UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND

PARTICIPATORY ACTION LEARNING: AN APPROACH TO GENERATIVE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT OF PARENTING EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

A Dissertation submitted by

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People's participation in social and political transformation is the central issue of our time. This can only be achieved through the establishment of societies which place human worth above power and liberation above control. In this paradigm, development requires democracy, the genuine empowerment of the people. When this is achieved, culture and development will coalesce an environment in which all are valued and every kind of human potential can be realized.

Aung San Suu Kyi

Winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize from Burma (Myanmar)

ABSTRACT

The study explores an approach where professionals work with people in the communities for the development of a parenting education programme for mothers to enhance their early childhood care practices. The focus of the study is the process of generative curriculum development, applying participatory and dialogic pedagogical principles and practices which facilitate empowering and emancipatory learning in the parenting education programmes. Accordingly, the literature review is concerned with two areas: the first is on the concept and practices of early childhood care and development with some highlights on parenting education; and the second on the theory and practice of empowering and emancipatory adult education with reference to the Generative Curriculum Development approach to blend local knowledge and academic/professional knowledge on early childhood care and development.

Since the focus of the research is the process for change in child care practices of the mothers as well as the pedagogic practices of the adult educators, participatory action research was considered an appropriate research methodology and participatory action learning as a learning approach. There were two action learning circles involved in the research: the parenting education action learning circle and the pedagogic action learning circle. Parenting action learning circles dealt with enhancement of early childhood care practices of mothers while the pedagogic action learning circle explored more effective pedagogic practices of parenting educators. Data were collected from both circles and data analysis was done in a continuous and progressive manner, along with the repeated cycles of participatory action learning using the constant comparative method based on the grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The findings have indicated that the Generative Curriculum Development process appeared to be a practicable model for participatory development of an education programme while contributing to the progressive understanding of praxis-based pedagogy (Freire, 1970, 1995; Shor, 1992; Vella, 1994) and

advancement in related pedagogical principles and practices for empowering and emancipatory education for social change. The research experience has also shown that people have an impressive wealth of knowledge and immense potential to advance their knowledge if the opportunity is provided. It was evident that in order to realise this potential the adult educators had to make an ideological shift from depositing knowledge into the learners towards empowering them to build their competence and confidence in creating their own knowledge. The analysis, on the other hand, enabled a number of recommendations in relation to development programming in general, and adult education and early childhood care in particular. It is envisioned that these recommendations will enable the development partners in the country to promote greater and genuine participation for empowerment of the people to bring about change.

CERTIFICATION OF DISSERTATION

I certify that the ideas, results, analyses and conclusions reported in this dissertation are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

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Signature of Candidate Date

ENDORSEMENT

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Signature of Supervisor Date

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My doctoral journey has taken an unusually long time for various reasons but my immediate and extended family have all shown their understanding and faith in what I have been doing. I would like to express my heart-felt thanks to them for their strong faith in me and support of my study. Particularly, I owe a lot to my wife, Pyone, for her sacrifices during my ten year doctoral journey. She has been supportive to my commitment in life-long learning. Thank you, Pyone, for being you.

I am deeply indebted to my colleagues from the Ministry of Education and the partner Non Governmental Organization (NGO) as they have enthusiastically and voluntarily joined me in conducting this study as co-researchers and co-learners in spite of their enormous work responsibilities. I also would like to express my sincere thanks to my colleagues from my office who have provided invaluable comments and suggestions during both the research process and the analytical writing stage of the dissertation. Particularly I am very grateful to my "critical friend", Linda Jenkinson, for her insightful comments and provocative questions when developing the draft.

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Last but not least, I want to thank the individuals from the communities, particularly the mothers from the Mothers' Circles who participated in the study. Without their contributions, this dissertation will not be possible.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

critical democratic dialogue a communicative interaction between the educator and learners as well as among learners to reflect together on the meaning of their knowledge, experiences and actions. This term is used to put emphasis on the critical and democratic nature of the interaction, contrasting it from the mere conversation/discussion among participants.

generative curriculum development a curriculum development process in which curriculum objectives, content, materials and methodologies are grounded in learners' own knowledge and experiences, and generated by themselves.

informal learning the way people learn things in their every-day life, without predetermined, and pre-structured learning objectives, procedures, materials and methodologies, and formal facilitation.

informal education provision of education without any specifically structured learning programmes; e.g., educating people through media.

naturalistic learning a form of learning organized in such a way that people engage in the learning process as closely as possible to how they learn naturally in every-day life.

Participatory Action Learning (PAL) an approach to generate experiential and collaborative learning among participants through

repeated cycles of action, reflection and reaction upon the issues of their concerns and interests.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) a form of collective and collaborative self-reflective enquiry undertaken by a group of people in a repeated spiral cycles of action and observation, critical reflection, and reaction to improve their own social and educational practices, as well as to enhance their understanding about these practices.

Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) a qualitative research methodology, which derives from the rapid assessment methods such as Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Rapid Assessment Procedures (RAP), involving communities from the outset through the entire process of research, and helps them analyze their own situation and make decisions regarding actions to solve their problems.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Research is a politically sensitive activity in Myanmar (Burma), and opportunity to do research in a genuine and authentic sense is extremely limited. This particularly applies to the field of critical social research. However, I feel that there is a need for us as socially responsible educators to manoeuvre opportunities and initiate efforts to conduct the kind of research that will help field development workers address social issues. With this view in mind, I have attempted the action research on ***Participatory Action Learning: An approach to generative curriculum development of parenting education programmes.*** This chapter will highlight the context of research, its rationale and significance, and the objectives and related research questions.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Since I was first involved in United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) supported education programmes in 1994, I have been facilitating various training and education programmes for educators, school administrators, teachers and parents. As the term “participation” has become a “buzz word” for any development programme, participatory processes and participatory learning has been the centre piece of any discussion among development partners. Accordingly I have been asking myself whether and how it could be

possible to promote genuine or authentic popular participation in a country like Myanmar (Burma), which has had a deep-rooted culture of highly centralised authoritarian governance for many decades. Then I came across a statement by Windham (1993) in one of my readings:

> Centrist planners, no matter how much discretionary power they have, never determine the actual outcomes of a policy. They can only set in action forces which they anticipate will have certain effects. The effects themselves are the results of the millions of micro-decisions made by individuals (p. 25).

This statement has made me realise that individuals, no matter what their circumstances, make their decisions and choices based on their capacity and opportunity to take them. Obviously I am also aware of the fact that there are a number of driving forces that put pressure on individuals to make unwanted and unwilling decisions. Yet I am still convinced that there must be ways to empower people to be able to make informed decisions and choices even in a highly authoritative society. Thus, promoting popular participation in development efforts has been a learning programme for me during my more than 10 years work in UNICEF.

In 1998 I was assigned as a Project Officer for the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) programme, and one of my responsibilities was to develop a programme for parents, particularly for mothers, on early childhood care and development. At that time parenting education in early childhood was relatively new in the country as no agency had experience

with parenting education apart from some health education activities delivered by basic health staff. The project team also explored early childhood care and development programmes reported in available documents such as reports, manuals and modules on parenting education from various countries. ECCD partners also made study visits to neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and India to observe and learn community-based and family-focused programmes with an emphasis on parenting education. Based on what we have learned from the documents we have studied and what we have observed, we developed a parenting education programme where community facilitators were trained as volunteers to conduct semi-formal parenting education sessions.

After a few years experience with the ECCD programme, I felt that the programme did not seem to have the impact on the situation which may have been expected. The programme was driven by messages from outside professionals on recommended so-called "appropriate care practices" and very little was taken into account on the existing “grass-roots” practices and situations of families and their communities.

The approach we adopted was like a "deficit" model where we looked at things parents did not have or do, but disregarded their current good knowledge and achievements. This also made me recognise the gap between our rhetorical discussions and real actions in relation to popular participation. At that time I had started thinking of exploring an alternative, innovative and participatory approach to the development of a culturally grounded and contextually appropriate parenting education programme with

genuine participation of parents and communities bridging the two views of both external professionals and communities in the development process.

Subsequently, I came across some articles about the Partnership Programme of the First Nation Communities, the University of Victoria, Canada, which employed the "Generative Curriculum Model," to empower communities and families with deep engagement about questions, necessitating and celebrating dialogue among diverse perspectives (Ball, 2004; Ball & Pence, 1999; Pence & Ball, 1999). This Model sounded like what I was looking for. Therefore, I had a discussion with my colleagues from partner agencies on the idea of development of a similar type of model and process, and we collectively decided to do a case study of an action research on how the participatory process could be promoted through a “Generative Curriculum Development” model while exploring an alternative parenting education programme for early childhood care and development.

1.3 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Expansion of early childhood care services is one of the commitments made by Myanmar (Burma) to meet Education For All (EFA) goals set in its National Action Plan (NAP) (Ministry of Education, 2003). However, the importance of early childhood development is not widely recognised, and the evolvement of early childhood care and development programmes is relatively new. There is a lack of understanding of the broad sense of the holistic and comprehensive nature of early childhood care for the development of the "whole" child.

In Myanmar (Burma) less than 10% of 3 - 5 year old children have access to early childhood care services (Save the Children, 2004). The majority of them are in urban areas, and not accessible for disadvantaged families as the direct cost for those services is high. Moreover, most of the available child care services do not integrate health, nutrition, and psychosocial care and stimulation but put more emphasis on formal teaching and learning such as memorisation of the alphabet rather than addressing the dire needs of the healthy growth and holistic development of the children in the early years. There is virtually no child care service available for children under three. The care for that age group is primarily provided by the home and family. Yet, there is no support mechanism for the families to facilitate their care responsibilities.

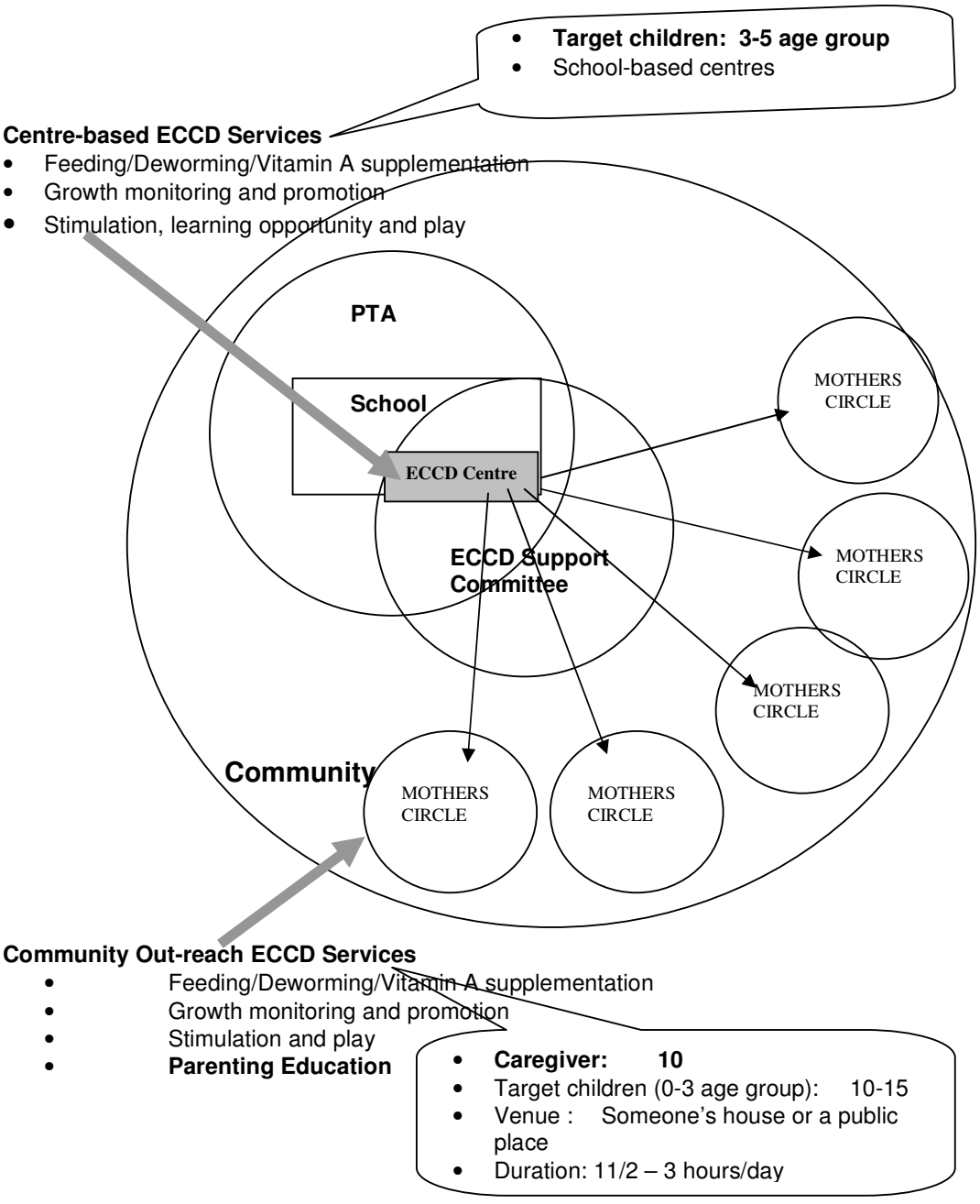
In order to address these issues, a local NGO launched the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Network Project in collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MoE) and with the support of UNICEF. The overall goal of the project was to introduce ECCD practices which would promote those conditions of care, socialisation and education in the home or community that enhance a child's total development. This was done through interventions programmed to create an enabling environment which would ensure the support needed for the whole and healthy growth and development of the young child. The target population of the project was 0 - 5 year old children and their parents from disadvantaged families of participating communities.

The ECCD Network project strategy was to mobilise local communities to take quick and decisive actions to organise community-based interventions which would provide integrated child care and development services, particularly to those children from the disadvantaged families (UNICEF, 2001c). Parent-Teacher Associations and newly established community-based ECCD Support Committees played a critical role in planning, implementation and monitoring of project activities. The strategy highlighted the efforts to empower communities, especially mothers, through capacity building and creating opportunities for participation in the whole process of the development of community-based ECCD interventions.

The Network project had two main components. The first was the establishment of ECCD centres attached to basic education schools. The second was the establishment of the Community Outreach programme through home-based Mothers' Circles. Integrated early childhood care services, which included supplementary feeding and nutrition supplementation, growth monitoring and promotion, providing opportunities for learning and socialisation, were provided through these two channels: school-based ECCD Centres and the Community Outreach Programme (see Figure 1.1).

The school-based ECCD Centres were basically similar to typical preschools in the country, running from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. and providing services for children aged 3 to 5. Despite the integrated nature of services, including nutrition supplementation and growth monitoring, the focus of these centres was on preparation for the children to be ready for school.

Figure 1.1: ECCD Network Project Activities in the Communities



Note: *The school based ECCD centers are very much like the conventional Kindergartens, pre-schools and day care centers. However, these are not the concern of the proposed participatory action research.* ***Mothers' Circles are the focus of the research.*** ***Source:*** *adapted from UNICEF,* (*2004*), p. 33.

On the other hand, the Community Outreach programme involved the establishment of Mothers' Circles in the communities through community mobilisation efforts of Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) of the participating schools. The purpose was to provide integrated early childhood care services to the younger aged children (0 - 3 year olds) through the Mothers' Circles, which were grass-root level action groups informally organised for participatory social change.

In the context of the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Network project, the action research on action learning with generative curriculum development for parenting education was conducted. It was carried out as a part of the second component of the project: Community Out-reach through Mothers' Circles, with a particular reference to one of the activities of those Circles, the parenting education programme for mothers.

1.4 THE RESEARCHER IN THE RESEARCH

Since the ECCD Network project was funded by UNICEF, the principal researcher as the Project Officer for the UNICEF supported ECCD programme was responsible to plan, manage and monitor the implementation of the project in collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the NGO.

The project team responsible for the overall management of the ECCD Network project comprised the professionals from the MoE and the staff from the NGO. The MoE professionals were adult educators who designed training programmes, developed training materials and facilitated training

workshops for capacity building of various actors such as teachers, PTAs, community volunteers and parents of the project communities. The staff from the NGO were the community facilitators who encountered day-to-day interaction with communities to implement project activities.

While undertaking the responsibilities of the overall management of the project, and as part of the technical capacity building of the team, the principal researcher quite often facilitated the training programmes for the adult educators from the MoE and the community facilitators from the NGO. At the same time, the project team was responsible for monitoring what was going on in both centre-based ECCD programmes and community-outreach ones.

In order to carry out the research, the principal researcher formed the research team with selected colleagues from the project team including both MoE and NGO staff. There were five professionals from the MoE and four community facilitators from the NGO, who participated as co-researchers in the research project.

1.5 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Parenting education has been used as an alternative and complementary strategy to improve the situation of early childhood care for development in both developed and developing countries. It is now becoming more popular in developing countries as a cost-effective way of strengthening and reinforcing family roles and responsibilities for comprehensive and integrated early childhood developmental care. However, many child development

programmes around the world use a "deficit" model, focusing on the "professional" view of what people lack and stressing the need for parents to be educated without recognising and respecting families' and communities' achievements and resourcefulness in raising their children (Arnold, Bartlett, Hill, Khatiwada, & Sapkota, 2000; Evans, 2000a, 2000b).

In order to have a programme which is family-focused and community-based, it is vital to understand and value local child care practices and build on the existing strengths – the positive things that people are already doing. The traditional and existing child care practices should be recognised as a foundation to be built on in strengthening childrearing capabilities of parents and families. Blending of traditional practices with modern knowledge should be the approach for developing family-focused and community-based ECCD programmes. Fals-Borda (1991) has stated that a combination of academic knowledge and popular knowledge could result in total scientific knowledge which reflects a more accurate picture of reality. The process advocated by Fals-Borda will require a clear understanding of perceptions, beliefs, patterns and practices of parents and communities regarding childrearing. However, that understanding alone will not help the professionals to develop a successful programme unless there is an opportunity created for genuine popular participation through meaningful dialogue between professionals and communities.

Despite the rhetoric among professionals about popular participation in the process of development of culturally and contextually appropriate programmes, there is little realisation of the effort required for ensuring a

genuine participation of people in the entire process of programming, especially in those as seen in the field of early childhood care and development (Arnold et al., 2000; Myers, 1995). Many of the programmes are generally designed and controlled by outsiders without adequate consultation with, and/or participation of communities in making decisions that affect their lives. That was the case for the parenting education programme that the project team initially developed and implemented.

The parenting education programme, as initiated in the Mothers' Circles of the ECCD Network project, was implemented with prescriptive modules and lessons traditionally developed by outside-experts based on the pre-determined sets of knowledge and information for parents (see appendix 1a and 1b for example modules). Through engagement with parents and communities, the project team realised many of the messages and information that we were providing them were not new to them; they have been receiving those messages from various sources, and yet there was very little change in their daily child care practices. This situation confronting the project team then made them think about the real source of the problem.

After reflection on the initial experiences of implementation, the principal researcher, as the responsible project officer, and some of the project team members had an enthusiasm to explore an alternative, innovative and participatory approach to the development of a parenting education programme. This alternative would be culturally grounded and contextually appropriate.

In developing a culturally grounded alternative it would be critical to create opportunities to have inputs from the communities on what the current practices of the parents are, what strengths these current practices have and what the communities really need in relation to caring and nurturing of their children. Therefore, the learning outcomes would be jointly generated and be the result of their own learning, rather than something imposed by outside professionals.

The project officer and the team felt that through action research they could explore in what ways parents, particularly mothers, could be empowered through genuine popular participation. Therefore, it was decided to do a case study of an action research on participatory action learning through a "Generative Curriculum Development" model.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In the development field, efforts have been shifted from economic-growth-oriented to social-oriented equity-led sustainable growth strategy through people centred development alternatives. This shift is reflected in a UNICEF report (1991) in which David Korten has expressed that "development is a process by which the members of society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvement in their quality of life consistent with their own aspiration" (UNICEF, 1991, p. 19).

Consequently, more and more attention has been given to popular and/or community participation in development efforts through a gradual

empowering process of active engagement of people in making decisions that affect their lives and increasingly taking ownership of the development efforts to be sustainable in the long run. With this people-centred approach to sustainable development, the participatory action research on generative curriculum development for parenting education on early childhood care and development has been carried out through active engagement and reflective dialogue between parenting education professionals and parents. This empowering and emancipatory intent is the most significant aspect of the research as it could be the first research with critical social perspectives in Myanmar (Burma). In general terms, it is hoped that the lessons learned from this research will significantly contribute to the understanding and practices of the development work, in particular, on how development workers can work with people using emancipatory and empowering processes of education.

In the field of early childhood care and development, professionals at different levels have been paying attention to the importance of the role of parents as the first teachers and the primary socialising agents in their children's lives, and the need to strengthen their roles and responsibilities in childrearing. Increasingly, emphasis has been given to using the traditional and existing child care practices of parents as the foundation to build a programme. However, adequate exploration has not been done on how external/academic knowledge and local wisdom could be blended through participatory processes of learning with people to have a sound and sustainable progress in caring and rearing children for their development to the fullest potential. Therefore, this research is unique in the sense that it will

provide early childhood development practitioners with an insight on how to translate the rhetoric of partnership with, and participation of parents into daily forms of interaction to change their care practices through a process of learning that offers an opportunity for reflection on their own practices.

As explained before, the research has been conducted as a process of empowering education, where both adult educators from external agencies and adult learners from communities have worked together to enhance their knowledge and practices to address their respective concerns and issues. By participating in the research, the adult educators/development workers have an opportunity to advance their pedagogical practices by changing themselves into transformative and empowering adult educators. Meanwhile parents from those communities have also gone through a process for empowerment to analyse their situation, reflect upon it, and take appropriate and necessary actions for their own destiny.

As empowerment itself is seen as a process of a long-term effort, the programme could not see the absolute empowerment as an immediate outcome of the research. However, it is hoped that through active engagement of "praxis-based learning", a repeated cycle of learning through action with reflection, parents will break the "culture of silence" (Freire, 1970) where people are kept quiet as passive objects and prohibited to take part in transformation of their society. Accordingly, they will have the opportunity to gradually start to look at their world with critical consciousness and actively participate in transforming, creating and recreating of their world. When people start to be really engaged in authentic praxis, that engagement could

be seen as a seedling of empowerment, which could be gradually nurtured over time.

As the research has been conducted with critical and Freirian pedagogical frameworks, the experience and results of the research will be a contribution to the knowledge base and theory building of critical pedagogy and libratory education. Very few studies have been done on the pedagogical practices of adult education in Myanmar (Burma), and none has been done in the critical pedagogy paradigm. Therefore, the results and experiences of this research could be used as a basis for further learning to alter and advance pedagogic practices of adult educators with an emphasis on emancipatory and empowering education in the country.

1.7 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND QUESTIONS

There seems to be a huge gap between the rhetoric and the realisation among professionals regarding popular participation in the process of development of culturally and contextually appropriate programmes. Many of the programmes are generally designed and controlled by outsiders without adequate consultation with, and/or participation of communities in making decisions that affect their lives. Therefore, the purpose of the participatory action research on generative curriculum development was to explore an approach where professionals can work with the people in the communities for advancement of their lives through a process of participatory action learning for empowerment and emancipation. Accordingly, the focus of the proposed research was on:

What contribution can a participatory action learning approach make to the process of change in pedagogic practices of professionals in emancipating and empowering communities for greater and genuine participation?

Hence, the research also attempted to answer the following questions:

1. *How can the professionals and community facilitators learn to enhance their pedagogic practices through the PAL process?*

2. *In which way can outside professionals work with parents and communities to advance their child care practices?*

3. *How can people be empowered to genuinely and meaningfully participate in the development of a parenting education programme?*

1.8 COMPONENTS OF THE STUDY

In order to answer the afore-mentioned research questions, a three-phase research process with three different but intertwined components was conducted. The three components of research referred to the Parenting Education Action Learning Circles, the Pedagogic Action Learning Circle and the overall Participatory Action Research (PAR) process. On the other hand, the three phases were the three different stages of the PAR cycle:

- Phase one as the Reconnaissance Stage of the PAR cycle, where the research team explored the existing child care knowledge and

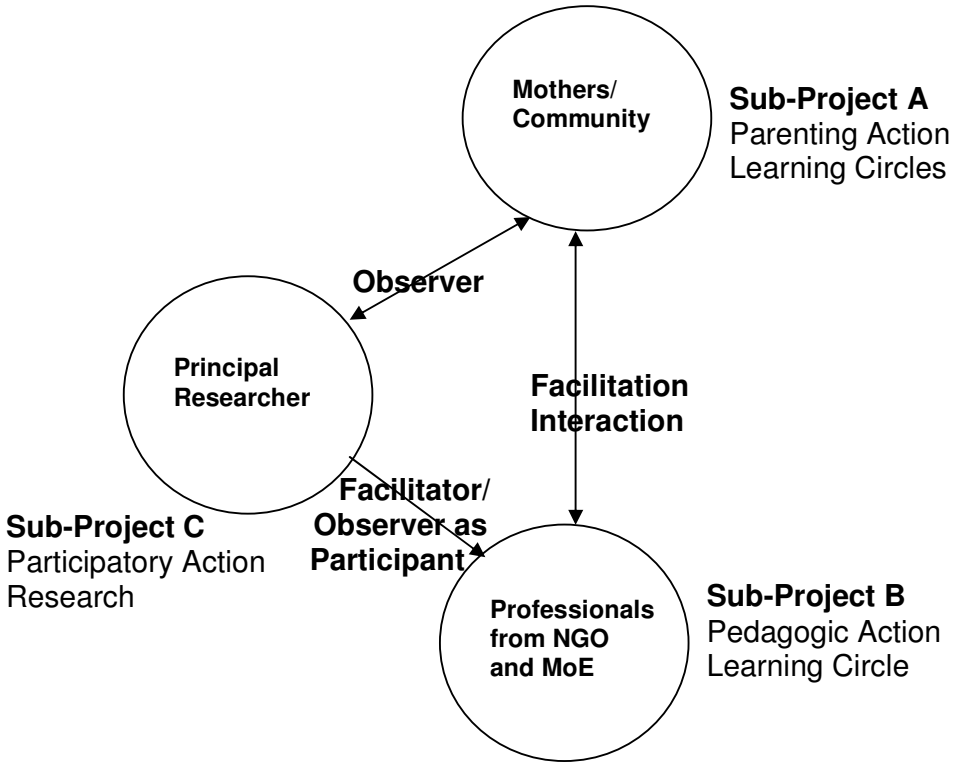
practices of the participating communities as well as the situation of childcare in those communities.

- Phase two as the Planning Stage of the PAR cycle, where the team generated ideas, issues and concerns with the people, and made action plans for the parenting education programme

- Phase three as the Stage for Action and Subsequent Action cycle where the team facilitated the parenting education sessions for the mothers

These three phases involved all three research components; therefore, these could be identified as sub-projects of a larger Participatory Action Research project (see Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2: Dynamics and Relationships among Research Participants in All Three Phases of the Research



Sub-project A was conducted in Parenting Action Learning Circles on the Generative Curriculum Development Process where the research team and the communities, particularly mothers, jointly explored their own existing child care knowledge and practices, identified key themes or issues to be explored more, and then went through a learning process to address those issues. This process was facilitated by the professionals (adult educators) from MoE and the community facilitators from the NGO. The principal researcher was an observer on any event under this project.

Sub-project B was conducted among the research team in the Pedagogic Action Learning Circle to reflect and act on their pedagogic practices they had employed while working with the communities. During the course of research, the team regularly met to reflect on their experiences in implementing activities, discuss the issues they encountered and plan new activities for the next round of dialogue with the mothers. In this reflective learning process, the principal researcher acted in the facilitating role as well as an observer.

Sub-project C was the overall participatory action research project, where the principal researcher with rotating roles of facilitator, participant and observer attempted to explore and learn to answer the research questions while working with both groups of research participants. The relationship between different sub-projects of the research is illustrated in Figure 1.2.

1.9 OVERVIEW

The research was conducted using three components in three phases. Phase 1 was the reconnaissance stage where the research team explored current child care practices using Participatory Action Learning methodologies. Phase 2, the planning stage, involved reflection on the data on child care practices by the research team and the subsequent development of plans for parenting education. In Phase 3, the action stage, the research team, community facilitators and mothers went through repeated learning and research cycles of action and reflection to address the issues of child care in those communities. While working with communities, the research team also organised reflective action learning sessions throughout the three phases on their pedagogic practices to explore more effective approaches to the pedagogy of parenting education. The organisation of this thesis thus reflects the experiences of these three phases.

Chapter Two provides literature review relevant to the study, which includes two main parts. The first part is on the concept and practice of early childhood care and development with some highlights on the care framework and environment, the role of culture in early childhood, and issues that have emerged out of the experiences of various parenting education programmes around the world. The second part is on the theory and practice of empowering and emancipatory adult education with reference to the concept of generative curriculum development and its application as an empowering

education approach to blend local and academic knowledge on early childhood.

Chapter Three describes the details about the methodology adopted for this research. The chapter clarifies the two basic terms of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Participatory Action Learning (PAL). Then the chapter provides some highlights on the accounts of research phases including research participants and specific research methods used in different phases. The use of Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) methodologies as specific research methods for the initial phase of the research is also highlighted. The processes and procedure for the analysis of the qualitative data are explained and some considerations of validity and ethical issues are discussed in the last part of the chapter.

Chapter Four presents the experiences of sub-project A, where the research team worked with communities through the three phase process of generative curriculum development: how the content, approach and methodologies of parenting education sessions emerged out of the participatory learning process. In Chapter Five, reflections on pedagogical practices in the action learning circle under sub-project B are discussed with reference to Freirean adult education theories. The constraining factors affecting both facilitators and participants to have a genuine dialogic learning process are also highlighted.

Chapter Six provides discussion on the overall findings of the entire action research project. Chapter Seven gives a summary and conclusions of the

research while explaining the limitations of the research. It also highlights the implications of the findings on adult education in developing countries in general and parenting education in particular, and gives recommendations for further research in the fields of participatory social development, adult education and parenting education for early childhood care and development within the context of Myanmar (Burma).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW: EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT; AND EMPOWERING ADULT EDUCATION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The research problem addressed in this dissertation concerns developing a parenting education programme on early childhood care and development (ECCD) within the framework of empowering and emancipatory adult education. To address the research questions outlined in Chapter One, it is necessary to review the literature on both early childhood care and development and empowering adult education. This literature review includes two main parts: the first part is on the concept and practice of early childhood care and development with some highlights on parenting education and the second on the theory and practice of empowering and emancipatory adult education with reference to the generative curriculum development approach.

The first part initially attempts to define the term “early childhood care and development (ECCD)” explaining the comprehensive and holistic nature of child care and development. Then it reiterates the global commitment made in various international forums to pay more attention to, and investment for ECCD. The importance of early years of a child’s life, the care framework and environment for those years, and the role of culture in early childhood care are also discussed. Finally the issues that emerged out of the

experiences of various parenting education programmes around the world are considered.

The second part reviews the literature on empowering and emancipatory adult education with reference to the issues of purpose, content and process of education including the use of active learning methodologies, as well as the role of, and relationship between the learner and the teacher in the dynamics of education. Finally, the review looks into the concept of generative curriculum development and its application as an empowering education approach to blend local and academic knowledge on early childhood care and development.

2.2 EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT

The term “early childhood care and development (ECCD)” refers to the practices, programmes and policies that address the rights and needs of children from birth to eight years of age as defined by the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development (Consultative Group, 1993). Other organisations use other terms and acronyms: early childhood development (ECD) by UNICEF and the World Bank, early childhood care and education (ECCE) by UNESCO, and early childhood education and care by OECD (UNICEF, 2001a). Despite slight variations in the terminology they use, there is general recognition of the importance of a holistic approach to support children’s survival, growth, development and learning – including health, nutrition and hygiene, and cognitive, social, physical and emotional development – from birth to entry into the primary school (UNESCO, 2006).

For many decades, ECCD programmes have focused on two functions: either preparing children for entry into primary schools or relieving families from the burdens of child care during working days. In recent years, attention has been increasingly given to the third direction which is the very basis and the heart of ECCD – the total well-being and holistic development of the child (Consultative Group, 1993; Evans, Myers & Ilfed, 2000; UNESCO, 1998 UNICEF, 1993). ECCD programmes are no longer limited to children's cognitive and psychosocial development only, but more broadly defined to include survival, healthy growth and holistic development of the young child, covering the period from conception to early schooling years. Evans et al. have explained the comprehensive and holistic nature of ECCD:

> Early childhood care for development includes all the supports necessary for every child to realize his/her right to survival, to protection, and to care that will ensure optimal development from birth to age eight (p. 2).

In the new conceptualisation of ECCD, care is the key factor in promoting children's optimal development. Although the term "care" has been used by many organisations with limited sense, it is now being broadly defined as the integrated set of actions or behaviours that promote survival, growth and development of a child (Evans et al., 2000; Myers, 1995; UNICEF, 1993). Care is also a process of creating an enabling environment, which can promote synergy among different forms of support and responses to the health, nutrition, psychosocial, and cognitive aspects of development.

Consequently, there is an increasing call for development of more integrated and comprehensive ECCD programmes.

2.2.1 Global Commitments for Young Children

Recent arguments for investing in early childhood development have not only highlighted the comprehensive and holistic nature of early childhood care and development but also emphasised the right of the child to have optimal care for her/his development to the fullest potential (Consultative Group, 1993; Evans, et al., 2000; Myers, 1990, 1991, 1995; UNICEF, 1989, 1993). These advocates have asserted several influential lines of social and economic arguments, which provide a powerful basis for early childhood programmes to go for more comprehensive and integrated approaches. These arguments include:

- the right of the child to develop fullest potential,
- the transmission of moral and social values at earliest life,
- the potential of programmes to promote social equity,
- the economic benefits gained through increased productivity and cost savings, and
- the effectiveness of programming through integration of services (UNICEF, 1989).

As the advocates of ECCD are continuously and consistently trying to convince the governments and policy-makers, the global community has recently shown increased interest in early childhood development. There were two events which drew the attention of the world to the importance of

early childhood, namely the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand in March 1990 and the World Summit for Children (WSC) in New York in November 1990. The declarations made at those events have clearly articulated the acknowledgement by state parties on the importance of early years of children, and their commitment for investment in caring and nurturing of young children (UNESCO, 1994; UNICEF, 1990).

The World Conference on Education for All acknowledged the importance of early childhood by incorporating the expansion of early childhood care and developmental activities as one of the goals set in the Framework for Action to meet basic learning needs (UNESCO, 1994). This goal was reiterated in the Dakar Framework of Action adopted by the World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal in 2000 emphasising the comprehensive nature of care, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children (UNESCO, 2000).

The World Summit for Children organised by the United Nations in September 1990 also endorsed the expansion of early childhood development activities as its first basic education goal for the 1990s, and urged for concerted national action and international cooperation for the total wellbeing of all children (UNICEF, 1990). It was again reinforced in "A World Fit for Children," the outcome document adopted by the UN General Assembly at the twenty-seventh special session for children held in May 2002 (UNICEF, 2002). In line with the global commitment made in the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000, the outcome document has reaffirmed the expansion and improvement of comprehensive early childhood care and

education especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children as their survival, protection, and development in good health and with proper nutrition is the essential foundation of human development.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in November 1989 established the rights of all persons under 18 for their survival, protection, development and participation (UNICEF, 1990). This global commitment also indicates the need to pay increased attention to early childhood development. The CRC not only affirms the responsibility of the state but also articulates the concept of joint and shared parental responsibility for the development of children to their fullest potential. Accordingly, the CRC has been increasingly used as an advocacy tool at different levels for convincing various stakeholders to invest more in early childhood in many developing countries including Myanmar (Burma).

Myanmar (Burma), as a signatory for both EFA and WSC declarations, has expressed its commitment to expand early childhood development services in the National Programme of Action for the Survival, Protection and Development of Myanmar's Children in the 1990s (Government of Myanmar, 1993). Later the commitment was reinforced in the Education for All National Action Plan (EFA NAP) which was developed in response to the Dakar Framework for Action adopted in the World Education Forum, 2000 (Ministry of Education, 2003). In the Myanmar EFA NAP, the importance of parental education to increase awareness and knowledge of parents and caregivers on the fundamental need of early childhood development and to

support child development at home, at the centre, and in the community was also highlighted.

2.2.2 Importance of Early Years

As explained earlier, there are good reasons for both global and local commitments on the expansion of ECCD programmes. One underlying principle for such commitment is the importance of early years of a child's life. It is widely accepted that children's experiences in the first years of their lives have a long-lasting and profound impact on their overall development, setting life-long patterns for physical, cognitive, social and emotional development (UNESCO, 1998; UNICEF, 1989, 2001a). To lay this foundation, critical inputs for the young child during early years include proper feeding, quality health care and adequate psychosocial stimulation. Children who receive good quality care and education in their early years perform well in school as well as in their later lives. It is now increasingly advocated that the interventions need to focus on the very early years of the child and address the issues of survival, growth and development in an integrated and comprehensive manner.

The synergistic relationship among different forms of care has been highlighted by many scholars (Engle, Menon & Haddad, 1997; Levinger, 1996; Myers, 1990, 1991, 1995; UNICEF, 1993; WHO, 1999). There is an emerging view on the interplay among nutrition, health and psychosocial well-being as a two-way effect between different components of the early childhood intervention as depicted in the Figure 2.1 below.

Figure 2.1: Emerging View of Nutrition, Health and Psycho-social Wellbeing

Source: Myers (1991), p. 25.

