Theoretical framework on the use of art-inspired pedagogy in early childhood to mitigate urban barriers

VVOB CITIES 3 Project in Da Nang City, Vietnam, 2022

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ABSTRACT

"Cities around the world are changing rapidly, putting new pressures on the education system. Vietnam has particularly seen a period of rapid economic growth in many of its major cities, such as Da Nang. These urban environments can create both barriers and opportunities for learning. This paper aims to answer the question of if and how art-based pedagogy (AIP) can be used to mitigate the urban barriers in the early childhood education system. Through a rapid literature review, we discovered the potential benefits of AIP and what conditions are needed to implement AIP in SE Asia. Additionally, the CITIES project, a 3-phase programme in Da Nang, Vietnam with 29 schools, provides a practical lesson learned on how AIP can fit within the existing system and support the new early childhood curriculum in Vietnam, and what still needs to be in place for this to be successful. This paper provides a theoretical framework, based on literature and practice, for implementing art-inspired pedagogy in the urban environment in Vietnam.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Vietnam's recent economic growth has been among the highest in Southeast Asia, framed as an 'economic miracle' (Van & Sudhipongpracha, 2015). This sizable transformation has led to rapid urbanization in big cities. Da Nang, the sixth largest city in Vietnam, is a prime example of rapid urbanization given its current economic growth and foreign investment (World Bank, 2013). As an industrial and tourist hub, Da Nang attracts high levels of rural to urban migration; official figures indicate a population increase from 500,000 in 1997 to 1,157,000 in 2021 (Marcotrends, n.d).

While urbanization is seen as a driver of economic growth and poverty alleviation (UN Habitat, 2016), the process also creates specific social challenges, particularly for children. Da Nang is now home to a considerable number of migrants workers from neighboring provinces who fill the need for low-income labor, seasonal jobs in construction and food sales, and as street vendors (Chatterjee 2015). This economic growth has contributed to the marginalization of certain populations by pushing up land and rental prices, thus widening the economic disparities within the city. Certain adverse experiences resulting from urban growth have the potential to affect child development, such as poor social and emotional development and a higher risk of mental health problems, which can hinder school readiness for preschoolers (Perry and Conners-Burrow, 2016, cited in Solis Schnyder et al, 2020).

1.1 VVOB CITIES Projects

In order to analyze and respond to the potential educational challenges resulting from urban growth in Da Nang, VVOB's CITIES 1-3 projects aim to strengthen local teacher capacities to discover the urban barriers that hinder children's development, their learning, and their well-being and to develop interventions to mitigate them. Through a series of workshops with teachers and school leaders in CITIES 1, common barriers were identified as limited access to green spaces, limited interaction with surroundings, changes in social cohesion, lack of parental time, and increased screen time, highlighting similar factors as mentioned by Perry and Conners-Burrow, 2016 (VVOB, 2019).

In order to address the above-mentioned challenges, teachers created learning activities based on art-inspired pedagogy (AIP) using professional learning communities (PLCs). These activities were introduced through CITIES 2 and 3 into teaching and learning environments as part of innovative practices for teachers to tackle these challenges. **VVOB defines art-inspired pedagogy[1] as a creative approach that stems from the foundation of** **'learning through play.' It leverages the arts as a vehicle that teachers can use to promote creativity and exploration while meeting set learning goals**. Art-inspired pedagogy is a pedagogical approach that uses one or more art forms[2] to deepen understanding and support learning objectives in the classroom (Bowell & Heap, 2001; Burnaford, Aprill & Weiss, 2009; Dohahue & Stewart, 2010; Luftig, 2000; PCAH, 2011; Silverstein & Layne, 2010). Because the CITIES project was in Da Nang City, a city rich with culture, history, and arts; the city's identity[3] was also leveraged as a way to mitigate the urban barriers children are facing.

