals and milestones for playschool to reach and achieve over the course of next year. To establish a shared vision of playschool education with key pro-play educational organizations such as Playright and ASCD is an important step in the right direction forward. To facilitate a change in educators' roles are also initial steps forward. Finally, to accomplish a shift in attitude and thinking, educators are encouraged and facilitated to examine their own personal mastery and mental models and definitions of education, particularly childhood education.

In summary, our words matter. The term Playschool truly represents the heart and soul of children's desire to be free, to have fun, to be children. The notion of "work smarter, not harder" is well received and accepted as a new work productivity model. Interestingly enough to turn dreams into reality at the heart of "wishful thinking" is no longer fantasy play. The art and

mastery of *play* is scientifically proven, using intention, imagination, visualization, affirmation, appreciation, excitement, allowance, and gratitude, to energetically power the heart and mind, feeling-thinking endorphins to manifest thoughts and feelings into forms and reality. This dream to unify kindergarten, nursery school, and preschool into one seamless model to create a new playschool ECEC paradigm for the twenty-first century is a dream six year ago that is beginning to take form and a life of its own in creation.

## Chapter 5. Conclusion

*I believe that imagination is stronger than knowledge –*

*That myth is more potent than history.*

*That dreams are more powerful than facts –*

*The hope always triumphs over experience –*

*That laughter is the only cure for grief.*

*And I believe that love is stronger than death.*

Robert Fulghum

The ideal of the Industrial Revolution toward working “harder” for success is now shifting to the idea of the path of least resistance toward working “smarter.” To be “smart” means to be in “flow”: To achieve naturally, easily, joyously, spontaneously, and freely. For children, *play* is their young life’s “work” and in their non-directed, uninterrupted play process they achieve supreme happiness and good health, beaming and blooming in all areas of multiple intelligences.

The Playschool pilot project shows that the momentum for the *playschool education* framework and paradigm is growing. Empirical findings from the case study show that a quality seamless child-centered, psychosocial play-based framework from birth to six is highly linked with happy, expressive, healthy, and intelligent children. The child development and parent education program plays a pivotal role in helping parents gain a deeper understanding of the value of play and of playschool education in their children’s holistic development with long-lasting benefits. Observational findings also show that the children’s physical, emotional, and social progress is strikingly noticeable over time while parents are evolving, too, through their own transformation in relearning how to educate their children by redefining their own belief

systems, patterns, and habits: To educate children by being a role model worthy of imitation and to educere children by trusting and following their lead.

All paradigms shift and change as part of the cycle of life. One ending directly changes into a new beginning. A paradigm is constantly reinventing itself and rises up whole and new and even more powerful with every ending it experiences. No failure is involved, but it is time for a complete overhaul of our priorities and terminologies in ECEC. Intuitively we all know it is time to move on and try something new. A death of the old and a celebration of new life and breath in ECEC is called for. Whatever we do now will indeed be a successful endeavor, for a rebirth is imminent. Rejoice, for change is in the air and new things are about to enter our world in the twenty-first century. It is time to broaden our horizons as we move forward on our path. Movement brings new opportunities – opportunities that may elude our imagination – that must not be resisted, for progress can only be made by welcoming what is and what is yet to come – a change for the better for our children’s education and for the education of humanity.

In order to succeed, change must be in alignment with certain unchanging laws. The process must begin at the right moment, gather support from a broad base of people, be guided by sincere and capable leadership, and – most important of all – must address a real need. In the Information-Computer-Digital-New Media-Wireless Age, it is fortunate and timely now for us to be willing to learn new things, be teachable, and malleable, yet firmly be grounded in who we are and truthful to what we stand for. Logic and reasoning is important, but so is an open heart and our inner compass. Listen, see, and do what children do best; stay open, stay curious, stay aware, and relax and open up to infinite possibilities that the Spirit knows and shows through its miraculous unfolding.