Referring to different bodies of research on interactive relationship between health and nutritional status on the one hand, and social, emotional and cognitive development on the other, Levinger (1996) has also argued that there is a delicate interplay between psychosocial and physical aspects of child development. She has asserted that the patterns of children's development are the byproducts of their health, nutrition and psychosocial status. WHO (1999) has reviewed a number of research documents on the critical link between interventions for physical growth and psychological development, and concluded that "combined interventions to improve both physical growth and psychological development have been of greater impact in disadvantaged populations at risk of malnutrition" (p. 2). Various experiences in developing countries have also supported this view of a need for a more comprehensive and integrated agenda of child survival, growth and development (Grantham-McGregor, Fernald & Sethuraman, 1999).

At the same time, research findings in neuroscience have supported the argument of creating synergy among different interventions during early years of a child's life. It is widely accepted that good health, adequate

nutrition, and experiences and opportunities of early stimulation and learning significantly influence a child's brain development (UNICEF, 2001a). There is a growing consensus that during early childhood the brain is developing with a speed that will never be again equalled. Loving care and nurture children receive in their first years or the lack of these critical experiences leave lasting impacts on their later life (Eliot, 1999; UNICEF, 1993, 2001a). Besides, the plasticity of the brain is so vulnerable to the environment that the stressful or traumatic experiences, whether physical or psycho-social, can directly undermine brain development, and in some cases, impair the brain function (Shore, 1996).

New knowledge about brain functions reveals that the interplay between nature (an individual's genetic endowment) and nurture (the nutrition, various forms of care, surroundings, stimulation, and teaching that are provided or withheld) is critical to development of a human-being. Neuroscientists indicated that the early years of life are important for brain development, when most of the brain circuitry is being formed through inputs from her/his environment (Eliot, 1999; UNICEF, 2001a). This period was initially called "critical period" referring to the first three years of life as the circuitry wiring of most of critical brain functions were assumed to be completed during that period. Later, the "critical period" concept was criticised by many educators as a neuromyth and instead the term "sensitive period" or "window of opportunity" has been used to refer to that period (Hall, 2005). Despite the criticism, there is still an agreement among the practitioners on the importance of early years because "both brain architecture and developing abilities are built 'from bottom up,' with simple circuits and skills providing the

scaffolding for more advanced circuits and skills over time" (National Scientific Council, 2007, p. 7).

The two arguments of synergistic relationship among the various facets of early childhood development and the sensitive period for brain development of a young child have become vital rationales to draw the attention of all stakeholders to early childhood care and development (UNICEF, 2001a & b). At the same time, the stakeholders have shown more and more interest in the quality of care since the kind of care a child receives in early life is critical to optimal development of that young child, and it also has a major influence on later child and adult health and life-long development. The experiences and interactions with parents and other caregivers influence the way the child's brain develops with as much impact as such factors like adequate nutrition and good health (UNICEF, 2001a).

2.2.3 Early Childhood Care Framework

As indicated earlier, the term "care" becomes the key ingredient in ECCD programming, and increased attention has been given by researchers across different disciplines to the notion of care, and its framework and quality. Caring means responding to basic needs of development, which goes beyond the provision of food, health care and protection to include the need for affection, interaction and stimulation (Engle & Lotska, 1999; Meyer, 1991). An enabling environment will respond to those needs to support the child's optimal development. However, care is embedded in culture and all

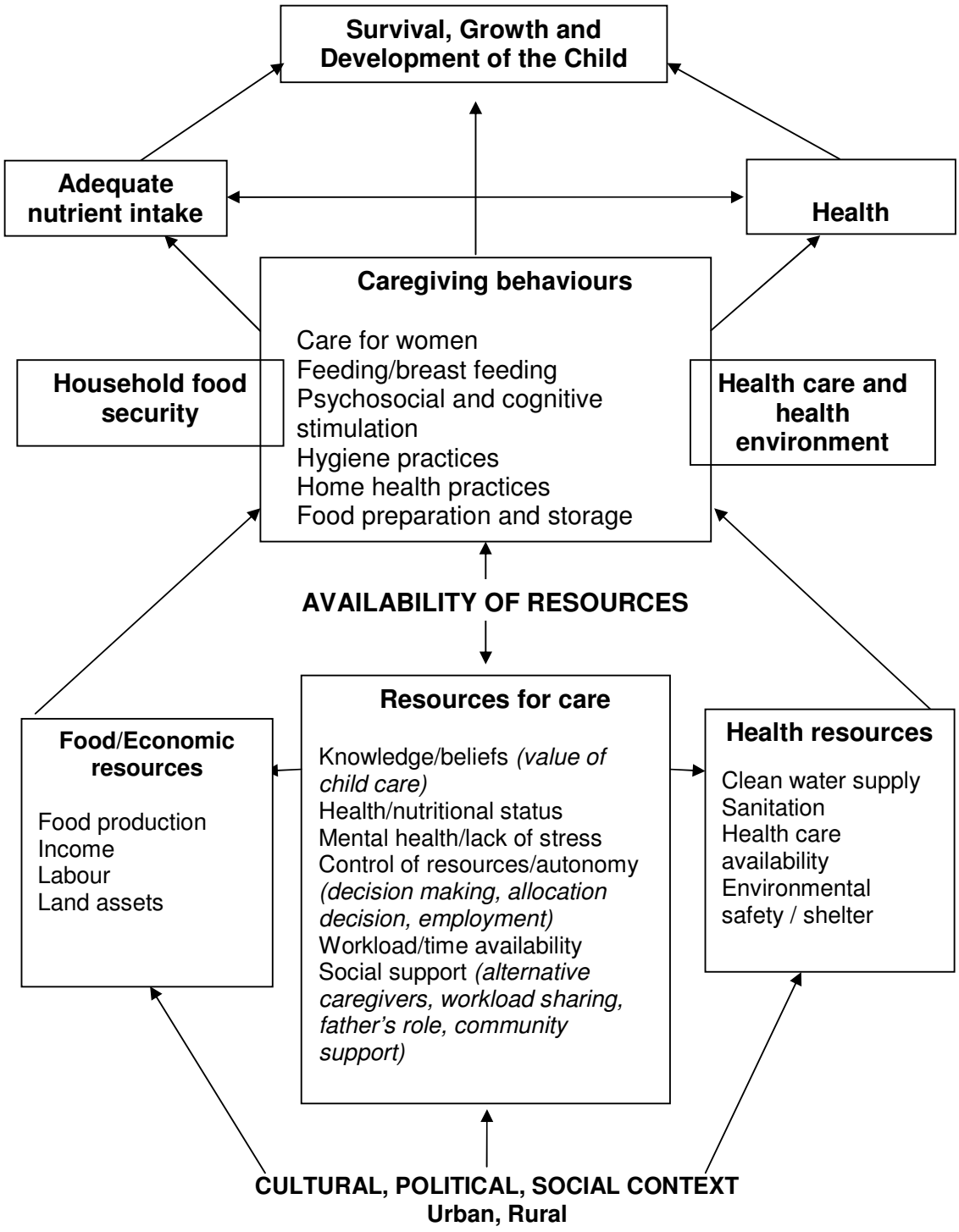
the basic needs for a child will be again defined differently, and will be given different priorities by different cultures.

Myers (1995) has provided a review of different child care frameworks of various disciplines such as epidemiology, nutrition, demography, economics, sociology, psychology and anthropology. Despite differing disciplinary origins of the frameworks and their related focus of attention, all have illustrated a process of redefinition of child care in which child survival, growth and development can be seen with a view of:

- processes rather than states or conditions
- multidimensional and integrated nature rather than isolated emphasis on individual dimension
- two-way interactive relationship rather than one-way
- the child as actor rather than passive recipient and
- culturally relative and sensitive rather than universal definition.

The review of the frameworks has also highlighted the importance of biological and environmental factors in the developmental process, and the dynamic interplay between the child and the environment. Thus the new perspectives on child care led to the development of a new care framework (Engle, Menon, & Haddad, 1997) which focuses on the “whole child” in a comprehensive and integrated manner as seen in the Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: Early Childhood Care Model



Source: Engle, Menon & Haddad, (1997). p. 5

The new care framework is an interactive relationship of three key factors such as the caregiver's behaviour, the behaviour of the child and the characteristic of the child's environment (Engle et al., 1997). The developmental status of a child such as healthiness, vulnerability and physical attractiveness affects the practices of the caregivers while a long successive mutual interaction between the developing child and the caregiver results in quality developmental outcomes. At the same time, the quality and practice of care provided to the child depends on the environment, particularly the availability of resources such as the caregiver's education, knowledge and belief; physical and mental health status of the caregiver; caregiver's autonomy and control over the resources for care; workload and time availability; and social support received by the caregiver (Engle, Lhotska & Armstrong, 1997; Engle et al., 1997).

In this model of care, there are several variables that determine the quality of care for the child. Among those variables, the care-giving behaviours are the key mediating factors which can bring about effective interaction between social, health and nutrition, and caregiver attributes and the child's survival, growth and development. A recent review on the importance of caregiver-child interactions by WHO (2004) has highlighted the importance of sensitive and responsive care-giving as well as the quality of the nurturant caregiver-child relationship. Care-giving is the key determinant for not only the quality of care received by the child but also the quality of caring environment provided for the child. Therefore, it is important to make sure that parents and families can demonstrate supportive caring behaviours for their child's full and healthy development.

2.2.4 Culture and Context in Early Childhood Care for Development

For many decades in the field of early childhood development, "developmental appropriateness" has been a guiding principle for all programmes and practices. The concept was developed building on the theories and research in child development and drawing attention to the distinctive features of children's physical, cognitive, social and emotional functioning associated with their age and developmental stages (Bredekamp, 1987). After the position statement by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) from USA, the Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) has been used as a powerful frame of reference for defining quality experiences by many early childhood policy makers, planners and practitioners (Woodhead, 1996). The concept is influential because of its focus on the universal nature of children's developmental stages and needs. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) from USA has been instrumental in rigorously promoting those practices all over the world.

In recent years, the notion of developmental appropriateness has been challenged because of its insensitivity to cultural diversity especially in the developing world (Nsamenang, 2006; Woodhead, 1996). The practices established under this concept are based on the experiences and research conducted in most of the western world and the proponents of DAP usually tend to demean the value on the practices of other cultures. Despite universalities in developmental needs, how those needs are fulfilled varies from one culture to another. "Actually, the same need is often fulfilled in

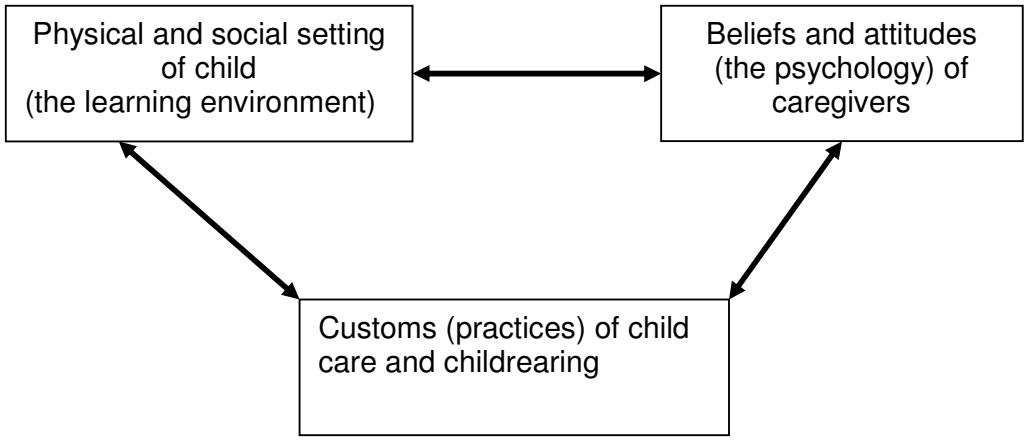
different ways by different cultures" (Nsamenang, 2006, p. 4). Therefore, it is inappropriate to say certain practices are good practices for all children across the world. When defining how to respond to the universal needs of a child, the culture and context in which the child grows must be taken into account.

Those who would like to see developmental appropriateness with a different perspective have proposed a new and different concept of "developmental niche" (Myers, 1995; Nsamenang, 2006; Woodhead, 1996). The framework consists of three integrated components; namely, the physical and social setting of the child, customs and practices of child care, and the psychology of the caregiver. These three components are influencing each other and a change in one component may lead to changes in other components. For example, a change of physical setting (moving to a new place) may lead to a change in child care practice that is not consistent with the current setting. That change in practice in turn may cause a change in the belief and expectations of the caregiver. This kind of dynamic interplay among those components as illustrated in Figure 2.3 is the key argument of the developmental niche model.

In a way, the developmental niche model embraces the biological features as: universal needs of a child, the ecology of the child and the culture where the child is being brought up as the context for child care arrangements (Woodhead, 1996). It is apparent that the concept of developmentally appropriateness should be defined not merely based on the universal nature

of child development but incorporating the other important elements of culture and context in which the child grows.

Figure 2.3: Developmental Niche Framework



Source: Adapted from Myers, (1995), p. 69.

Accordingly, there is also a need to value and assess the traditional and existing child-care practices of families and communities which have evolved over time and are grounded in cultural beliefs and values. If the calibre and quality of a programme is an outcome of blending of local culture and knowledge with external best practices, the programme can provide multiple benefits to children, families and communities (Wood, 1998). Evans and Myers (1994) have highlighted why knowledge of childrearing practices, patterns and beliefs is important. They offer two sources of knowledge for child care: the first source is "scientific literature" (as they stated) of studies related to child development, and the second is "traditional wisdom" of the caregiver's personal and accumulated experiences of child rearing in a given

culture. The question for early childhood development policy makers, planners and practitioners is how these two sources of knowledge could be tapped into and appropriately and effectively blended and utilised. It has become more and more apparent that the culture and context of the childhood have a particularly important role to play in programming as "childrearing practices, patterns and beliefs are based on a culturally-bound understanding of what children need and what they are expected to become" (Evans & Myers, p. 3).

In order to have a programme which is family-focused and community-based, it is vital to understand and value local child care practices and build on the existing strengths – the positive things that people are already doing. Therefore, the programmes need to involve parents from the outset as much as possible so that cultural values and wishes, and traditional practices and experiences of communities could be adequately taken into account while programming. "Reflecting cultural values, the best of these programmes are deeply rooted within families and communities, blending what is known about the best environments for optimal child development with an understanding of traditional child-rearing practices" (UNICEF, 2001a, p.15).

There have been efforts in various development programmes to bring about genuine participation of people and communities in making decisions which will affect their well-being and lives. Similarly, the same call is given to ECCD programmes to be developed with parents and communities through a dialogue that respects different views and allows different voices to be heard, valuing diversity and creating new knowledge and new ideas (Arnold,

1999; Evans, 2000a, 2000b). It seems to be critical to have a balance between parents' own knowledge and experiences that reside in the community, and what the professionals bring from outside to the community.

> There has rarely been enough emphasis on ways of observing and listening to parents, to see if we can understand childrearing practices at play in a family or community before we prescribe what we, with our best intention, believe are appropriate practices. (Angeles-Bautista, 1998, p. 26)

It has become evident that ECCD professionals have to start open dialogue with parents which would result in a generative process as explained by Arnold (1999) as pooling of both popular and academic knowledge bases to create new knowledge and ideas through dialogue with all involved learning along the way.

2.2.5 The Role of Parents in Early Childhood and the Need for Parenting Education

Children are born with immense potential to grow and develop but the realisation of that potential will depend on the parents and other immediate caregivers. The kind of care provided can take those potentials to any direction, either negative or positive (UNESCO, 1998). There is a wide acknowledgement among ECCD professionals and educators that parents and families have significant influence on their children's developmental opportunities, and consequently they play the critical roles as primary

socialising agents, companions, playmates, mentors and the first teachers for their children.

As neuroscience research has indicated, parents also play a significant role in establishing brain circuitry in the early years of the child (Evans & Stansbery, 1998; UNESCO, 1998). Children need to interact with their parents to develop effective learning. The caregiver child interaction is instrumental in establishing attachment and affection, which is the critical foundation for emotional and social development of the child. It does not need to prove that parents have been long doing their best to fulfill the responsibility through creating innovative ways of helping their children to grow and develop. Even if the child receives the care and education from the child care centre, parents still play a significant role for sustaining the accomplishment of early childhood development programmes (Landers, 1992).

Child rearing is not merely a job of mothers but includes the responsibility of fathers as well as other family members. Article 18 of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child indicates that both parents have the primary responsibility for meeting the basic needs to support the optimal development of their children (UNICEF, 1990). Evans (1995) has argued strongly for the need for fathers to be involved in childrearing and the fathering roles in the family. Together with parents, families are also the primary social institutions for supporting the development of their children although rapid socio-economic changes have affected the structure and functions of the families. Especially in the developing world, care is not

provided by parents only but the responsibility is still being shared among family members, even including extended family members.

Despite the fact that parents have long been trying their best to fulfill their parenting responsibilities, there is a growing consensus that parents need support and education to strengthen their capacity to fulfill the needs of their children in a rapidly changing world. Most parents these days are under a lot of pressure by current social and economic challenges, and consequently they are encountering more and more barriers to fulfill their parenting responsibilities. Some existing parenting styles and care practices may not be conducive to providing an optimal learning environment (Landers, 1992). Some child care practices that may work well in a traditional setting may not necessarily work well in a new and different environment (Landers & Myers, 1988). At the same time, new knowledge about health, nutrition and development of the child are also increasingly available these days. Therefore, it is apparent that dialogue and negotiation between ECCD professionals and parents and communities through parenting education programmes is critical to jointly find the most appropriate and effective parenting practices.

Many advocates of young children have highlighted the need for parenting education programmes (Evans & Stansbery, 1998; Landers, 1992; Landers & Myers, 1988). There is also a call for strengthening parents' roles and capabilities by recent findings from brain research which have given new insights for early childhood practitioners that the child's first two years are the most sensitive years of life when the child's brain develops rapidly and

extensively, and is also vulnerable to environmental influence (Evans, 2000b). During these sensitive years, the family is the key, and in the majority of cases provides primary care for the young child in developing countries. In recent decades, early childhood development programmes have given their attention to strengthening parents' roles and responsibilities in providing child care through different forms of parenting education and support systems.

There are many good reasons for educating parents on child caring and rearing. Among many others, Landers and Myers (1988) have highlighted that parenting education programmes could build and reinforce family responsibilities, sustain improvements over the long run, promote integrated approach to child care and development, and extend coverage at a reasonable cost for the programme. When given support, families and communities have the capability of organising good quality early childhood care and education services for the development of the children. Particularly, community-based ECCD programmes must build the local capacity of adults to enable them to organise around the issues they have identified and to generate their own solutions (Wood, 1998).

Evans and Stansbery (1998) have done an extensive review of parenting education programmes around the world, and provided a frame of principles in creating parenting education programmes based on three broad areas of context, content and process of parenting education. In developing quality parenting education programmes, it is critical to look at and address the political, social and economic context in which children and parents are

living. At the same time, it is also important to make sure the programme is culturally relevant and appropriate while addressing parents as active adult learners.

Despite the increased recognition on the importance of parent involvement in early childhood development programming, many of the parenting education programmes around the world seem to be message-driven and content-focused, seeing parents as their audience or target beneficiaries rather than partners (Angeles-Bautista, 1998; Arnold, 1999). Quite often it seems easier to work with a prepackaged curriculum or prescribed modules in educating parents. However, by working in this way one can overlook or undermine some of the good things parents have already been doing. Both Arnold and Angeles-Bautista have made the same recommendation to look for a new way of working with parents through dialogue where both parents' existing knowledge and professional knowledge could be reflected and negotiated.

2.3 EMPOWERING ADULT EDUCATION

In the new way of working with parents, Angeles-Bautista (1998) and Evans and Stansbery (1998) have recommended some basic principles such as meaningful participation of parents and communities in early childhood programming with recognition and respect of parents as active adult learners, and consequently consideration of how adults learn as a principle in developing a quality parenting education programme. Participatory process will be an essential ingredient for development of an empowering parenting education programme as in many other education activities of

social development programmes. Accordingly, parenting education as a form of adult education in social development context requires careful consideration of different theories and models of adult education.

2.3.1 Adult Education in Development Programming Context

In the field of adult education, adult educators have adopted various models and approaches based on differing philosophical stances in relation to the purpose, process, and content of adult education as well as the role of, and relationship between the learner and the teacher in the dynamics of education. Elias and Merriam (1980) have classified five philosophical standpoints: classical/traditional, behaviourist, progressive, humanistic and radical/critical adult education. However, in the field of education for social development, the mixture of the above-mentioned models in designing various training programmes for different adult audiences, especially the mixture of progressive, humanistic and radical adult education approaches can be seen to be most desirable (Dodge, 1994; Frings, Gachuhi, Matiru, & Muller, 1993; Torkington & Landers, 1995; UNICEF, 1995; Werner & Bower, 1982). The majority of those who have designed participatory training programmes have adopted Malcolm Knowles' principles of "andragogy," David Kolb's "experiential learning" theory, Carl Rogers' "learner-centredness" and Paulo Freire's "conscientization" as guiding principles for developing adult education programmes. This integration of different theories has apparently been the dominating approach in designing training programmes for more than two decades now.

However, recently early childhood educators have indicated that there is a need to pay attention to the type of education which will empower parents to make responsible choices and decisions that will affect the situation of their lives. Angeles-Bautista (1998) has hinted to parenting educators not to be too comfortable with prescribed modules and materials, and even called for a radical change of approach with more action-based learning "to translate the rhetoric of partnership and participation into daily form of interaction that reaffirms competence and respect in adult learners" (p. 26). By doing that, parental "empowerment" will not exist just as a mere rhetoric but as the real feeling in the hearts and minds of the parents.

In fact the term "empowerment" becomes a buzz word in development discussions together with the concepts of "people-centred" and "participatory" development programming. There is a variety of different definitions of the concept of empowerment. Some define empowerment as a process of individuals gaining knowledge, competence and confidence for making choices and decisions (Paz, 1990) but for others, empowerment means a process of growth and development in learners individually or together with others to transform the situation of their lives (Carnegie & Weisen, 2000; Eade, 1997). In the context of social development programming, people's empowerment involves positive social change. Therefore, empowering education means an active, cooperative, social process of the pedagogy for self and social change (Shor, 1992). This new approach to adult education fosters a critical-democratic pedagogy, and the curriculum is designed to empower adult learners who can make reflective

decisions and implement their decisions in effective personal, social, political, and economic actions.

2.3.2 Empowering and Emancipatory Adult Education

Since the central aim of empowering education is to help people bring about social change for sustainable human development, it is classified with radical education, which is fundamentally different from the dominance practice or experience of today in Myanmar (Burma). Foley (2001) defines radical adult educators as "those who work for emancipatory social change and whose work engages with the learning dimension of social life" (p. 72). Radical adult education is also defined as critical and emancipatory education: it is critical because it helps people to make judgments about social injustices and attempts to resolve them, and at the same time it is emancipatory because it helps people free themselves from constraints to have control over their lives.

The most influential proponent of critical and emancipatory education in the third world is the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Freire (1995) has criticised the dominant practice of education as "banking education" where educators treat learners as empty vessels to be deposited with predetermined bodies of knowledge. In the banking model of education, people are domesticated and manipulated to become naive citizens under authoritarian order. Freire believes that people as human-beings are subjects of knowledge construction, not objects of knowing. In that sense, the banking model of education dehumanises people, controlling their thinking and action, and

thus limiting and inhibiting their power of creating knowledge. For Freire, true education must be libratory with humanisation especially for those who are in the "culture of silence" so that they can transform themselves and take part in the transformation of their society (Freire, 1970, 1995, 1997).

Freire (1995) has also asserted that those who are truly committed to libratory education must reject the banking education model, and replace it with what he called "problem-posing" education. "The problem-posing approach views human beings, knowledge, and society as unfinished products in history, where various forces are still contending" (Shor, 1992, p. 35). "In sum: banking theory and practice, as immobilizing and fixating forces, fail to acknowledge men and women as historical beings; problem-posing theory and practice take people's historicity as their starting point" (Freire, 1995, p. 65). Therefore, in problem-posing education, learners will neither accept a "well behaved" present nor the predetermined future. They will look at all issues with critical eyes and bring about true reflection and action upon reality, thereby developing critical consciousness and leading creative transformation of self and others.

Mezirow (1991), in his theory of transformative adult learning, has also indicated his agreement with Paulo Freire for the need to liberate learners from the forces that constrain their opinions and rationale actions to control over their lives. These forces, which include misconceptions, ideologies and psychological distortions, have been taken for granted or seen as beyond human control after experiencing them over a long period in one's life. Emancipatory adult education can result in transforming learners'

perspectives on those forces and see the reality more clearly and inclusively through critical reflection (Imel, 1995; Mezirow, 1991).

Emancipatory adult educators have put emphasis on learners as subject of their own learning through the emancipatory praxis of action, reflection and reaction (Freire, 1995, 1997; Mezirow, 1991, 1997; Vella; 1994). Adult education's purpose is to assist adult learners to become more critically reflective, and participate more fully and freely in rationale discourse and action. "The central responsibility of the adult educator who wishes to encourage transformative learning is to foster learners' reflection upon their own beliefs or meaning schemes through a critical examination of the history, context, and consequences of their assumptions and premises" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 225).

Mezirow (1997) has explained the need to define learning needs so as to recognise both short-term and long-term goals of the learners. Short-term objectives could be subject matter mastery or attainment of specific competency while the long-term goal is to become a socially responsible autonomous thinker. The short-termed goals will be achieved through what Imel (1995) has termed as subject oriented adult learning and consumer oriented adult learning while the long-term goal of becoming autonomous thinkers will be achieved through emancipatory adult learning. In the transformative and emancipatory learning, participatory dialogue with critical reflection on assumptions is essential in every phase of identifying learning needs, setting learning objectives, designing materials and methods and evaluating learners' progress.

2.3.3 Praxis: Repeated Cycle of Action and Reflection

This critical-democratic pedagogic process of examining assumptions concerning social norms, cultural codes, and ideologies is what Freire (1995) terms as "conscientization" through which adult learners can reach critical consciousness, which can simultaneously engage learners in action for social change. Some use conscientization and awareness-raising interchangeably (Archer & Cottingham, 1996a). However, conscientization does not mean simple awareness-raising. Freire (1996) has clearly made distinction between mere consciousness and conscientization: consciousness is a simple presentation of objects to one's conscience whereas conscientization leads to critical understanding of the relationship between objects and their reasons for being. Conscientization develops people to move from intransitive level of consciousness, which denies the power of human-beings to change their lives or society, to critical consciousness, which allows them to go through praxis and action for social transformation (Shor, 1992).

The Freirean praxis-based pedagogy put emphasis on the critical reflection upon the reality of the world in order to transform it. Similarly many adult educators have also proposed reflection as an important component of adult learning. In those models such as Mezirow's transformative learning, Lewinian and Kolb's experiential learning and Schon's reflective practitioners, reflection upon experiences, assumptions and premises has been considered as a crucial element in adult learning (Atherton, 2004; Mezirow, 1997; Smith, 2001) All have agreed that it is the responsibility of

adult educators to cultivate the capacity of their learners to reflect in action (while doing something) as well as reflect on action (after having done something). In fact both Freire and Mezirow have already highlighted the need for adult learners to become critically reflective.

In praxis-based learning, critical reflection will lead to action. Both reflection and action are inseparable elements for transformative learning. Without action it will become only verbalism, and similarly without reflection, there will be no commitment to transformation. Therefore, it is an ongoing process of action with reflection (Vella, 1994). However, that does not necessarily mean to have concrete actions taken place right after reflective observation. Freire (1995) gives clarification on this process of praxis and action more clearly:

> Let me emphasize that my defense of the praxis implies no dichotomy by which this praxis could be divided into a prior stage of reflection and a subsequent stage of action. Action and reflection occur simultaneously. A critical analysis of reality may, however, reveal that a particular form of action is impossible or inappropriate at the present time. Those who through reflection perceive the infeasibility or inappropriateness of one or another form of action (which should accordingly be postponed or substituted) cannot thereby be accused of inaction. Critical reflection is also action (p.109).

2.3.4 Power Relationship in Empowering and Emancipatory Education

Freirean emancipatory education also looks at power relationship between the educator and educatees. As empowering and emancipatory education is

based on the philosophy of men and women as the knowing subjects of the world, all involved are considered as subjects who jointly construct or generate knowledge through critical reflection. Therefore, the distinction between teacher and learner in relation to "authority" is not necessary. "The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow" (Freire, 1995, p. 61). In this pedagogic process, teachers can no longer assert their arguments based on authority, but only on rationality.

Actually the recognition on adults as experienced learners, and consequently the respect for their experience, has long been promoted by both progressive and humanistic adult educators (Dewy, 1963; Knowles, 1978; Rogers, 1983). In their models, mutual interaction between the teacher and the learner is promoted and the role of the teacher becomes a guide or a facilitator who helps the learner's learning process. In that sense, their models seem similar to the emancipatory educators'. However, in the typical models of both progressive and humanistic education, the relationship between the teacher and the leaner seems still to be hierarchical. Despite being categorised as "humanist," Rogers is different from other humanists and connected with radical educators as he wanted to democratise teacher/learner power relations (Foley, 2001; Rogers, 1983). Radical educators consider that emancipatory education must entail a genuine sharing of power among teachers and learners.

Freirean pedagogy also put dialogue at the centre of the learning process. In empowering and emancipatory education, one-way transmission of knowledge is considered as a form of imposing authority; therefore, fostering mutual dialogue between the educator and educatee is crucial to generate authentic knowledge. However, for Freire (1995), dialogue does not mean a simple discussion: "this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's 'depositing' ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be 'consumed' by discussants" (p. 70). Consequently, dialogue requires a horizontal relationship with mutual trust between dialoguers so that they can meaningfully engage in a process of conscientization (Darder, 1991; Freire, 1995).

However, that does not mean that they are equal to each other as each has their own distinctive role. Freire (1996) writes:

> The fact that both are subjects of the practice does not nullify the specific role of each one. The former are subjects of the act of teaching; the latter are subjects of the act of learning. The former learn as they teach; the latter teach as they learn. They are all subjects of the knowing process, which involves teaching and learning (p. 127).

2.3.5 Emancipatory Education and Active Learning Methodologies

Despite strong emphasis on problem-posing, praxis and dialogue as means of learning, Freire did not propose any concrete methodologies for emancipatory and empowering education apart from the use of what he

called "codifications" to initiate discussion that will lead the learners toward a more critical consciousness (Freire, 1970, 1995, 1997). However, it does not seem to be certain how that process will make the emancipatory intent possible as Darder (1991) has pointed out that there may be theoretically emancipatory content but in practice it could be pedagogically oppressive.

In fact, empowering and emancipatory educators have used the attributes or values such as dialogic, participatory, affective or emotional, democratic, problem-posing, problem solving and action-oriented to indicate the kind of learning experiences that adult learners have to encounter for their own emancipation and empowerment (Mezirow, 1991; Shor, 1992). However, simple application of those terms will neither lead to real understanding of the issues nor bring about subsequent actions to address those issues. Without critically looking at the political premises of the issues, mere active or participatory methods will provide only technical level solutions through "instrumental learning," but not the real feasible solutions through "communicative learning" as in the terms Mezirow used. In the process of learning, Mezirow (1991) also emphasised the importance of both posing and solving problems through experiential, participative and projective methods.

> The essence of adult education is to help learners construe experience in a way that allows them to understand more clearly the reasons for their problems and the action options open to them so that they can improve the quality of their decision making (p. 203).

In development programming, many educators have adopted some of the contributions of Freire as an underlying philosophy in designing the so-called "participatory" and "empowering" education programmes for various types of adult learners, and proposed a certain set of participatory and/or active learning methods (Dodge, 1994; Frings, Gachuhi, Matiru, & Muller, 1993; Pretty, Gujit, Thompson, & Scoones, 1995; UNICEF, 1995; Werner & Bower, 1982). Those participatory and active learning methodologies encourage learners to be actively involved in open-ended activities, fostering independent and critical thinking, and taking responsibility for their own learning. However, since active learning can also take place within the framework of progressive or humanistic approach to education, due to its lack of political analysis, learning may only occur within the over-riding dominant ideological framework which limits the kind of thinking that emancipatory educators are expecting (Kane, 2004).

It is critical for emancipatory and empowering adult educators to be aware of the political nature of education as no educational act is value-neutral. It is also crucial for them to have problem-posing elements in their education activities as a problem-posing approach can help learners take part in the contention over the issues of self and society, and by doing that, they will free themselves from the forces that are inhibiting their human potential to learn and grow. Therefore, it is necessary for both educators and educatees to go beyond mere active participation to critical dialogue or discussion so that both will be able to understand deeply the premises of problems and issues, and find solutions to appropriately and effectively address those issues.

Within this context of critical emancipatory and empowering adult education paradigm, the research has been designed to explore how adult educators and adult learners can engage in a democratic pedagogic process of praxis to blend academic knowledge with popular knowledge and wisdom through genuine and meaningful participation of all concerned. In order to achieve this goal, the concept of "Generative Curriculum" is used as a model with which the process for collaborative action learning and action research has taken place.

2.3.6 Generative Curriculum Development

The term "Generative Curriculum" was originally used by the Partnership Programme of the First Nation Communities and University of Victoria, Canada, which employs an empowerment approach that assumes that communities and families have the most valid and useful knowledge about the rearing of children across generations, in networks and in ethnic and cultural traditions (Ball, 2004; Ball & Pence, 1999; Pence & Ball, 1999). The generative curriculum model not only embodies the culture of the families served but also encourages among learners intense engagement about questions, necessitating and celebrating dialogue among various perspectives.

In fact Freire (1970, 1995, 1997) originally used the term “generative words” in his dialogic and empowering pedagogy for adult literacy programmes. In this approach the words to be learned do not come from the educator’s own inspiration but emerge out of the field vocabulary research. From there he

further developed the term “generative themes” to indicate the meaningful thematics emerged out of the genuine participatory investigation, and proposed those thematics to be used as the basis for the development of the curriculum or the programme content of an education action (Freire, 1995).

The term "Generative Curriculum Development" used in this study is the reflection of such an approach inspired by Freire in developing thematic concerns as learning content. However, Freire did not elaborate on the specific techniques to be used in the process of investigation of generative themes. The research team decided to use Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) methodologies as specific tools to work with in investigating themes because the methodologies have demonstrated in various occasions to be practical and effective tools to get communities to talk about their problems and generate ideas to solve those problems (Angeles-Bautista, 2001; Arnold, et al., 2000; Evans, 1997; Sternin, 1999).

In that sense, the approach is similar to REFLECT (Regenerated Freirean Literacy Through Empowering Community Techniques) that has been developed and used by a development organisation called ActionAid in some developing countries such as Uganda, Bangladesh and El Salvador (Archer & Cottingham, 1996a). REFLECT is a combination of Freirean theory and the techniques of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), which challenges literacy primers as the pre-packaged solutions, and adopts the premise that the development solutions must start within, and with what community already knows (Archer & Cottingham, 1996b).

In the generative curriculum development model, the term curriculum is used as a broad framework of learning going beyond the limited interpretation as the programme content. As defined by Smith (2000), the model is a process-based and praxis-oriented approach allowing both the educator and educatees to learn and grow together through the dynamic interaction of action and reflection while confronting the real problems of their experiences and relationships.

The idea of generative process has been attempted in the generative curriculum development model used by the Partnership Programme of the First Nation Communities and University of Victoria, Canada, which employs an empowerment approach that assumes that communities and families have the most valid and useful knowledge about the rearing of children across generations, in networks and in ethnic and cultural traditions (Ball & Pence, 1999; Pence & Ball, 1999). The generative curriculum model not only embodies the culture of the families served but also encourages among learners intense engagement about questions, necessitating and celebrating dialogue among various perspectives.

In the context of developing countries, a similar approach of involving parents and communities in developing parenting and ECCD education programmes has been used in some countries. Early Childhood and Family Development (ECFD) project in Laos has developed community-based ECCD curriculum, which not only draws on existing traditional knowledge of ethnic communities but also encourages acceptance of appropriate new knowledge (Masouvanch & Phanjaruniti, 1996). In the Mount Pinatubo

project in the Philippines, parents learn alongside their children through a curriculum that is built on their own indigenous culture but they are also introduced to appropriate health and nutrition methods and interactive games or home- and community-based activities that support children's development (Angeles-Bautista, 2001).

The significant effort in those programmes is the attempt to translate the rhetoric of partnership and participation into daily forms of interaction that reaffirm competence and respect in adult learners. In those programmes, adult learners are actively engaged in empowerment process with the relevant educational content and process of learning that offers an opportunity for reflection on their practices. In other words, the adult learners are involved in experiential learning "process whereby knowledge is created through transformation of the experience of the learner, who is at the centre of learning process" (Torkington, 1996, p. 4).

2.4 CONCLUSION

In recent years, the international community has been giving increased attention to the integrated and comprehensive programming of ECCD for the survival, healthy growth and holistic development of the young child, covering the period from conception to early schooling years. A wealth of research literature in various academic fields such as cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and health and nutrition together with the experiences of ECCD programmes and projects has contributed to the understanding of how children develop in their early years, and also affirmed the importance

of providing quality early childhood care and the need for integrated and comprehensive support to be provided to them for their optimal development.

At the same time, it is also widely acknowledged that the most significant influence on the care and development of the child is the family. Parents have the critical role as the primary socialising agents as well as the first teachers of their children. Consequently, there is also a need to understand and value the traditional and existing culturally grounded child care practices of families and communities. "Reflecting cultural values, the best of these programmes are deeply rooted within families and communities, blending what is known about the best environments for optimal child development with an understanding of traditional child-rearing practices" (UNICEF, 2001a, p. 15).