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[1] *Many terms are used to describe similar approaches, such as "arts-based" and "art integration." VVOB has chosen to use "art-inspired pedagogy" as "art" is a technique used to meet learning goals rather than art products or art education being the end goal.*

[2] *Art forms include visual arts such as painting and drawing or performing arts such as music, drama, or dance.*

[3] *City identity in VVOB CITIES project: what a city or urban environment can offer in terms of pedagogical opportunities.*

1.2 Rationale for framework

Little is known about the casual effects of AIP application in preschool education in Vietnam on the holistic development of children. Because of this, primary research through harvesting (consisting of interviews, group discussions and a survey) and secondary research through a rapid literature review were conducted to form a theoretical framework for the use of AIP in early childhood to improve holistic development. Using the CITIES project in Da Nang, VVOB conducted a harvesting investigation on the interest in and perceived effectiveness of AIP with relevant DOET, BOET, school leaders, and teachers. Due to the high level of interest, and teacher-reported effectiveness in AIP shown by these participants, VVOB, in collaboration with the KUL and Vietnamese education experts, has developed empirical research to create a theoretical framework for the use of AIP to mitigate urban barriers. The authors applied rapid review and secondary data review to firstly provide an overview of AIP theory in a variety of contexts, then to explore the crucial factors in the AIP theoretical framework before proposing recommendations for further programmes.

The initial harvesting results show the participants' positive perceptions of AIP in enhancing the professional capacity of teachers as well as in creating an active and engaging learning environment for children. However, the question to be raised is how this approach can be applied systematically and effectively in preschool education as a measure to reduce urban barriers and at the same time take advantage of city identity and resources.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research questions and sub-questions

The following research questions were answered through the rapid literature review and project data collection.

Main research question: *"What is known about the effect of art-inspired pedagogy on the holistic development of children in early year childhood education in urban environments?".*

The main question above is divided into two supplementary questions along with sub-questions:

1. How can art-inspired pedagogy facilitate the development of preschool children?

    a. What is art-inspired pedagogy?

    b. What is known about the effects of art-inspired pedagogy on the development of preschool children?

    c. What is known about possible moderators that affect that relationship?

2. What is the evidence that art-based pedagogy helps to mitigate urban barriers faced by children in urban environments?

    a. What is known about the role of art-inspired pedagogy in the relationship between urban barriers and preschool children's development?

    b. How can the city's identity be used as an opportunity to mitigate the barriers through art-inspired pedagogy?

2.2. Rapid review

Evidence reviews come in many forms. One of the best-known types is the conventional literature review, which provides an overview of the relevant scientific literature published on a topic. However, a conventional literature review's trustworthiness is often low (Briner, 2014). Clear criteria for inclusion are often lacking and studies are selected based on the researcher's individual preferences or theorizing perspective. As a result, conventional literature reviews are prone to severe bias when it comes to systematically evaluating the evidence. Here, a 'rapid review' method is being used. This type of review is a specific research methodology that aims to identify the most relevant studies on a specific topic as comprehensively and structured as possible and to select appropriate studies based on explicit criteria[4]. In contrast to a conventional literature review, the rapid review is transparent, verifiable, and reproducible, and as a result, the likelihood of bias is considerably smaller. In this case, there were two separate rapid reviews conducted, one on AIP in general on an international scale and one specifically focused on Southeast Asia (SEA) and AIP.

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4 *The inclusion criteria for the rapid reviews can be found in Annex 1.*

2.3. Project data collection

Along with the rapid review, the CITIES project-related reports and survey results have been collected and carefully reviewed. The project data collection provided the authors with the practical background to propose an AIP theoretical framework in the context of an urban city in Vietnam. Project data collection included a harvesting investigation completed 2 years after the programme began to gain insight into the interest, practicality, and effectiveness of AIP in preschools from the perspectives of government officials, school leaders, and teachers.

The harvesting employed a mixed-method approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection tools and methods including survey questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. Data collection activities were applied with 98 teachers from 29 preschools, 29 school leaders from 29 preschools, 7 officials from Bureaus of Education and Training (BOET) and 1 Department of Education and Training (DOET) official in Da Nang city.

The harvesting was conducted to understand how and at what level the teachers applied and plan to apply art-based activities with children and to provide evidence of the changes that were institutionalized in the schools' operations. The results present the successes and challenges on the ground when implementing AIP and the effects that teachers, school leaders, and government officials saw after implementation. In addition, it discusses the practicality of AIP to fit in with and enhance the current curriculum and systems in place in ECE, from the perspective of DOET, BOET, and school leaders.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

In order to answer the above-stated research questions, a rapid review was conducted first analyzing global practices and research and then more specifically on SEA to provide us with research more applicable to our context.