As an inspiring symbol of artful, compassionate protest, environmental activist Julia Butterfly Hill succeeds in echoing the soul messages of Froebel, McMillan, Steiner, Weikart, and Giang in professor and psychologist Dr. Benjamin Tong's DVD "The Taoist and the Activist" when she says: "So often activism is based on what we are against, what we don't like, what we don't want. And yet we manifest what we focus on. And so we are manifesting yet ever more of what we don't want, what we don't like, what we want to change. So for me, activism is about a spiritual practice as a way of life. And I realized I didn't climb the tree because I was angry at the corporations and the government; I climbed the tree because when I fell in love with the redwoods, I fell in love with the world. So it is my feeling of 'connection' that drives me, instead of my anger and feelings of being disconnected."

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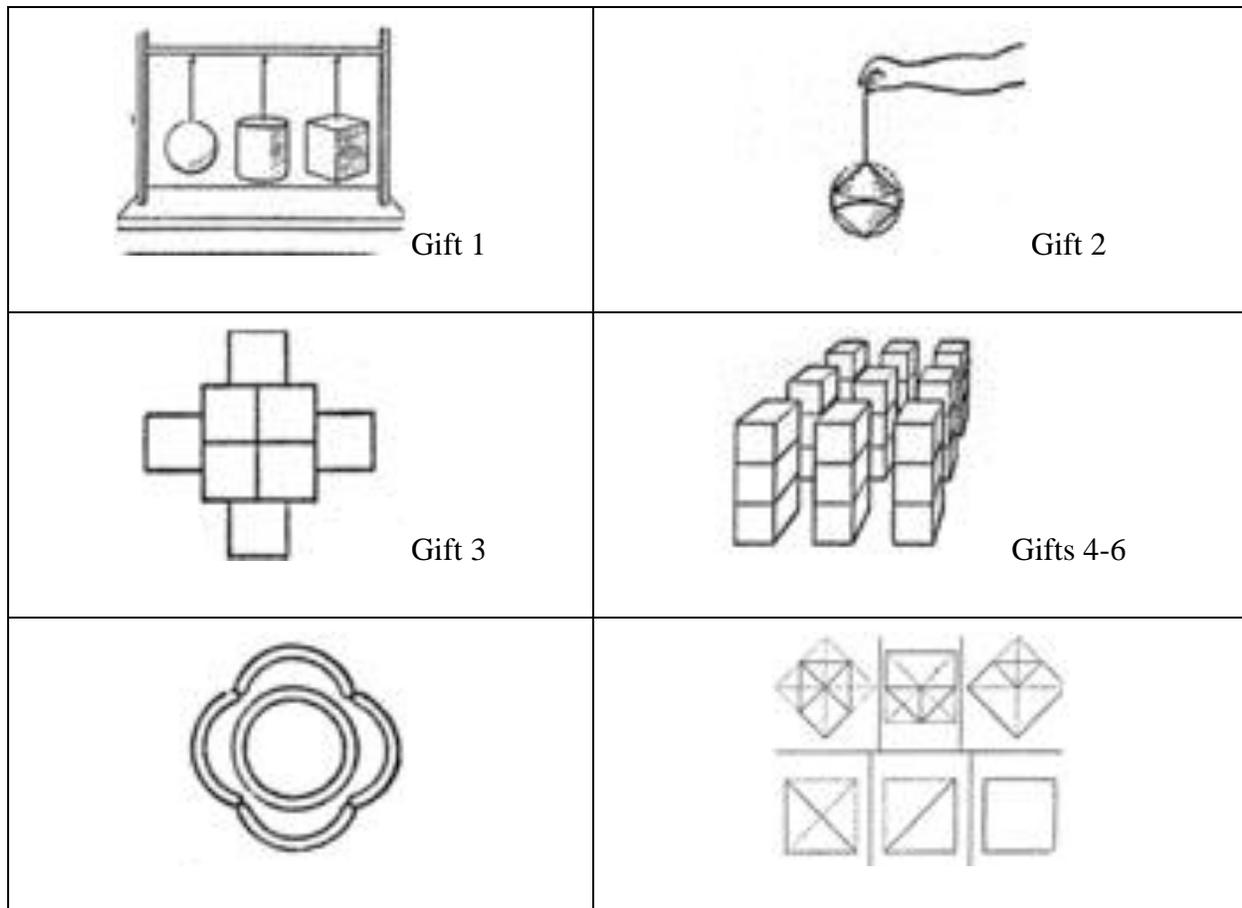
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## APPENDIX