It is critical to have a balance between parents' own knowledge and experiences that reside in the community, and what the professionals bring from outside to the community. In order to have that balance, a generative process must be created through partnership with parents and communities to pool both popular and academic knowledge bases together to create new knowledge and ideas by means of open dialogue with all involved learning along the way. In that effort, parents need to be engaged as active adult learners in an empowering education process respecting and valuing their knowledge and practices, and building upon them (Angeles-Bautista, 1998; Arnold, 1999).

This new approach to adult education needs to foster a critical-democratic pedagogy that Freire (1970, 1995, 1997) and others have been advocating and practicing as a form of libratory education for self and social change. In this approach, the traditional "banking education" model is abandoned and the problem-posing approach is adopted to create an avenue for learners to critically examine the premises of social issues, have deep understanding of the problems, and find and take necessary actions to address those issues.

Although active and participatory methods are used to generate discussions and learning, both educator and educatees need to go beyond technical and "instrumental" learning to see the underlying constraints through what Freire called "conscientization." Conscientization develops people to move from intransitive level of consciousness, which denies the power of human-beings to change their lives or society, to critical consciousness which allows them to go through praxis and action for social transformation (Shore, 1992).

In this emancipatory and empowering education, both educator and educatees engage in praxis of action, critical reflection and reaction to construct generative knowledge of their own and "they become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow" (Freire, 1995, p. 61).

Within this context of critical adult education paradigm, the action research on parenting education on ECCD is designed to explore how adult educators and adult learners can engage in this democratic pedagogic process of praxis to blend academic knowledge with popular knowledge and wisdom through genuine and meaningful participation of all concerned. The concept

of generative curriculum development, which was first introduced by the Partnership Programme of the First Nation Communities and University of Victoria, Canada, was adopted to illustrate the process of generating knowledge jointly by both the educator and educatees.

In the next chapter, the design and processes of the research will be discussed. The methodology of participatory action research and action learning is initially explained, and subsequently, details of the research process are presented with some highlights on the accounts of research phases including research participants and specific research methods used in different phases. Some considerations of validity and ethical issues are discussed in the last part of the chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCESS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

It is vital for a critical researcher to find appropriate research methodology and methods which facilitate a dialogic learning process involving people as co-researchers and learners. This chapter explains the rationale for the use of a critical social research methodology, which employs Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Participatory Action Learning (PAL) as both research and learning approaches for empowering and emancipation of people. The chapter also provides some accounts of research phases and research participants, and then describes specific data collection methods and analytical procedures. Some considerations of validity, reliability and ethical issues are discussed in the last part of the chapter.

3.2 DETERMINING METHODOLOGY

Every year the development agencies in Myanmar (Burma) conduct a significant number of studies to contribute to the understanding of the situation of people, to explore more efficient and effective processes of their interventions, and to gauge effectiveness and impact of the development programmes. Most of these studies are based on the positivist paradigm with observation and/or experimental manipulation of people as the so-called beneficiaries. Despite rigorous promotion for popular participation in development programmes, few studies have been done with critical social

perspectives. Allen (1985) has explained the difference between three dominant contemporary models of science: analytical-empiricist, phenomenological-interpretive and critical social theory. Referring to nursing research, he has asserted that more discussion can be found on the former two while the third model is rarely mentioned. This has also been the case for most of the studies in Myanmar (Burma) in any field of work. Since the aim of development work is to improve people's lives and it takes place in the context of wider process of social change (Eade, 1997), it is important to have a research agenda with critical social science perspectives.

Comstock (1982) has clarified the difference between critical social science and positivist social science, and highlighted the need for a critical method of research. He has asserted:

> A consistent critical method which treats society as a human construction and people as the active subjects of that construction would be based on a *dialogue* with its subjects rather than the observation or experimental manipulation of people. A critical social science must directly contribute to the revitalization of moral discourse and revolutionary action by engaging its subjects in a process of active self-understanding and collective self-formation (pp. 371-372).

The significant aspect of critical research is its focus on social action and its aim at empowerment and emancipation (Blyler, 1998).

However, not all critical social research activities are empowering in the same way. Smith and Speedy (1993) have provided a tripartite framework of

empowerment to classify critical research methods. There are three orientations to empowerment:

- Empowerment as self growth
- Empowerment as personal/political consciousness raising and
- Empowerment as collective action/struggle.

With the tripartite framework, critical social research could be classified into two strands: an active or participatory strand and a passive or non-participatory strand. The former is a critical research design with emancipatory intent for social and political awareness raising and consequent collective political action while the latter being critical to raise political awareness, but without much effort for emancipation. Therefore, critical social research designs can be grouped in the following two main categories as seen in Table 3.1 below (Smith & Speedy, 1993).

Table 3.1: Empowerment Potentials and Critical Research Methodologies

Empowerment as political consciousness-raising	Empowerment as collective action/struggle
▪ Critical ethnography ▪ Critical political analysis ▪ Critical text analysis	▪ Participatory action research ▪ Critical feminist praxis ▪ Educative research

Participatory action research, together with its other branches such as critical feminist research and educative research, goes beyond empowerment as self-growth and personal/political consciousness-raising to collective action towards ameliorative changes for social justice and human emancipation. It is a collaborative reciprocal process with an intentionally interventionist objective and an orientation to praxis (Smith & Speedy, 1993).

As explained earlier, the proposed research was conducted in the context of the parenting education programme of ECCD Network project, where community volunteers were the facilitators to organise parenting education activities for parents, particularly mothers. It was designed to explore an approach for professionals to work with people in the community in jointly generating knowledge on child care practices by merging community and external knowledge through a participatory action learning process. Therefore, the focus of the research was on:

> *What contribution can a participatory action learning approach make to the process of change in pedagogic practices of professionals in emancipating and empowering communities for greater and genuine participation?*

Consequently, the research also attempted to answer the following questions:

1. *How can the professionals and community facilitators learn to enhance their pedagogic practices through the PAL process?*

2. *In which way can outside professionals work with parents and communities to advance their child care practices?*

3. *How can people be empowered to genuinely and meaningfully participate in the development of a parenting education programme?*

Since the focus of the research was on the process of people learning together rather than the product of their learning, Participatory Action Research (PAR) was considered as the most appropriate research approach for the study.

3.3 ACTION RESEARCH

Action research is defined as a form of collective and collaborative self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants to improve their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices (Kemmis, 1997; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; McTaggart, 1991; Smith, 1990). Action research is also a participatory process to establish self-critical communities of people committed to:

> …enlightening themselves about the relationship between circumstance, action and consequence in their own situation, and emancipating themselves from the institutional and personal constraints which limit their power to live their own legitimate educational and social values (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 23).

Based on the theory of cognitive interest, Smith and Speedy (1993) have described three orientations to action research, namely:

- technical action research, which is managed by an outside researcher and seek to solve problems by answering 'how to' questions;
- practical action research, which involves participants to improve their practices but has unproblematically contained discourse within the cultural and linguistic boundaries of contemporary cultural practices; and
- emancipatory action research, which is carried out through an emancipatory praxis methodology.

Out of the three orientations, the present research emphasises the emancipatory aspect of the practices.

Fals-Borda (1991) describes participatory action research as an experiential methodology, a combination of research, adult education and sociopolitical action, that "implies the acquisition of serious and reliable knowledge upon which to construct power, or countervailing power, for the poor, oppressed and exploited groups and social classes – the grassroots – and their authentic organizations and movements" (p. 3). Rahman (1991) also asserts that an immediate objective of PAR is to return to those people the legitimacy of the knowledge they are capable of producing and the right to use the knowledge. Therefore, it is essential for the people to develop their

own consciousness-raising and knowledge generation. "People cannot be liberated by a consciousness and knowledge other than their own" (p. 14).

In practice, participatory action research involves a group participation process of 'praxis': a spiral cycle of action and observation, critical reflection, and reaction to improve the social situation they find themselves. Therefore, in doing participatory action research, the participants need to:

- observe and produce a description of the particular practices they are investigating
- individually and critically reflect on the identity of the sources and socializing forms
- collectively share critical self-reflections and then, through dialogue, confront these with critical questions
- collectively plan and implement strategic actions which will help bring about changes (Smith & Speedy, 1993, p. 263).

As participatory action research involves collaborative and cooperative effort of a group and calls for symmetrical and reciprocal relations within the group, Smith (1990) has suggested that it is critical to have functional group norms developed that will facilitate democratic participation of group members, arguing that

> [p]articipatory action research necessitates the explicit establishment of group norms which foster rationale discourse, the critical interrogation of beliefs and practices, and which require the free

> commitment of participants to consensus decisions and to any prudent political action that follows (p. 7).

Together with the establishment of functional group norms, participants need to be engaged in the process of norm development, implementation and monitoring, which, in turn, promote a sense of "ownership" through collective understanding of what it means, and why, to conduct a participatory action research.

The important consideration to be made here is the distinction between the researcher and the researched, which is traditionally very clearly made in the empirical research. Since participatory action research is a group activity involving those engaged in the action, both the researcher and the researched are all involved acting as participants who are collectively and collaboratively working for the improvement of their work practices and lives (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Fals-Borda (1991) has highlighted the transformation of the subject/object relationship into subject/subject relationship so that academic knowledge combined with popular knowledge and wisdom may result in total scientific knowledge of a revolutionary nature. Lather (1986) has also mentioned that "the methodological task is to proceed in a reciprocal, dialogic manner, empowering subjects by turning them into co-researchers" (p. 73).

3.4 ACTION LEARNING

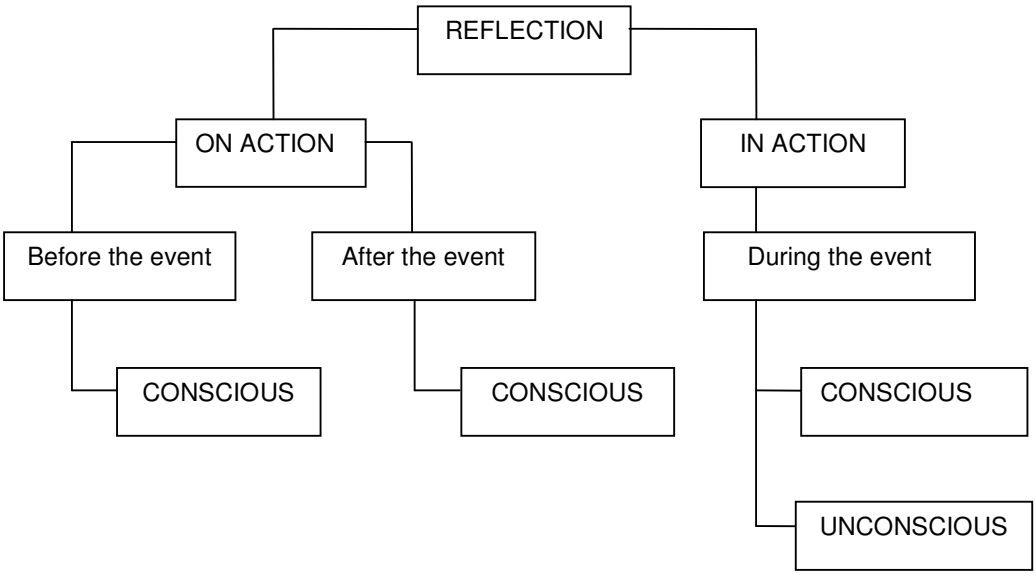
Action learning is one of the action inquiry strategies, along with action research, participatory action research and action science (Ellis & Kiely,

2000). In all approaches, the main thrust is the relationship between improved knowledge through action and improved action through reflection. However, they differ from each other in terms of the ideological and procedural dimensions: what is being undertaken and how it is undertaken. At the same time, it is believed that action inquiry strategies are powerful approaches to solve real issues and enable meaningful learning for change.

As one of action inquiry strategies, Action Learning is defined as a developmental approach used by a group of people to analyse an actual work problem and develop action plans. In Reg Ravens' original conceptualisation, Action Learning is L = P + Q, where learning (L) occur through Programmed knowledge (P) and insightful Questioning (Q) (Raelin, 1997). The Action Learning approach is based on an understanding that people learn best from engaging with real life problems and then reflecting on what happens as a result of their actions and why the action was or was not appropriate.

Like other action inquiry strategies, action learning emphasises reflective learning by all participants. The heart of action learning is the two intertwining concepts of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action as developed by Donald Schon (1987). Based on various conceptualisations of action learning proponents, Roberts (1997) has clearly categorised different types of reflections as shown in Figure 3.1. In any action learning practices, these types of reflections are engaged, and it is primarily important to have conscious efforts so that critical reflection could be made to the practitioner's self as well as the governing world.

Figure 3.1: Reflection Types



Source: Roberts, 1997, Chap. 4.

In the action learning framework, differing methods are conceptualised. Argyris (1997a, 1997b) has proposed two different types of learning: single-loop learning, which attempts to change actions within the existing governing values, and the double-loop learning changing the governing values first and then the actions. Later Foldy and Creed (1999) have extended the concepts as three different learning types of single-loop, double-loop, and triple-loop learning. Particularly in addressing the governing values, they distinguished two levels, that is, double-loop learning (level one) addresses the actors' driving values, and the triple-loop learning (level two) goes beyond that, addressing the values of societal environment and traditional systems.

While the research is designed as Participatory Action Research, Participatory Action Learning (PAL) is used as an approach to generate

experiential and collaborative learning among partners. Although there are some people who try to make a distinction between Action Research and Action Learning, the distinction is now becoming more and more blurred (Dick, 1997). Both PAR and PAL are collaborative and experiential learning through the repeated cycle of praxis; that is, action, reflection and reaction.

To return to action research and action learning:

> [In] each, action informs reflection and is informed by it. The reflection produces the learning (in action learning) or research (in action research). Think of both learning and research as understanding. In both, the action is changed as a result of learning/research and leads to more learning/research (Dick, 1997, p. 4).

Therefore, in this research on generative curriculum development, there is no attempt to make any distinction between PAR and PAL; however, Participatory Action Learning is used as a learning approach within the context of Participatory Action Research.

Within the context of androgogic approach to learning, Wade and Hammick (1999) have suggested action learning as a strategy to promote experiential learning through a continuous process of learning from experience through reflection and action. Because the action learning process involves a group or 'set' of colleagues working together as critical co-investigators promoting collaborative enquiry and subsequent actions through dialogue, action learning circles have been identified as the most suitable form of learning

groups and are distinguishable from other forms of group learning activities such as seminars or workshops. In this research, this concept of action learning circles has been adopted for practical operation of research.

3.5 RESEARCH PROCESSES

3.5.1 Research Sites

As indicated before, the research was conducted in the context of the ECCD Network project, where the principal researcher had been involved in planning, implementation, monitoring and management of project activities. Under the project, UNICEF had been supporting the improvement of child care in 50 communities of the selected five municipalities of Yangon (Rangoon) metropolitan area. Out of those 50 communities, only two communities were selected to participate in this action research study. It was mainly because the NGO staff who had been working with the families in those communities had shown enthusiasm to explore alternative models of parenting education for those mothers, who had not yet attended any parenting education programme under the project. Therefore, the selection of the project sites was not random but purposive and convenient.

After the discussion with the NGO staff, the research team visited those communities and undertook a consultation process with the parents, especially mothers. The team explained to the communities the purpose and rationale for the research and how the research activities would be carried out. The team also explained the need for the communities, especially mothers, to collaborate with the team, and obtained their agreement to

participate in the research for all three phases. Since the responses from the mothers were positive, the sites were confirmed. Then, the research team went through informal consultation with other stakeholders such as UNICEF, the NGO and the Technical Team of MoE for their endorsement to conduct the research in those communities.

After confirmation for participation from those who would be involved as co-researchers and participants and endorsement from those who had a stake in the entire project, the application for ethics clearance was submitted to the USQ Human Research Ethics Committee in February 2003. The formal endorsement from UNICEF was also submitted together with the application. Although any written endorsement was requested from neither the MoE nor the NGO because research was a politically sensitive activity and neither of the two agencies was willing to formally approve the activity, there was adequate informal consultation with technical level people of both agencies. As further clarifications on the roles and relationships among the research team members was requested by the committee, the application with additional information was resubmitted to the committee in August 2003. The USQ Ethics Committee approved the research project in September 2003.

3.5.2 Research Participants

Selection of the research sites simultaneously determined the research participants. The participants of the research could be classified as follows:

- the principal researcher (Project Officer from UNICEF)

- co-researchers/team members (Professionals from the Ministry of Education and the Facilitators from the NGO)
- community volunteers
- mothers from the Mothers' Circles and
- others such as selected community leaders and selected children.

The principal researcher performed as the facilitator of the action learning team and played the catalytic role to bring about change in pedagogic practices of the professionals who were working with communities. The team members were the professional staff from the NGO and the Ministry of Education (MoE), who were involved as adult educators in various training programmes of the project. They were co-researchers who, together with the principal researcher, conducted research field works such as interviews and focus group discussions. The community volunteers were those from participating communities who mobilised people and organised the logistics of research activities. The volunteers were the link between outside professionals and parents in the communities.

In practical operation of the research, five professionals from the MoE and four facilitators from the NGO had worked with the principal researcher in the whole research process. Four community volunteers, and four community-based mothers' groups, each of which comprised approximately 10 mothers, were initially involved as participants in the generative curriculum development process. While participating in the process as a facilitator-learner, the principal researcher did observation of that process; that is, observation of the interaction as a dialogic engagement between the

professionals of the executing NGO and the MoE as co-researcher facilitators, and the community volunteers and mothers as participants in search of generative knowledge.

3.5.3 Research Phases

The research was conducted in three phases. In phase one, the research team explored current child care practices in the community through Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) activities. Approximately eight to ten PLA sessions took place in each of the four mothers' groups, using various data collection tools to learn about the existing situation of child care in the respective community. The purpose of the phase one activities was to understand the people by illuminating their perceptions, beliefs and practices and situation of child care practices. In phase 2, the principal researcher and research team discussed the outcomes of phase 1 to reflect on the current child care knowledge and practices of the communities and to plan for further learning. The ideas generated in those PLA sessions became the starting point for the participants to go through participatory action learning cycles.

In phase 3 of the research, the facilitators and mothers worked together to merge the existing knowledge and external academic knowledge for the creation of new knowledge. This was done through action learning circles, which had taken place at two levels. The community volunteers together with the mothers organised learning circles to discuss issues of their interest as a form of parenting education sessions, which were facilitated by the external

facilitators (professionals from the NGO and MoE – Sub-project A). At the same time the research team, consisting of the principal researcher and the professionals, also organised a separate action learning circle to plan, act, observe and reflect upon the pedagogic practices of the parenting education sessions (Sub-project B).

Throughout the research process, the principal researcher had also played the roles of an adult education resource person and the facilitator at the pedagogic action learning circle, and simultaneously participated as a participant observer in the activities of parenting action learning circles in the communities. While participating in those learning circles, the principal researcher also conducted Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with participants and had interviews with selected participants. The focus of the research in this component (Sub-project C) was the interaction between the professionals, community volunteers and mothers. This relationship among the principal researcher and co-researchers and participants of different sub-projects is outlined in Figure 1.2.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

In this research, two different sets of data were collected. The first set was on the context and situation as well as people's perceptions, beliefs and practices of child care in the communities, and the second set was on how the professionals work with the communities. In phase one of the research, the data on child care practices were collected with specific research tools called Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) methodologies. Throughout

the entire research process, each research team member kept reflective journals, which was one of the two main sources of the data. The other source of data was the principal researchers' field records on observations, interviews and discussions. The principal researcher conducted a series of observations on the interaction between the professionals and the mothers. Focus Group Discussions and interviews were made with selected mothers, volunteers and professionals.

3.6.1 Participatory Learning and Action

The term "Participatory Learning and Action (PLA)" is used to refer to a qualitative research methodology that derives from the rapid assessment methods such as Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Rapid Assessment Procedures (RAP) (Pretty, Gujit, Thompson, & Scoones, 1995) In RRA or RAP, a multi-disciplinary research team completes research on a community to find out the situation within a short period. Although both RRA and RAP do not allow the community's control over the research process, PLA involves communities from the outset through the entire process of research, and helps them analyse their own situation and make decisions regarding actions to solve their problems. The difference between RRA/RAP and PLA is that RRA/RAP does research on the people and PLA with the people (Kane, 1996). Although the emphasis and philosophy of each approach differs, the techniques and tools used for data collection and analysis are similar. PLA methodologies include a wide range of data collecting techniques such as in-depth interviews, observations, focus group discussions, analysis of trends and other participatory techniques.

Although PLA has become an established participatory research methodology, there are some criticisms of such an approach, largely in terms of validity of the data and information gathered through PLA tools. Pretty, Gujit, Thompson and Scoones (1995), for example, have pointed out that some commentators view PLA methodology as a mere subjective "undisciplined", "sloppy", “fancy" method which does not have academic credibility. Despite those criticisms, in the field of community development in general, and early childhood development in particular, PLA methodologies have been widely used for various programmes in many developing countries. There have been studies in developing countries which show the efficacy and effectiveness of PLA methodologies in getting community people to talk about their problems and generate ideas to solve those problems (Angeles-Bautista, 2001; Arnold, et al., 2000; Evans, 1997; Sternin, 1999).

The following PLA data tools (see Table 3.2) were used to find out the existing child care practices of parents and families, and to generate ideas, issues and concerns with them to identify appropriate strategies and make action plans for parenting education programmes. Most of the information was collected from mothers; however, some activities were conducted with older siblings since they were also the immediate caregivers in the families. Key actor interviews, traditionally called key informant interviews, (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1994) with selected community leaders and teachers were also made to get a broader understanding about the communities and their child care practices. The PLA protocol used in this research study was adapted from Sternin’s (1999) study on child care practices of selected peri-urban

communities of Yangon in Myanmar (Burma). A more detailed description of the PLA tools can be seen in Appendix 2.)

Table 3.2: Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) Tools

No	Activity	With Whom	Brief description
1	Community-map-drawing to know about the community/neighbourhood	Community members	Community members draw a map to show important places and things in the community.
2	Wealth ranking exercise to get well-being profile of the community	Community members	Community perception on the "rich" and "poor," and community well-being and its implication on child care
3	Transact walk to learn about, and from the community	Team of two researchers with 1 or 2 community members	To learn about the environment in which children are brought up
4	Timeline on stages of child development	Mothers	Group exercise to learn about caregivers' perceptions and understanding of child development
5	Matrix on child development	Mothers, Fathers and other community members	Group exercise to learn about caregivers' perception on child development and children's needs
6	Matrix and discussions on what children know and should know by the age of 5	Mothers, older siblings, fathers and other community members	Group exercise caregivers' perceptions and expectations on child development
7	Unstructured observation and interview	Mothers, older siblings and fathers	Home visits to find out current feeding and hygiene practices
8	Focus Group Discussion (FGD)	Mothers, fathers, community	FGD on care practices in prevention and

		members and health workers	management of illness, accidents and minor injuries
9	Focus Group Discussion	Mothers, fathers and older siblings	FGD on how children are socialised and how young children's emotional needs are met
10	Time line and daily routine	Mothers and older siblings	Group work on drawing timeline with daily routine on caregiver's daily schedule, workload and time spent on child care
11	Focus Group Discussion	Mothers	FGD on characteristics and role of caregivers
12	Matrix and ranking on child care activities	Mothers and older siblings	Group exercise to learn about caregiver perceptions on priority of child care activities
13	Problem ranking for problems in child care	Mothers and older siblings	Group exercise on problems and difficulties in child care, prioritizing serious and common ones
14	Focus Group Discussion with Venn diagram	Mothers, community members and older siblings	FGD through developing a Venn diagram to identify important resources for child care
15	Focus Group Discussion	Mothers, community members and older siblings	FGD on how child care problems are solved

3.6.2 Reflective Journals

Keeping diaries or journals is the core element of any action research because the journals are the useful source of information as the texts have

revealed participants' self-reflection of experiences and actions through critical analysis (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).Therefore, each member of the research team wrote reflective journals throughout the whole process of research. However, there was no particular format prescribed to be used by all team members, but only a general consensus that the journals would be on what had been done, how it had been done and what were the reflections upon the process and outcomes.

In many instances of action research, the journals are used as a most powerful means to foster and facilitate individual and collective reflections supporting dialogue among participants (Smith & Speedy, 1993), and consequently, participants might share their journals among the team members. However, in this research, the team members shared their reflective journals only with the principal researcher because they did not feel comfortable in revealing their personal impressions and feelings regarding their own practices and those of others. However, in their reflective team meetings, they were encouraged to, and in fact did voluntarily raise issues and exchange views from their journals that they felt comfortable in sharing. Otherwise, the principal researcher raised those concerns on behalf of the members in the meetings with anonymity. The detailed account of their information was kept confidential by the principal researcher.

3.6.3 Observations

Since participatory action research is concerned with how people act and how things go, the answers for those questions could be best obtained

through observation of people and events. In conducting observations, there are generally four different roles a researcher can take (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1994; Singha, 1993), these are:

1. *complete participant*, who participates in the activities as naturally as possible while observing without revealing her or his identity

2. *participant-as-observer*, who participates fully in the activities but at the same time reveals the identity

3. *observer-as-participant,* who reveals the identity, does not attempt to participate in the activities, and just remains essentially as an interested observer

4. *complete observer,* who just observes the activities of the group but the group may or may not know the researcher is observing them.

Each of these roles has both advantages and disadvantages. The choice of the role will be based on the purpose and context of the research.

As indicated earlier, the principal researcher as the participant observer in the research process had made a series of observations throughout the research on the interactions of a dialogic engagement among external facilitators, internal facilitators and mothers in search of generative knowledge. However, the researcher generally switched the roles of *participant-as-observer* and *observer-as-participant* depending on which stage and which activity of the research was being observed. For example,

in conducting PLA activities in the initial phase the principal researcher was a mere observer-as-participant but in the action learning circle of the facilitators, the researcher actively participated in the discussion while observing group interactions.

Whether it was a participant-as-observer or an observer-as-participant, most of the observations were naturally conducted without any predetermined checklist or tools. However, it was a focused observation since the research questions were used as the guiding framework for any observation the principal researcher made. The interaction among the group members, the language they used, and the kind of meaning they made were observed and taken in the observation notes. For some selected observations such as the observations of parenting education sessions with mothers, audio-taped records were also made for further reference.

3.6.4 Focus Group Discussions and Interviews

Although researchers can get information about a phenomenon through observations, there are different types of information that the researcher could not easily get through observation. It is better for the researcher to use interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to get the in-depth information regarding personalised feelings, beliefs, perceptions, past experiences and sensitive issues (Denscombe, 1999). In fact, interviewing is an important data collection technique in qualitative research. However, in this research, individual interviews were not the integral part of data

collection; instead, FGD was the key technique for collecting in-depth information.

Focus Group Discussion is a group discussion technique that enables in-depth discussions on a particular issue involving a relatively small number of people. The focus groups have been used for many decades in market research, and social research is now paying more and more attention to this technique. Some researchers considered focus groups as a form of group interviews like brainstorming groups, nominal groups or Delphi groups; however, it is not merely interviewing a group by exchanging questions and answers between the interviewee and interviewer but establishing and facilitating the lively and natural discussion among the group members (Flores & Alonso, 1995). Homogeneous grouping in a natural and informal setting, relaxed atmosphere and open-ended nature of questions are the factors that encourage the participants to feel free from constraints typical of one-to-one interviews, and hence to express their views openly and spontaneously (Khan & Manderson, 1992). Since the technique is useful for generating ideas and hypotheses based on the participants' ideas and views, it is one of the major research techniques that tries to describe and understand perceptions, interpretations, and beliefs of a select population on a social phenomenon.

A series of FGDs were used in different phases of this research. In phase one, FGD was part of the PLA methodologies, and the research team conducted several FGDs with mothers. The principal researcher also conducted separate FGDs with facilitators and mothers to find out their

feelings and perceptions about the research process at the end of each phase of the research. All FGDs were semi-structured with some predetermined general questions but the FGD guide was flexible enough to make changes whenever there was a necessity.

After each FGD, the principal researcher also conducted semi-structured and/or informal conversational interviews with selected key actors such as facilitators, community volunteers and participating mothers. The purpose was not to seek additional information but to check the validity and reliability of the FGD data through further clarification.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

As mentioned earlier, there were two different sets of data collected in this research; therefore, different forms and procedures of analysis of data were followed. The analysis of data on child care practices was done with a view to generating themes of concern by the participating mothers and the research team. Therefore, the process was a simple inductive approach to enable concepts, meaning and issues to emerge out of the data. At the same time, the analysis of data on the pedagogic practices of the adult educators (the professional staff of NGO and MoE) was done with a view to establishing a conceptual understanding of education for empowerment and emancipatory social change.

3.7.1 Analysis of Data on Child Care Practices

During phase one of the research, the analysis of the first set of data collected through Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) activities was done by the whole research team to identify thematic concerns or key issues that could be the content for the parenting education sessions. Like other qualitative research methodologies, data analysis in PLA is done in a continuous process as data is collected. After each PLA exercise, an analytical review of each day's activity was done, sorting and classifying data, comparing and contrasting data from different sources and different data collecting teams, verifying data and formulating additional questions, reflecting and drawing preliminary conclusions. Reflection was done not only on the data but also the process through which data was collected so that there could be a thorough understanding of local knowledge and capacities. It also provided feedback into the on-going research work.

In analysing data and information, a similar analytical framework and procedure proposed and used by Bartlett et al. (2001) was used. The framework was composed of the following key questions of basic concerns of children's rights:

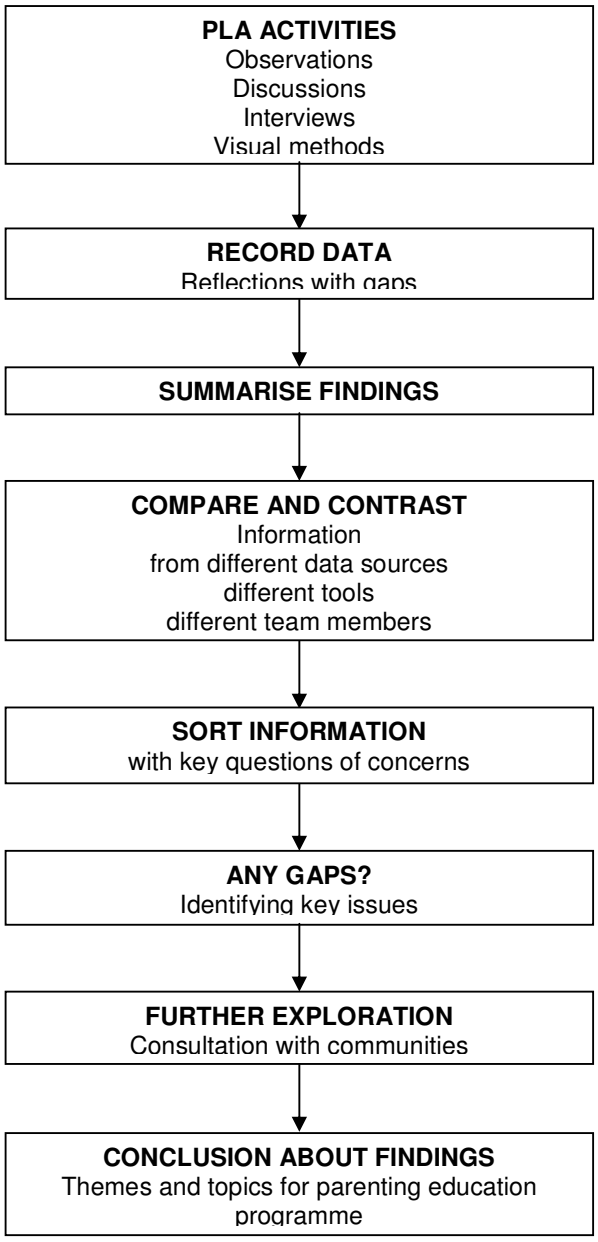
- What are the implications for children's survival, development, protection and participation?

- What are the implications for parents' capacity to support their children's development?

- What are the implications for parenting education programming?

The information related to the context, perceptions and beliefs, and practices of early childhood care were filtered through those lenses.

Figure 3.2: Flow Diagram for the Analysis of Findings from Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) Exercises



Source: *adapted from Bartlett, et al. (2001), p. 95*

Most of the data collected with PLA activities were recorded in two forms: one was the illustrative visual records such as tables, diagrams and matrixes while the other was researchers' field notes. After each activity, all data recorded in different forms were compared and contrasted not only with different data collected by different team members but also the data previously collected from different sources with different tools. This process of constantly checking and comparing data helped the team not only look for regularities and patterns of behaviour of the communities but also clarify and guide the team on what had been done and what needed to be done in terms of data collection. The summarised data were later sorted with reflections through the key questions, and issues of concern by the parents and communities were identified. When all PLA activities were completed, the research team went back to the mothers' groups, and presented those issues to them.

3.7.2 Analysis of Data on Pedagogical Practices

Data on pedagogical practices of professionals who worked with mothers and communities were mainly in the form of reflective journals, meeting minutes, observation notes, and FGD and interview notes. Data collection and analysis were done simultaneously and in a continuous and progressive manner, along with the repeated cycles of participatory action learning using the *constant comparative method* based on the grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Some steps of grounded theory methodology suggested by Stern (1980) and Hadden and Lester (1994) were adopted. The approach was inductive, having concepts, meanings and

understandings emerge out of the data. No attempt was made to test any hypothesis verification.

During the data analysis, the processes of substantive coding, categorising, clustering and concept formulations were followed. However, there was no predetermined set of codes used in the analysis since the aim was not to test any hypothesis but to generate concepts and theories from the data. The substantive incidents or bits of information relevant to the research questions were initially coded into tentative concepts. These concepts were in fact literal reductions of substantive matters using the same or similar wording or expressions that appeared in the data. The initial coding on the data pertaining to the pedagogic practices of adult educators was done only after completion of the PLA activities in phase one of the research. Most of the data were from the reflective journals and observation notes. The researcher initially reviewed each data piece in totality to get a sense of the data. The researcher then started coding the substantive segments of information that appeared in the textual data, which was considered relevant to the research questions by using same or similar key expressions as seen in the text. This process produced initial codes as open codes (Denscombe, 1999) as seen in the examples in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Examples of Coding

Textual data	Code
I was very surprised with the knowledge they have. They know quite a lot; I think, more than what we actually know regarding child care knowledge. *(A comment by MoE staff in FGD)*	Surprise with the wealth of community knowledge
We discuss the issue of garbage collection, which the authority is supposed to do regularly but they don't do it. We tried to identify what we can do about it. There is a pile of garbage at the corner of the street. The only thing we can do seems to be just to inform the ward-leaders. I didn't go beyond this. If we criticize them, we'll be in trouble. *(Excerpt from the journal of an NGO staff)*	Challenging authority
But what they know and what they actually practice are rather different. That is interesting for me. Maybe there are some other reasons that they don't use their knowledge. That we don't know. Maybe that is the area where we need to further explore. *(A comment from MoE staff in FGD)*	Gap between knowledge and practice
Maybe because they are not friendly with me, they are shy and reluctant to talk. How should I do? *(An excerpt from the journal of MoE staff)*	Friendliness

In the next step, those open codes were sorted out, comparing and contrasting with the emerging codes, into different clusters with different categories. The initial analysis of data provided a tentative set of categories, such as, problem denial, motivating learning, informal learning, planning and structuring learning, role of language in communicating, friendly relationships, fear and frustration of educators, confidence of educators, and attitudes of educators. However, these were not a fixed list of categories but only tentative categories that initially came out at that stage of the research, and used as categorical codes to constantly compare and contrast with emerging codes from the successively collected data in the later stages of the research.

Using this constant comparative method, the analysis process also generated other categories since the new segments of data in further coding did not easily fit into the initial codes and categories. For example, the categories such as "use of authentic materials" and "emphasis on technical details" came out only after conducting two or three parenting education sessions in phase three of the research. Similarly, the code "worry" was initially used to grasp the feeling of the adult educators after learning the challenges of the communities; however, later it was learned that the new code "fear and frustration" was more appropriate to capture the feeling of the adult educators with worries on not being able to deal with the demands of the communities.

In the analysis process, the categories were again compared with each other to find the linkages and inter-relatedness among themselves. From these

categories, there emerged tentative themes which lead the researcher into the conceptual understanding about the answers or issues related to the research questions set at the beginning. Since the analysis of the data was done simultaneously with reflective learning process in the pedagogic action learning circle, these initial understandings together with codes and categories were then discussed with the research team in the reflection sessions so that they could be further verified, strengthened, and/or further explored.

As it is crucial to involve a constant checking of analysis (concepts and theories) against findings and constant refinement of theories and concepts during the course of research (Denscombe, 1999), this process helped the team for systematic reflection on their experiences as well as their learning on pedagogic practices. This constant feedback to the research team to facilitate their reflective learning also made it possible for the principal researcher to solidify the theory through the processes of data reduction and theoretical saturation of categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

3.8 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

As in all other research studies, qualitative research is concerned about the accuracy of the account of research experiences and information generated by those experiences, the generalisability of the findings, and the possibilities of replicating the study. However, traditional notions of validity and reliability do not fit well into qualitative research, and qualitative researchers have established quality criteria such as "trustworthiness" and

"authenticity" of data (Creswell, 1994) for ensuring validity while reliability is referred as consistency, that is, whether the results are consistent with the data (Merriam & Simpson, 1995).

To ensure the credibility of qualitative data and information, a number of strategies have been recommended by qualitative researchers (Lather, 1986; Merriam & Simpson, 1995; Pretty et al., 1995). Out of those recommended strategies, this research study has adopted the following:

- triangulation - *the use of multiple investigators, multiple sources of data and multiple data collection methods.*
- member check - *taking the data and tentative interpretations to the research participants*
- peer/colleague examination - *asking some colleagues to examine data*
- engagement in the research long enough to ensure the in-depth understanding.