1. AIP general findings

1.AIP and the holistic development of children

Whilst extensive research has demonstrated the positive effect of art-inspired pedagogy on children's development in learning and wider outcomes, there is still very little scientific understanding of the causal effect of this relation. There is strong evidence that the use of art activities (e.g., drama, dance, music, visual arts) in a classroom setting could contribute to children's academic outcomes and their related psychological and social outcomes such as the attitude towards achievement, creativity, critical thinking, communication skills and emotional intelligence. The arts can serve as a tool for cross-domain integration and can enhance both the teaching methodology and the learning process (Stoycheva & Perkins, 2018).

One domain that tends to show positive effects from different types of AIP (such as drama-based pedagogy (DBP), music and visual arts) is in literacy related outcomes/ emergent literacy. In Taiwan, pilot research found that AIP could foster young learners' Chinese language ability by facilitating their pronunciation and word memorization (Chen, Chien-Hsu, et al., 2007). Others, such as Lee et al. (2020) support the benefits of DBP on students' learning experience in terms of students' literacy-related outcomes in general. The findings suggest that DBP has a significant positive effect on achievement. This effect is explained by the similarities between drama and literacy (e.g., character development and focus on language). Through drama, students could learn about characters, thematic understanding, complex language, and nuance, as well as their enjoyment of and persistence with interpreting and creating stories. Music interventions as well generally had a positive and significant effect on the teaching of reading skills, though they were inconsistent across studies. Standley (2008) suggests that teachers set up listening stations for reading achievement or provide popular, recreational music ensembles with participation earned through reading improvement. Results of this meta-analysis argued that the effect of music is found because music allows for repetition that is not perceived as a drill and song lyrics contain elements of reading comprehension and practice for visual decoding skills.

Along with performing arts, visual arts are said to play a strong role in the teaching of emergent literacy skills for preschoolers. Arts instruction could help children focus their visual attention and pay more attention to forms and detail and skills, leading to an increase in their reading readiness scores. Burger and Winner (2000) carried out meta-analyses that supported that when reading instruction was integrated with art instruction, children became more motivated to read more as they find art activities engaging via art projects compared to traditional reading curricula.

3.1.2 The possible moderators that affect the relationship between AIP and child development

To gain a nuanced understanding of the effect of art-inspired pedagogy on children's development, it is important to understand possible moderators that might influence the quality of the intervention. This review found and discusses two possible moderators across studies namely instructors (i.e., researcher, classroom teacher, or teaching artist) and structure of the intervention (i.e., duration and model of the intervention).

Instructors

Lee et al., (2015) conducted moderator analyses on the type of leader (i.e., instructor) as a basis to understand the potential moderating effects of the facilitator. In sum, interventions directed by the researcher or classroom teacher had significantly more positive effects than interventions led by a teaching artist for achievement and 21st-century skills whereas the opposite pattern showed when the interventions led by teaching artists had more positive effects on attitudes towards school. This raises the question in teachers' education or teacher professional development of how to train teachers to acquire as well as combine a deep pedagogical improvement on teaching skills and a strong understanding of the arts and its application. If schools opt for teaching artists as leaders in a class context, it is essential to provide them with extensive training in pedagogy and content knowledge to be more effective in the classroom (Lee et al., 2015). It is relevant to note that the achievement moderator

analysis has the strongest effect on preschool and lower elementary (d = 0.75) compared to upper elementary (d = 0.44), middle school (d = 0.48) and high school/ college (d = 0.21).

In the meta-analysis regarding the effect of DBP on literacy-related outcomes, Lee et al (2020) also found that the leader of the DBP is the crucial moderator of studies. The largest effect is for studies reporting the classroom teacher (d = 0.89) leading the DBP which is significantly larger than treatments led by the researcher (d = 0.54) and treatments led by teaching artists (d = 0.31).

Structure of the intervention

The second possible moderator for the correlation between AIP and children's outcomes is the structure of the intervention[5], including the duration and model of the given intervention. According to Stanley (2008), music for reading achievement functioned better when it was added to ongoing music education activities than when it replaced regular music education in the general curriculum. Studies that employed more than 60 hours of music instruction in the given period showed no significantly greater effects than those with less than 20 hours of intervention even when spread across the entire school year (p = 0.11). On the contrary, the duration of intervention plays an essential role in the effect of drama-based pedagogy on children's academic-related outcomes (Lee et al., 2015, 2020). This shows that the effect of the duration is likely dependent on the specific art form being used.