## Appendix 1. Froebel's Gifts



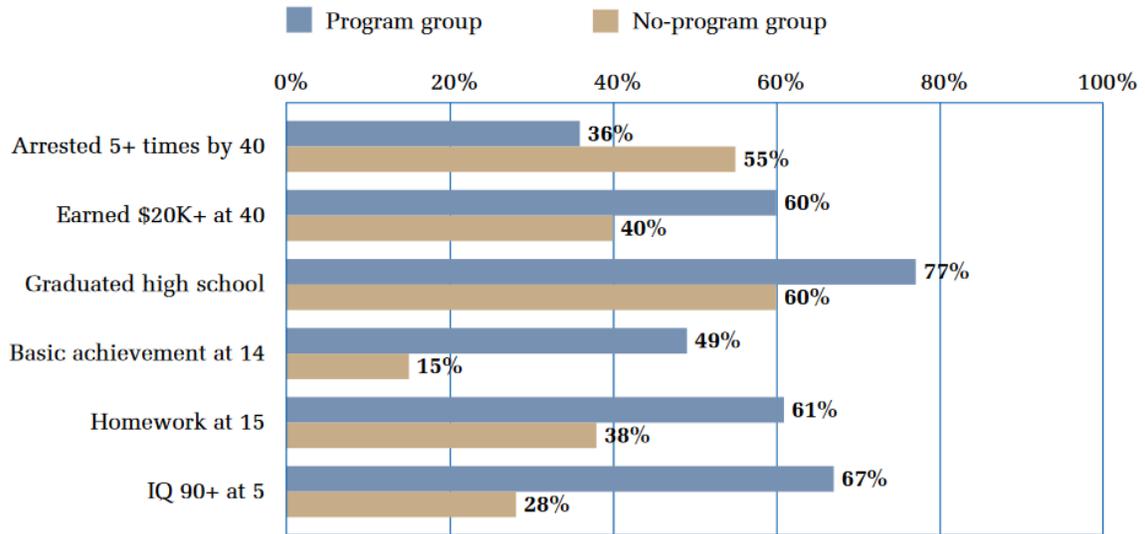
Source: White, J. (1907). *The Educational Ideas of Froebel*. London: University Tutorial Press.

Froebel's original six playthings and playgifts are coded as Gift #1 (Yarn balls consisting of three primary and three secondary colors), Gift #2 (Wooden sphere, cube, cylinder), Gift #3 (Cube divided into eight smaller cubes), Gift #4 (Cube divided into eight equal right prisms; develops parallel to #3), Gift 5 (Cube divided into thirty nine smaller cubes and prisms; it shows the threefold principles of the forms of knowledge, beauty and life), Gift 6 (Cube divided into thirty six smaller cubes and rectangles; develops parallel to #5) and Play of the child (cradle songs, dolls and movements). In *The Educational Ideas of Froebel* by Jessie White and *The*