Since triangulation is critical in establishing the trustworthiness of data and information, triangulation was done not only to find convergence of findings but also to see any inconsistency and/or contradictory items among them (Mathison, 1988).

In this research, triangulation to ensure the trustworthiness of the data has been done in all different phases of the research, extensively using different

methodologies and tools, and collecting data from different sources. For the data from the communities on child care practices under Sub-project A, various PLA tools were used to collect information not only from the mothers but also from the community and even from some selected children so that the team could verify and validate the information. Similarly, the data on pedagogic practices under Sub-project B were also collected from different sources such as journals, observation records, and interview and FGD notes. The information was also collected from the mothers on their perceptions and attitudes towards both the educators and education processes so that deeper and reliable understanding on the issues could be reached.

As the primary focus of the present research was empowerment and emancipation of participants, the issues of what Lather (1986) termed "reflexive subjectivity" and "catalytic validity" were carefully considered. Since it was apparently an ideological research project conducted with some prior assumptions, there was a need to make a *systematized reflexivity* to indicate how those assumptions were affected or changed by the logic of data. It was also crucial to ascertain the catalytic role of the research, that is, to what extent the participants would gain self-understanding and self determination for transforming reality through participation in research. As the action research involved the repeated learning process in the action learning circle of the research team, the themes and issues that emerged out of the data were constantly presented and discussed among the team so that more clarity and authenticity of the understanding could be gained among the research team. The repeated process of analytical reflection and

subsequent action also helped the team to ensure the consistency of emerging concepts and ideas despite the subjective and catalytic nature of the research.

3.9 ETHICAL ISSUES

As participatory action research necessitates the collaborative efforts and praxis of participants, careful consideration has been made on the ethical principles and protocols in relation to these. Ethical approval to conduct this study was obtained from the University Human Research Ethics Committee. Written and informed consent was also obtained from all participants and related stake-holders of the project.

There was no physical risk involved in this study. However, potential risks for participants were identified as psychological distress or discomfort and disruptions in their daily livelihood activities. Therefore, from the very beginning, it was made clear for all participating mothers to understand that participation of individuals was voluntary throughout the whole research process, and there was no obligation that they had to participate until the whole process was completed. The research activities were also carefully planned and scheduled to accommodate the availability of the participants and not to disrupt any of their daily routines.

The ethical protocol was developed based on the principles of procedures that Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) have suggested for action researchers. In order to reduce the potential risks to the minimum extent possible, close attention was paid to the key ethical issues such as confidentiality,

authorisation and permission, understanding and agreement, and open and equal participation. Especially, the principal researcher made conscientious efforts to maintain confidentiality, based on the level of comfort to reveal information by individual team members.

However, as the researcher has a managerial and supervisory role in implementation of the project, there could be a possibility of unintentional imposition of new ideas by the principal researcher. It could also be difficult to encourage co-researchers to engage in an open and genuine dialogue within the research team since there was a hierarchy in the work relationship between the principal researcher and co-researchers. In order to overcome those difficulties, the principal researcher made special efforts to establish collaborative and collegial working relationships among members of the action learning team.

3.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided an overview of critical social research underpinning the study, with a rationale for, and explanation of, participatory action research (PAR) and participatory action learning (PAL) as the choice of methodology for this study. However, there is no attempt to make any distinction between PAR and PAL as these two terms refer to the same learning process (Dick, 1997; Krogh, 2001). It has been argued in this chapter that participatory action research as research methodology and participatory action learning as learning approach are appropriate to the study since both have emancipatory intent for social change. Such

methodologies facilitate the emancipation of research participants and the giving of opportunity to express voices of those participants who are typically marginalised by other approaches. The research process undertaken for the study was also explained, detailing different data collection methods and analytical procedures, and clarifying the measures for assurance of validity and reliability as well as ethical conduct of the research. In Chapter Four, the findings of this study are presented, illustrating the experiences and reflections on the learning during the different phases of research.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH EXPERIENCES: WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES FOR GENERATIVE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT ON PARENTING EDUCATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Three the research design, methodology and processes were explained highlighting the theories and practices of participatory action research and action learning. In this chapter and Chapter Five a detailed account of research experience is provided. Each chapter reports on one of the action learning circle. Chapter Four presents the experience of the parenting action learning circles and Chapter Five reveals the experience of the pedagogic action learning circle.

As mentioned earlier, there were two types of action learning circles that took place within the framework of participatory action research. The first was the parenting action learning circles where the local people, particularly mothers, and the professionals from the NGO and the MoE jointly carried out a learning process called Generative Curriculum Development to address the child care issues of the participating communities. The second was the pedagogic action learning circle where the research team (which is the principal researcher and the professionals) pursued collective action research work to plan, act, observe and reflect upon the pedagogic practices employed in the parenting action learning circles in the communities.

As outlined in Chapter Three, the generative curriculum development process in the parenting action learning circles involved three phases. In phase one, the research team, jointly with the participating mothers, explored existing child care practices in the communities through Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) activities, illuminating their perceptions, beliefs and practices, and investigating the situation of child care in those communities. In phase two, the researcher team analysed the outcomes of phase one reflecting on the current child care knowledge and practices of the communities, and generated thematic concerns to be negotiated with the mothers to plan for further learning in the parenting education programme. In phase three, the facilitators and mothers worked together in a series of parenting education sessions to merge the existing community knowledge and external academic knowledge for the creation of a new knowledge to address the child care issues that confronted these mothers. This chapter highlights the experiences with the communities during those three phases.

4.2 PHASE ONE: EXPLORING COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES ON EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT

Since the context of this research is associated with the concept of integrated early childhood care services provided by the ECCD Network project, the care practices in this study are broadly defined encompassing all activities which guarantee and promote survival, physical growth, and psycho-social well-being and development of a "whole child" (Consultative Group, 1993; Evans, Myers, & Ilfed, 2000; UNESCO, 1998; UNICEF, 1993).

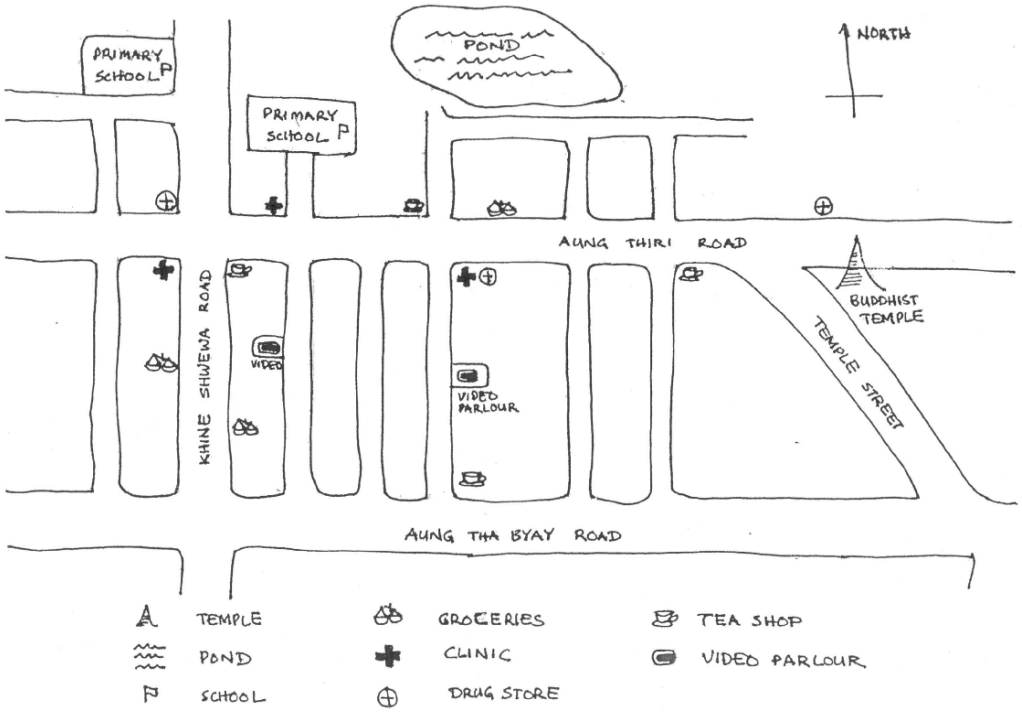
These activities are actually influenced by the beliefs, values and expectations of the child's parents and communities as well as the context in which the child is brought up. The context refers to a broad range of child care environments including physical, socio-political, economic, philosophical and cultural aspects of child care. Through Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) activities, the research team and participating mothers and communities explored three key issues: the context and environment of child care in their communities, the perception and beliefs of the parents regarding child care, and their actual child care practices and related issues.

4.2.1 Community Context

All four communities where the study occurred were located in the new settlement towns in Yangon (Rangoon). These towns were established in the late 1950s when the government conducted a "swept-out" campaign of illegal residents in the slum communities from the inner part of Yangon (Rangoon) city to new settlement towns in the outskirts of the city. The majority of the residents in those communities had experienced intense challenges during the early years of the settlement. Despite the establishment of the communities for more than four decades, the physical situation of the communities did not improve much. Most of the families were living in shanties congested on a small piece of land. In some cases, four or five families were dwelling together under the same roof. There were limited basic urban services such as water and electricity supply, sanitation and

garbage disposal service, and road and drainage maintenance (see the map of a community drawn by participants in Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1: A Community Map Drawn by a Mothers Group



Water and sanitation was a major problem. Despite the rigorous promotion on the use of sanitation facilities, safe drinking water, and food and personal hygiene by the government through annual national campaigns, adequate facilities and services were not in place yet in those communities. Although there was a community water supply system provided by the city authorities, the water supply was not adequate and regular, particularly in the dry season.

Some wealthier families could get water from tube-wells but the majority of the people had to rely on the water from the ponds harvested with rain-

water, and these ponds were usually not well protected. Therefore, for many families safe drinking water was not available most of the time. Also there was no systematic sewage and garbage disposal, and the drainage for waste water was not properly maintained. Hence, in the rainy season most of the area was always flooded with dirty water. Many families did not use proper sanitary and hygienic toilets. Mothers indicated that water-borne diseases like diarrhoea and dysentery, and worm infection were very common among young children in the communities.

Proper health care services were limited in the communities. There was virtually no public health care service available, and only private health clinics were providing basic services. Although some Non-Governmental Organisations were providing health and child care services in some areas, they were not actually reaching the extremely poor families. However, there were a number of drugstores in the communities, where both traditional and modern medicines were available, and poor families essentially relied on those drugstores for treatment of various illnesses. As it was costly to see a licensed physician, for minor illness many poor families generally consulted drug store keepers and got the medicine prescribed by them.

According to the criteria set by the participants for wealth ranking of the communities as one of PLA exercises, it was indicated that approximately only 5% of the population in their respective communities were rich, 15 % were middle class and the rest were poor. Although initially they identified only three categories in their wealth-ranking, later the participants realised that in fact there were four categories; among the poor families, there was a

group of families who should be categorized as extremely poor. Therefore, out of the remaining 80% of the population, 60% were categorised as poor and 20% extremely poor. This 20% was the most vulnerable and marginalised group in the community, who virtually had no access to social services. The majority of people from poor stratum did not have permanent jobs, and many of them worked as casual labourers and street peddlers. Extremely poor families could not afford three meals a day. They were living from hand to mouth.

Table 4.1: Wealth Ranking by Participants in a Community

(A synthesis of wealth ranking exercises of the communities)

	Rich 5%	**Average 15%**	**Poor 60%**	**Extremely poor 20%**
Asset	Own house, Posses telephone, TV, refrigerator	Own house, Posses TV, furniture	Rented room, Not much furniture	Shared room with others Limited number of kitchen and dining utensils
Occupation	Own business: e.g. shop-owner	Own small business	Carpenter, bus-conductor, street vendor, restaurant waiter	Casual labourer
Food	Eat a variety of meat and fish	Afford a variety of meat/fish from time to time	Small and cheap fish	One meal per day for most of the days
Education	Not well educated	University graduates and finish high school	Not more than secondary education level	Poor education level
Leisure	Enjoy karaoke, Picnic outing	Go to movie theatres	Sit in a teashop and watch TV there	
Social relationship	Not very sociable, Live separately	More sociable, lead social events in the community	Contribute to social events	Not participate in community activities (marginalised)

Since the majority of the residents had lived together for a long period in those communities, there appeared to be community cohesiveness. In general, social relationship between different strata of the community did not seem to be a problem, and there was no indication of intentional discriminatory practices among different social groups. However, there was apparent inadvertent social divide between the groups. Families from middle and poor classes were associating more with each other, and consequently children from those families got an opportunity to interact with other children and adults. On the other hand, rich families usually lived in isolation and did not physically actively involve themselves in community activities although they often provided financial contributions to the community activities. Likewise, their children were not allowed to mingle with other children from poor families. People from the middle strata appeared to be the glue for social cohesiveness.

Extremely poor people were the most vulnerable group as they did not get along well with others for various reasons. Even though there appeared no indication of discriminatory practices in the community, they seemed to be marginalised and virtually socially excluded. Their social capital in terms of reciprocal social bondages and networks was also extremely limited despite the fact that social capital had been considered as a valuable asset, which could powerfully shape child development (Smith, 2007). Accordingly, those families did not possess adequate coping mechanisms in times of need, and children were the ones who suffered most. Yet there was no easy access to social services available for those families and their children.

Economic hardship did not allow many people in the communities to spend much time on leisure and recreation. Most of them spent their scanty leisure hours in teashops. Virtually in every corner of the main streets in the communities there was a teashop, which served tea, coffee, and some snacks and light meals. These shops were the places where people spent a bit of their spare time drinking tea, watching TV, meeting and chatting with friends, and quite often making job arrangements. In a sense, these teashops were very much like public houses in the western world. Especially among average and poor families of the communities, teashops played an important role for the social interaction.

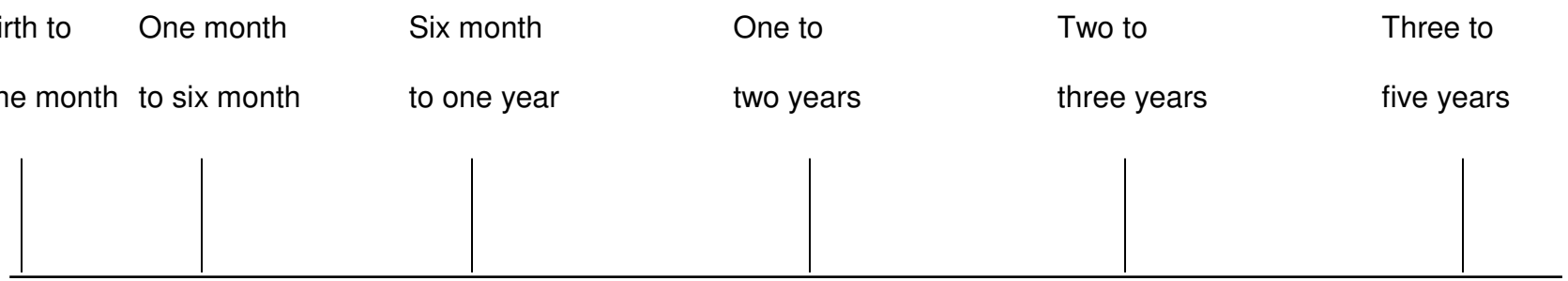
4.2.2 Perceptions, Beliefs, and Expectations of Parents and Communities Regarding Children's Development

Despite the extremely challenging context of child care in these communities, there came out an impressive wealth of knowledge and information among participating mothers regarding early childhood care for development. Some of the child care knowledge and practices were learned through traditional transfer of knowledge and practices from one generation to another while others, particularly the non-traditional practices such as birth-spacing, exclusive breast feeding, growth-monitoring, immunisation and so on were learned through informal education via media as well as more formal orientations and trainings provided by outside agencies.

The majority of the mothers were able to easily identify milestones for physical development and language development, which had clear, visible

indicators. However, cognitive, psycho-social and emotional development milestones were not easily identifiable. The mothers also indicated that they were aware of the fact that development pace was different from one individual child to another, and there was a possibility of developmental delays among different children. Figure 4.2 shows the child development milestones identified as important ones to pay attention to by a group of mothers. These milestones turned out to be indicators of parental expectations, which had a great influence over the way they nurtured their children.

Figure 4.2: Milestones of Child Development Identified by a Group of Mothers



- Can detect the world through five senses

- Turn the body
- Response stimulation (smile)
- Identify voices
- Recognise mother's voice

- Sit by herself
- Teeth grow
- Recognise own name when called
- Recognise different people
- Start verbal responses

- Walk by herself
- Response with two words
- Start eating by herself
- Grip things firmly
- Show emotional distress when the need is not fulfilled

- Repeat after mother
- Play with others
- Start asking questions
- Climb stairs

- Play games with physical movements a lot
- Relay messages given by others
- Answer questions clearly
- Assist parents
- Buy things from street vendors
- Imitate others

In order to catch up those developmental milestones, mothers identified children's needs for different types of care depending on different age levels as shown in Table 4.2. These needs were ranked by the mothers as the most important ones for the respective age groups. For the early years of life between birth to age 2, care for health and nutrition such as breast-feeding, immunisation, vitamin supplementation, and complementary feeding were identified as the most important needs for the children. Care for proper hygiene and sanitation and protection from accidents and injuries were identified as critical elements throughout the years of the entire early childhood, together with loving kindness and compassion. Adult interaction with children for stimulation and language acquisition, providing opportunities to play, and encouragement from adults to explore things were also seen as important care practices starting from early years. On the other hand, deliberate teaching or coaching was identified as a necessity for children starting from around two years of age.

In answering the question on who fulfilled those needs, a child's mother was seen as the primary responsible person to respond to those needs in the early years of life, and other family members could only support the mother to fulfill most of the child's needs. Only starting from the age of two did other family members involve significantly in fulfilling the needs. Starting from that age level, the role of older siblings was highlighted as they were the ones who fulfilled the basic daily needs, or performed the routine functions such as feeding, cleaning and caring. As the child became older, more people including outsiders were

involved. The mothers indicated that even deliberate teaching or coaching needed to begin at the age of two or three and specifically assigned persons as teachers or coaches were supposed to fulfill those needs.

Table 4.2: Community Perception on Children's Needs in Early Childhood

Age	Children's need	Who fulfill the need
0 – 1	• Breast milk • Nutritious food • Being healthy • Stimulation • Tender, loving kindness, compassion and care • Sleeping and rest • Safe environment (protection from accidents and injuries) • Hygiene and sanitation	Mother is primarily responsible but other family members can also support
1 - 2	• Breast milk • Nutritious food • Learn to speak • Compassion and care • Sleeping and rest • Safe environment (protection from accidents and injuries)	Mother is still primarily responsible but other family members can also support

	• Hygiene and sanitation • Play materials/ toys • Support for physical movements such as walk, climb, etc.	
2 - 3	• Nutritious food • Compassion and care • Playmates and play materials • Good environment to imitate, and to encourage curiosity • Safe environment (protection from accidents and injuries) • Hygiene and sanitation • Becoming fluent in speaking • Being polite	Mother, father, siblings and grandparents can fulfill those needs
3 - 4	• Nutritious food • Safe environment (protection from accidents and injuries) • Hygiene and sanitation • Compassion and care • Play • Preschool experience • Being physically strong • Being courageous • Becoming intelligent	Parents, family members, siblings, peers in the preschools and teachers

	• Fluency in language • Study and learning • Learning materials such as books, pencils, etc.	
4 - 5	• Play, playmates and play materials • Safe environment (protection from accidents and injuries) • Hygiene and sanitation • Preschool experience • Teaching • Compassion and care • Ability to follow teacher's instruction • Formal learning materials such as books, pencils, etc. • Being courageous • Becoming intelligent • Being polite and respectful to elders	Parents, peers and teachers

Even though some aspects of child care were identified by the mothers as needs, these could also be seen as parental expectations. The needs such as becoming physically strong, intelligent, courageous, polite, respectful and fluent in speaking were in fact what the parents wanted their children to become when they reached the respective age levels. However, delving in more depth into the expectations, there seemed to be apparent high expectations of parents for

child development. These expectations were confirmed in the Focus Group Discussions on what children by the age of 5 needed to know. Those mothers participated in the FGDs wanted their children to be hardworking, polite, obedient, and respectful to elders. Besides, the 5-year-olds were also expected to converse well, play with others well, and get along well with other children.

One significant common expectation among parents regardless of their socio-economic background was for children to have achieved autonomy and assumed responsibility for taking care of themselves as early as possible. Since the parents could not afford adequate time to pay attention to each child, they encouraged their children to become independent and responsible for the management of their routine functions such as eating, bathing, toileting and dressing/changing clothes even starting from age 3. Mothers indicated that by age 5 children would be able to have meals by themselves, to perform basic hygiene practices such as washing one's face and body, to change their clothes, and to take care of one's belongings. Children at that age had to be able to distinguish between "good" things and "bad" things, as well as to identify dangerous things and avoid them.

The impoverished socio-economic situation of the families demanded help from children as much as possible in their daily routines of the household. Parents expected that children by the age of five would be ready to assume some of the household responsibilities such as fetching water, cleaning home, washing clothes and utensils, and looking after younger siblings. In the Focus Group

discussions, many mothers expressed that children had to be able to help their mothers in various ways. The children at five could even buy some necessary things from nearby grocers.

As five-years-old is the age for primary school entry in Myanmar (Burma), all parents expected their children to be ready for school by that age. The majority of mothers in the discussion groups indicated that children by that age had to be able to recognise and write alphabets, and to follow instructions by the teachers. Some even wanted their children to be able to read Grade 1 textbooks.

In order to help children meet those expectations, role modelling, spending time with children, interacting and teaching, which includes both informal coaching, and formal instruction were the methods the caregivers used. For the older age group of children, the mothers emphasised the need for teaching, which was associated with character development and disciplining children. However, they were also aware of the fact that children could learn from their peers by imitating them, and consequently the mothers also stressed the need for "good environment" which could support their children's character development.

4.2.3 Child Care Practices and Patterns

Through Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) activities, all participating mothers demonstrated in the discussions that they possessed an impressive wealth of knowledge about early childhood care. However, there seemed to be

a huge gap between what the mothers knew and what they actually practiced. Apparently it seemed to be the reflection of the contradiction between the knowledge the mothers possessed and the non-conducive environment where the children were brought up. Despite understandings about the importance of early childhood care and acquired knowledge on child caring methods, they did not have adequate means with which they could apply their knowledge. Apart from fulfilling some mere basic needs such as feeding, washing/bathing, toileting, and getting dressed, most of the mothers could not afford to pay adequate attention to other requirements.

Time for Child Care

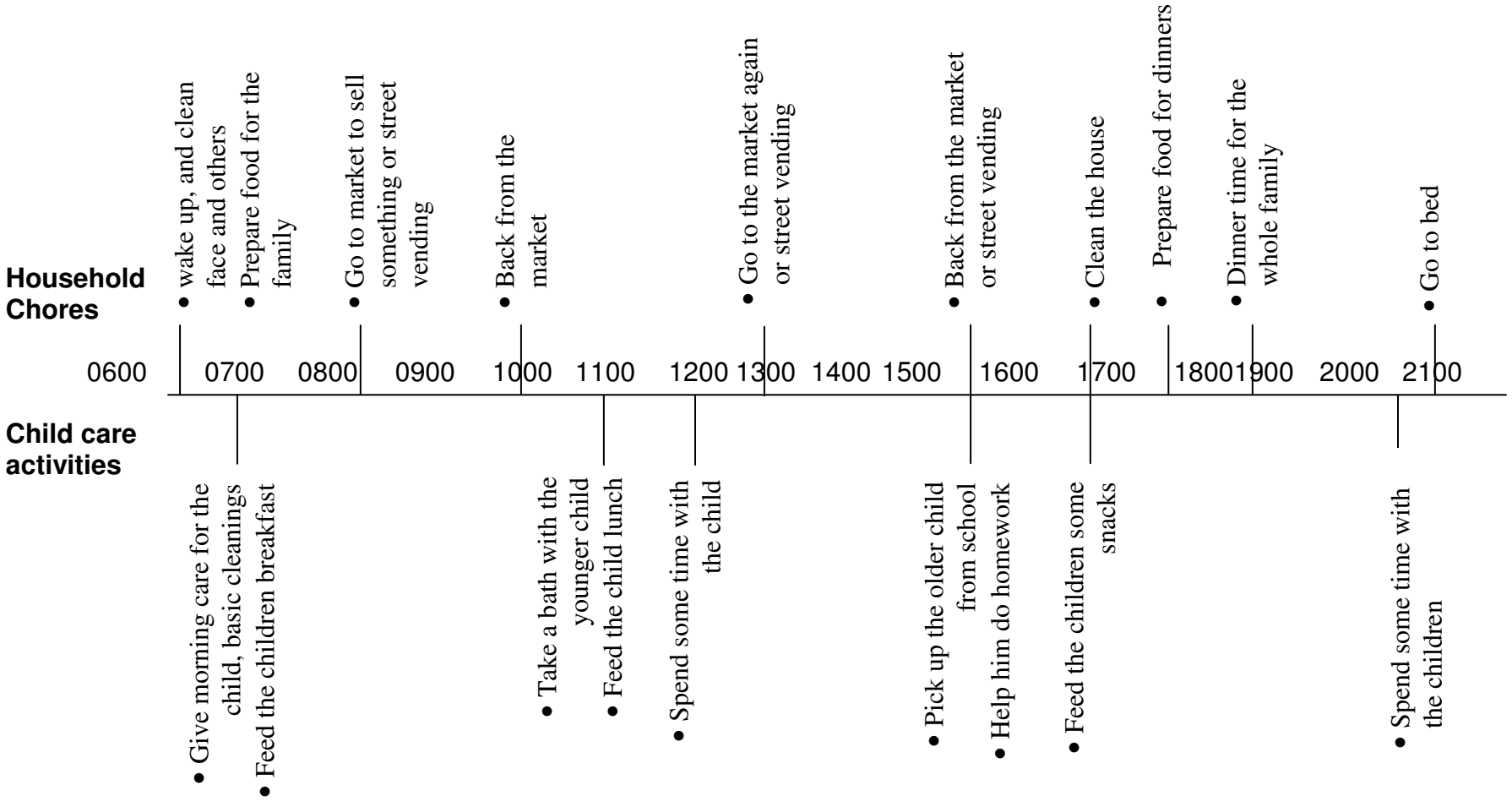
One of the reasons for the mothers not being able to fulfill their child care responsibilities was because they seemed to be overwhelmed by a lot of activities to be carried out routinely as indicated in Figure 4.3. Most of the mothers who participated in the discussions worked outside home in the informal sector as they needed to make or supplement their family income. Even if they did not work on a full-time basis, they went out for a certain period of time in a day to work, and usually children were left by themselves, or with older siblings or other children. The mothers, especially those who had to work outside, could not spend much time with their children simply because they had too many responsibilities with both income generation and household chores in the family and consequently they were too exhausted when they arrived back

home. All caregivers expressed that parents normally paid special attention to, and spent more time with a child only when she/he was sick.

The time given for children in a day varied from one mother to another depending on how much they were involved in making an income. The average estimate of time on child care tasks was approximately three hours a day, and most of the time was used on basic routine care activities such as feeding, cleaning/washing and putting children to sleep. The majority of the mothers expressed that they usually could not give specific time to interact and play with their children; but their interaction with the children was simultaneously done with other routine activities.

Among the poor families where mothers usually worked outside home as causal labourers or street vendors, older siblings were the ones who spent most of the time with younger children. Since more and more families were becoming smaller, child care responsibilities, which were traditionally shared among grandparents in the extended families, had been shifted to older siblings. This phenomenon has a substantial impact on the well-being and developmental conditions of both the younger and older siblings, including the restraining of opportunities of schooling for older ones. Parents also tend to expect their children to be able to assume the responsibilities for looking after younger siblings.

Figure 4.3: Daily Routines of a Working Mother's Household and Child Care Activities



On the other hand, those mothers who were not working had more time to spend with children for the activities like talking and playing, reciting songs and rhymes, and telling stories. When children became older, parents gave specific time for teaching and coaching: e.g. helping children with their homework, reciting prayers, and story-telling for moral education.

Care for Health and Nutrition

It was apparent that neither the availability of time nor the acquisition of knowledge alone would help much to adopt a particular child care practice. There were other factors such as resource availability of the families and the environment they lived in, which had a considerable influence over the practices that the mothers adopted. Some modern care practices as seen in health care activities such as immunisation or medical treatment were service-oriented and resource demanding. If the service was not available and/or the resource required to have access to those services was not at their disposal, it was impossible for the families to adopt that practice.

In the communities studied, minor illnesses were treated at home for at least one or two days. Only when there was no improvement was the referral made to the clinic. Common illnesses of children in those communities were colds, coughs, stomach distension, diarrhoea, and worm infection. The participating mothers said that they could easily detect whether a child was sick or not by observing her/his physical appearance and behaviour although they might not identify the type of illness. In order to identify the type of illness, and seek

advice for necessary medical care, parents usually consulted first with their mothers or grandmothers, who were believed to be the most experienced person in the family regarding child care, and followed their advice.

Although there were some private clinics available in their communities, the majority of the participating mothers mentioned that they relied on traditional and folk medicine for two reasons: one was that it was costly to go to see a qualified physician in a private clinic as public services were not available in their communities, and the other was that they felt traditional medicines were more appropriate for the minor illnesses of the very young child. At the same time, many families also relied on the drug-stores where store-keepers were providing prescriptions for some illnesses although they were not qualified and certified to do so. In reality these health care practices depended on the availability of financial resources.

The other issue for adopting a care practice was its practicality. Despite rigorous promotion by health professionals of six-month exclusive breastfeeding for new-born babies, the majority of mothers were not practicing it. Water and bottle milk were given to the babies as complementary liquid food even in the very early days of the life. It was difficult for the mothers who were working outside home for long periods to adopt the practice of exclusive breast feeding, and alternative arrangements were also not possible for them to have that practice covered for the recommended period.

As indicated above, household food security was a major challenge for the majority of poor families; for extremely poor families, they were able to have barely three basic meals a day. Children from those families survived the day with either a bit of traditional snacks or junk foods sold by their neighbour street vendors before the proper meal was served in the family. There was no data available for the nutritional status of the communities. However, it was commonly accepted that the majority of young children were malnourished due to scarce food security compounded with the high prevalence of diarrhoea and worm-infection in the community.

Care for Pregnant Women

Despite the nationwide nutrition promotion campaigns organised with a great deal of effort by the health authorities, traditional beliefs and practices regarding food and feeding were rather predominant among many poor families. A food taboo for the pregnant woman not to take salty and spicy meals was very common, and the mother who recently delivered a baby was supposed to eat rice and some boiled meat, usually chicken only. Eating various vegetables and fruits were not encouraged as it was perceived that this would cause stomach trouble for both the mother and the newly born child. The problem seemed to be the craving period when the pregnant mothers demanded to chew some peculiar items like beetle-nuts (areca nut) soaked in kerosene, mothballs or tobacco ashes.

Regardless of a strong reliance on traditional beliefs and practices regarding child care activities, there were also some concerns on the so-called “harmful” practices. Particularly, concerns were raised on the issue of unwanted pregnancy and abortion. There were three common practices among families to prevent pregnancy: taking birth-control pills or injections from health service providers, using a natural method like calendar-rhythm, and taking traditional/folk medicine. The mechanical ways of controlling birth like the use of condoms or IUD (intra-uterine device) did not seem to be very common. However, whatever practice they might follow, they did not seem to be using them properly. Therefore, unwanted pregnancy and deliberate abortion became a response to the problem. Although abortion is illegal, it appeared to be very common among poor families in the communities. The common methods for deliberate abortion mentioned by the mothers were massaging the uterus by a traditional birth attendant, taking hot traditional medicines or hot herbal items like nutmeg (*myristica fragrans*) or ginger, and using other techniques to destroy the fetus, all of which were dangerous practices.

The mothers also indicated that domestic violence was common in the poor families, which had affected the welfare of the pregnant mother and the children. In some extreme cases, the fight between the husband and the wife often resulted in the pregnant mother being hurt, which, quite often, caused accidental abortion. The mothers also expressed that they often unintentionally beat or scolded children as their emotional outlet although they knew it would

hurt the children. Apparently they also realised that the way they reacted might have impacted their child's behaviour development.

Care for Socialisation and Behaviour Development

Many mothers expressed the importance of parents as role models since children usually imitate their parents' behaviour. Formal teaching or coaching of the child was important to become a good child. Many parents did not have the patience and time to explain to the child what was acceptable behaviour. The parents understood that when a child had unacceptable behaviour the first thing they should do was to explain the reason to the child. However, many mothers expressed that in reality they would give punishment to the child. Corporal punishment such as beating was very common among many families and many of the mothers did not see it as a serious problem. Verbal threatening and scolding were also common methods for managing behaviour.

Polite and obedient were the attributes that mothers mentioned to describe a "good" child, and a "bad' child was described as the one who was aggressive and used obscene language. The parents felt that environment had a great deal of influence over the child's behaviour. It was also expressed that the children had to be well-protected from the undesirable external influences, particularly from the imitation of bad behaviours such as the use of obscene language. As indicated earlier, children from rich and more affluent families were usually kept at home until they went to pre-schools, and not allowed to play with other children outside home. On the contrary, children from the poor families usually

spent most of their time outside the home, mainly on the street playing together with other children. It was mainly because of the simple inadvertent negligence of the parents as they could not pay much attention to their children.

On the other hand, some of the invaluable traditional practices were unfortunately diminishing. Although many mothers expressed that loving care and interaction with children by adults were important activities for child development, only a very few parents could indicate their engagement in traditional ways of interacting with children. Story-telling, for instance, by elderly parents to their grand children, which was very strong in the past, had no longer been a common practice in those communities. All participating mothers admitted that they could not recall a full account of a story that they had heard when they were young. Instead, TV soap operas have occupied traditional story telling time of the families.

The knowledge they had of modern practices of child care seemed to be superficial factual knowledge. Although they received information on modern practices of child care through various channels, they did not seem to have adequate understanding of why these practices were important and more favorable than others, and how these practices could be translated into appropriate practical daily actions in their context. There was clear indication that message-driven efforts did not help the parents and communities to change their behaviour.

Out of the various child care activities that the caregivers perform every day, feeding children, helping children for cleanliness and hygiene, and helping children do homework were identified as the most important tasks for the caregivers, and most of the mothers indicated that they were happy to perform those tasks. However, older sibling caregivers did not like those tasks, and they preferred to play and sing songs with children. Unfortunately, none of these caregivers mentioned talking to children, telling stories and playing traditional games as important child care activities, and obviously such kind of activities did not seem to be habitually taking place at homes.

4.2.4 Coping with Child Care Problems and Challenges

All participating mothers agreed that child caring was a labour-intensive job since there were many little daily routine things they had to care about especially when the child was very young. Therefore, caregivers needed to be patient and diligent. Concerning the problems and challenges they were facing with child caring in their daily life, many mothers indicated, as shown in Table 4.3, that they had difficulty to deal with and fulfill children's demands. However, when discussed with them furthermore, there came out the issues of availability of resources to fulfill the demands and availability of time to be committed for child caring. Economic hardship seemed to be the underlying cause of those challenges for many families: the parents could not devote adequate resources as well as time needed as they were living from hand to mouth, and working outside home most of the time.

Table 4.3: Problems and Challenges for Child Caring Identified by a Mothers Group

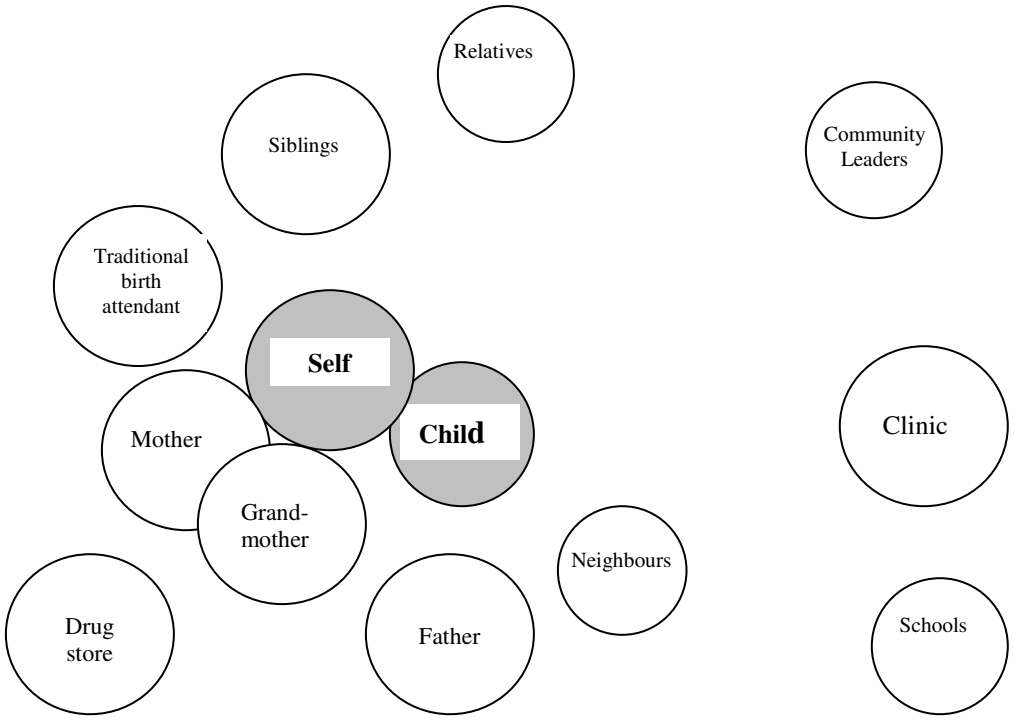
No	Problem/Challenge	Rating
1	Caring for a sick child with fever, cold, and/or cough	3
2	Caring for a child while working/busy with household chores	3
3	Dealing with badgering and pestering by a child	3
4	Dealing with wake-up cries	3
5	Helping the child to sleep during the bedtime	3
6	Helping a child to get along well with other children	3
7	Caring for a sick child with diarrhoea	2
8	Dealing with fights against other children	1
9	Caring for a sick child with skin allergy	1
10	Dealing with demand for new things such as toys, clothes, etc.	1

(Rating: Very serious = 3; serious = 2; less serious = 1)

On the other hand, the parents were not coping with the child care problems single-handedly; they quite often tried to get help from outside the family. As shown in Figure 4.4 of the Venn diagram developed by a group of mothers, when the help was needed for child caring, mothers, grandmothers, neighbours and traditional birth attendants were identified as both important and closely available resources to solve problems. Although they knew that the professionals such as doctors, nurses and teachers could provide services and/or advice to manage the problems, those professionals were too far for

them to reach when the help was urgently needed. Interestingly, the traditional birth attendant was identified as the immediate resource for the poor families regarding early childhood care, especially for the delivery period and the subsequent care to be provided to the neonatal mother and the newly born baby.