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5 *The intervention can be expressed in two main forms, including visual arts, and performing arts. Visual arts focus on what children see and how they develop their artistic awareness, for example, painting, drawing, photography, etc. while performing arts consider the activities related to body movements such as dance, drama, and music activities.*

In the research on the effect of DBP on literacy outcomes, Lee et al (2020) used the intervention duration as coded as the number of hours. The largest average effect is for the 3-10 hours of lessons (d = 0.87) which is significantly greater than all other categories (e.g., up to 2 hours, 11-20 hours, more than 20 hours. Studies reporting 11-20 hours (d = 0.87) are significantly more positive than more than 20 hours of lessons (d = - 0.01). Based on the findings, Lee et al (2020) recommended that DBP learning experiences are more impactful when informed by a focused inquiry (duration) and by learning theory and practice (leader). The requirement of sufficient time in instruction highlights the specific feature of DBP which focuses on the process-oriented and reflective experience rather than the final product or theatrical outcome.

Following that idea, the randomized experimental study of Çetin (2021) also argued that artistic activities should be process-oriented rather than product-oriented, which is more important for children's personal and social development. Artistic learning is the creative activity process between the individual and the work through planned, meaningful relationships created in pre-programmed aesthetic activities between the teacher and the learner. This explains why they proposed a modular art education program guided by a researcher in 7 weeks for 54 preschoolers. The program was divided into three separate modules: painting, paper-collage, and kneading where children were encouraged to use different techniques in their work and collaborate and

discuss with others. As a result, Çetin (2021) identified that the emotional and social development of children in the experimental group is significantly different from those of the control group after participating in modular art education, showing that modular art education improves children's social and emotional development. Since the artistic activities in Cetin's study focused on production rather than on children's products, their programs were centered on the senses, psycho-motor skills, aesthetics, and comprehension on developmental and perception levels.

In conclusion, the effects of art-based instructions on preschool-aged children's development and learning are moderated by instructors (i.e., classroom teachers, researchers, artists) and the number of hours/lessons. The influence of the second moderator depends on the form of arts and study objectives which are planned to integrate art forms in the teaching and learning activities (e.g., music or drama).

3.1.3 AIP and urban barriers

Although no high-quality studies are identified on the role of AIP on the relationship between urban barriers and preschool children's development explicitly, this review acknowledges that art-inspired pedagogy could foster children's development and study-related outcomes, fitting in the general practice of 'play-based learning'. Given the context of urban/city environments, art-based programs seem to support urban children to develop self-esteem, creativity, and social skills as well as their coping skills to

overcome adversities or low socioeconomic backgrounds. A few studies discussed how art-based programs could alleviate the social and financial disadvantages of urban children living in underprivileged neighborhoods. Certain types of performing arts, such as dance, have been shown to help increase different emotional intelligence skills like self-confidence, well-being, self-esteem, self-control, efficiency in interpersonal relationships, and so on. (Hyun and Seo, 2011; Abbas, Fiaz, & Fareed, 2011; Hong, 2012, cited in San-Juan-Ferrer & Hípola, 2020).

This rapid review indicates some studies showing how city/urban context could convert urban-related challenges into learning opportunities for young children. One of the ways that researchers recommended is to rethink urban/city infrastructures as 'spaces of learning' or 'learning infrastructures.' The learning infrastructures could refer to cultural heritages (e.g., museums) and public art. It is likely to observe that art and its activities can be considered as a vehicle to turn a city's identity into pedagogical materials and resources, which teachers have employed to organize their lessons and learning activities. Learning is more entertaining with art and becomes more authentic and experimental when integrated with lively infrastructures existing in the habitual life of the children. The lessons conducted in the combination of arts and city materials not only could improve children's

creativity, and social and emotional skills but also create occasions for them to learn more about 'what is there' in their city, have moments of thinking, and come up with ideas how they would like to make their city better. This review reflected on the activities regarding visiting, organizing workshops in museums, and walking around the city as examples of how arts could assist to consider the city's identity as learning opportunities for young children.