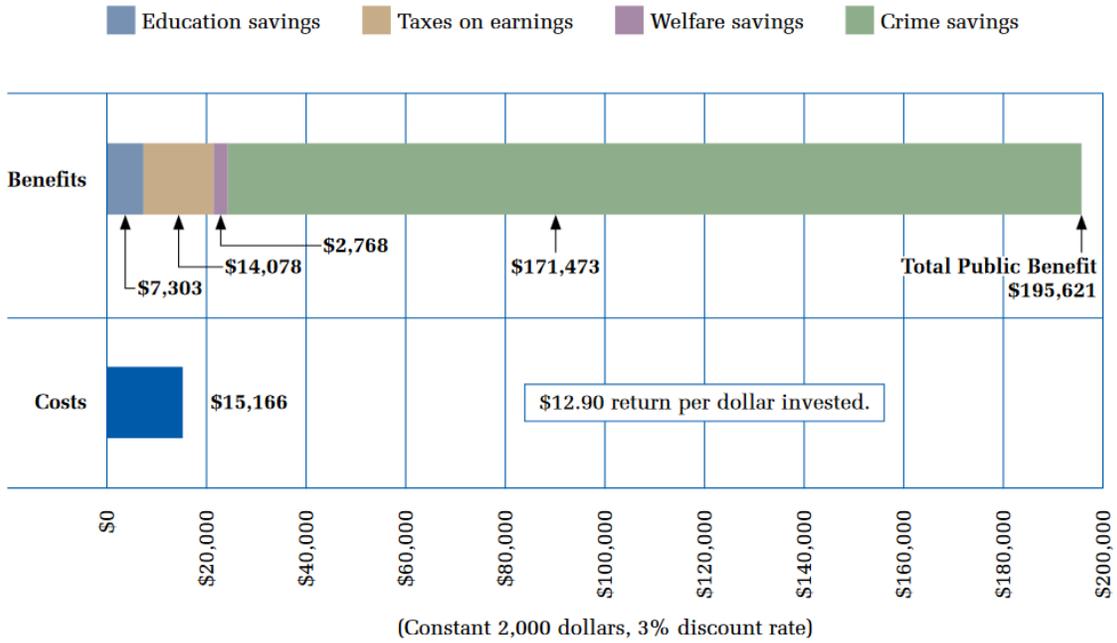
*Paradise of Childhood. A Practical Guide to Kindergartners* by Edward Wiebé and Milton Bradley and *The Republic of Childhood - Froebel's Gifts and Froebel's Occupations* by Kate Wiggin and Nora Smith, Froebel's twenty gifts and occupations are detailed and explained.

**Appendix 2. Major Findings: High/Scope Perry Preschool Study at 40**

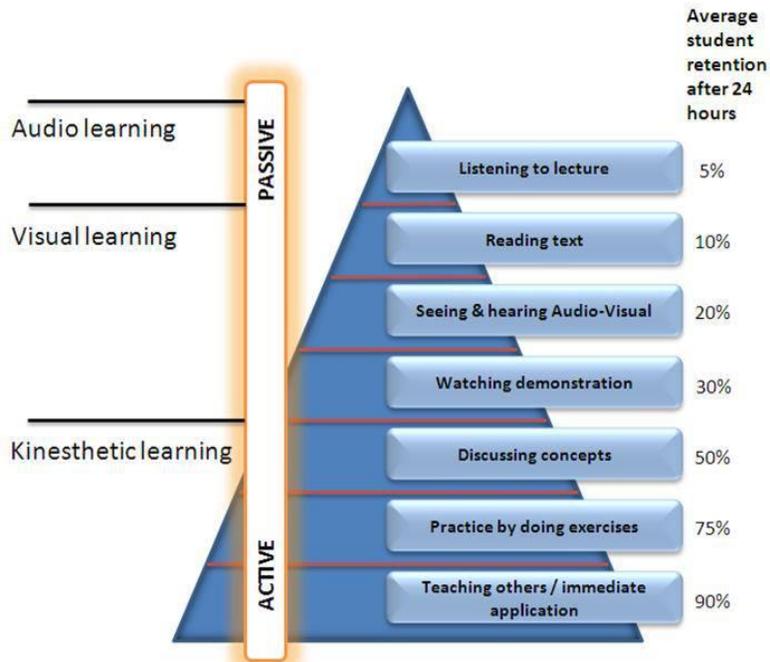
**Figure 1**  
Major Findings: High/Scope Perry Preschool Study at 40



**Figure 2**  
High/Scope Perry Preschool Program Public Costs and Benefits



**Appendix 3. The Learning Pyramid**



**The Learning Pyramid**  
 Attributed to National Training Laboratories Institute  
 For Applied Behavioural Sciences, Bethel, Maine