Figure 4.4: Venn Diagram: Resources to Solve Child Care Problems in the Community (identified by a Mothers Group)



Similarly, those key people were also identified as their teachers/mentors for child caring. The mothers indicated that they learn all the nitty-gritty things of early childhood care from their parents, grandparents and neighbours. Some

also mentioned that their past experience as caregiver to their siblings or nieces and nephews had helped them to adopt some care practices. It was also apparent that the guidance and advice of those immediate resources were more influential in adopting a certain type of child care practice than the advice from the professionals. The informal learning from peers seems to be a powerful way of transferring knowledge and practices in the communities.

4.2.5 Key Issues that Emerged

While conducting PLA activities, the participating mothers and the research team also did analytical reflection on the information generated from each session, and noted the emerging issues down to be discussed later. The reflection processes had made mothers aware of the gaps between what they knew and what they were actually doing in relation to child care, and these gaps were highlighted as key issues for further discussion on why there were gaps and how those gaps could be overcome. The key issues commonly identified by the mothers and the communities were mainly concerned with sanitation and hygiene, feeding, illnesses, pregnancy, discipline and punishment, adult-child interaction, and school readiness (See more details in Table 4.4).

Table 4.4: Key Issues on Child Care Identified during the PLA Exercises

PLA Activity	Key Issues noted
1. Community-map-drawing to know about the community/ neighbourhood 2. Transact walk to learn about, and from the community 3. Wealth ranking exercise to get well-being profile of the community	• Environmental sanitation and toilets • Availability of water • Reaching the poorest families • Poverty
4. Timeline on stages of child development 5. Matrix on child development to know community perception about child development and children's needs 6. Matrix and discussions on what children know and should know by the age of 5	• High expectations by parents from children • Gaps between what they know and what they actually do
7. Unstructured observation and interview to find out current feeding and hygiene practices 8. Focus Group Discussions on care practices in prevention and management of illness, accidents and minor injuries	• Personal hygiene • Environmental hygiene • Home-based care for illness • Reliance on drugstores • Availability of health services • Abortion • Maternal care • Food-taboo
9. Focus Group Discussions on how children are socialised and how young children's emotional needs are met	• Punishment, beating and verbal abuse • Domestic violence
10. Time line and daily routine on caregiver's daily schedule, workload and time spent on child care 11. Focus Group Discussions on characteristics and role of caregivers 12. Matrix and ranking on child care activities	• Availability of time for children and adult-child interaction • Why not stories, traditional games and rhymes
13. Problem ranking for problems in child care (Group exercise on problems and difficulties in child care, prioritising serious and common ones) 14. Focus Group discussion through a Venn diagram to identify important resources for child care 15. Focus Group Discussions on how child care problems are solved	• Seeking help for child care • Child care knowledge transfer • Control of resources for child care in the family

The experience through PLA activities in phase one was a great opportunity for the professionals from the MoE and the NGO to learn about the situation of child care in the participating communities as well as the knowledge and practices of communities regarding early childhood care. The PLA outputs demonstrated the impressive wealth of knowledge on child care, owned by the communities. The experiences also provided the team a sound understanding on the context of child care and related challenges together with coping mechanisms available for the families. The knowledge gained through PLA activities facilitated the research team to change their perspectives on the communities, acknowledging the potential of the communities to generate their own knowledge and actions to address their concerns and issues.

At the same time, the PLA activities enabled the research team and the communities to generate a wide range of issues and concerns by the communities, particularly mothers, on their child care situation, which could be later used as thematic topics for further learning in the parenting education programme. The outputs of PLA activities as well as salient incidents and stories of parents were also identified so that these could be used as authentic materials later in the parenting education circles. Although the findings were rather overwhelming for the research team, phase one of the research appeared a promising ground work for participatory development of a programme.

4.3 PHASE TWO: PLANNING AND DEVELOPING A PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE

In phase two of the research study, the research team went through a series of meetings to make further analytical reflection on both the processes and the findings of PLA activities conducted in phase one. As explained in Chapter Three, the analysis of data was done with a focus on the implications for the situation of children, the parents' capacity related to child care, and thus, parenting education programming. The issues initially identified during phase one were used as a starting point for further analysis by the research team in this phase. Since this phase was to plan a parenting education programme for the participating mothers, the reflections on both the processes and findings were done to facilitate the research team to make important decisions regarding the following three areas:

- Generating themes or thematic concerns and topics for parenting education sessions,

- Identifying appropriate content materials and language to be used in those sessions, and

- Proposing the methodological approach for conducting parenting education sessions.

The insights gained through the reflective analysis had guided the team for further development of action steps to plan and implement parenting education sessions.

4.3.1 Themes and Topics for the Parenting Education Programme

Through the analytical reflection on the processes as well as the outcomes of the first phase of the research, the research team encountered an intense dialectic engagement of the professional knowledge the team brought to the research and the knowledge they gained from the community. In many cases, it was concluded that by and large at the factual level there was very little tension between the professional knowledge and the community knowledge. On the other hand, the team noticed that there was an apparent gap between what the mothers knew and what they practiced regarding early childhood care. Communities apparently possessed a wealth of knowledge on child rearing. However, the choice of any practice did not necessarily depend on the knowledge they had on modern practices of child care. Instead, the research team found a strong reliance on traditional beliefs and practices regarding child care activities, and consequently there were some concerns on the so-called “harmful” practices, which might threaten the survival of both the child and the mother. In this regard, the research team brought the technical or academic knowledge into consideration while identifying potential themes to be negotiated with mothers

After the discovery of potential themes and topics, the team went back to the communities and had discussions with them and made further joint reflections and negotiations with the groups to generate concrete themes and sub-themes, which could be used as topics for further discussion in the parenting action learning circles. The following were the themes and topics jointly agreed upon after the negotiation:

1. Hygiene and sanitation
    1.1. Personal hygiene
    1.2. Environmental sanitation
    1.3. Using sanitary toilets
    1.4. Clean and good water
2. Behaviour management
    2.1. Discipline
    2.2. Punishment
    2.3. Solving children's problems
3. Interaction between children and adults
4. Care for pregnant mothers
    4.1. Prenatal care
    4.2. Postnatal care
    4.3. Birth-spacing and birth-control
5. Feeding practices
    5.1. Breastfeeding
    5.2. Complementary feeding

5.3. Clean food

6. Home/Family-based care for health

6.1. Common diseases

6.2. Preventive practices

7. School readiness

Although the issues of "poverty" "domestic violence" and "control over resources" were proposed by the research team as themes to explore further, the mothers were neither willing nor eager to discuss them; therefore, they were dropped from the list.

4.3.2 Content and Language

While generating themes and topics for the programme, the research team also looked for more detailed content and potential related materials to be used in parenting education discussion sessions. As mentioned before, PLA activities produced data in two forms: one was visual representations such as maps, drawings, timelines, matrixes and diagrams while the other was verbal expressions recorded either in the audio-tapes or in the form of field notes. The verbal expressions included personal experiences of parents, communities and even children, many of which were narrative stories about themselves. The team identified salient incidents and cases to be used as authentic materials to initiate discussion among mothers. Some of the narrative stories were translated into visual representations later; however, the attempt was made to maintain the case not to be deviated from its originality.

At the same time, the team also delved into the areas where there could be possibilities of information gaps due to distorted or incomplete information the parents and communities received, confusion in understanding that information or mere lack of information, particularly on modern child care knowledge. Once they identified the gaps, the team developed materials on additional information for a particular issue so that those participating mothers in the parenting education sessions could see alternatives and options, and consequently make informed decisions. For example, in the case of the prevalence of unwanted pregnancy and related abortion in the community, the parents appeared to have either incomplete information only on related issues or confusion in understanding of that information. Likewise, they did not seem to see any alternatives since they did not have updated modern knowledge on that practice. Therefore, the team developed materials for giving adequate information to them. However, it was also carefully considered that the additional information provided was not to impose any particular practice on the mothers but to ensure that there were options for them.

Moreover, reflection on the processes of conducting PLA activities gave the research team a deeper insight into the issue of language. All those professionals who facilitated the PLA activities admitted that at the beginning they had a hard time to communicate with the parents and communities as they had been using academic jargons, which most of the community people did not understand well. For example, the term "development" is common technical jargon in the field of ECCD as seen in the terms such as "cognitive

development", "physical development", and “social development”. On the contrary, these technical terms did not make much sense to the communities though they could superficially understand the meaning. For them, the term “getting older” or “growing older” is what they use when they refer to the progress of a child in relation to its physical growth as well as maturity. Therefore, the team pursued an extensive exchange of their experiences in the use of language, and further discussed among themselves to explore the possible choice of language to be used for translating technical expressions into everyday language.

The facilitators also noticed that even though both the facilitators and the communities spoke the same dialect of Burmese language, there was apparent distance between the two linguistic repertoires. Together with the use of technical jargons, the different linguistic repertoire of the professionals created a hierarchical relationship between the two parties indicating authoritative nature of knowledge, and consequently it made the participating mothers reluctant to talk about their opinions, ideas and feelings freely. The facilitators learned that it was necessary to narrow that distance so that there could be mutual trust built between the facilitators and learners. It was also found that the narrower the gap between the two linguistic repertoires, the better the learning by both parties. Therefore, the team also discussed how to carry out constant negotiation with mothers throughout the whole process so that more effective language could be jointly created.

4.3.3 Pedagogical Approach for Conducting Parenting Education Sessions

The other outcome of the analytical reflection was the choice of pedagogical methodological approach to be used in the parenting education programme. Through FGDs with mothers, it was learned that the informal learning from elders and friends was more influential to have impact on their daily child care practices than learning from the formal orientations such as lectures and talks by professionals. Communities appeared to be more comfortable and confident to raise their concerns and issues in a less formal and more naturalistic learning environment. Based on this finding, the research team decided to have parenting education sessions as informal as possible, by planning these sessions in a naturalistic setting without structuring the learning arrangements.

As the research team had originally conceived the idea of staying away from prescriptive messages, manuals and modules, the team decided to go with minimum preparation for organising learning activities. Each circle had freedom to choose any topic that they would like to discuss according to their need and interest. Two facilitators, two professional staff from MoE and NGO facilitated each discussion session of the parenting action learning circles. There were no prescriptive manuals or modules developed, except the materials generated by the communities through PLA activities, and the facilitators were given only the following guidelines:

1. No prescriptive guides or manuals would be used by the facilitators

2. Visual aids, stories or other stimuli that depicted the real life examples that emerged out of the PLA study would be used to start the discussion

3. Instead of disseminating messages or imposing ideas, the focus of the discussion would be to answer three fundamental questions:

    - What was the problem or issue with a particular topic of discussion?

    - Why was it a problem or issue?

    - How could the mothers act on it?

4. After each session, the group would decide which topic they would like to discuss at the next meeting.

Nonetheless, these were just mere guidelines, and not rigid schedules to be followed. There was adequate flexibility given to the facilitators to adjust the course of discussion based on the issues emerged out of the learning by the group in the circle.

4.4 PHASE THREE: MERGING COMMUNITY WISDOM AND PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN PARENTING ACTION LEARNING CIRCLES

As explained in Chapter Three, phase three of the study was devoted to the parenting action learning circles to merge community wisdom and professional

knowledge, and to generate new and authentic knowledge, which would help mothers to address their child care issues. As praxis-based pedagogy was the overall approach to pursuing learning, the parenting education sessions were generally designed to have dialogic engagement among participating mothers to critically look at their child care issues and explore options and possible actions to address those issues. The professionals from the MoE and the NGO facilitated the learning process bringing the professional knowledge to the mothers while acknowledging and respecting their existing knowledge.

4.4.1 Setting the Ground for Learning

When the PLA activities were conducted with the communities, communal centres such as schools or community halls were used as venues for organising events. That arrangement was considered by the team as a semi-formal structured learning, and in contrast, it was decided for the parenting education sessions to be conducted in the home-setting to ensure the learning process was as naturalistic as possible. Therefore, the sessions were conducted in somebody's home where extra space was available for a certain period of a day in a week for the mothers to gather for, and participate in action learning. Depending on the availability of the space, the venue was changed from time to time.

One-hour weekly meetings were organised with the mothers for Focus Group Discussions on the topics identified and agreed upon during phase two of the research study. Though the mothers groups agreed to join learning circles, their

participation was voluntary and there was no obligation to participate in the discussion for all topics. They were free to choose the topics they would like to participate in and discuss and disregard any topic they felt was not necessary.

Although the immediate and real need to learn would be the factor for motivating mothers to participate in the learning circles, the team felt that the participation should not be limited to those with real needs. The team had decided that especially elder women should be encouraged to participate in the learning circles as they were the ones who traditionally transferred knowledge and practices of child rearing in the community. Therefore the team encouraged the participation of those elder mothers as it would benefit the community in the long run.

As the facilitators had worked with the mothers through PLA activities in the previous phases, there was mutual trust as well as close relationship established among them. The facilitators tried to maintain that trust and relationship throughout all the parenting education sessions.

4.4.2 The Learning Process

The learning process for each topic usually began with a presentation of the issue in the form of picture illustrations or other stimuli. The purpose was to present the issue as a problem posing situation for further elaboration and discussion in the learning circle. Some materials were the authentic visual presentations produced by the mothers during the PLA activities. However,

apparently this was not possible for all topics as some of the outcomes of PLA activities were verbal notes and related interpretations, for which codification of verbal ideas into visual representations was inevitably necessary so that the generative theme could be presented to the mothers for further elaboration and discussion to refresh their awareness of the issue. At the same time, the team also tried to make sure that the materials were created to depict as closely as possible the real life examples related to the issues that emerged out of the PLA activities. For example, when discussing the issue of sanitary toilets, the facilitator prepared pictures portraying different types of latrines found in the community.

Facilitator1: Here are some pictures of different types of latrines, and I'd like all of you to look at them and choose which ones are common in your communities. Please make a tick beside the pictures that you think are common in your community.

Participants: (all participants choose the pictures and mark ticks)

Facilitator1: Now let's look at the pictures again, and see which type of latrine is the most common in the community. What are the differences among those different types of latrines?

Participant1: In our community, majority of the families are using sanitary latrines but we can also see some dilapidated latrines being used by poor families.

Facilitator2: Look, here. Someone has put a mark in this picture too. That means people also use open-pit latrines as well, right? Why do you think they're using different types of latrines?

(An excerpt from the principal researcher's observation on parenting education session)

As explained before, the informal learning with open discussions among participants without much structuring of learning was used as a pedagogic approach in earlier sessions of the learning circles, and the discussions usually started with the presentation of issues with visual materials as illustrated in the above excerpt. Although starting the discussion with visual illustrations appeared to be an effective way to sensitise the issue, it was not always possible to help mothers discuss and identify problems by just looking at pictures. The facilitators also raised their lack of confidence to facilitate the learning process without structuring learning activities. They indicated that without such structured activities they were not achieving the desired outcomes. Therefore, later for some topics, issues were presented with more structured learning activities as the excerpt below shown:

(After playing one of the children's game that they identified during PLA activities)

Facilitator: How many of you have spent time with your children playing games like that, and how long do you usually spend

in a day? Please write down you names and answers in the matrix given here.

(Participants write down their names and the figures in the matrix.)

Facilitator: *Now we have this list, and we can easily see those who have spent time about 2-3 hours a day with children, and those who spent less than one hour. We'll divide ourselves in to two groups: those who spend more than one hour in a group, and less than one hour in the other.*

(Participants move to form two groups.)

Facilitator: *Let's discuss among the groups. Those who spent more time will discuss what they usually do with their children, and why they do so? For those who spend less time will discuss why you don't spend much time with your children, and what will happen if you don't spend time with your children.*

(Participants work in small groups, and then the groups tell their ideas to the others.)

(An excerpt from the principal researcher's observation on parenting education session)

It appeared to be true that the mothers were more engaged in the discussion with the structured learning than the open discussion without any structured activities. In some cases, structured activities were conducted together with visual illustrations. However, it was also found that some structured activities quite often inadvertently imposed ideas of facilitators on the mothers. In the above excerpt, there was a hidden message in the discussion that the parents should spend time with children though the facilitators did not explicitly mention that in the discussion. Bearing in mind this type of possibility in imposing ideas, the team particularly attempted to carefully formulate the type of questions which did not lead to any predefined solutions or advices, but generated discussion among mothers in the learning circles.

Despite the mutual consensus on the issues among the group, there was quite often a difficulty for the mothers to accept the issue as a concern of their own. Even though those materials and activities at this stage were derived from the conclusions generated by themselves during PLA activities, the materials did not help them see the problem as their own and they appeared to have a tendency to deny it as the problem of somebody else. In those cases, the participating mothers quite often mentioned "We don't do that" or "it was they who do that". The problem denial by the mothers appeared to be the first obstacle for the facilitators to overcome so that the group could pursue a substantive discussion on the issue. In order to tackle that kind of situation, the facilitators explored different strategies to further elaborate the issue, and one of the strategies proven affective is the use of "authentic" materials produced

during the PLA process such as matrices, graphs and some audio-taped interview responses.

> *When I was discussing about corporal punishment as one of the behaviour management practices, I initially used some illustrations of different types of corporal punishment found in the community but the mothers said that they never do like that to their children, and it was only a few uneducated poor parents who did like that. Luckily at that time, I had an audiotape with me, in which I had a record of an interview with a child who expressed an account of being beaten by the mother and the feeling he had at that time. So I switched on the cassette tape recorder and let the mothers listen to the boy's story. Then, I saw changes in their faces with increased enthusiasm and emotions. That was a real starter for impassioned discussion.* (MES 2, MoE Staff)

Since these authentic materials were the products generated by the mothers, they had ownership, and these materials helped them seriously see the issue.

The other strategy the facilitators used to overcome the denial phase was to help them feel comfortable to express their feelings and experiences among themselves as well as in front of the outsider facilitators. One way of doing it was for the facilitators to provide their own personal experiences as problematic practices.

When I talked about my experiences regarding how I was unskilled and how I made mistakes, it made the mothers feel confident and comfortable to talk their experiences as well. I think this has made the mothers feel that even the facilitators often make mistakes. At the same time, they also feel confidence and trust on me because I was openly confessing my mistakes to them. (MES 3, MoE Staff)

Providing personal accounts of the problematic practices of the facilitators made the mothers feel confident and helped the group build the trust in the facilitators, and consequently made it possible for the mothers to talk about their problems and concerns in child care.

Once the issue was presented to the mothers, the subsequent discussion was done on what would be the consequences of that situation, particularly the implications for children's survival, healthy growth and development. At this stage, the facilitators quite often brought their professional knowledge to the discussion. In most of the parenting education sessions observed, the facilitators put more emphasis on imparting a lot of technical information to the mothers.

Facilitator: *You know that health department is asking mothers to give excusive breastfeeding for at least four months to the new born babies. Why do you think they are asking that?*

Mother1: *Breast-milk is cheap because you don't need to buy it.*

Mother 2: *it's easy; you don't need to prepare.*

Facilitator: *Any reasons else?*

Mother 3: *it's because breast-milk can protect babies from diseases.*

Facilitator: *Yes, breast milk doesn't cost money, it's easy to get; besides, it has energy, protein and vitamins that the baby needs. So it can protect the baby from diseases. It's the best and only food for new-born babies. What'll happen if mothers don't do exclusive breastfeeding and provide other liquid or solid food to the babies?*

Mother1: *It'll cost money you have to buy milk powder or formula baby food.*

Mother3: *The baby will get diarrhoea.*

Facilitator: *Why does the baby get the diarrhoea?*

Mother 3: *Because the food is not clean.*

Facilitator: *Yes, you're right. Because we don't know how the milk powder or the formula food is prepared, we cannot assume the food is safe.*

(An excerpt from the principal researcher's observation on parenting education session)

A significant amount of time was spent on this segment of learning process in those topics where the facilitators thought that they should put more emphasis on the technical knowledge. These topics included feeding pregnant women, exclusive breast-feeding to young babies, sanitation and hygiene practices and adult child interaction. They also used extra information materials such as posters, leaflets and case illustrations to convey the message to the mothers. In

many instances, the facilitators provided information on not only “what to do” but also “how to do it”.

After discussion on possible consequences of the issue, the group further explored why they were doing what they were doing as well as why they were not doing what they felt they should be doing. In this segment of the process, the facilitators tried to encourage the mothers to discuss the constraining factors or facilitating factors for adopting certain child care practices, thinking beyond the level of technical knowledge to the socio-political arena. However, it appeared that this segment was the most challenging for the facilitators as it usually ended up with the conclusion that it was something beyond their capacity and control.

Facilitator: *We've already listen to the audio-tape of a boy telling how he felt when he was beaten by his mother.*

Mother 1: *We feel sorry too when we beat our children. But we can't be that patient to explain because we are too busy all the time.*

Mother 2 *I was too busy with a lot of things to do and I was frustrated with my husband and got angry with him. At that time my son came to me and demanded something and my anger went to him. So I slapped him, and later I regretted.*

Facilitator: *Yes, we know that beating our children is bad for both the child and ourselves. But all of us are doing it. Why are we doing it?*

Mother 2: *Because we don't have time to explain them. We have to take care of the household, we have to earn money, we have to look after children.....*

Mother 3: *It's because of economic hardship.*

Facilitator: *Why are we having economic hardship?*

Mother 3: *Because we are poor.*

Mother 4: *We don't have money to invest for good business, and we are just casual labourers.*

Facilitator: *Why do you think we are poor?*

Some mothers: *Well... it's our "kam." (the Burmese word kam is derived from the Buddhist concept of karma)*

Facilitator: *Yes, kam means what we do. So it's because of what we do.*

Mother 4: *We do our best but we are poor so we can't do that much.*

(An excerpt from the principal researcher's observation on parenting education session)

Apparently, the issue was not what they did with their children during their contact time or how they spent their time with the children but whether they had time available for children, and if not, why the time was not available. It became

obvious that the problem was not the knowledge but the practicality of a certain care practice since that particular practice demanded resources or time, which was beyond their coping mechanism. The facilitators admitted that they did not have adequate skills on how to handle the deeper level issues such as fundamental causes of the problems.

> *It was rather frustrating for us to end a discussion like that without being able to find any concrete solution. And we usually go back to the same question like "There must be something we can do. What can we do about it, individually or collectively?"* (MES 4, MoE Staff)

In many cases, it appeared that both the facilitators and the participating mothers were not eager to discuss the fundamental causes of the problem. Even when they looked for the solutions and alternative actions to address the issues, they usually went around the technical arena only.

4.4.3 Taking Actions for Change

After discussing the constraining factors, the learning circles went into the final segment of learning which was devoted to exploring possible solutions, alternative arrangements and actions to address the issue for change. As explained before, because the facilitators were not able to delve into a deeper level of the discussion to address the fundamental causes of the problems, the discussion usually ended up with finding solutions or alternatives within the

technical level and the personal level. Quite often, the way the group handled the issue was with the stance of "you do what you can do"

(After discussion on the need for spending time with children)

Facilitator: *Now, let's find out how we could find time for our children, and what we can do with them.*

Participants: *We'll come back a bit earlier than before from work.*

We'll give time to children before we go to bed.

Facilitator: *What about the fathers? Can they also spend their time with the children?*

Mother 1: *They don't have time. They usually leave home very early morning for work, even before the children wake up, and come back very late. When they arrive home back, they are exhausted.*

Mother 2: *If they are free, they usually play with children.*

Facilitator: *Don't they have any holiday?*

Mother 1: *Well, very rarely.*

Mother 4: *When they're at home, they do stay with children.*

Facilitator: *Yes, it's good to know that fathers also spend time with their children. Now please prepare yourself for one or two*

things that you'll do with your children at home, and when we meet next time, let's share our experiences with others.

(An excerpt from the principal researcher's observation on parenting education session)

At the end of each Focus Group discussion, the facilitators encouraged the mothers to make action plans for relevant changes in their care practices or the situation they were faced with. Most of the mothers usually made commitments to take actions to the extent possible, and agreed to report back on their experiences in the next session. However, in reality their actions were only at individual and personal level, and more on the changes related to their own practices.

Although the participants were encouraged to develop collective actions on the issues beyond their individual level, it was almost impossible to do so. The only collective engagement of the groups considered was to participate and contribute to activities of the Mothers' Circles, which already had been established in the community as part of the ECCD network project. The participants were cautious to take any collective activities unless the activities were linked with the existing organisations or institutions.

4.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the experience of the three phase process of the generative curriculum development for parenting education programme on early childhood development was presented. The findings on the existing child care knowledge and practices of the communities as well as the issues that emerged out of those findings were highlighted as the grounds for further development of the parenting education programme. After that, the planning process for parenting education sessions was discussed, highlighting how the key issues were resolved into themes and topics for parenting education, and the materials, the language and the pedagogical approach were generated based on the knowledge gained during phase one. Finally, the experiences of the parenting education action learning circle as an empowerment effort for mothers were explored with some highlights and related examples.

Despite the original intent of finding solutions to address both the pedagogical practices of adult educators as well as the child care practices of participating mothers from the communities, the generative curriculum development model raised more issues than solutions The impact of the process on the empowerment efforts for the mothers was limited to the actions taken at the individual and technical levels. For various reasons, the learning process did not tackle the fundamental issues at deeper level, and the facilitators did not go much beyond the technical level discussion. However, the action learning experience gave a significant contribution to address the issues related to the pedagogical practices of the professionals from the MoE and NGO. In the next chapter, the reflections on the pedagogical practices will be presented

illustrating reflective learning experiences of those professionals who have explored pedagogical approaches to emancipatory and empowering education.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRAXIS IN THE ADULT EDUCATION ACTION LEARNING CIRCLE: REFLECTION ON THE PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Four the experiences of the research work with the communities on the three phase generative curriculum development process were presented, focusing on how the content and related materials as well as the pedagogical approach and methodologies for parenting education programme on early childhood care and development emerged out of the participatory learning process. In this chapter the reflections on the pedagogical practices of the adult educators who had facilitated that process are discussed. The reflective process was facilitated by the principal researcher as the resource person to contemplate the parenting education experiences of the research team and to explore more effective pedagogical practices for working with the communities.

5.2 ADULT EDUCATORS AS LEARNERS IN THE GENERATIVE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

In the dialogic pedagogy that Freire (1970) proposed, he describes that in the learning process, the teacher learns while he/she is teaching and the learner teaches while learning. Vella (1994) has also asserted that the educators must demonstrate their own ability to listen, to learn, and to grow. Listening to, and

learning from the learners has been an important educational act for those educators who believe in the critical democratic pedagogy, and by doing so the educators demonstrate their respect to the learner as a subject capable of her/his own knowledge construction. With this view in mind, the research team went through the process of generative curriculum development to learn from the communities, particularly mothers.

In most of the typical adult education approaches, need assessment has been an important initial step in designing education programmes, and adult educators try to learn and identify needs and characteristics of learners, which are used as the basis for development of learning content and process (Knowles, 1978; Vella, 1994). However, in the generative curriculum development model, learning from the learner is not merely confined to identification of needs, but it is seen as an important part of the continuing process of the education activity where adult educators and learners jointly pursue a dialogic exploration on an issue of their interest, though each may have a different interest on the same issue. Therefore, the adult educators as learners in this research have attempted to learn from the mothers to come up with a total understanding on the child care issues: the knowledge they have, the gaps between their knowledge and their practices, the constraining factors and challenges they encounter, the mechanisms they use to cope with those challenges, and the way the child care knowledge and expertise are transferred from one generation to another. The Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) activities have been used as tools for learning from, and learning together with

the communities, particularly mothers. Reflection on the PLA experiences has provided the research team insights on two aspects of learning: what they learned from the communities and what factors facilitated their learning from the communities.

5.2.1 Reflection on What was Learned from the Communities

The PLA activities conducted during phase one of the research appear to be excellent and exciting learning opportunities for the research team, especially for the professionals from MoE who usually have limited opportunity to learn the reality on the ground. They expressed that PLA exercises were the most fruitful experiences for them as they learned a wide range of things about the communities and the families. Through PLA exercises, the communities had revealed their wealth of child care knowledge, not only the traditional knowledge they possessed but also some modern knowledge that they received from various sources. The research team acknowledged the impressive wealth of knowledge owned by the communities.

> *I was very surprised with the knowledge they have. They know quite a lot; I think, more than what we actually know regarding child care knowledge.*
>
> *Yes, I think so. I think the PLA activities are good learning opportunities for us. It gives us a lot of information to be considered.* (MES 1, MoE Staff)

This acknowledgement by the research team has made themselves change their perception on the mothers as passive learners lacking knowledge, and start considering how to use that wealth of knowledge as a starting point for further discussion to develop the parenting education programme. The products of PLA activities were invaluable information for the team to use as a basis not only for determining the content of the programme but also for developing materials to be used in the programme.

However, it was also learned that there were apparent gaps between what the mothers knew and what they actually practiced. The findings from the PLA exercises indicated that the knowledge they had on modern practices of child care was superficial factual information. Mothers appeared to be receiving various messages on modern practices of child care through media, national campaigns and some form of health education provided by different groups. However, the knowledge gained through those messages appeared rather shallow and one-dimensional on certain care practices. There was an indication of apparent lack of understanding by the mothers on why these practices were important, and more favorable than the others, and how these practices could be translated into appropriate practical daily actions in their context. The professionals from MoE have indicated their concern on those gaps:

> *But what they know and what they actually practice are rather different. That is interesting for me. Maybe there are some other reasons that they*

don't use their knowledge. That we don't know. Maybe that is the area where we need to further explore. (MES 3, MoE Staff)

Even though the mothers received messages on how to respond the needs of their children, in some cases, the messages were with distorted or incomplete information, and a deep understanding on the issues appeared to be missing. For example, the mothers could tell that taking contraceptive pills could prevent pregnancy but they could not tell how systematically they should take them. Therefore, it was necessary for the educators to dig out further together with the mothers why they could not apply what they knew and what constraining factors they encountered. In the parenting education sessions later, these were the major questions we raised and discussed with mothers to pursue further learning to have a deeper understanding on the issue, and to find options to address those issues.

Although it was found that there were positive traditional care practices in the communities, the team also highlighted the significant influence of traditional practices which were harmful for the wellbeing and development of the young child as well as the mother. There were practices such as corporal punishment for disciplining children, complementary feeding provided to the young child during the neonatal period, and methods used for deliberate abortion, which were seen as harmful practices from the professional point of view although those practices were reported as common practices among the mothers/caregivers in those communities. This kind of influence by the existing

or traditional practices was a major concern for the team when they started thinking of identifying key thematic areas for the parenting education programme. It appeared that there was a difference of opinion between the views of the professionals and the mothers regarding the existing practices. Though the professionals saw the practices as harmful ones, the mothers saw these as inevitable. However, after deeper analysis on the consequences of those practices, the research team appeared later to be able to convince the mothers to accept those practices as problematic ones.

Starting from the completion of a few PLA exercises, the researchers gradually realised the life of the communities and the problems that they were facing, and they also learned from the communities their coping mechanisms to overcome those challenges

> *It was an eye-opening opportunity for me to learn many new things from the mothers. I've never been to such kind of community and never heard before such kind of challenges that they are facing with. I was also surprised how they were coping with those challenges, and their ability to survive.* (MES 4, MoE Staff)

Consequently, the team also expressed their concerns over all the emerging issues that the communities had raised and they were worried that the project might not have any impact to change the existing situation of the families and communities. The challenges of the communities were so overwhelming that the research team started to worry about the next steps they would pursue.

There was growing fear among researcher/adult educators that they might not be able to fulfill the needs and expectations of the mothers and the communities to their satisfactory level.

> *I was also worried that our work will not help them to solve their problems. These are beyond our capability. The challenges that they are facing are quite overwhelming. I even don't know where to start.* (NGS 4, NGO Staff)

> *The challenges and difficulties they (mothers) are facing with are very much overwhelming. I'm very much worried that I could not fulfill the needs and expectations of the mothers, and couldn't help them solve their problems.* (MES 3, MoE Staff)

The frustrations and fears of not being able to fulfill the needs and demands of the communities had initially resulted in loss of confidence among some of the facilitators. It was admitted later that this had implications on how they facilitated the parenting education circles in the next phases.

5.2.3 Reflections on the Factors Facilitating Learning from the Communities

In the pedagogic action learning circle, the research team also reflected on what factors facilitated them to learn from the mothers and the communities through PLA activities. The team saw this as an important exercise because

they felt that the reflective results would help them to find better ways of facilitating learning in the future parenting education programme. In fact, later it was realised that the PLA experiences were the fruitful groundwork for the educators to explore how to facilitate the participatory learning among the mothers.

Despite the overwhelmingly challenging situation of the communities, there was obvious willingness among the parents and communities to talk about their child care situation as they all had interest and concerns for the wellbeing of their children. The research team noticed that throughout a series of PLA activities, there were impressive and active contributions from all participants:

> *When the mothers are talking about their children, their eyes are sparkling with enjoyment. They seem to be very proud of their children.* (NGS 1, NGO staff)

All the mothers showed their enthusiasm and eagerness to talk about their experiences, to learn from others and to find better solutions to address their concerns. The research team felt that it was important for the educators to make use of learners' enthusiasm and eagerness as naturalistic and intrinsic motivation to promote participation in the learning process.

The other important factor that facilitated learning from the communities was trust: it is the mutual trust not only between the educator and the learners but also among the learners which would provide comfort and confidence for the

parents and communities to talk openly among themselves. During the PLA exercises, the research team found that there were things in the communities that were normally hidden for outsiders, but it was possible to learn those hidden things if one could build trust with communities. The experiences indicated that if one could build trust with the communities, they became comfortable and confident to talk openly about personal experiences, feelings and opinions.

> *When we became closer to each other, then they are more willing to talk. They felt more comfortable to express their experiences, feelings and opinions in the public.* (NGS 3, NGO Staff)

The team also noticed that how one portrayed oneself was critical in order to build trust with the communities. Depending on the way the educator behaved, the language they used and even the outfit the educator put on, it could be a facilitating factor or a barrier in promoting learning.

> *If you depict yourself as one of them, it's easier to become close to them. In my opinion, even your outfit is important. I usually try to wear as closely as possible to them whenever I have a meeting with them. They know that we're outsiders but we've to make sure ourselves that we're not much different from them.* (MES 1, MoE Staff)

Depicting oneself as closely as possible to the learners was an important behaviour for the educators in establishing a close and trustworthy relationship

with the learners. It was learned from the PLA experiences that the more you portrayed yourself closer to the learners, the easier to build trust with them.

Besides, the research team particularly noticed the importance of the language they used in communicating with the communities in creating a trustworthy relationship between the two parties. Initially it was difficult for both to do so because the team, particularly the professionals for MoE, used the technical language in communicating with the communities, and that not only made them dumb but also unfortunately created hierarchical divide between the team and the communities. Later, it was realised that the language and its repertoire the educators used had significant impact on narrowing down the perception of hierarchical distinction between the educator and the learner, and thus, creating closeness between the two parties.

As the PLA exercises were the very first opportunity for the professionals from MoE to work with communities, the engagement also enabled the team to become good listeners. In the PLA activities, the parents and communities were the ones who talked and the facilitators were supposed to be listeners and observers. In the initial stage, it was difficult for the professionals to listen without intervening with their ideas because they used to be the ones who talked. However, later they were able to control themselves to be good active listeners, and also able to learn how to probe for more knowledge from the communities.

As we used to be teachers, we're more earnest to talk, rather than to listen. When the mothers were talking, quite often I was almost to intervene with my comments but I was able to manage myself on how to keep my mouth shut. Through PLA activities, we learned how to be good listeners and good observers. (MES 1, Staff from MoE)

It was extremely important for the facilitators to be good listeners because it not only helped them to learn but also helped the parents and communities build confidence to talk and participate in the learning process.

As explained before, the purpose of PLA activities was not to identify the needs of communities but to learn from the communities to have a total understanding of the child care situation there, and it appeared that PLA experiences had significantly impacted on the perceptions, understandings and attitudes of the adult educators regarding the strengths, gaps, capabilities and commitments of the participating learners from the communities. The PLA exercises had convinced the research team that it was crucial for a good educator to be a good learner and the experience also broadened their mind on how they could learn to become a good educator.

5.3 FACILITATING LEARNING IN EDUCATION FOR EMPOWERMENT AND EMANCIPATION

Since the intent of the generative curriculum development process was to jointly construct knowledge through dialogic engagement between the educators and

the learners, the critical democratic pedagogy was adopted as an effective pedagogical approach in empowering learners to meaningfully participate in the learning process, and to make actions for self and social change, Therefore, it was crucial for the research team to promote genuine participation of the learners, staying away from both depositing ideas and knowledge into the learners' mind and imposing certain practices on them. The research team attempted a number of strategies to facilitate the learning process valuing the knowledge owned by both sides and searching for a new knowledge merging the two together.