Both activities create unique learning moments in which students can experience, explore and be more attentive with their dwelling through different learning senses (e.g., such as touching, seeing, and concretizing abstract information). Careful attention inspires children to take more active roles to raise questions, communicate with others, and be more connected to their living places. This might help to improve social cohesion between the child with the space and place they are living as the idea of an assemblage of the city. City infrastructures such as public art spaces have the potential to invite the children's gaze, arouse their curiosity, stimulate different ways of seeing as well as offer them chances to think about how city center spaces might be designed as more aesthetic and playful places supportive of public life. In other words, the employment of art in this case highlights the value of a city's identity and its resources in which children do not simply learn about the city, but rather they learn *with* it.

3.2 AIP in Asian contexts

Despite many Asian countries adopting more student-centered ECE policies, studies carried out in several East Asian countries suggest that young children still find their curriculum consisting of scripted instruction, repetitive learning, and standardized testing (Hui & Yuen, 2010; Lee & Yelland, 2017; Lim-Ratnam, 2013). Lee and Yelland (2017) report that parental expectation is that pre-school teaching shall bring about academically rigorous (i.e., content-based) instructions, as well as conduct regular assessments to acquaint children with high-stakes testing that are typical in Asian contexts. Conventional ways of schooling, such as work assignments, memorization, and grade-based evaluations are common in this region, even in ECE (Lim-Ratnam, 2013). Equivalently, creative and "outside-the-box" thinking is obliquely downplayed in the major parts of Asia which are still influenced by Confucian principles of modesty, particularly in the Chinese traditions (Hui & Yuen, 2010). In these settings, there is an implicit expectation that kids must obey rules and disciplines. As discussed previously, AIP is a playful pedagogy that promotes exploration and creativity. Because of the expectations many Asian families and teachers have for preschool students, AIP has not been a widely adopted practice in this context, therefore providing us with limited research on its effectiveness in this context as well as a need to analyze the relevance and adaptability of such a model.

Despite the cultural aspects presented above, there are some schools and organizations in the region that are applying AIP. In Singapore, the "Nurturing Early Learners'' (NEL) approach based on AIP has been increasingly adopted to facilitate children's creative thinking and self-exploration of ideas. According to Stan and Popa (2014), art-related teaching methods carry significance in several Singaporean early schools (Stan, Liliana & Popa, Nicoleta Laura, 2014). Bautista et al. (2018) went through 104 clips of art-related teaching and learning practices in Singapore to find some typical features which are promising as to the positive effects of AIP, including students' positive attention and focusing, encouraging students to ask questions, teachers being responsive to students and providing feedback, generating enthusiasm, motivation, and/or curiosity, allowing freedom, self-expression, creativity and/or out-of-the-box thinking in children, and tailoring arts-related activities to students' interests. Despite the initial promising results of AIP, several drawbacks emerged, of which, teachers' competencies are the most notable challenge. In the Asian context, teachers thinking 'out-of-the-box' is rarely encouraged, teaching is often highly structured, directive, and rather rigid, and children's needs are seldomly used in lesson planning (Lim-Ratnam, 2013).

There have been a variety of AIP initiatives starting in Asia, which, despite not having casual evidence to prove effectiveness, do show a growing interest in the methodology and mindset as well as provide us with some lessons learned moving forward. Creative Arts Activities (CAA) program in Malaysia, for instance, has deployed a five-step creative process: sensitivity, fluency, flexibility, elaboration, and originality to facilitate teachers' and school leaders' new ideas in the teaching and learning (Kuong, Ling Pik et. al., 2012). Research in Indonesia also implied that certain elements, namely adequate facilities, and infrastructure; teachers' creativity; teacher-children cooperation; and parents' assistance are key factors for the effective implementation of AIP (Trisnawati & Sugito, 2020). Moreover, the implementation of art-inspired pedagogies poses some challenges which consist of facilitating different students' creativeness, the requirement of teachers' high competency to manage the classroom, and the need to attend to children's queries and expectations. To achieve the best learning outcomes, teachers must be able to properly integrate their daily educator tasks while taking into account students' creativity in the implementation of AIP.