Overall reflection on the pedagogic practices of the research team indicated that it was not the specific methodologies that mattered in promoting empowering and emancipatory education but more of how these methodologies were translated as the actual pedagogic practices: the content and materials the educators used, the language and related repertoire in the education exercise, the mindset and the ideology of the educators which consciously or unconsciously influenced the practices of educators and what issues and how those issues were raised during the education exercise. Therefore, it appeared particularly important for the team to contemplate the perceptions, feelings and attitudes of the educators regarding both the learners and the learning process.

5.3.1 Creating Conducive Learning Environment

In order to bring about genuine participation of the learners in the dialogic pedagogical process, the fundamental condition required appeared to be

creating a conducive learning environment for, and with the learners. The experiences in the generative curriculum development process showed that providing factual knowledge and information might help the learners build their technical capacity for child care but did not lead to empowerment for change. Empowering education needs an environment where learners could confidently and comfortably talk and contribute openly their opinions and feelings.

As explained in the previous section, building trust between educators and learners was a fundamental requirement for creating a conducive learning environment. The experiences in the parenting education action learning circles indicated that mutual trust among the participants of the circles was critical to have successful discussion on any issues because trust lead to a comfort zone for all participants to express not only their opinions but also feelings and individual perceptions.

> *When we became closer to each other, then they are more willing to talk. They felt more comfortable to express their experiences, feelings and opinions.* (MES 2, MoE Staff)

However, building trust among participants was not an easy task; therefore, the facilitators initially tried to gain trust from the learners. The educators used some strategies such as depicting themselves as part of the group as closely as possible, using the same language repertoire as that of the learners, and being patient enough for the learners to gain confidence and comfort.

[WA] I notice that it's a challenge for you to convince mothers talk in your meetings. How do you encourage mothers to contribute in the discussion?

[MES 1] We can't do like training teachers or teaching students that we are usually doing. If you become close (friendly) to them, it's possible. If we depict ourselves as someone like them, we can see the reflection in their eyes, then they speak up. Usually they're reluctant to speak up in the public.

[MES 3] Maybe it's part of our culture. For some issues I also prefer to talk to you for example bilaterally rather than in the group. They may have the same feeling.

[WA] Then, what would you do?

[MES 5] For example, they seem to be aware of the negative practices. When I asked them whether they encounter that kind of experience, they are reluctant to talk. They seem to know that these practices are not what we like. Only when they are told that I myself quite often did the same type of things before. Then they start talking...

For some members of the research team, it was not so difficult to establish a good rapport with the learners. They indicated that friendliness, patience, and showing respect and empathy would lead to a trusting relationship with the learners.

> *Initially the mothers were not comfortable to express their feelings and opinions to the strangers like us. However, after two or three sessions, we found that we were very much like sisters and brothers so they became comfortable to talk to us. In fact, the parents were very eager to talk about their experiences and challenges with their children. When they were talking about their children, I'd noticed that there was an enthusiasm and joy by them with their eyes sparkling. The only thing was you have to be patient until they felt comfortable to talk to us.* (MES 5, MOE Staff)

The other strategy the educators used to gain confidence among the participants was to raise the issue as the collective issue of the group rather than that of an individual or somebody else. When an issue was raised and asked if anybody had the same concern, problem denial appeared among the participants, indicating their discomfort to discuss the issue in public. Therefore, it was learned that the best way was to raise the issue as the group's collective concern, and hence everybody felt comfortable to discuss it.

5.3.2 Structuring Learning Activities

As mentioned earlier, the initial decision made by the team regarding the pedagogical approach to the parenting education programme was to organise the parenting education sessions as informal as possible and as closely related to what the mothers were pursuing in their everyday life. Consequently, the first few topics were conducted with open discussions in the circles without any

prescriptive schedules and materials. However, after two/three topics, there was an extensive discussion among the facilitators on their confidence in the unstructured open discussion type of education activity. They felt that with this approach they were not able to see and follow the course of the education action clearly, and it was something like roaming around without any clear direction to go.

> *Since the discussion was planned as less-formal and less structured I don't have confidence from the very beginning. Worried. Oh! Dear what should I continue to say?* (MES 1, MoE Staff)

Most of the facilitators of the parenting education sessions proposed the use of structured learning activities rather than open discussions. After intense consideration on a number of pros and cons, it was finally decided to carry out the sessions with organised or structured learning activities based on two premises: one is for the facilitators to have a clearer understanding of the process of the one-hour session and the other for the participating mothers to have a more active engagement.

For most of the facilitators, the use of informal learning approach used in the initial parenting education sessions without prescriptive learning modules or manuals appeared to be challenging. Since the facilitators were familiar with facilitation of more structured learning they were not able to manage the sessions well with the informal learning approach. Five out of the six facilitators expressed that they had times when they were stuck in the middle of the

discussion as they were not prepared for some of the issues the mothers raised.

[MES 4] This time I think I need to plan my discussion with the mothers interesting for them. But it's easier said than done. I prefer to have a 5 day continuous training workshop rather than organizing bit by bit week after week. However, since it's a new experience for me, it was interesting.

[MES 2] Informal arrangement didn't work. If it's more structured and planned properly, they will take it serious.

[MES 4] Yeah, I feel like we're doing things in a fumbling manner.

[NGS 1] Approach is not that different. Even though it is not a structured workshop type, but we encourage them to participate, discuss and contribute as freely as possible.

[MES 3] I agree that informal learning has impact on the parents' child care practices but their informal learning is more hands-on - natural learning, I'd say. However, what we're doing is an organized learning and it's not as natural as they're used to have. Therefore, we need to organize properly as it's not truly informal or natural.

[MES 5] Sometimes we got lost in our discussion.

[WA] Then, what do you think we should do?

[MES 1] There is a need to prepare a proper procedure to go through for the discussion even though it is supposed to be less structured It is not that we just discussed whatever we encountered. We should go with

preconceived ideas. Maybe it's only those experienced facilitators who can do without much preparation.

[NGS 2]I think we don't necessarily have to follow a rigid plan but at least we need to make clear ourselves on the steps we follow through, and accordingly plan activities.

[MES 5] Although we planned something, in reality it doesn't go that way. The discussion went according to the flow with the group. Therefore, it's also important to have flexibility

Therefore, it was felt that there was a need for structuring of learning activities to a certain degree. Otherwise, the programme would require highly skillful facilitators, which was not the case for this project.

The other reason for shifting to a structured learning approach was because it also provided the mothers with an avenue for active contribution and learning in the session. As mentioned before, there was reluctance by the majority of the mothers to speak in the open discussion and there were usually only two or three dominant speakers actively contributing to the discussion. On the contrary, the structured learning activities made the mothers more enthusiastic about, and more involved in the activity. Since their previous learning experience in a formal setting was more as passive recipients, they did not appear comfortable to speak in the open discussion setting. In many cases, usual dominant speakers only participate and the rest were passive listeners. The facilitators recalled that in phase one of the research the Participatory

Learning Action (PLA) activities, which were structured, had demonstrated to be productive learning tools to have communities express their perceptions, beliefs, and knowledge about child care as well as their concerns and issues. The experience in the PLA exercises was a strong argument for the facilitators to use more structured learning activities in parenting education sessions of the next phase.

However, there were two concerns raised by some of the team members on the use of structured learning activities. The first was based on the limitations of the structured nature of the PLA activities. Despite the high productivity of the PLA activities to generate outputs, some PLA activities as data and information collection tools did not allow participants enough room to have further in-depth discussion on the underlying reasons for certain child care practices because attention was given more to the output of the activity, and adequate effort was not given to the reflective and analytical nature of the exercise. The second concern was the possibility of ideas imposed by the educators intentionally or unintentionally to the learners through structured learning. Those team members expressed that it was easy to manipulate people through structured learning. Therefore, it was noted by the team to have the learning activities not too structured, but with adequate flexibility to adapt the process in accordance with the course of learning created by the learners.

5.3.3 Using Authentic Contents and Materials

The PLA exercises have produced an impressive wealth of information for the research team to be considered in designing and developing the parenting education programme. The outcomes not only helped the team to identify and negotiate with the mothers the thematic areas and topics for further discussion in the parenting education circles but also to elaborate the content and develop materials for each topic. The outcomes of the exercises included visual representations such as matrixes and drawings, verbal notes and audio-records, some of which were directly used as authentic materials to initiate the discussion. For others, the team transformed the verbal information into visual illustrations depicting the real life situations and the real incidents as seen in the PLA process. Some of the incidents were used as case studies for the mothers to discuss, and it appeared that those materials generated intense discussion.

> *I used a case study of the real incident of a woman who did deliberate abortion. Although I changed the names of the persons involved and the community where they lived, it was quite catchy for the mothers and we were able to discuss the issue at deeper level, raising the question of why it happened. The life of that woman appeared to be the same as what is happening in the community. Of course, the incident was not from this community.* (MES 5, MoE Staff)

As explained before, the use of those authentic materials such as the products of PLA activities, including the real life incidents of the communities helped the

mothers to overcome the problem denial, which usually happened in the initial stage of the discussion, and to see the issue as a collective problem of their community.

Similarly, the use of visual illustrations, which derived from the ideas and incidents generated by the PLA exercises, has also demonstrated as a way of effectively stimulating and generating discussion. The team also expressed that what they learned from the PLA exercises helped them to guide illustrators to develop more realistic and meaningful illustrations for the communities.

> *For some topics, we use visual illustrations to initiate discussion or do an activity. We make sure that those illustrations depict the real life situation of the communities we work with. In the past, when we developed the materials, we usually did with imagination, and quite often our illustrators made the picture look nice and attractive because we couldn't guide them properly. Now we can easily tell them exactly what we want them to draw. Therefore, I feel confident to use those illustrations and I think the mothers feel the same.* (MES 3, MoE Staff)

With this approach, the illustrations appeared to be more culturally grounded and contextually appropriate. The approach challenged the traditional use of education materials such as posters or illustrations prepared by outside professionals although the educators acknowledged the fact that some of those materials were still appropriate and valid to use for specific purposes. However, in order to raise an issue in a problem-posing (Freire, 1995) manner for dialogic

pedagogy, the authentic materials appeared to be undoubtedly effective as seen in this generative curriculum development process.

5.3.4 Exercising Authority and Delegating Responsibility

In the critical dialogic pedagogy for empowering education, the power relation between the educator and the learner is rather neutral. As Freire (1973) explained, the educator and the learner are the subjects of the knowing, respecting and celebrating each other's capability of knowledge construction. However, it was not possible to establish such a relationship between the two groups in the generative curriculum development process. There was apparent divide among the participants - insiders vs. outsiders and community vs. professionals. Even in addressing each other, although the facilitators called the mothers “sisters”, they addressed the facilitators as “teachers”. Therefore, the relationship between the participants was rather hierarchical: facilitators were generally seen as those with authority while mothers were appearing as subordinates. As the research team looked into the nature of the hierarchical relationship between the educators and the learners, they found two different types of authority owned by the educators: authority of knowledge as seen by the learners and authority with the position in the system and society. Therefore, it was a crucial question for the educators how to exercise their authority rightly.

From the learners’ perspective, the educators were seen as an authoritative source of knowledge; therefore, by participating in the parenting education

sessions, the learners expected that they would be able to gain new knowledge from the educators and/or be able to confirm their existing knowledge. Meanwhile, the facilitators also showed their strong confidence in themselves as a source of knowledge and even quite often expressed that they needed to, and had responsibility to share their knowledge to the communities; otherwise, their reputation would be lost.

> *In my mind, I'm reminding myself that I'm not just coming to listen to what they said but also to give something to them.* (MES 4, MoE Staff)

These different views of the two sides appeared to be perfectly matching each other. However, the question for the facilitating team was how to exercise the authority of knowledge appropriately in a democratic and empowering manner without imposing their ideas on the learners. Apparently, the experience of the parenting education circles showed that it was important for the educators to be efficient observers sensitive and responsive enough to know when to intervene with their knowledge during the course of learning, and when not to.

Meanwhile, the position held by the educators in the system and society also had an impact on the form as well as the course of the learning that had taken place in the communities. Since these learning activities were initiated by the educators, they originally had a control over the learning. In the dialogic engagement of learning, it appeared to be also critical for the educators to share their authority of control over the learning and to delegate the responsibility of the learning to the learners. However, there was also a

dilemma here because there appeared to be a thin line between delegating and coercing responsibility. In the parenting action learning circles, quite often the educators were inclined to force the learners to talk and contribute in learning.

> *Particularly in the open discussion sessions in the large group, we sometimes forced the mothers to speak up, and quite often, they showed their uneasiness to speak in front of others. Even if they spoke, they spoke only one or two words. I feel sorry for them. But when they were engaged in activities in smaller groups, a group of three or four people, they were really involved.* (NGS 2, NGO Staff)

It was extremely important for the educators to organise learning in such a way that everyone was involved in it voluntarily. The structured learning activities appeared to be effective ways of delegating the learning responsibility to the learners. By arranging the activities in order for each of the learners to participate and contribute, they gradually developed a sense of responsibility and ownership in learning. At the same time, the experiences also showed that the facilitators had to observe the course of learning susceptibly, and accordingly to decide when to exercise their authority and when not to.

In addition, the authoritative position of the educators inevitably resulted in another expectation, that is, to have the educators as advocates for the communities to have a progressive change in their situation. The learners quite often told the educators:

If you meet higher authorities, could you present our situation to them so that they know and provide help for us. We're sure you've access to them. (A group of mothers from community 1)

Unlike the other expectation, the facilitating team did not feel confident and comfortable to respond to that expectation, and at the same time they were reluctant to admit their lack of confidence on this as they were worried about losing their face. Therefore, it was a challenge for them to deal with such an expectation. Although those concerns should be discussed in the learning circles and collectively explored for solutions in an empowering manner, unfortunately the educators were not able to handle it in that way and they usually tended to respond that they would do as much as they could.

5.3.5 Creating a "Third Idiom" for All

As discussed in the previous sections, the role of language appeared to be extremely critical in communicating with families and communities. Shor (1992) has asserted that in empowering education, educators and learners had to create a dialogic discourse called the "third idiom" which is different from the two conflicting languages brought to the learning process by the educators and the learners: non-academic every-day language and academic professional talk. In typical education programmes, the educators have comfortably used technical terms to convey certain concepts and ideas developed by the academics. In the democratic pedagogical approach, the use of those jargons are not appropriate partly because they do not make much sense to the

ordinary people, but mainly because these jargons also connote the authoritative position of the language user and downplay the voice of the others. Therefore, it was important for the research team to learn the language of the community and then create a language for mutual benefit of both the educators and the learners.

In this process, the facilitators pursued two simultaneous and intertwined actions: one was to learn the language and its repertoire used in the communities and the second was to translate the academic language into daily expressions. The engagement with parents and communities in PLA exercises gave the research team the opportunity to learn the right language to be used in discussing issues with the mothers.

> *It was also a good opportunity for us to learn the right language to use in communicating with parents. The language they use is different from what we're using in the classrooms, seminars and workshops. During PLA exercises, if you're a good listener, you'll learn how they're talking about their children, and the language they use in talking about their child care issues. I think it's important for us to know their language.* (MES 2, MoE Staff)

However, the facilitators found it extremely difficult to translate technical and academic jargons into every-day language of the community. Despite the power connotation associated with the technical jargons, there were also important concepts and ideas expressed in those words, for which the learners needed to

have clear understanding so that merging the knowledge of the community and the knowledge of the professionals would be possible. Therefore, the team felt that it was crucial to translate those jargons into the community language.

> *Finding a language that the mothers understand is a challenge. We can't use the technical terms that we have been using all along. For them, these terms are not meaningful. For example, the term 'development' is not in their everyday language but they use 'growth'. On the other hand, the terms 'development' and 'growth' are two different concepts for us: 'development' meaning the total wellbeing and advancement of a child while 'growth' means physical growth. It was extremely difficult for us to make those two concepts accepted by mothers with two different meanings. Finally we decided not to use the terms but put our focus on the meaning that we would like to make clear among ourselves.* (MES 3, MoE Staff)

Finally, it appeared that the focus should be on how to convey the concepts and ideas rather than on the attempts to translate technical jargons into every-day language.

Creating the third idiom not only helped the educators and the learners have smooth communication and understanding but also create a good rapport for learning together. All the educators indicated that the change in the language and its repertoire they used made them closer to the learners, and quite often it also created a hilarious atmosphere in the action learning circles.

5.4 PROMOTING PARTICIPATORY ACTION FOR CHANGE IN ADDRESSING CHILD CARE ISSUES

The overall goal of the generative curriculum development process was to emancipate and empower communities for genuine participation in designing and developing a parenting education programme on early childhood care and development. It was hoped that by participating in the process, the communities, particularly the mothers, would be able to address their child care issues and concerns more effectively. It was aimed that by merging the community wisdom and the professional knowledge on the child care, the mothers would be able to find solutions and options for their child care issues and accordingly they would take action for change. In order to meet those aims, the praxis-based action learning approach was used in the parenting education circles to promote participatory action for change among the mothers. On the contrary, despite the intent for finding solutions to change, the overall result of the learning process appeared to be raising more questions than solutions.

5.4.1 Emancipatory Learning: Prerequisite for Genuine Participation

As Mezirow (1994) has explained, emancipatory learning is a critical self reflective learning which brings about emancipation from the forces that limit our options and our control over our lives. In order to promote genuine participation in the learning process, emancipatory learning is a prerequisite which both educators and learners will have to pursue. Bearing this in mind, in the generative curriculum development process, the research team promoted

emancipatory learning so that all would be able to overcome constraining factors that limited their participation, learning and taking actions.

The first constraining factor in pursuing learning was “problem denial’ by the learners as it was termed by Werner and Bower (1982). When issues were raised, the majority of the responses appeared to be “no problem” or “problem of somebody else”. Even if there was an acknowledgement of the problem, the follow-up response was that there was not that much they could do. This lack of ownership on the issue by the learners became an obstacle for further learning and action. As data in Chapter Four illustrated, the facilitators used some strategies to overcome that problem denial phase, and those strategies appeared to be effective and successful to a certain extent. Making the issue as a collective concern of the group, normalising the problem as one of the many, and establishing a trustworthy relationship among participants were the strategies that helped the learners to overcome the problem denial. In fact, when deeper discussion was made, the learners gradually tended to acknowledge that they had the same concerns about the issue.

Unfortunately, in some cases, the problem denial of the mothers created unease among the educators towards the learners. Particularly, some of the educators indicated their negative perceptions towards the learners, which led to a problem for effective communication and a difficulty to build trust with them.

> *We see these as problems but they (mothers) do not see them as problems. We're not supposed to tell them that these are problems for*

them but to help them see those as problematic issues. For instance, pregnancy before the age of 18 is very common in the community; therefore, for them it isn't seen as unusual but we see that as a problem. In what way we could help them see the problematic consequences. That has been what we have been struggling for long. (NGS 1, NGO Staff)

In fact, this was their own self restriction among the educators as they did not pursue critical reflection on the existence of the constraint. When the issue was further discussed in the pedagogic action learning circle, most of the educators were able to overcome that constraint. It appeared that the educators had quite often self-imposed the barriers, and it was necessary for them to pursue critical reflection on those barriers as a way to overcome them.

The experiences in the research showed that the most critical change in emancipatory and empowering education appeared to be the change in the educators themselves before actually helping the learners change. It was learned that self awareness and self realisation were the results of reflective learning which made the educators see the constraining factors that they imposed on themselves, and the crucial step in emancipatory learning was to make themselves free from those constraints.

5.4.2 Empowering Mothers for Participatory Action for Change

The primary objective of organising parenting education circles was to empower mothers to look at their situations and problems with critical perspectives and to find solutions to address their child care issues. Empowerment here is seen as a process with different stages such as knowledge acquisition, self-realisation and awareness, participation, and finally collective action. Therefore, the parenting education sessions were designed in such a way that mothers would realise and accept the existence of the problem, then critically look at the problem to see the causes and reasons surrounding it, and finally find possible solutions to address them.

In terms of knowledge acquisition, participating mothers had indicated that they had learned many things by participating in the learning circle. In fact, many mothers said that they came to the circle actually to gain more knowledge to verify what they had heard and what they had learned before.

> *We're happy to participate in the learning circle. Our teachers always teach us things we don't know. For example, we don't know much about those things like dengue. We have a lot of mosquitoes. We discussed those things like dengue and diarrhoea.* (A mother from community 2)

Concurrently, the educators also put more emphasis on transferring of technical knowledge to the mothers. While discussing issues with the mothers, the facilitators appeared to have difficulty to go beyond the technical arena towards

the socio-political arena. Most of the questions discussed were at the level of single-loop learning if seen from the perspective of the action learning framework (Foldy & Creed, 1999). They found it extremely difficult to raise issues at the double-loop or triple-loop level as they felt that they might not be able to find answers for that level.

As the discussion in the parenting education sessions were mostly at the technical level without going to the deeper level of analysis, it was also challenging for the educators to bring down the awareness of the learners at their personal level to be able to see their strengths and weaknesses, the constraining factors they encountered, and the options they had to address the issues. The technical knowledge alone was not adequate to fully realise the situation and to see the options. Their participation in the discussion as well as taking action was limited to the technical arena only. The reason for those limitations appeared to be the educators' lack of confidence and competence on how to facilitate a deeper level of learning. They actually admitted that they were more comfortable in discussing technical issues.

The other constraining factor in promoting emancipatory and empowering learning was challenging authority. Due to the strong hierarchical structure of the society, obedience and respect were key values that people demonstrated to their superiors. Therefore, it was almost impossible for the learners to raise their questions and concerns against the arguments made by the educators since they were perceived by the learners as those in the higher position. Even

though the educators attempted to establish a more horizontal relationship, the hierarchical nature remained. Consequently, it was a challenge for the educators to promote truly critical and reflective learning as they tend to limit themselves as mere subordinates in the society. That appeared to be another reason why the learning did not go beyond the technical matters; hence, their participation was limited in discussion but not leading to taking concrete actions.

As explained in the previous chapter on the process of the generative curriculum development, after each session of the parenting education programme, all participants were encouraged to plan concrete actions for change in their child care practices, and they usually tried to do so. However, the actions that they planned and took appeared to be more individual and technical, and collective action for change at a societal level was barely happening. Even if they did collective action, it was limited to participation in already organised institutions such as the mothers' circles. Therefore, it appeared that empowering education required a conducive environment where the learners would have room to manoeuver possibilities for taking collective action for social change. On the contrary, creating that kind of environment could be beyond the educator’s capacity.

5.5 CHALLENGES IN EMANCIPATORY AND EMPOWERING EDUCATION FOR MOTHERS

Despite concerted efforts through a relatively long participatory learning process to address the child care issues, it has generated more issues and challenges

rather than solutions to the problems. Motivating learners to genuinely participate in the learning process, convincing educators for democratisation of the education process, resolving power issues between the educator and the learner, and challenging socio-cultural constraints in learning appeared to be major challenges encountered in the process.

Throughout the three phase process of action learning, motivation was the topic that the team frequently discussed because motivating learning and motivating participation appeared to be a major challenge for the team. There was a question on how to motivate learners to be engaged in the dialogic and reflective learning. The facilitators acknowledged that the engagement in the learning circles would not fulfill the immediate needs of the mothers. Therefore, it was difficult to convince the mothers that the learning experiences would benefit them. Freirean pedagogy did not seem to indicate how that aspect of learning could be addressed.

There were three different groups of mothers found in the action learning circles: those who came to the discussion with genuine intention of learning, those who came with a sense of obligation as their children were receiving services from the project and consequently they felt themselves responsible to join the mothers group, and those who came with expectations that the staff from either NOG or the MoE would give, or do something for them. Therefore, different groups had different expectations. The question for the team was how to motivate those whose expectation would not possibly be met as acquiring

more knowledge and skills on child care was not a really attractive incentive for them to participate in the discussion.

Besides, it was also difficult to maintain the momentum of the enthusiasm by the mothers to participate in the learning circles because the process appeared to be too long. Initially there was eagerness and enthusiasm among the participants; however, later that momentum was gradually reduced.

> *I think the process was too long. In phase one when we were conducting PLA activities, there was great enthusiasm from the parents to contribute to learning. However, that momentum was interrupted for a while in phase two, and when we resume parenting education sessions in phase three, it was difficult to gain the same level of momentum. I wish we could have done in a quicker way.* (NGS 4, NGO Staff)

It was suggested by the team that the process should have been shorter and quicker. Instead of the three phase model, the team should have done it differently; probably, all learning steps together within a single phase as seen in the REFLECT model, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

It appeared to be that the expectations for mothers to initiate collective actions was too far away from reality. In such an authoritative society like Myanmar (Burma), there was extremely limited opportunity for communities to initiate grass-root level collective action. However, it can be expected that the families and communities will express their views and opinions when opportunities to do

so are given. The research team feel that the circles were able to facilitate critical reflection and self realisation on the issues though it is not sure when the collective action will be taken place.

The reason for not being able to take collective action was because of unfavourable socio-political environment of the society. Even in the learning sessions, participants were reluctant to discuss issues and options that would challenge existing authoritative systems, structures and institutions. In a highly authoritative society, there was a fear among common people that challenging authority is a dangerous act. Therefore, the solution that people were looking at was more at the technical level, and the mind set was choked not to go beyond that.

> *We discuss the issue of garbage collection, which the authority is supposed to do regularly but they don't do it. We tried to identify what we can do about it. There is a pile of garbage at the corner of the street. The only thing we can do seems to be just to inform the ward-leaders. I didn't go beyond this. If we criticize them, we'll be in trouble.* (NGS 2, NGO Staff)

An attempt to initiate an empowering education process in an extremely authoritative society seems to be just having a dream that will never be realised in this kind of context. Through this action learning experience with the generative curriculum development model, there came out more questions and challenges than answers. However, the research team feels that realising

reality, and knowing the context and its implications for pedagogical practices of educators are the fruits of the work. The goal might be quite far away but it can be said that the first step has already commenced.

5.6 CONCLUSION

The main focus of the preceding two chapters has been the presentation of the experiences and the findings of the analysis of data pertaining to the participatory action learning for the generative curriculum development of a parenting education programme on early childhood care and development. Chapter Four concentrated on the experiences of the three phase process of the generative curriculum development, explaining how the content and materials as well as the pedagogical approach and practices emerged out of it. Chapter Five presented the reflections on the pedagogic practices of the adult educators who facilitated the learning process of the generative curriculum development. This process has been an excellent opportunity for the research team to learn how to promote participatory dialogic learning for emancipation and empowerment of learners, and how to overcome the constraining factors that hamper learning and action.

In the generative curriculum development process the first promising outcome was learning how to learn from the communities: creating a trustworthy relationship and a good rapport with the communities; learning and creating a mutually understandable language jointly with the communities; and exercising authority and delegating learning responsibility to the communities appeared to

be a significant ideological shift that happened among the educators. This process has helped the educators to find not only the right content and materials but also the language and the pedagogy with which their facilitation in learning become more effective and efficient.

However, it was also learned that there was still a power struggle in the mind set of the educators. In order to have a dialogic pedagogy in place, the educators have to transform themselves as genuine learners, renouncing their authoritative position as the only competent source of knowledge, and recognising the fact that the learners are also a sound source of knowledge. With this understanding, the educators will be able to facilitate a learning process, where both parties can grow together and construct one's own new knowledge each by using the two knowledge sources.

In summary, the three phase participatory process of the curriculum development model has demonstrated that working with the parents and communities and learning from them is an excellent way of developing genuinely grounded and contextually appropriate curriculum for a parenting education programme. In the next chapter, the reflective experiences of the learning process will be discussed within the framework of Freirean pedagogy, referring to the theories, principles and practices of emancipatory and empowering education.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapters Four and Five, the research experiences on the generative curriculum development process as well as the reflections on the pedagogic practices of the adult educators during that process have been presented, and in this chapter the overall findings of the research study are discussed. The chapter is organised in such a way as to answer, if not fully, partly the specific research questions, namely:

1. *How can the professionals and community facilitators learn to enhance their pedagogic practices through the PAL process?*

2. *In which way can outside professionals work with parents and communities to advance their child care practices?*

3. *How can people be empowered to genuinely and meaningfully participate in the development of a parenting education programme?*

The chapter has four important sections answering the above questions. Firstly, the overall reflection on the findings pertaining to the effectiveness of the generative curriculum development model itself as a viable participatory

approach to developing a parenting education programme is discussed. Secondly, the issues related to working with communities to improve child care practices are deliberated. Thirdly, the pedagogical practices of adult educators used in the three-phase process of generative curriculum development are presented. Finally, the issues of emancipation, empowerment and participation are elaborated to have an understanding on the theoretical framework for those inseparable and intertwining concepts.

6.2 REFLECTIONS ON THE GENERATIVE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT MODEL

As explained in the previous chapters, this study adopted a three-phase process of generative curriculum development, engaging communities, particularly mothers, in a dialogic learning process for development of the parenting education programme that would empower parents to change their child care situations and practices. The concept of generative curriculum was first promoted by the partnership programme of First Nations tribal council and the University of Victoria in Canada (Ball, 2004; Ball & Pence, 1999; Pence & Ball, 1999) whereas the three-phase model was derived from what Freire (1970, 1995) proposed for designing adult literacy programmes. The model also incorporated some participatory techniques such as those activities of Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) methodology as specific techniques for promoting participation and generating data and information on child care knowledge and practices of the communities.

The overall experience of the research on the generative curriculum development has indicated that the principles and practices adopted in this approach are appropriate to the research and there are some promising outcomes for adult educators and development workers to further advance their understanding, and consequently to improve their practices in related works. The generative curriculum development process appeared to be a practicable approach for adult educators to work with communities to jointly undertake both the development and delivery process of an education curriculum with the intent of emancipation and empowerment of the people. Apparently the model was also found to be able to generate significant learning outcomes for the adult educators leading to change in their perceptions, understandings and attitudes, and accordingly their practices regarding educating adult learners.

Despite those promising outcomes, there were also some limitations found with the current model. The three-phase process adopted and adapted from what Freire (1970, 1995) suggested was rather time consuming, and it was not efficiently helping the learners whose concerns and issues were to be addressed immediately. In the three-phase generative curriculum development model, the issues identified in phase one were set aside for a certain period of time until the whole series of PLA exercises were completed, and thus this lack of immediate response to the issues and concerns of the communities resulted in losing the momentum of the process as well as the enthusiasm of the learners. Besides, when the actual parenting sessions were conducted, refreshing and recalling the issues again for further discussion appeared to be

unnecessarily a waste of time for the learners. Once an issue was identified trough a PLA exercise, further learning and discussion should have been done immediately on how that issue could be addressed. The overall reflection by the research team was that there should have been a different way of organising and sequencing the components and the activities of the learning process.

Meanwhile, the research team also found out at the later stage of the research that the generative curriculum development model had similarities to the REFLECT (*Regenerated Freirean Literacy Through Empowering Community Technique*) approach developed by ActionAid and implemented in a number of countries, combining the theory of Paulo Freire and the participatory techniques of PRA/PLA (Archer & Cottingham, 1996a). The difference was that in the REFLECT approach each individual PLA/PRA session led to a learning session with a focus on a particular issue whereas the model in this research employed a series of PLA activities over a period of time to explore generative themes which would later emerge as learning sessions. Initial reaction from the reflection of the overall model was that it could be more effective and efficient if the model adopted the process similar to REFLECT rather than the three-phase one. If the team followed the same procedure as REFLECT did, they would have helped the learners keep the momentum and enthusiasm for learning, and apparently addressed their concerns and issues immediately.

On the other hand, the team also felt that the approach used in the research was still valid for developing education programmes which could afford a certain

time frame for curriculum planning. As an approach for planning of a particular education programme, the approach appeared to be a useful one to have genuine participation of the people in all different steps of the planning process such as generating themes and concerns, identifying and prioritising issues, and developing content, materials and delivery methodologies. In that sense, it was also learned that the approach appeared similar to the approaches of Adult Learning Project (ALP) described by Shor (1992) quoting Kirkwood and Kirkwood (1989) and the "Four D" model (Discover, Dream, Design and Deliver) of the Appreciative Inquiry approach as explained by Greany and Elliott (2001). Apart from the use of participatory methodologies, the most important similarity among these models is that unlike simple PRA/PLA approaches which usually concerns about understanding of a situation, these models lead to a change of that situation.

In the newly proposed model for the parenting education programme, the Freirean pedagogic principles and practices will be maintained but the new processes and procedures will be used for the actual implementation. The appropriately selected Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) activities will be used as tools for exploring the existing child care knowledge and practices of the communities. However, instead of going through the three-phase process, the reflective learning to identify the issues and concerns of the community and exploring solutions and actions for them to address those issues will be pursued immediately after the completion of each PLA activity. In this way, the momentum and enthusiasm generated by participation in the PLA activities will

be maintained and at the same time, the learning will be more meaningful for the community as their concerns are immediately attempted to be addressed.

6.3 WORKING WITH PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES ON THEIR CHILD CARE ISSUES

As explained earlier, early childhood programme developers are gradually shifting their approaches of designing and developing ECD programmes towards more participatory processes of working with parents and communities in both development and delivery of the programmes. Similarly increased attention has also been given to the development of community-based and family-focused programmes bringing the knowledge of communities and the professional knowledge together. For doing so, Evans (2006) has pointed out that there is a dilemma for programme developers on how to support existing knowledge while introducing new knowledge that has been shown to be effective. In addressing that dilemma, she has suggested ECD practitioners deal with the following elements in working with communities:

- recognising both the strengths and challenges of the existing child care knowledge and practices of the community, and using them as the ground for further learning

- building confidence and competence among caregivers/mothers in relation to both local positive child care practices and the new ones that the professionals bring into the community

- generating solutions, alternatives and choices for caregivers/mothers to adopt as appropriate and feasible to their own context.

These salient elements have been used as an analytical framework to look at how the professionals worked with communities on child care issues in the development of a parenting education programme under this study.

6.3.1 Recognising the Existing Strengths and Challenges

Many advocates have been raising the need to recognise and value the existing child care knowledge and practices of communities, and to use them as the basis for further leaning and advancement of child care (Angeles-Bautista, 1998; Arnold, 1999; Evans, 2000a, 200b; Evans & Myers, 1994; UNICEF, 2001a). It is critical for the programme developers to consider the culture and context of child care: even if the need for child care is universal, the responses to those needs are specific to the context and culture of each family and community. Therefore, the generative curriculum development process was started with an attempt to explore existing child care knowledge and practices of the communities where the research team was working with. The effort helped both the professionals from outside as well as the communities, particularly mothers, to have an in-depth understanding on the existing situation of child

care in those communities, and to undertake critical reflection and realisation on the strengths and weaknesses of their child care so that feasible solutions and options could be found to address their concerns.

The outcomes of the phase one research through Participatory Learning Action (PLA) exercises showed that the parents and communities had an impressive wealth of knowledge. It was even acknowledged by the educators that some of the predetermined set of knowledge prepared by professionals appeared unnecessary for the parents since they already had that knowledge. Though early childhood development workers generally acknowledge the fact that communities possess a wealth of knowledge which has been traditionally transferred from one generation to another, it is still necessary for the outsiders to learn what those exiting knowledge and practices are since each community has its own different child care knowledge and practices in accordance with their context, culture and tradition. The outcomes such as the understanding on the context, the perceptions and beliefs, the expectations, and the practices of child care in a particular setting are as important as the knowledge and expertise the professionals bring into the setting. In the generative curriculum development process, it was demonstrated that the reflective understanding on existing knowledge and practices of parents and communities provided both the adult educators and the learners with a useful foundation for further learning and action to change their child care situation.

The issues and concerns raised by the communities during phase one also indicated that their perception of child care and development was related to the total wellbeing of their children. This has reaffirmed the call for the need for integrated programming on early childhood care and development, incorporating different aspects of child care such as health, nutrition, protection, stimulation and learning as highlighted by many scholars (Engle, Menon, & Haddad, 1997; Levinger, 1996; Myers, 1990, 1991, 1995; UNICEF, 1993; WHO, 1999). Even though most of the service providers usually tend to be more comfortable with the sectoral approach to development of programmes and delivery of services, the community requirement appears to be the integrated way of responding, even in the parenting education programme. In the research process, it became apparent that the emergence of diverse themes and topics across various disciplines for the parenting education programme was an indication of the nature of demand from the communities. It was for this reason that the parenting education content was organised with an integrated framework of topics related to different disciplines.

Apart from the wealth of knowledge owned by the communities, the other remarkable positive sign shown by them was their enthusiasm and eagerness to address their concerns and issues of child care. Active contribution in the PLA exercises, and openness to express their experiences, challenges and concerns were obvious indicators of the passion they had in relation to the wellbeing of their children. It is important for educators to acknowledge and harness that enthusiasm while working with communities. However, as

explained in the previous section of this chapter, it became apparent that the programme model was not appropriately designed to be able to maintain that enthusiasm of the mothers in the later stage of the research. The programme appeared to be lacking flexibility to respond to the concerns of the mothers immediately.

When dialectic engagement was made on the knowledge and practices of the communities with the professional/academic knowledge which the educators brought in from outside, it was found that there were some gaps between what the parents knew and what they actually practiced, particularly regarding modern child care practices. Those gaps indicated that awareness and knowledge alone on a certain child care practice would not help the parents to adopt the practice. When deeper analysis was made on the gaps, there appeared a number of issues around those gaps. In some cases, the knowledge and information the communities received were either incomplete or distorted, and in others certain care practices were service-oriented and resource demanding, and not practical. Besides, it appeared also true for those communities that prevalence of a particular child care practice was an outcome of the interaction among different factors around the family such as knowledge, perceptions and expectations, availability of resources and coping mechanisms, and socio-cultural environment.

6.3.2 Building Confidence and Competence among the Caregivers/Mothers

The purpose of working with communities on child care issues was to build confidence and competence of parents and communities so that they were empowered enough to make informed decisions and choices and to take actions that affected the wellbeing of their children. Building confidence in either individual or collective ability to bring about change has been highlighted as one of the essential steps in empowering communities (Arnold, 1999; Evans, 2006; Evans & Stansbery, 1998; Manoncourt, 2000; Tilakaratna, 1991). It is critical for them to feel confidence in their knowledge and abilities to contribute to the learning process, as well as to provide appropriate and effective care for their own children. Similarly, it is also important for them to have different types and adequate levels of competence in relation to the positive existing practices as well as the new practices that are brought in by the professionals.

Opportunities provided for the participants in the generative curriculum development process appeared to help the communities, particularly mothers, build confidence in their knowledge and abilities. Recognition given by the outside professionals on the wealth of knowledge owned by the communities was also instrumental in building confidence and self-esteem among themselves that they were capable of providing effective child care. Organising the discussions around their own experiences and encouraging and letting mothers to make their own choices and decisions were important strategies in

building confidence and competence of the communities. On the other hand, the process appeared to focus more on the issues and challenges, and too much emphasis on the issues also appeared a drawback in building people's self-esteem and confidence. It is important for the professionals to make sure parents see these issues with reflective analysis against their experiences and successes.

It is also important for the educators to build the competence of communities, while building their confidence, to take appropriate actions in responding to the needs and concerns about their child care. Quoting Habermas (1971), Mezirow (1991) has explained three areas of human knowledge construction: instrumental, practical and emancipatory. According to Habermas, these three types of knowledge are generated with human interests in, and are grounded in our relationship to the environment, other people, and power, respectively. From this assertion, Mezirow has proposed three different types of learning: technical/instrumental, practical/communicative and emancipatory. Instrumental learning is the learning based on empirical knowledge and governed by technical rules while communicative learning involves human interaction to have mutual understanding among ourselves. Emancipatory learning is critical reflective learning which helps human-beings free themselves from various forces that limit actions and control over their lives. In building competence of the communities and the parents, these three different types of learning need to be involved.

In the generative curriculum development process, opportunities were also created for the communities to engage in both instrumental and communicative learning. The adult educators spent a significant amount of time to address the instrumental learning of the mothers. In fact, that appeared to be their main purpose of joining the learning circles as many of them indicated that they wanted to clarify and confirm their knowledge and practices or to gain additional knowledge or new knowledge so that they would have more complete information. It is not wrong to provide additional or new knowledge or to introduce new child care practices since it is desirable to promote the practices that have been proven effective with empirical evidences in other settings. Meanwhile, interactive learning methodologies were also used to have the participants involved in communicative learning, where they shared and tried to understand each other's experiences, feelings, opinions and ideas. Apparently, this interactive learning process appeared to be widening their instrumental and practical knowledge. However, the critical caveat here is for the educators not to use their professional authority to impose any practices on the parents and communities.

Despite the valid endorsement on the two types of learning mentioned above, the critical competence that the parents and communities need to build is the emancipatory learning (Mezirow, 1991). Differing from the technical or practical learning, the emancipator learning would help the mothers pursue critical reflection on the conditions and reasons of a given behaviour, and thus lead to reinforcing that behaviour or a change of it with some alternatives. An obvious

example of that type of learning was that after listening to a true story of a boy beaten by his mother, some mothers admitted that they realised the true reason of their violent acts as a way of letting their frustrations and angers over something else out, and this realisation helped them to overcome their internal constraints and accordingly to change their practices. This has been the type of learning that the participants pursued in the parenting education circles along with both instrumental and communicative learning with the intention to build confidence and competence among themselves.

6.3.3 Generating Solutions, Alternatives and Choices

Generating solutions, alternatives and choices for caregivers/mothers to adopt as appropriate and feasible practices to their own context was the aim of parenting action learning circles in phase three of the research. Attempts were made to resolve the gaps identified in the previous phases, addressing certain issues around a topic in each session, and merging the existing knowledge of communities and the academic knowledge the professionals brought to the programme. Although the purpose of the parenting education programme was to improve the child care situation in the communities, the focus of the research was not on the outcome but on the process of the generative curriculum development. Therefore, it was not possible and not even intended to gauge to what extent the child care situation was improved in the participating communities.

Since child care is a complex issue and various factors are involved in adopting a certain child care practice, there is no prescribed formula for any parents: each family needs to make their own decision and choice according to their context. Prescriptive advice by professionals is useful but not always feasible for the communities to adopt directly. Parents need to be creative enough to adjust, adapt or even make alternative arrangements with that professional advice. Therefore, in working with communities, the emphasis was made on strengthening abilities of families to generate different options so that they could make the best possible choice in relation to not only adopting the practices but also obtaining required services and resources for child care. The professionals also paid careful attention to their facilitation work in order that they never attempted to provide any coerced advice on any practice. Their focus was more on facilitating parents to assume responsibility for making their own decisions.

Contrary to the expectations of the project, it became clear from the analysis that there were not many concrete actions taken by the communities. The reflections on the observations of the mothers' circles also did not indicate much on the change of practices by the mothers. It appeared challenging for the parents and communities to find solutions or even look for alternatives and choices since actions required a number of factors beyond knowledge and competencies. Although they looked for various alternatives and options, those solutions were more of actions at the individual level and virtually no collective action or struggle was considered. There was apparent lack of adequate critical reflection on the situation and challenges in relation to power dynamics within

the community as well as in the larger society. For libratory educators such as Freire (1970) and Shor (1992), critical reflection on the reality in the context of power dynamics is a fundamental step towards action for change.

6.4 PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES IN EMPOWERING AND EMANCIPATORY EDUCATION

The main focus of area in this research was the pedagogic practices of adult educators and community development workers who were providing different forms of adult education to the communities. The pedagogic practices encompassed how the curriculum content and materials were generated, how the parenting education programme was actually delivered with the aim to promote emancipation and empowerment for change of child care practices by the parents, and what characteristics and qualities the empowering educators possessed. The experiences and data presented in Chapters Four and Five already revealed all those pedagogical concerns to a certain extent.

6.4.1 Development of the Curriculum for the Parenting Education Programme

The curriculum in this research study was defined as a process of learning with praxis: repeated cycle of action and critical reflection as defined by Smith (2000). Unlike the conventional way of curriculum planning, where the curriculum components were defined based on the identified needs of the

learners, in this study the different elements of the parenting education curriculum were organised around the issues and concerns jointly raised by the educators and the learners. Therefore, the curriculum was not limited within the boundary of technical knowledge and competencies regarding child care but designed to build capacity of all participants to pursue critical reflection and action for change. The primary goal of learning in the mothers' circles was to look for the possible solutions, alternatives and choices so that they could make more informed decisions. This broad objective of the parenting education programme appeared to be well-understood by both the educators and learners. The reflection on the overall process showed that the way the curriculum content and materials were developed was appropriate and effective.

The curriculum development process started with exploring the existing child care knowledge, practices and situations through Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) exercises with the communities. The PLA methodologies appeared to be effective in generating information and themes, as well as concerns and issues by the communities, which were later used as a basis for developing topics and related content and materials. Besides, the process also helped the educators to have an understanding of the characteristics of the learners, their life situation, the challenges that they faced and the coping mechanisms they had. At the same time, it also provided opportunities for the educators to learn the language repertoire of the communities, which later helped the educators for effective communication and building a trustworthy

relationship with the communities. Overall, it became apparent that PLA methodology was a good start for the generative curriculum development.

Although the target audience for the parenting education programme was the mothers, the generative curriculum development process purposely involved a wide range of community representatives such as mothers, fathers, community leaders and even some children. This arrangement was meant not only to validate the information and issues against various sources but also to have an understanding with multiple perspectives on the issues of child care in the community. It has been demonstrated in child care studies (Arnold, Bartlett, Hill, Khatiwada, & Sapkota, 2000; Sternin, 1999) that generating information from multiple sources usually helps the professionals from outside to have a comprehensive and total understanding of the child care situation in a community. It was also found that involving stakeholders in the process for development of an education programme was a significant aspect of the issue-based approach to curriculum development, which was different from the need-based approach where the focus was traditionally mainly on the characteristics and needs of the target learners only.

Based on the themes and concerns identified during PLA exercises, the adult educators went through a dialectic engagement of community knowledge and professional/academic knowledge by themselves to identify areas of congruence or divergence between the two types of knowledge so that a more in-depth understanding of the issues could be reached. Then, the consultation

process with the communities followed later to prioritise issues and identify topics, upon which specific learning content of the programme was developed. In this process, there was contradicting interest of priorities between the educators and the learners on some issues. The communities did not show eagerness, and even were reluctant to address some fundamental issues such as "poverty" or "domestic violence" while the educators had keen interest in those issues. However, the educators did not impose their priorities and let the mothers decide as they felt necessary and comfortable to address in the circles.

The information generated during phase one of research was useful in a sense that it helped the educators develop authentic content and materials to use in the later parenting education sessions. Among the materials, some were the actual products of PLA exercises while others were the "codifications", as termed by Freire (1970, 1995), of the incidences or stories retold by the communities. Since the materials were direct references of their own experiences, these appeared more meaningful and stimulating for them to have deeper discussion. The phase one experiences also provided an opportunity for the educators to learn community language and accordingly create a “third idiom” (Shor, 1992) for both parties to facilitate a dialogical learning process. These authentic content and materials as well as the "third idiom" for all appeared to be the good pedagogical practices that helped the educators and learners to merge community knowledge and academic knowledge together to create more authentic knowledge.

6.4.2 Delivery Process of the Parenting Education Programme

The pedagogical approach for delivery of the programme was informal and naturalistic learning with active involvement of the learners. The learning process usually started with an issue, followed by a discussion on the consequences and implications for the wellbeing and development of children. At this stage, the educators also provided additional information to the learners. After that, the group pursued reflections on their current child care practices in relation to the issue presented, highlighting the facilitating or constraining factors. Finally they explored possible solutions, alternatives and actions to address the issue. This approach is similar to the active learning model referred to by Carnegie and Weisen (2000) in promoting action-oriented life skills education. In the model, a deliberate effort was made to go beyond giving knowledge and information to the learners but to facilitate critical reflection on the current issues and to find solutions by the learners themselves. It is important to stress here that although the two models have different stages differently defined in the learning process, both approaches have a common premise, that is, a continuous cycle of learning, action and reflection with the aim of empowering learners.

In designing parenting education programme, there appeared to be a role for more structured learning activities in promoting participation in learning. In the mothers' circles the facilitators initially attempted to facilitate free and open discussions among mothers, assuming that this type of learning was what they

naturally pursued in the community. However, later it was found that more structured learning activities could bring about participation and contribution to the learning process. Perhaps it was because the PLA exercises in phase one were structured activities and the prevalent experiences with those activities made the educators more comfortable to work with similar activities in later stages. It was found that structured learning activities could actually create enthusiasm and motivation among the learners who were traditionally passive recipients of instructions from the authorities, and not used to active participation in public discussions. Therefore, organising special avenues and arrangements was necessary for them to be more actively engaged in the learning activities. The caveat here again is for the adult educators not to develop too rigidly structured learning but to be flexible enough so that the learners can manoeuver their own course of learning.

Also, it became apparent that specific participatory methodologies did not really matter in promoting empowerment and emancipation, but what really mattered was how the educators and the learners dialectically engaged these methodologies in practice around the issue of their interest and concern. Participatory techniques such as PLA activities appeared to be effective tools in promoting interactive engagement with learners/participants, particularly motivating them to actively contribute to the discussion with their knowledge and experiences.

It also became apparent to the educators that they needed to go beyond the interactive aspect of those methodologies, bringing about praxis-based learning of the repeated cycle of action, critical reflection and re-action. For instance, the PLA exercises that were used in phase one of the research definitely generated invaluable information for the educators and learners; however, the activities focused more on generating information but did not really promote analytical reflection on certain important issues among the discussants; thus limiting the potential capacity of learners to transform themselves for emancipation and empowerment. Arnold, Bartlett, Hill, Khatiwada, and Sapkota (2000) have indicated a similar reflection regarding the focus on products of PLA activities rather than the process in their child care study in Nepal. It is important for educators not be too satisfied with the understanding of a situation only but to further pursue necessary steps that will lead the learners to action and change.

6.4.3 The Role of Learners in Empowering Education

As Freire (1995) has asserted, in critical and democratic pedagogy, both the educators and learners are subjects of learning, perhaps assuming different responsibilities in generating knowledge for both parties' interests. This was one of the basic principles promoted in the generative curriculum development process of this research. The communities and the parents were actively involved as subjects of the learning process, identifying issues and concerns, setting overall learning goals and objectives, developing curriculum content and materials, and pursuing the learning process. The mothers were not regarded

as passive recipients of knowledge and practices imposed by outside professionals but involved as active subjects who could learn things, reflect critically on them and make the best options, choices and decisions out of them. As the role of the learners in this process was perceived as active subjects, it appeared crucial for the educators to create avenues where the learners could confidently and comfortably contribute to the learning process.

It is also important to make sure that learners take the role of responsible team players in the learning process. Vella (1994) has highlighted the need to make role clarity between adult educator and learners as well as the importance of the role of the learners as active members of the learning team. In the parenting education circles, delegating learning responsibility to the learners was deliberately emphasised. There were two different responsibilities that the mothers in the circles had to assume: the responsibility to contribute to the learning process as active members of the learning team and the responsibility to make their own decisions for the choices and actions that they would pursue. In empowering education, the ultimate goal of education is to build the capacity of individuals to have critical consciousness and to become responsible citizens.

The challenge here was how to bring about active involvement of the communities, waking up from the culture of silence (Freire, 1995) with which they had been living throughout their lives. The deep rooted culture of authoritarian governance in the country and the long prevailing hierarchical

structure of the society had resulted in authority-dependent traditions at different levels of the society. Even though people need to be liberated by themselves, there appeared to be a need for an enabling condition for them to overcome the constraining factors that limit their ability and actions. In this respect, the experience of the research indicated that one possible solution was the educators' efforts for exercising professional authority, and delegating responsibilities to the learners in such a way that they felt sense of individual responsibility to contribute to the collective learning process, and eventually to change their life conditions.

6.4.4 Characteristics and Quality of Empowering Adult Educators

As explained before, there were some educators who believed that the use of participatory or active learning methodologies was a way of promoting democratic education and thus empowering learners to become autonomous thinkers. On the contrary, the experiences in the current research did not necessarily positively contribute to that assertion. It appeared that the specific participatory methodologies did not really matter in promoting empowerment and participation. Instead, the realisation of education as a political act (Freire, 1995) as well as the genuine understanding, the firm conviction and the strong commitment of educators regarding empowering education and democratisation of education process appeared to be more potent determining factors for successful delivery of an education programme targeted to those who did not have power. As Kane (2004) has pointed out, "in any given situation the

success of an active learning methodology depends not on the methodology alone but, ultimately, on the ever-evolving, dialectical relationship between methodologies and learners, mediated by the educator" (p. 285).

Similarly, the ability of the educator to transcend social distances also appeared to be an important factor for promoting participatory and empowering education. Among those who had been facilitating learning in the mothers' circles, the ones who could build trust and trustworthy relationship with the learners were able to help them build more confidence, and to generate more interactive engagement among the learners. Although there was cultural divide of hierarchy between the educator and the learners, it was crucial for the educators to transcend those boundaries to have a seamless relationship with the learners. It was the educator who had to look for avenues of providing confidence and comfort to the learners so that they could actively contribute to the learning process.

The most important type of learning by the educators in this regard was emancipatory learning with critical reflection. As the educators were traditionally given a high respect in the society, and they were in the upper position of hierarchy, there was reluctance from the educators to surrender their authority. In order to become an empowering educator, one needs to look at constraining factors, quite often self-imposed perceptions and beliefs, critically, and try to find ways to liberate oneself from those constraints. This appeared to be the most challenging tasks for the educators in the generative curriculum development as they felt that it would affect their credibility. However, in

emancipatory education, educators "actively use their authority to create the conditions for a critical transformation of consciousness that takes place in the process of the interaction of teachers, students and the knowledge they produce together" (Darder, 1991, p. 110).

6.5 EMPOWERING PEOPLE TO GENUINELY AND MEANINGFULLY PARTICIPATE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PARENTING EDUCATION PROGRAMME

The terms “empowerment” and “participation” in this research were seen as processes in which people's confidence and competence were built so that they would have greater control over their choices and actions that shaped their lives. The research was process-oriented on "how-to" questions rather than the outcome of whether, or to what extent, people were empowered, or participated in making decisions and choices, and consequently taking actions. Therefore, the analytical reflection on the data was focused on the strategies the research team used in relation to “empowerment” and “participation” and the kind of considerations they made in using those strategies.

6.5.1 Emancipation

Emancipation, which is termed as liberation in Freirean pedagogy, is freeing ourselves from "forces that limit our options and our rationale control over our lives but have been taken for granted or seen as beyond human control"'

(Mezirow, 1991, p. 87). For Freire (1995) those limits or constraining factors are the results of oppression, domination, domestication and manipulation of people by those who have power. In order for the people to free themselves from those constraints, it is critical for educators to facilitate “conscientization” or raising critical awareness among the people over those limitations. For Freire, conscientization process will help people look critically at what the constraints are, why they are constraints, how other people see them and what alternatives or choices are available to overcome them. With this view in mind, the research team facilitated the parenting education sessions for mothers.

During the analytical reflection on the process of learning, it was found that there were different types of forces that constrained mothers to participate in learning as well as to change or adopt a particular child care practice. Some of the constraints such as problem denial, and lack of confidence and trust appeared to be self-imposed limitations while others such as availability of time, services and resources, as well as the hierarchical and authoritative nature of society were externally imposed factors. In the parenting education sessions, the educators and learners jointly pursued emancipatory learning, involving critical reflection over the constraining factors that hindered learning and subsequent actions.

As Freire has pointed out, emancipatory or libratory learning is necessary not only for the learners but also for the educators as well. The educators also faced constraints to effectively facilitate libratory and empowering education for

the mothers. The facilitators expressed that they had difficulty surrendering their authority. Although they had understanding and acceptance of the concept on participatory and dialogic process for empowering education, they still saw themselves as knowledgeable beings; therefore, they had to transmit the knowledge. They saw themselves as candles from which other people could get light as Zargarian, Azamova and Yespulganova (n.d.) wrote:

> The authoritarian system in our countries has created small dictators everywhere. The consequences are disastrous and especially in the education system. Teacher, teaching in traditional classrooms, believe that they are "**candle**" [*emphasis in original*] that spread light (p. 2).

On the other hand, the mothers also saw the facilitators as technical resource persons whom they could rely on for useful advice to solve the problems that they were faced with. Hence, there was a fear of losing credibility among the facilitators unless they could demonstrate their knowledge and expertise. Consequently, the facilitators spent a lot of time presenting technical details of a particular care practice. Apparently, there was a need for the educators to critically reflect on the limits they set for themselves.

Although awareness raising or awareness creation is a strategy that most of development agencies use as a tool to mobilise communities, perhaps this awareness does not lead to sustainable actions as expected. Despite the synonymous use of the two terms “awareness creation” and “conscientization”, there seems to be an interpretation gap between the two. Quite often the term

‘awareness creation’ is used with superficial definition without deeply examining critical element of “conscientization” (critical consciousness). It was found in the study that in many instances, the educators were focusing on the awareness of issues from mere technical perspectives.

While discussing issues with mothers, the facilitators appeared to have difficulty to go beyond the technical arena towards the socio-political arena. The constraint for not going beyond the technical level was the reluctance to challenge authority. In a highly authoritative society, there was a fear among common people that challenging authority was a dangerous act. Therefore, the solution that people were looking at was more at the technical level, and as such the mind set did not to go beyond the technical and individual level solutions.

6.5.2 Empowerment

In the development field, the notion of "power" has been becoming the central theme of discussion among those who design and implement development programmes in a participatory manner. However, power should not be seen as a service or commodity that someone can give to others. At the same time, the dichotomy of "powerful" and "powerless" is also over simplification of the issue as there is no neat divide between "powerful" and "powerless" in the society (Masaki, 2006). Consequently the notion of empowerment also needs to be seen not as making someone to have power or not to have power but as a process of building capacity of people to be able to exercise power wisely with

an appropriate degree of control. This view was the central focus of the process for empowering communities and mothers throughout the three-phase participatory action learning on the generative curriculum development.

As explained before, empowerment in this study was defined as self growth and social change. As indicated in Chapter Three, there are three orientations to empowerment: empowerment as self growth, empowerment as personal/political consciousness-raising, and empowerment as collective actions/struggle. In this study, it was expected that the communities would be empowered to genuinely and meaningfully participate in the generative curriculum development process, and a number of strategies were employed by the research team to achieve that expectation. In relation to empowerment strategies, Garba (1999) has classified two types of empowerment strategies: the first type is endogenous strategies relating to building competence and confidence and the second is exogenous strategies that provide an enabling environment for the people to take actions. In the generative curriculum development process, the research team tried both types of strategies.

Using Wedeen's framework quoted by Carnegie and Weisen (2000), from the very beginning of the research, the team has employed participatory activities to promote three different aspects of empowerment: ways of thinking, ways of feeling and ways of behaving. The opportunity created for the communities to meaningfully participate in the whole process of generative curriculum development itself was an important strategy for facilitating empowerment,

which provided them not only for learning but also for contributing to the education process with the intent of changing their life situation. During that process, a number of activities involved raising critical awareness and competence, building confidence and self-esteem, and exercising authority with increased autonomy and determination.

On the other hand, it was also learned from the study that building competence and confidence alone was not adequate to truly empower the people. There were a number of other factors that were inevitable for the people to overcome in order to have change happened. Socio-political factors, government legislations, cultural norms and beliefs, availability of services, resources, and coping mechanisms, and socio-economic conditions appeared key determining factors for them to meaningfully participate. Therefore, it appeared critical to have an enabling environment for the people's genuine participation. Unfortunately, many of them were not within the scope of interventions under this research project. The generative curriculum development process mainly addressed the endogenous strategies, and creating opportunity to participate in the process was the only intervention as an exogenous strategy for empowerment. However, Garba (1999) has also pointed out that with the perspective of looking at empowerment as a process, endogenous strategies are more likely to be effective than exogenous strategies. In that sense, it could be said that the empowerment strategies used in this research were worth the experience.

Manoncourt (2000) has classified empowerment at three levels: individual empowerment, organisational empowerment and community empowerment. Individual level empowerment is basically self-growth in personal efficacy and competence while organisation level empowerment concerns the control within a formalised structure. Community empowerment is about collective action and control based on the participation of both individuals and organisations. If this framework is used to look at the practice of empowerment, as used in the generative curriculum development process, the practice only deals with the individual level, that is, the strategies used in the process were more for personal efficacy and growth creating more confidence and competence of the participants in the learning process.

Although the ability to take collective actions as a group was the goal of the learning process, it was not possible for the learners to actually take that stance. The reason for the inability to move beyond individual level appeared to be lack of an enabling environment that would create a space for the participants to maneuver and exercise their power. The current political climate in the country does not provide enough space for the grass-root level group actions. Even if the groups attempt to address only social issues, there is always a curiosity and suspicion by the authorities that these group activities may lead to political activist movement. That could be the main reason why the group activities or actions are usually confined with technical interventions of the development programmes.

6.5.3 Participation

Although "participation" and "empowerment" are different concepts, they are inseparable, depending on each other to give meaning and purpose (Holcombe, 1995). Both concepts are intertwined, and could be seen as either means or ends. Participation of the communities from the outset of the research built their competence and confidence, and accordingly empowered themselves. Similarly, the more people are empowered, the greater their participation is boosted. With this intertwining nature of the two concepts, "participation" in this study was basically seen as a process where people were actively involved in making decisions at different stages of the generative curriculum development process.

When participation itself was looked at in this study, two important aspects were found. One was the "genuineness" and the other was the "meaningfulness" of participation. Genuineness was related to the motivation and control of the communities to participate while meaningfulness was looked at from the perspective of how and to what extent participation was promoted in the research process. Both concepts are important since participation could be misinterpreted in different ways. Participatory processes do not always empower people, and quite often it could involve manipulation, domestication and coercion (McKee, 1993). Therefore, it is critical to look at those two aspects of participation when reflecting on the experiences of participation in the research.

In relation to the motivational aspect of participation, the data from the pedagogic learning circles revealed that there were three different types of participation among the communities and mothers:

- participation with genuine interest and intention for learning
- participation with a sense of obligation as they belonged to the project where their children were benefiting
- participation with expectations of incentives, usually material or tangible support for them from the project.

Whatever the motive they had, all participants from the communities came to the action learning circles with full enthusiasm, interest and eagerness at the first stage of the research and these were the drives for them to actively contribute in the learning process initially. However, it was a challenge for the research team to sustain those drives in later stages. It became apparent that until and unless the expectations were met, the initial motivation would easily fade away. It was also important for the research team to make all stakeholders/participants clear about the objectives and processes of the research and particularly about what the participants could really expect from the research. Although there were three different types of motives of participation, the relationship made between the research team and the communities, the confidence and self-esteem obtained among the participants,

and the knowledge they gained from the learning made a difference in moving from incentive-driven participation to participation with genuine intention.

As McKee (1993) has defined, genuine participation is a higher level participation, where people are increasingly involved in, and demand control over, decision making. In order to bring about genuine participation, it is important to address the issue of power and responsibility. In the generative curriculum development process, increasing opportunity for the people to exercise power and setting conditions for them to develop a sense of responsibility over their actions were two important strategies for promoting genuine participation. At the same time, efforts were also made to ensure that participation in the process was voluntary without any sense of either obligation or coercion. However, it was not easy to bring about genuine participation among the people, especially for those who were under authoritarian culture of governance for their whole life. For these people, participation was involvement as a passive recipient, and it appeared extremely difficult for them to break the "culture of silence" as termed by Freire (1995). In many instances, their participation appeared more as the results of coercion.

The meaningfulness of participation here refers to how participation is exercised or promoted in the action learning circles. Referring to community participation, Ife (2002) mentioned that people will participate under the right conditions, particularly when they feel that:

- the issue is important for them,
- their action makes a difference for them,
- their participation is acknowledged and valued,
- there is support for their participation and
- the structures and processes are under their control.

In the generative curriculum development process, the research team addressed many of those conditions. The participation and contributions of the mothers in the learning process were well respected and valued. The team also made concerted efforts to create an enabling environment for them to feel confident and comfortable to participate. Although it was not possible for the participants to have much control over the structures and processes of learning their inputs were considered in designing the curriculum content and implementation processes. Overall, if the participation in the research is looked at from that perspective, there appeared a sense of meaning for the mothers.

When participation is seen as the outcome of a process, some scholars look at participation as a continuum of change. Different scholars define different levels or degrees of participation ranging from eight "rungs" of the ladder of participation to four (Bertlett et al., 2001; McKee, 1993; Hart, 1997). For this research, the five level continuum of participation was used, which included the levels such as no involvement, passive involvement, consultation, negotiation, and empowerment as a framework to look at. It was also assumed that people could move from one level of participation to the next level. The research team

involved all participants from the outset of research in the activities for consultation, negotiation and empowerment. Participation by the individuals at those levels was observed in the process though there was no attempt made to gauge the degree of participation.

However, it became apparent that the expectation for mothers to initiate collective actions was too far away from reality. Though the ultimate goal of the participatory action research was to empower people for collective action to bring about social change, it would take time to reach that goal. In such an authoritative society like Myanmar (Burma), there is extremely limited opportunity for communities to initiate grass-root level collective actions. However, it can be expected that the families and communities will express their views and opinions when opportunities to do so are given. The research team felt that the action learning circles were able to facilitate critical reflection and self realisation on the issues, though they were not sure when the collective action would take place.

6.6 CONCLUSION

The three-phase journey of participatory action learning on generative curriculum development has demonstrated itself as an effective way of bringing the community knowledge and the professional knowledge together to create more advanced knowledge. It was also an excellent learning opportunity and experience particularly for the professionals from MoE to explore a new way of developing an education programme with and for the communities. The

professionals have indicated a significant change in their perceptions, understandings and attitudes towards the communities, and eventually that change will lead to advancement in their pedagogical practices. The research experience also showed that the process contributed to empowerment of the communities providing opportunities for genuine participation in the learning activities as well as the development of the programme. By participating in the process, the communities have built their confidence, competence, self esteem and self efficacy, and the progress in those personal competencies has facilitated the change of their child care practices at the personal level.

The Freirean dialogic approach in developing and delivering an education programme appeared to be a rewarding and fascinating pedagogical approach. The critically reflective and problem-posing nature of the approach helped the professionals from both MoE and NGO to understand a new and radical way of thinking about education. The experiences demonstrated that emancipating or librating from the constraining factors was critical in promoting empowering education for not only the learners but also the educators themselves. Although the professionals were familiar with the terms "empowerment" and "participation", they did not have real understanding of the meaning before, and consequently there was no real commitment to promote those concepts. Although both the educators and the learners jointly pursued the repeated cycle of praxis: action, reflection and re-action, most of their action appeared to be at individual personal level and collective action for change of wider society appeared to be too premature.

The next chapter, Chapter Seven, is the last chapter for the thesis, and it presents the summary of findings, answering the global research question with recommendations for both future programming and further research in the field of early childhood care and development, adult education, and development education. The chapter also highlights broader implications of the findings on the above mentioned fields as well as discusses the limitations of the research to a certain extent.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This last chapter presents a summary of findings relating to the study, attempting to answer the research questions. In terms of theory, the study has contributed to progressive understanding on the Freirean praxis-based pedagogy adopted as a basic principle of educating people. The study has also provided the research team some useful insights into the efficacy of the generative curriculum development concept used for merging academic knowledge and local wisdom. Based on the findings of the research, the general implications for adult education and early childhood care and development in particular, and development work in general are discussed, providing recommendations for both programme developers/managers and those who are practically involved in programme implementation.

The study's limitations are also discussed in this chapter, explaining the study's methodological limitations, together with the emphasis on the process rather than the outcome of the research. Meanwhile, this study's contributions and limitations indicate what further research could be conducted to progress its findings and to overcome limitations, as well as to increase the benefit of the research to the adult educators as well as the learners. Finally, this chapter

concludes the thesis with a personal insight into the exceptionally long journey of such an important endeavour under the current circumstances of the country.

7.2 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As explained in Chapter One, the purpose of the participatory action research on generative curriculum development was to explore an approach where professionals could work with the people in the communities for improvement of their lives through a process of participatory action learning for empowerment and emancipation. Therefore, the research had focused on the question: W*hat contribution can a participatory action learning approach make to the process of change in pedagogic practices of professionals in emancipating and empowering communities for greater and genuine participation?* From this focus of the research, three key research questions were formulated:

1. How can the professionals and community facilitators learn to enhance their pedagogic practices through the PAL process?

2. In which way can outside professionals work with parents and communities to advance their child care practices?

3. How can people be empowered to genuinely and meaningfully participate in the development of a parenting education programme?

These research questions were formulated to promote advanced understanding on the participatory and dialogic pedagogical principles and practices which facilitated the empowering and emancipatory learning in educating adults.

While developing this thesis, it became apparent that the research process did not fully answer the research questions; instead, it has raised more questions with emerging issues. However, the findings have provided both adult educators and development workers with significant insights into the notions of empowerment and participation and related strategies for promoting them. Even the emerging issues that appeared at different stages of the research, including the data analysis and interpretation stage, could be important outcomes that the educators and development workers may elaborate and explore in their future programming process.

Particularly, an examination of the research questions have generated specific data and information for some of the stakeholders of the early childhood care and development project as the findings have given indications for the need to change in the approach and methodologies of service delivery. For example, the adult educators from MoE can use the findings to increase their understanding and implementation of participatory pedagogical methodologies. The community development workers from the NGO can also use the findings to adjust the current practices of their work with the communities. The communities, particularly mothers, may use the experiences of the research to

advance their child care practices though this possibility does not sound promising for various reasons.

7.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The overall reflection on the experiences of the research has concluded that the principles and practices adopted in the approach are appropriate to, and in accordance with the research objectives. Also, the generative curriculum development model is workable for the planners in designing and developing an education programme in a genuinely participatory manner. Although the model does not appear appropriate for developing the kind of parenting education programme that enables an immediate response to the parents' issues, it has potential as a tool for developing programmes which can afford adequate time for a participatory process. If looked at from the operational perspective, it appeared to be time-consuming, however, the development of the model with some modifications, maintaining Freirean pedagogic principles and practices but organizing and sequencing components, processes and procedures differently, could be still useful.

7.3.1 Contributions to the Understanding of Freirean Pedagogical Theory

Freire (1995) views human-beings as subjects of knowledge construction. Recognition and respect to the learners as subjects of learning is the starting point for dialogic engagement between the educators and the learners in Freirean pedagogy. There is no doubt on people's possession of knowledge as

well as their potential capacity to construct knowledge. This study has clearly indicated an impressive wealth of knowledge owned by the communities, and at the same time, it has also shown the immense potential of the people to advance their knowledge if the opportunity is provided.

In the Freirean pedagogy, dialectic engagement between the knowledge of the people and the professional/academic knowledge is an important exercise for the educators to have reflective understanding of the whole situation, which is a useful foundation for further development of an education programme. It is important to have this exercise through dialogue and critical reflection. The problem-posing approach of Freirean pedagogy in this study has helped both the educators and the learners to make critical reflections on the reality of the gaps, issues and concerns emerged out of the process, and reasons for their existence. This reflective understanding eventually leads the educators and the learners to find solutions by merging the two knowledge bases together.

In order to engage in the true dialogue as subjects of knowledge construction, it is critical for the learners to feel confidence in their knowledge and abilities to contribute to the learning process, as well as to take appropriate and feasible actions to change the situation. Similarly, it is also important for them to have different types and adequate levels of competence in relation to the positive existing practices as well as the new practices that are brought in by the professionals. In this study, it appeared critical to build confidence, competence,

self esteem and self-efficacy of the learners so that they were empowered enough to actively contribute to the dialogue and learning.

On the other hand, it appeared important to have emancipatory learning take place among the learners. As Mezirow (1991) has explained, emancipatory learning is critical reflective learning which helps human-beings free themselves from various forces that limit actions and control over their lives. In the generative curriculum development process, it was found that both the educators and the learners had their own constraining factors. Some of the factors appeared to be self-imposed while others were externally forced. For instance, as both the educators and the learners were used to the culture of authoritarian governance, the learners had difficulty exercising power while the educators were reluctant to surrender their authority. Therefore, it became apparent that both parties had to pursue emancipatory reflective learning to overcome those constraints; otherwise, the learning would not lead to any action for change.

The ultimate goal of Freirean praxis-based pedagogy is to help people to bring about action and change. Therefore, in working with communities, the emphasis was made on strengthening abilities of families to generate different options so that they could make the best possible choices in relation to addressing their issues and concerns. Contrary to the expectations of the project, it became clear from the analysis that there were not many concrete actions taken by the communities. Building confidence and competence was necessary but not

enough; an enabling environment was necessary so that people could find solutions or even look for alternatives and choices since actions required a number of factors beyond knowledge and competencies.

7.3.2 Contributions to the Advancement of Pedagogical Practices

The significant contribution from the research to the pedagogic practices of empowering education is the way the curriculum has been developed. Unlike the conventional way of curriculum planning, where the curriculum components were defined based on the identified needs of the learners, in this study the different elements of the parenting education curriculum were organised around the issues and concerns jointly raised by the educators and the learners. Besides, the materials were considered as authentic content and materials since they were derived from the true experiences of the communities, and not artificial fantasies created by the professionals. Therefore, the curriculum was not limited within the boundary of technical knowledge and competencies regarding child care but designed to build capacity of all participants to pursue critical reflection and action for change. In that sense, the generative curriculum development process appeared to be a practicable model for participatory development of education programmes.

Participatory techniques such as PLA activities appeared to be effective tools in promoting interactive engagement with learners/participants, particularly motivating them to actively contribute to the discussion with their knowledge and experiences and so are the other participatory methodologies. However, it

became apparent that there was a need for educators to go beyond the interactive aspect of those methodologies, bringing about praxis-based learning of the repeated cycle of action, critical reflection and re-action. Similarly, it also appeared that the genuine understanding, the firm conviction and the strong commitment of educators regarding empowering education and democratisation of education process was more critical than any specific methodologies in facilitating successful delivery of an empowering education programme targeted to those who did not have power.

There were three different learning strategies that appeared to be critical in the process for facilitating empowerment. One important strategy was the creation of opportunities for people to meaningfully participate from the outset in the whole process of programme development. Opportunities provided for the participants in the generative curriculum development process appeared to help the communities, build confidence and self-esteem among themselves. The second strategy was the engagement of participants in both instrumental and communicative learning. This helped the people to strengthen their competence in gaining additional knowledge and communicating that knowledge with others. Critical reflective learning, the third strategy, helped them free themselves from various forces that limit actions and control over our lives.

Meanwhile, it is also important for educators to transform their ways of thinking and practice. Building trust and a trustworthy relationship with the learners and the ability to transcend social distance are key determining factors that

educators could demonstrate in facilitating learning. Besides, the educators need to make efforts for exercising professional authority and delegating responsibilities to the learners in such a way that they feel a sense of individual responsibility to contribute to the collective learning process, and eventually to change their life conditions. However, surrendering authority and appreciating and acknowledging other people's power potentials is not an easy task for the educators who have been traditionally recognised and respected in the upper strand of social hierarchy.