Overall, there is a growing body of literature that recognizes the correlation between AIP and children's development (e.g., emotional intelligence, 21st-century skills) and learning (e.g., literacy, mathematics, science); the casual relationship between these variables remains speculative. As explained by Huat See and Kokotsaki (2016), the main reason is because of the weaknesses in the research, lack of replication, and inconsistent findings across studies. Compared to other age groups

(i.e., elementary, and secondary levels), the experimental studies on the preschool-aged phase are limited. Given the shortage of evidence on the causal impact of arts, See and Kokotsaki (2016) recommended considering the effect of arts as a bonus if it leads to improvements in academic attainment and other affective outcomes when integrating it in teaching and learning environments.

3.3 AIP in practice from the project findings

AIP has been introduced to 29 Da Nang preschools in the CITIES project, from 2019 to 2021. To Vietnam's education system, AIP is a new methodology both in policies and in practice. In CITIES, AIP was introduced to schools to primarily improve children's learning experience and to overcome urban barriers to learning. The project left valuable results and lessons learned in the application of AIP in preschools and the needed conditions of human capacity and institutional systems and support the implementation and to develop and nurture the inspiration of using arts in preschools. It provides us with a promising model that should be explored on a larger scale and in different contexts to validate its relevance and effectiveness.

1. Knowledge, Attitude and Practices (KAP)

The end-project KAP survey indicated a proficient level of knowledge and understanding of art-based innovation among the project's participating groups, namely BOET, school leaders, and teachers. Teachers used a wide range of activities, from visual to performing arts to engage children. Most teachers (86%) have shown adequate knowledge about best practices of AIP in dealing with barriers to children's learning in urban contexts, proving the effectiveness of the AIP training. Teachers have utilized arts in experimental activities as well as activities to achieve foundational skills, such as learning numbers, shapes, and letters. Teachers were also able to organize transitional or preparational activities to get students well prepared to fully engage in arts-based activities. To enhance the practice, teachers shared what they had tried and learned via teacher PLCs. In CITIES, PLCs were used as a platform for teachers to tackle teaching and learning challenges, such as urban barriers, through a collaborative process of co-design, try-out, and reflection on applying innovative methods such as AIP. This provides us with encouraging results that with focused training and coaching, teachers can make significant advances in their teaching practices.

2. Interest and application

The KAP survey revealed that arts/innovative activities were applied in all schools in the last school year (2020-2021) to varying degrees. School leaders and teachers have asserted the regularity of art-based innovations being integrated into lessons by teachers. Most teachers (98%) showed their willingness and commitment to continue integrating art-based innovations in their work. There is a correlation between the way teachers select activities to continue in their work and the difficulties teachers have experienced in implementing art-based activities in the previous school years. Facing difficulties in implementing activities has led to teachers becoming hesitant to continue and advance the activities further. These results lead us to believe that while teachers are in general motivated to apply AIP, there are certain conditions that need to be met to be able to do this successfully (VVOB, 2021). More research needs to be conducted to further examine what challenges they faced in the implementation and why.

3.3.2. Effectiveness

According to the teacher's point of view in the CITIES project, applying AIP in activities has helped remove barriers to learning for children living in urban areas. Most of the teachers (77%) stated that this innovative method effectively reduced the urban barriers to students' learning. It is observed by many teachers that the students, when participating in art-based activities, spent more time exploring the materials and the environment, expressed their ideas and thoughts in more creative ways, talked more, and asked more questions about their artwork in comparison with how they were in the ordinary activities. Teachers recognized that their students improved their linguistic, social, emotional, and cognitive skills, however; full impact research would need to be conducted to prove statistical significance. It was stated by a teacher of a 4–5-year-old class that her students learned shapes and numbers faster when they made or created the shapes and numbers by themselves through the given materials such as clays, paints, or wood (VVOB, 2021).

Throughout the project implementation, DOET and BOET officials were side-by-side supporting preschools in the application of AIP. They attended the capacity development activities for school leaders and teachers and provided coaching support and other guidance which helped the integration of AIP into the current national curriculum. DOET and BOET officials have demonstrated their positive perspectives on the success of art-based innovation in enhancing the professional capacity of teachers as well as in creating an active and engaging learning environment for children. DOET officials in the interviews expressed that the innovative methods have allowed teachers to become flexible in designing educational activities which are play-based, engaging, and offer experiential opportunities for children at different ages. According to BOET officials, the effective application of the innovations has resulted in changes in teachers' capacity and practices. They emphasized that AIP could go hand in hand with the MOET curriculum

and they are able to see the effectiveness of this implementation in mitigating barriers related to urban contexts. Many school leaders consistently stated that AIP created a comfortable teaching environment for teachers and a comfortable and active learning environment for children. In terms of effectiveness in dealing with barriers to learning, 86% of BOETs asserted through the questionnaire survey that the applied arts/innovation activities have been (very) effective in mitigating barriers related to urban contexts (VVOB, 2021).

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.Basis for the AIP Theoretical Framework

The AIP theoretical framework is built based on the rapid review presented above and practical project implementation experience from the VVOB team and education experts (both national and international). While there is still a lot to be discovered in terms of AIP's ability to mitigate urban barriers and improve students' holistic development, the rapid review and practical experience give us some promising information to allow this theoretical framework to be designed. AIP has been shown to be effective in increasing students' social-emotional skills as well as some positive effects of literacy development. Many of the urban related barriers to student learning center on the high stress city environments and lack of social cohesion, therefore; leading us to believe the AIP could be used as a tool in the classroom to mitigate some of these barriers. While there may be some challenges in the implementation in the SEA context, new student-centered policies in ECE lend themselves to the adoption of methodologies such as AIP. With this theoretical framework, we hope to provide readers with a practical way to implement student-centered policies while increasing students' holistic development and mitigating urban barriers.

The rapid review found that there are two main factors that can affect the outcomes of art-inspired pedagogy on child development: (i) the instructor and (ii) the structure of the intervention (duration and model). Instructors can be existing teachers or teaching artists; both have shown positive effects but in different areas. Therefore, when choosing which type of instructor, one must be intentional about the desired outcomes and ensure that they are trained in the appropriate areas prior to implementation. To adapt to the method, instructors should be equipped with knowledge about AIP and trained on facilitation skills in which they consider the children as the center, paying attention to the children's process rather than the product. The instructors also can include school leaders, who provide encouragement for teachers to experiment and develop the use of AIP in teaching through various school policies.

To provide clarity for school leaders and teachers, guidelines ought to be developed that specify how the teachers can integrate AIP into their curriculum, including what capacities teachers need to have to implement them and the structure of the intervention. We recommend the creation of such guidelines alongside teachers and school leaders with concrete ways to implement AIP in the existing systems.

## 4.2 Explanation of the AIP Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for AIP aims to support school leaders and teachers in the implementation and facilitation of the emerging ECE program that emphasizes holistic development through child-centered pedagogy and learning through play methodology. AIP complements these two approaches by providing specific methods that integrate art into teaching and learning for preschools. AIP is one way that these two approaches can be implemented and could be a preferred method for ECE as art-based activities are already commonly used. AIP is process-, not product-, focused. It is a pedagogy that allows art to be integrated into daily lessons and activities as a way to increase engagement and interest, which often leads to improved well-being and involvement and learning outcomes.

This framework is not proposing a new curriculum but rather the use of art integration in the existing ECE curriculum to enhance student interest and holistic development and subsequently reduce the impact of the urban barriers to learning. The CITIES project has proposed 8 art-inspired activities for teachers to implement in their classrooms. However, the ways in which AIP can be included in the daily ECE curriculum are vast and should be explored further. As teachers become comfortable with the 8 proposed activities, they will be more likely to take ownership of the AIP mindset and adapt it to create new activities to meet their specific learning goals with their own classes. The goal of AIP is for teachers to develop the mindset and skills necessary to take ownership of this pedagogical approach and implement it as part of their daily lessons, meeting the necessary ECE standards. As mindset shifts are

a quite complex process, school leaders must provide close coaching to ensure they are able to transfer this into practice.

The model below (Model 1) represents the goals of AIP and demonstrates how it fits into a bigger picture. As stated previously, AIP can be considered a subset of the learning through play and child-centered approach as they share many characteristics such as the facilitation of activities based on children interests, active learning, and playful pedagogies. The center of the model represents the goal of these approaches (learning through play, child-centered, and AIP) which is the holistic development of children, broken into four domains: social and emotional, language, physical and cognitive. The below model can help explain how AIP fits in the existing push for a child-centered approach in the new Vietnam ECE curriculum and what the intended outcomes of such a methodology are.