7.4 GENERAL IMPLICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION, ADULT EDUCATION AND PARENTING EDUCATION IN MYANMAR (BURMA)

7.4.1 Early Childhood Care and Development

The experiences and findings of the generative curriculum development process may have implications for all stakeholders of early childhood care and development programmes across the country. In Myanmar (Burma), most of the ECD programmes are community-based and supported by NGOs, yet the programmes are more of a top-down nature. The issues surrounding culturally and contextually appropriate programmes, while ensuring developmentally appropriate practices for child care, could be explored and dealt with a view to achieving positive development outcomes for all the children. The findings presented in Chapter Five clearly indicated that the communities owned substantive knowledge of child care, which could definitely be used as a base for merging community knowledge and professional/academic knowledge

together. Therefore, the principles and practices generated in this research appeared to be a promising way of merging developmentally appropriate practices with culturally and contextually appropriate traditions to find better ways of child rearing.

For parenting education in particular, it would be valuable to adopt the same approach with some modifications on the model and its implementation procedure. The findings of the research clearly indicated that technical/instrumental knowledge basically in the form of factual information did not bring about change in child care practices and there was a need to go beyond knowledge and to address other issues such as building parents' confidence and self efficacy as well as creating enabling conditions and conducive environment. Critical reflective pedagogy could help parents not only to gain competence but to generate critical consciousness on the reality of the situation and the challenges and constraints that they are faced with, and eventually that consciousness will lead to better solutions, options and choices. If the aim of the parenting education programme is to empower parents to be able to bring about social change, critical reflective pedagogy should be the basic theoretical stance for the programme developers to take into account.

However, the current model may not be replicable direct to another context; in fact, it could be recommended that even if the generative curriculum development process is adopted, it should be organised in such a way similar to the REFLECT approach, where the participants (both educators and learners),

once key issues were identified through PRA/PLA exercises, immediately pursued further elaboration of the issues, and learning for action to address those issues. However, it may be rather challenging for those educators who are used to the prescribed manuals and modules to facilitate the learning circles using immediate outcomes of the PLA exercises as authentic learning materials. Apparently there is a need for development of skills by the adult educators to be able to effectively facilitate this type of learning process without dominating either the learners or the learning process.

7.4.2 Professional Development in Adult Education in Myanmar (Burma)

Although the idea of educating adults is not new in this country, and in fact, that has been what the individuals as well as community and religious institutions have traditionally been doing for some time, the formal training in adult education as a distinct field is relatively new. There are no formal institutions that are providing adult education courses in Myanmar (Burma). Most of educators who are involved in designing various types of adult education programmes and developing related materials are trained on adult learning and teaching on an ad hoc basis. Those educators usually recall their previous teaching experiences as formal school teachers or learning experiences as young learners in schools, and try to adapt these experiences as pedagogical methodologies to suit the needs of their adult learners. There is a dire need for constant capacity building of adult educators and accordingly, adult education

courses should be developed and offered in formal institutions such as universities and colleges.

Besides, critical pedagogy is also a completely new idea for many educators in the formal institutions in the country. Although participatory methodologies have been at the centre piece of discussions among educators for some time, the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of such methodologies do not appear well conceived or understood. The findings of this research study have clearly indicated that the adult educators from MoE as well as the community development workers from NGOs lack a deep understanding about the critical perspective of empowering education. Without clear understanding and commitment on critical perspective of education, the participatory methodologies will appear as a different form of manipulative techniques of educators, and the participatory approach still will be mere rhetorical propaganda. It is extremely important for development agencies and education institutions in the country to constantly build capacity of educators on critical pedagogy and participatory methodologies with authentic emancipatory and empowering intent.

7.4.3 Participatory Approach to Development Programmes

As explained earlier, participatory approach to programming has been a fundamental premise but a challenging task of development workers in Myanmar (Burma), and different strategies have been already explored to bring about genuine participation of people for sustainable advancement of humanity.

However, most of the development programmes are centrally designed and community participation rhetoric is not more than occasional consultation with the people, lacking a true sense of empowerment and participation. It will be sensible if possibility for the further replication of the generative curriculum development model could be delved into other areas of development work. The model still appeared to be a useful tool if the stakeholders of any development programme should be involved in a participatory and culturally grounded manner. Although the model does not fit well for the programmes that require an immediate response, it could be perfectly useful for the development programme planners who have the agenda for designing culturally grounded development programmes and at the same time, could reserve a relatively adequate amount of time for a participatory process.

The findings of the research also may have implications for those who are extensively using PLA and PRA methodologies. Despite the widespread use of participatory methodologies such as PLA or PRA tools, there is a need for ensuring the exercises are robust enough with critical reflection on the issues, and not just merely staying happy with the understanding of information collected. As Kane (2000) has asserted, it is important for the facilitators who are using participatory techniques to mediate the dialectical relationship between the methodology and the learner. That mediation also needs to be based on the premise of praxis: the repeated cycle of learning, action and reflection.

The research findings also indicated that in the community those who had closer ties and relationship with others had more and stronger coping mechanisms to deal with the challenges of child care. Many of the solutions that the mothers thought of to address their concerns quite often depend on the presence or absence of stronger social bonds and informal social networks in their neighbourhood. Quoting Putnam (2000), Smith (2007) has asserted that a family's stronger social capital with close social bonds and networks is a powerful determinant for shaping a child's development. This perspective on the social capital as a potential resource for families has implications on current strategies of the development work, particularly for the ECCD Network project. Although mothers' circles were created as grass-root action groups, their current role appeared to be more for facilitation of service delivery rather than pursuing any collective actions. It will be more meaningful and evocative for the project if those mothers' circles could be used as vehicles for helping the mothers to strengthen their social networks and allies, and thus to strengthen their social capital.

7.5 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

As explained in Chapter One, the action research on participatory action learning for generative curriculum development of parenting education programmes was conducted with critical social perspectives in Myanmar (Burma). The experiences and findings of the research have significantly contributed to the development of a conceptual framework of understanding on

how Freirean pedagogical approach could be realised with specific education processes and activities that promoted participation and empowerment among the adult learners. The research experiences have provided valuable insights to adult educators and community development workers, transforming their perceptions and attitudes towards communities and their ways of working with the communities. However, using a broader perspective, some limitations of the research emerged.

As indicated earlier, the study was conducted in the context of the ECCD Network project, which was designed by outside agencies without adequate consultation with participating communities. Despite the rhetoric made by those agencies on community participation, the communities were not involved in any form of participation until they were identified as the recipients or beneficiaries. Therefore, there was already a form of imposition of new ideas and activities in the communities by outside agencies. Although the research was planned to get meaningful participation of people in every stage of implementation, donor-agency-driven project activities unfortunately affected the genuineness of people's participation. For instance, it was found that participation of some community members was due to their sense of moral obligation as their children were benefitting from ECD services related to the project while the others joined the action learning circles with expectations for some incentives such as material or financial assistance from the agencies.

The other limitation was related to the focus of the research, which was the process of participatory action learning. The research focused on how participatory action learning was taking place among professionals and communities, and it did not look into the outcome of the PAL. The expectation of the research was neither to what extent the pedagogic practices of professionals were changed, nor to what extent the child care practices of parents were improved. The study was expected only to give the answer to how professionals could work with people for empowerment and emancipation through an action learning process.

As it was a small-scale qualitative and responsive action-oriented research, it could not be hoped that findings would be generalisable and the approach would be replicable to other situations. The focus of the research was change in situations with responsiveness to local relevance. Therefore, the methodology as well as the findings was bounded up with specific local contexts though the experiences and results gained through the research process could be applied to practice. Consequently, the generalisability of the results was limited to the specific circumstances and conditions where the research was done, and it would not be possible to generalise the results in the broader global context.

7.6 IMPLICATONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As mentioned in Chapter One, research is a politically sensitive activity in Myanmar (Burma), and opportunity to conduct research in a genuine and authentic sense is extremely limited. Although some assessment and evaluative

research studies have been conducted by various agencies, most of them are with empirical and positivist paradigm and research with a critical perspective has virtually never been done before. There is an urgent need for development practitioners to conduct studies utilizing critical social perspective since the ultimate goal of development programmes is for sustainable social change, which is not imposed by external agencies but generated together with the people on the ground building capacity of them for greater empowerment and genuine participation in the change process.

The experiences of the current research study also highlighted the attention to be paid to the notion of empowerment by all stakeholders including development workers, educators and communities. Continued discussion is needed to define the term empowerment more clearly, to develop indicators for different levels of empowerment, and to explore viable strategies for promoting empowerment, both endogenous and exogenous empowerment strategies. A wide range of research studies is needed around the theme of empowerment.

For the Early Childhood Care and Development field, particularly in parenting education programmes, a modified version of the generative curriculum development could be further explored. Despite a rather lengthy three phase process, which unfortunately could not respond to immediate needs and enthusiasms of the parents, the research has given parenting educators quite a range of useful information and experiences. Perhaps, if the model could be modified with a similar approach to REFLECT explained in Chapter Six, there

could be a possibility of obtaining a model that could be replicable to different settings of parenting education programmes. The parenting education programme developers may pursue an endeavour of similar nature.

Reflection on the data and experiences of the research also showed that language played an important role in promoting participatory process for emancipation and empowerment. As in merging the two types of professional knowledge and community wisdom, creating a "third idiom" with an integration of academic language and everyday community language not only facilitated effective communication between the two discussants but also built trust, confidence and comfort among participants, which appeared to be an essential ingredient for all to be engaged in genuine dialogue. It would be interesting for the development workers as well as educators to conduct an anthropological linguistic research to see the role of language in development work, and particularly the role language plays in facilitating critical reflective learning process of communities.

7.7 GENERAL CONCLUSION

The experiences and findings of this study, 'Participatory action learning: an approach to generative curriculum development of parenting education programmes', have been analysed and refined over a number of years. This research study was started in late 2003, with preliminary discussions with the colleagues from the Ministry of Education and the NGO who at that time were jointly implementing the Early Childhood Care and Development Network

project. Almost seven years later, I was able to complete the dissertation presenting the experiences and reflections on my research journey with my colleagues as well as the communities. Despite the unusually long process of the analytical reflection and translating those reflections into a thesis form, I have witnessed the growth and development in my own perspectives on early childhood development education, and adult education in general, over the years, through repeated engagement with the research data and through critical discussions with my colleagues.

For the outcome of the research, it was rather frustrating for me to see little impact of the research on emancipating and empowering mothers to take both individual and collective actions to change their situation. However, it was still quite promising that the research experiences have transformed the perspectives of adult educators including myself. The challenge for me is to apply the immense learning opportunities that this research process has presented to my work as an educator and a development programme manager. In many respects, this study is just a beginning for me, from which I need to further refine and revise the already acquired knowledge, experiences and practices constantly through further research and application in my future development work.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1a: An Excerpt from the Booklet on Home/Family-based Early Childhood Development Programme (Unofficial translation by one of the research team members)
Source: UNICEF, (n.d.).

Bed-time Early Childhood Care for Development Activities

Situation
1. Preparation for bedtime
2. Putting the child to sleep

Starting activity
Sleeping is resting for a child and is supportive to child development. It is critical to make parents aware of the importance of cleanliness in preparing the child for bed. An adult's accompanying with the child while sleeping can make the child have a sound sleep with complete sense of security

Telling
Tell the following
- the importance of cleanliness before going to bed and making the child have a happy and sound sleep
- the importance of nursery/bedtime songs/rhymes if the child is young
- the importance of storytelling until the child falls asleep

Explaining
Explain the following
- the importance of making sure the child understands that he/she has the adult who provides care, protection and affection while putting him/her to sleep
- the benefits of telling stories to the child
- the importance for the child to sleep without fear or anxiety
- the importance of telling the child what has happened in the day

Discussion
Discuss about the following:
- How to put the child to sleep
- Nursery songs/rhymes and stories for children
- Interaction between the adult and the child

Demonstration
Make practical demonstrations for the following
- Story telling
- Preparing bedtime for children

- Habits of children to be nurtured

Encouraging parents

Encourage parents for the following:

- Need to put the child to sleep after completing household chores
- How to make a pleasant bedtime for the child
- Importance of providing feedback on what is written in this booklet

Please notice the following points:

- All activities are organized for two age groups
- On the left side of the page are more appropriate activities for children under 3
- On the right side of the page are more appropriate activities for children above 3
- Children's skills differ according to their level of maturity. Therefore, age distinction is not a rigid rule to follow.

Preparation for bedtime

For children under 3

Parents and adults can

- train the child to go to toilet before going to bed.

- **Train the child to have a healthy habit.**

- talk the child, clean his/her teeth, wash the face, clean hand and foot; do those hygiene activities before going to bed.

- **Train the child to have a healthy habit.**
- **Let the child develop hygiene practices**

- Change the clothes that the child wears during daytime. After washing the face and others, let the child wear clean clothes.

- **Let the child develop a healthy habit.**

Preparation for bedtime

For children above 3

Parents and adults can

- train the child to go to toilet before going to bed. Tell him/her the importance to have that habit

- **Let the child to develop a healthy habit.**

- train the child to clean his/her teeth, wash the face, clean hand and foot before going to bed. Tell him/her the importance to have that habit

- **Let the child develop a hygiene practice**
- **Let the child develop the responsibility to take care of him/herself**

- Train the child to change his/her clothes after washing the face and others.

- **Let the child live cleanly.**
- **Let the child change clothes by him/herself.**

Appendix 1b: An Excerpt from the Training Manual on Parenting Education Programme (which was adapted from the Bangladesh Parenting Education Manual**)** (Unofficial translation)
Source: UNICEF, 2000.

Session 3: Our children learn through play

Key points:

1. Children learn through play.
2. parents/caregivers can support their children's learning by playing with them

Objectives:

- To enhance parents/caregivers' awareness and understanding of the role of play in learning

Supporting information

- Play is “children's work". Think about a baby who has just learnt to play "peek-a-boo". She repeats it again and again, because she loves practising this new game she has just learnt. Through play children practise skills they have already acquired and learn new ones.

- Adults often complain that children are "only playing" when they are young. Children need to learn about people and things in their environment before they are ready to count and learn to read. They learn through doing. The more children play with different things and with their friends, the more enthusiasm they will have for learning and their chances of succeeding in the school later will also be better.

- Children develop physically, socially, emotionally and intellectually through play.

- The Convention on the Rights of the /child emphasizes the child's right to rest and leisure and the opportunity to "engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child." (Article 31)

Session duration: 1.30 hours

Materials; Pieces of rope, bottle tops, plastic jars, toy cooking set, etc.

Activities

Activity 1. Review
Duration: 10 minutes

1. Ask the participants to form a circle by joining hands

2. Tell them that you are going to throw the ball to someone. The person will catch the ball and recall a point that she learned from the previous session. After recalling a point she will throw the ball to someone else. In this way, everyone will have a turn and share a point from the previous session, including yourself.

Activity 2. Brainstorming
Duration: 20 minutes

1. Ask the participants to think about what kind of activities young children like to do and share their ideas. Write down these ideas in point form

2. Reads the points out.

3. Ask them to think about what children learn when they play. Record their ideas in point form.

4. Read the ideas out. You can also add your ideas. Make sure the points in the "only play" box below get covered.

ONLY PLAYING

By playing a child learns:

- **How to get on with others, how his/her behaviour affects others and what types of behaviour are acceptable in society. He/she learns social rules and discipline through play.**
- **About different things from environment by discovering and finding out how things work.**
- **New word and concepts - e.g. shape, size, number, classification, categorization.**
- **To strengthen his/her muscles, balance, coordination and control movement.**
-
- **To develop communication skills.**
- **About him/herself and how to be independent.**
- **To use problem solving strategies.**
- **To feel a sense of some control of his/her environment.**

5. At the end of the session talk about:
    - The most important things is for children to be surrounded by loving people.
    - A child also needs to have the freedom to play and explore his environment

Activity 3. Order game and discussion
Duration: 20 minutes

1. Ask the participants to form a circle, holding hands - ready to play.

2. Arrange 7/8 familiar objects in a line on the floor and ask participants to name the objects.
    - Tell them to close their eyes or turn around. Move some objects. Ask them to open their eyes or turn around and try to identify which objects have been moved. Do this several times.

3. On completion of the game, ask the following questions:
    - How do you feel about this game/
    - What can we learn from this game?
    - What skills can children learn from this game?

4. Conclude the session by saying that we all learn through games and activities, not just children. This game is especially good for concentration and visual memory. Games are one of the most effective, enjoyable and natural ways of learning, particularly for children.

Activity 4. Group work
Duration: 40 minutes

1. Divide the participants into 5 groups to play with different materials in any way they wish. Examples of materials to give the participants:
    - a piece of rope
    - bottle tops or stones and plastic jars
    - toy cooking set
    - if outside, sticks and a marked section of ground; or slate and chalk, or paper and pencil
    - bowl filled with water and plastic cups
    - ball.

2. Ask them to think about and discuss the following:
    - How to play with these materials
    - What are the skills developed through playing with the material

3. Invite all groups one at a time to demonstrate the activities and explain the skills developed through the activities. After their presentations relate the skills to the areas of development referring to the information in the box below

Play and Children's Development

Learning, especially in the early years, is active. It involves physical exploration - touching, tasting, hearing, seeing and moving. Children learn by doing, by experimenting with materials and through language they learn from talking with, and listening to, each others and adults.

Play enhances and fosters children's overall development in the areas below:

Social development - through interacting with others, children learn to share, take turns, plan and cooperate.

Emotional development - children work through their feelings about events that frighten or confuse them for example, parents fighting, the birth of a brother or sister and the sickness of a family member. Children will be more in control of their feelings when they re-enact difficult or stressful experiences and come to some understanding of them.

Intellectual development - children practice language skills to try out new ideas, create situations and solve problems. They develop and refine their thinking skills as they use language.

Physical development - children develop small and large muscle skills and eye/hand coordination as they play with various objects. Many necessary skills for reading, writing and maths such as classification, sorting, eye/hand coordination, (visual discrimination like identifying differences and similarities) are learnt as children play with clay, sand, seeds and water, etc.

Appendix 2: Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) Tools

Source: Adapted from Sternin, 1999.

Topic:	**Learning about the community**
Activity:	Mapping (PLA activity 1)
With whom:	Community members (10 to 15 people)
Duration:	1 hour
Materials:	Flip chart paper, magic markers and scotch tapes

Purpose of activity (what do we want to know?)

- Where are the community's resources and infrastructure located?
- Where do the most vulnerable families live? Where is the most densely populated neighbourhood?
- Where do the children play? Where are dangerous places for children to be, to play?
- Where are the places where young children are looked after besides at home?

Directions to carry out PLA activity

1. Find a suitable place where a large of people can assemble.
2. Gather a group of community members.
3. Ask the community members to draw on a piece of paper their community as it would look to a bird flying over it, showing various things such as main roads, important buildings and places.
4. Encourage participants to use different colours for different areas or specific resources (buildings).
5. The drawing or successful drawings become more detailed as the exercise goes on and different members of the group add their suggestions and ideas.

Note to the facilitator: This exercise should be run by the participants, and the output is the map of the community ***as the group perceives it.***

Topic: **Learning about the community**
Activity: Wealth ranking (PLA activity 2)
With whom: Community members (10 to 15 people)
Duration; 30 to 45 minutes
Materials: Flip chart paper, magic markers and scotch tapes

Purpose of activity (what do we want to know?)

- What is the community's definition of wellbeing, poor or rich?
- What are the criteria (description) they use for definition of wealth, average wealth and poverty?
- What are the implications for children?

Directions to carry out PLA activity

1. Gather a group of people who are a good sample of the community.
2. Explain the purpose of the discussion, i.e. to learn from them what is the profile of a wealthy person/family, poor or/ and very poor family of 5 members
3. On a flip chart draw a matrix with 3 (or) 4 columns from left to right: (1) wealthy, (2) average and (3) poor, (4) very poor.
4. To facilitate discussion, ask the group to the assets of a wealthy, average and poor.
5. Do the same with topic such as type of housing, occupation, access to (what /frequency of eating), education (children's education level, or lack of), status in the community, recreation, care of children (time spent with children), community contribution etc.
6. Determine the proportion of rich, average and poor families in the community the following way. Draw a square above each column provide each participant with 9 beans and ask them to put beans for each column as follows: 1 bean = few families, 3 bean = fair number, 5 beans = many. Count the total number of beans and divide by number of beans in each square to find the percentage estimated by the participants

Note to the facilitator: Use appropriate language to describe each kind of people, i.e. 'shabby people' for poor people.

Topic: **Learning about and from the community**
Activity: Transact walk (PLA activity 3)
With whom: Team of 2 researchers with 1or 2 community members
Duration: 30 minutes to 1 hour
Materials: Flip chart paper, magic markers and illustrations/symbols

Purpose of activity (what do we want to know?)

- What kinds of environment young children live in?
- How safe is this environment?
- How young children and their caregivers interact with this environment, the community member?

Directions to carry out PLA activity

1. Select a specific street or housing block (peri-urban) or a small group of households like hamlet in a Village from the resource map with community members
2. Take a show walk down the road or path selected with a community member, or child.
3. While walking make careful observation on the environmental hygienic conditions of the street and houses, notice the type of interaction between children, with older kids, with older kids, with caregivers, etc. , the kind of play young children engage in, where they play, what toys they use etc.
4. Interact with people and children on the road (causal, informal conversations). For example when coming across a street vendor, ask her a lot of young children buying food from her, what type and for how much. Visit a video place to see who is watching videos, etc.
5. Create a chart with all the information gathered for further discussion with community members during Focus Group Discussions

Note to Researchers: A detailed list of items for observation, places to explore and topic for casual conversations must be created before starting the transect exercise.

Topic: **Child development/developmental stages**
Activity: Time line (PLA activity 4)
With whom: Mothers (10 to 15 people)
Duration: 1 hour
Materials: Flip chart paper, magic markers, scotch tapes

Purpose of activity (what do we want to know?)

- How does a child grow? What are important stages of child development?
- Is there any difference between a boy and a girl in terms of development patterns? How do they differ?
- How do you fulfill their needs?

Directions to carry out PLA activity

1. Draw a straight line.
2. Put marks for appropriate stages on the line. E.g. birth, entry to school, youth, adulthood, married, etc.
3. Ask the participants to mark important milestones of a life and discuss about those mile stones
4. Then ask participants to draw a timeline for children 0 to 5 year old. Let them put marks for important milestones of a child's life as they see them. facilitate them by asking those questions;
   - What do you know about a child's growth?
   - How does a child grow in his/her first year of life?
   - What happen in the second year?
   - And then?
5. Record the points discussed on the time line.

Topic:	**Child development and children's needs: who meet them and how**
Activity:	Matrix (PLA activity 5)
With whom:	Mothers (3 groups of 10 mothers: non-working, working at home, outside) fathers (5 to 10), and other community members (up to 10 people)
Duration:	1 hour
Materials:	Flip chart paper, magic markers and illustrations/symbols

Purpose of activity (what do we want to know?)

- How does a child grow? What are the signs for each stage of development?
- What do the caregivers perceive as children's need (physical, cognitive, emotional, social and spiritual)?
- Who fulfills/satisfies/is responsible for each need?
- How do caregivers meet these needs (child care practices)?

Directions to carry out PLA activity

1. Create a matrix with 4 or 5 columns: children<1, <2, <3, 3 to 5 years of age and ask the group to identify and name stages of young children's development as they perceive them with the question: What do we know about our children's growth? How children grow in the first year? What happens in the second year? Between the 3rd and 5th?
2. Record the group findings summarize and discuss findings briefly.(Note: these findings will be used for FGD later)
3. Show the 2 pictures to the group and ask participants;" What does this child (sick one) needs in order to be like the other child (healthy one)? "
4. Out of the discussion, create a list of things that young children need in order to flourish
5. Ask the group to rank the needs from most important with beans or colors
6. Create a column next to the new prioritized list of needs and ask participants who is responsible to fulfill each need. (What needs does the mother meet? what needs does the father meet? others?
7. Create another column to explore with the group how these needs are met, listing child care practices caregivers use.

Note to facilitators: This exercise requires a lot of probing (additional questions) to help participants to explore the topic in depth. Example of probing questions: On children's development: "How do you know that your child is growing normally?" On needs with mothers' group: for infants (<1), the identified need can be providing food. How does the caregiver provide food? By breastfeeding and complementary feeding? Probing question would be: When and how do you wean your child?"

Topic:	**What do children know and should know by the age of 5**
Activity:	Matrix, Discussion (PLA activity 6)
With whom:	Mothers (3 groups of 10 mothers, older siblings caregivers 6-12 year old, fathers (5 to 10), and other community members (up to 10people)
Duration:	1 hour
Materials:	Flip chart paper, magic markers, illustrations/symbols and scotch tape

Purpose of activity (what do we want to know?)

- What do parents, caregivers and other people think it is important for children to know, to learn to do by the age of 5?
- What skills and competencies they are supposed to acquire to live and grow in their culture (include religious knowledge and practice, moral practices: should/should not)?
- Who teaches them these various skills? And how?
- Are girls and boys expected to do the same tasks? Or behave the same ways?

Directions to carry out PLA activity

1. Explore the question:" What do you think children need to know by the age of 5 or learn to do by the age of 5?" With participants, list their answer. When working with girls caregivers only and boy caregivers only ask: "What boys need to know by the age of 5?" "What girls need to know by the age of 5?" (Show illustration)
2. For each answer, ask participants to rank the things to know by order of importance, Copy this list on a flip chart.
   Ask participants: "Who helps the child/or boy, or girl, to learn these things?" Gender options include father, mother, grandparents, sister/brother, by themselves, others.
3. Ask adult participants only: "How do you teach children these things?"
4. Ask adults participants: "Why should children know all these things?"

Topic:	**Current feeding and hygiene practices** **Interaction between child and caregiver at home**
Activity:	Unstructured Observation and semi- structured interview (PLA activity 7)
With whom:	Mothers at home, older sibling caregivers 6-12 years old, and fathers
Where	at their home
Duration;	2 hours
Materials:	Observations check list, semi- structured questionnaire, recording form, and notebook

Purpose of activity (what do we want to know?)

- Health status of child (healthy, unhealthy, malnourished)
- How do caregivers feed the young children (breastfeeding, weaning and feeding practices)?
- How do the caregivers keep young children clean (boy hygiene practices, toileting)?
- How do caregivers maintain food and environmental cleanliness (food and environmental hygienic practices)?
- How is the child's socialized (taught to interact with others, to get along with others, to be polite)
- How is the child disciplined?
- How does the caregiver promote a cooperative behavior in the child?
- How does the caregiver promote learning in the child? (Imposing, modeling, teaching, coaching, praising, ridiculing etc.)

Directions to carry out PLA activity

1. Introduce yourselves to household members and state the purpose of your visit, and the length
2. Get the family's approval to " tag along"
3. Befriend the family members; interact with family members (touching, playing, etc.)
4. If possible, offer to help in the activities going on,
5. Use casual conversation style for the interview of the current or primary caregiver
6. Learn about the family history, financial situation, caregivers' hope for the future of the children
7. After home visit, record observation in the observation log
8. Within 2 days write a story about this family with a focus on the caregiver(s) and the children under 5, using quote from family members in the write- up

Topic:	**Care practices in the prevention and management of illness, accidents and minor injuries**
Activity:	Focus Group Discussion (PLA activity 8)
With whom:	Mother at home, fathers, community members and Community Health Workers
Duration:	1 hour
Materials:	Note book & pen, cassette recorder and blank cassettes (optional)

Purpose of activity (what do we want to know?)

- What kind of care practices are used for the management of minor illnesses (colds, fevers, diarrhoea, earache, headache, eye inflammation, and worms)?
- What kind of minor injuries happen (cuts, bruises, burns, bites) and how are they treated?
- What signs of sickness make the caregivers seek help?
- What kind of decision process takes place when the child is identified as sick? (Who do caregivers consult first? Then who? Who decides what to do?)
- What health problems are people most concerned about? (seasonal health problems &diseases)
- What should be done?

Directions to carry out PLA activity

1. Introduce yourselves to the group members and have everybody introduce themselves
2. Create a comfortable atmosphere with a joke or light talk.
3. State the topic of conversation or use a visual aid to generate the conversation
4. Request permission to use a cassette recorder or to take notes of the discussion

Note: Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Focus groups are not simply questions and answers sessions. The facilitator presents a set of carefully chosen key issues that have emerged from other PLA activities though community participation. To raise key issues the facilitator can use visual aids (pictures), story-telling and other means besides asking questions to involve the group in a lively discussion. The group discusses the issues, rather than simply answering a set of questions from the facilitator. All participants are encouraged to voice their ideas and opinion. The content of discussion is either recorded by hand or via a cassette recorder.

Topic: **Characteristics of the young child**
For what, by whom and how are children socialized
How are young children's emotional needs met?

Activity: Focus Group Discussion (PLA activity 9)
With whom: Mothers at home, old sibling caregivers 6-12 years old, fathers and community members (10 to 15)
Duration: 2hours
Materials: Illustrations (model child/ naughty child)

Purpose of activity (what do we want to know?)

- "What is a "good child" like? /a child with good behavior?
- "What is a "naughty child" like? / a child with bad behavior?
- How is the child's socialized (taught to interact with others, to get along with others, to be polite)
- How is the child disciplined or controlled to be a "good child"?
- How does the caregiver deals with problem children?
- How does the caregiver respond the child's need for attention, love and involvement?

Directions to carry out PLA activity

1. Present a visual aid (picture) depicting a certain situation to the whole group
2. *Ask participants to describe what they see in the picture.
3. Tell a story about the picture or ask participants to make up a story for each type of children represented in the picture
4. Initiate a discussion among the group by asking the following questions: "What does a model child is supposed to be like?"

Note to facilitators of FGD: Work in teams of 2 or 3.Have one team member record what is being said during the discussion.

Note: Focus Group Discussion (FGD)
Focus groups are not simply questions and answers sessions. The facilitator presents a set of carefully chosen key issues that have emerged from other PLA activities through community participation. To raise key issues the facilitator can use visual aids (pictures), storytelling and other means besides asking questions to involve the group in a lively discussion.

Topic: **Caregivers' daily schedule, workload and time spent on child care**

Activity: Time line/ daily routine (group) (PLA activity 10)

With whom: Mothers (3 groups of 10 mothers and older sibling caregivers 6-12 years old

Duration: (1 hour)

Materials: Flip chart paper, magic makers, and illustrations/symbols, scotch tape

Purpose of activity (what do we want to know?)

- What is a caregiver daily routine?
- How much time is spent in child care? What does the caregiver actually do with the child?
- What are the child care practices people like most? Least?
- With older siblings, what type of games they play? With what?

Directions to carry out PLA activity

A.

1. Ask each participant to describe **a detailed** average day from sunrise to sundown. The various activities are either drawn or represented using different symbols that everybody can understand, one for each person
2. Discuss the amount of time spent on child care
3. Ask participants to make a list the various child care activities they do on a daily
4. Ask participants if their daily activities are affected by the seasons: for peri-urban site, planting and harvesting time for rural site (village). If so ask participants to create another time line for that other season

B.

1. On a big sheet of paper, list the activities (or symbols) on the left side, then draw horizontal lines between each side, then draw vertical lines (column) one per participant, draw horizontal lines between each activity.
2. Provide each member of the group with packet of beans (9) and ask them to put a certain number of the beans for each activity on list: 5 beans = very important, 3 beans = not so important, 1 bean = least important
3. Repeat the same exercise by order of preference: 3 beans = like very much, 2 beans = like, 1 bean = like least
4. Review and discuss with participants what activities they have identified, the one they collectively consider most and least important and why.

Topic: **Characteristics and role of caregivers**
Community, cultural expectations of the caregiver
Activity: Focus Group Discussion (PLA activity 11)
With whom: Mothers (3 groups of 10 mothers
Duration: 45 minutes
Materials: Note book & pen, cassette recorder and blank tapes

Purpose of activity (what do we want to know?)

- What is the caregiver supposed to do? To be like? Why?
- How and from whom does a caregiver learn about childcare?
- How the traditional role of caregivers has changed? **Why**?
- What are the new ways or behaviors caregivers have adopted?
- To what degree are caregivers aware of the need to prepare children for a changing environment?

Directions to carry out PLA activity

1. Using the information and visual aids (matrix, time lines) generated from pervious activities, explore with participants key issues **that have emerged from the community participation in the study.**
2. **Discuss** issues such as their traditional role as caregivers, the new role they have to play or not play because of current circumstances and change, what role they would like to have (dreams and aspirations), and others which will have emerged from the activities.

Topic: **Child care activities**
Activity: Matrix and ranking (PLA activity 12)
With whom: Mothers (3 groups of 10 mothers, older sibling caregivers 6-12 yrs old and other caregivers: grand-parent
Duration: 1 hour
Materials: Sheets of paper, beans, notebook and marker pens

Purpose of activity (what do we want to know?)

- What are the daily activities of the caregivers?
- What are the most important activities and unimportant activities?
- What activities do they like most and what activities least?
- How do they facilitate learning by young children?

Directions to carry out PLA activity

1. Ask the participants to list down all child care activities that they undertake every day.
2. Ask them to draw a matrix with those information on a large sheet of paper.
3. Distribute a packet each of beans to participants and put the beans in the matrix as follow:
    - Most important – 3 beans
    - Fairly important – 2 beans
    - Least important – 1 bean
4. Ask participants to do the same way for their likes and dislikes
    - Like most – 3 beans
    - Like a bit – 2 beans
    - Do not like – 1 bean
5. Reflect on what they have indicated, and have a discussion on why certain activity is important and the other is not.
6. Similarly, have a discussion on why they like certain activities but not the others.

Topic: **Problems in child care**
Activity: Problem Ranking (PLA activity 13)
With whom: Mothers (3 groups of 10 mothers and older siblings caregivers 6-12yrs old and other caregivers: grand-parent,
Duration: $^1/_2$ hour
Materials: 2 sheets of paper, magic markers, bags of beans, Notebook and pen, tapes, Illustration

Purpose of activity (what do we want to know?)

- What are the problems or difficulties the caregivers have in caring for young children?
- What are the causes of the problems?
- What are the most serious problems and how common are they?
- With older siblings: what are the health problems including minor injuries, accidents, etc.?

Directions to carry out PLA activity

1. Ask the participants what are the problems they face and make a list of them on the left-hand side of a big flip chart (2 pieces of butcher paper).
2. Ask people **why** they say it is a problem
3. Ask participants to prioritize the problems from the most serious and widespread to the least
   Using stones or beans: very serious = 3, serious = 2, less serious = 1
4. Record main ideas of discussion among participants as they prioritize the problems, take note of what people say (quotes)
5. Compute the results to review with participants which problems they found to be very serious, serious and less serious
6. Keep the finished product handy (put up on wall with scotch tape)

Purpose of activity (what do we want to know?)

- Which are the problems that the caregivers can easily solve and how?
- Which problem needs assistance?
- How do they think problems should be dealt with?
- How is their participation, community participation and external helping in solving child care problems?

Directions to carry out PLA activity

1. Discuss among participants on the specific significant problems that they have been encountering in relation to their child care, referring to the points identified in the previous sessions.
2. In the discussion, refer to the questions mentioned in the above box. Ensure every participant has an opportunity to express their opinions and voices

Topic: **Resources for solving child care problems**
Activity: Ven (Chappati) diagram (PLA Activity 14)
With whom: Mothers at home (30 in 3groups) community people (6) and older sibling caregivers 6-12years old
Duration: 1 hour
Materials: Scissors, paper of different colors, scotch tape, illustration, 2 to 4 flip chart

Purpose of activity (what do we want to know?)

- What do caregivers turn to when they have problems or difficulties with childcare?
- Who can help?
- Whom do caregivers trust to help when they have problems in childcare?
- What problems the participants face can be solved easily and how do they solve them?
- What are problems they need help with?
- How do they think the problems should be addressed?
- What would be their contribution? , community contribution? help from outside?

Directions to carry out PLA activity

1. Ask participants who are those people and/or institutions, and agencies that they turn to and who help when they face difficulties and problems with childcare.
2. Make a list of the identified individuals, institution and/or agencies.
3. Cut the colored paper into 3 different size of circles(the biggest circles: **most important** one, the smallest ones: **the least important**),3 time the number of individuals or institution on the list, have participants choose a circle(big, medium, small size, chapatti) according to the importance and usefulness of the person or institution, and have them write the name on the paper circle(Chappati)
4. Take 2 sheets of paper, scotch tape them, and mark a dot in the center of it saying:" You are here". And ask group to place each of the circle on the paper according to **frequency** of interaction and relationship. The ones that they go to frequently and are closely related to are placed **closer to the center.** The ones they less frequently are placed further away.
5. When all circles are in place, for each chappati as participants to tell you: What kind of help they seek from this person or institution? And Why?
6. Review with participants the problems and existing resources and ask the following questions: For problems they cannot solve by themselves, what are their ideas of how they could be solved? (at household level, at community level)

Topic: **Solving child care problems**
Activity: Focus Group Discussion (PLA activity 15)
With whom: Mothers (3 groups of 10 mothers), older siblings caregivers 6-12 year old, and other caregivers: grand-parent,
Duration: 1 hour
Materials: Notebook and pen, and cassette recorder and tapes

Purpose of activity (what do we want to know?)

- Which are the problems that the caregivers can easily solve and how?
- Which problem needs assistance?
- How do they think problems should be dealt with?
- How is their participation, community participation and external helping in solving child care problems?

Directions to carry out PLA activity

1. Discuss among participants on the specific significant problems that they have been encountering in relation to their child care, referring to the points identified in the previous sessions.
2. In the discussion, refer to the questions mentioned in the above box. Ensure every participant has an opportunity to express their opinions and voices