Model 1.
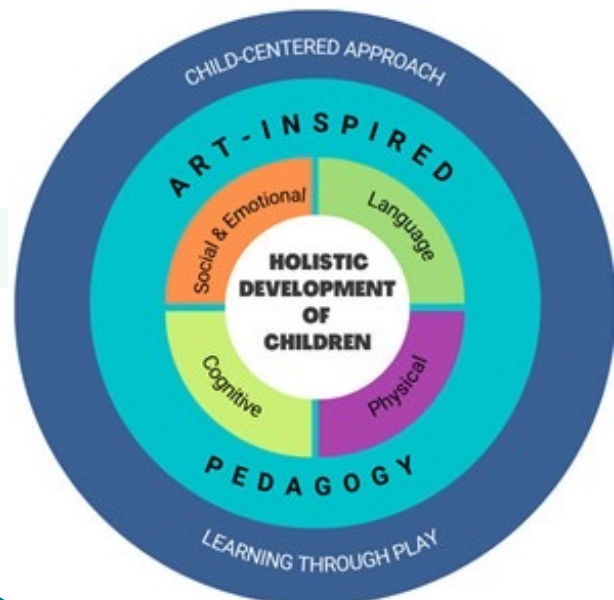
This paper has focused on the social-emotional and language outcomes of AIP on the development of children. Further research should be conducted regarding the cognitive and physical benefits of AIP.

4.3 The implementation of the theoretical framework

Lessons learned from the literature and the CITIES project indicate certain conditions needed for the AIP framework to be effectively implemented in schools. The desired environment for an art-inspired pedagogy framework consists of four pillars: **teachers' capacity, art-inspired activities, school support, and professional learning communities (PLCs).** The four pillars are interconnected, and the framework best supports the application of art-inspired pedagogy in school when all four components are in place and supporting each other. They take into account the two factors of instructors and structures of intervention as discussed in section 3 and expand on what other conditions might be needed to successfully implement AIP based on experience in the field.

Teacher capacities are the key capabilities that enable teachers to effectively use this AIP in schools. Teachers are the key component of any classroom-based intervention and AIP is no different. Teachers must be equipped with the toolset, skill set, and mindset of AIP for effective implementation. AIP can require unique materials and environments to be implemented. Teachers must be provided with the necessary tools that support AIP as well as be encouraged to explore diverse materials and environments. Not only the physical tools are needed but also the foundational tools of methodologies such as POM6 and learning through play. On top of the physical

and foundational tools, teachers must also possess a specific skill set to implement AIP. These skills include the understanding of AIP, facilitation skills, ability to adapt and modify curriculum implementation while meeting the desired government standards. It also includes a teacher's ability to reflect, give and receive feedback and adjust teaching practices accordingly.

The last, and arguably most important feature of teacher capacity is the mindset. The teacher's mindset refers to their attitudes and beliefs about AIP. In order to get the most out of AIP, teachers must possess the mindset that AIP can be effective and believe in its results. AIP is not just applying prescribed art activities or games, but rather an ability to internalize the concept and essence of AIP and learning through play in order to apply it systematically and consistently. Some suggestions for helping teachers adopt this mindset could include the presentation of positive effects of AIP in similar contexts, and observation of other classrooms, videos, or professional learning communities (discussed more below).

Art-inspired activities refer to the blending of the arts into class activities. This would require a revision of the current curriculum to identify the opportunities to integrate arts in a way that enhances the desired learning outcomes. Teachers can consider a variety of visual and performing arts as the means to help achieve educational goals. The AIP framework can be introduced into the existing school curriculum

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6POM, process-oriented child monitoring is a tool developed by VVOB to monitor the well-being and involvement of the child and take action steps to improve those aspects.

to boost engagement and learning outcomes. Activities that are inspired by arts have different dynamics, allowing for more child-led exploration meaning that student learning will require more teacher facilitation rather than direct teaching.

Specifically, for those in urban environments, cities offer a rich history and culture filled with opportunities to include the arts into daily activities. Teachers are encouraged to explore and identify the features and resources in the city that can enrich the learning experience for the children which will provide students with more authentic and meaningful experiences to connect with their community and with the curriculum. CITIES has provided a toolkit of 8 AIP activities in order to help schools and teachers begin this process. Ideally, once the other pillars described in this section are in place for AIP, teachers can go beyond these 8 prescribed activities and AIP will be embedded in the daily work of the teachers. Some characteristics that ought to be included in AIP include (but are not limited to):
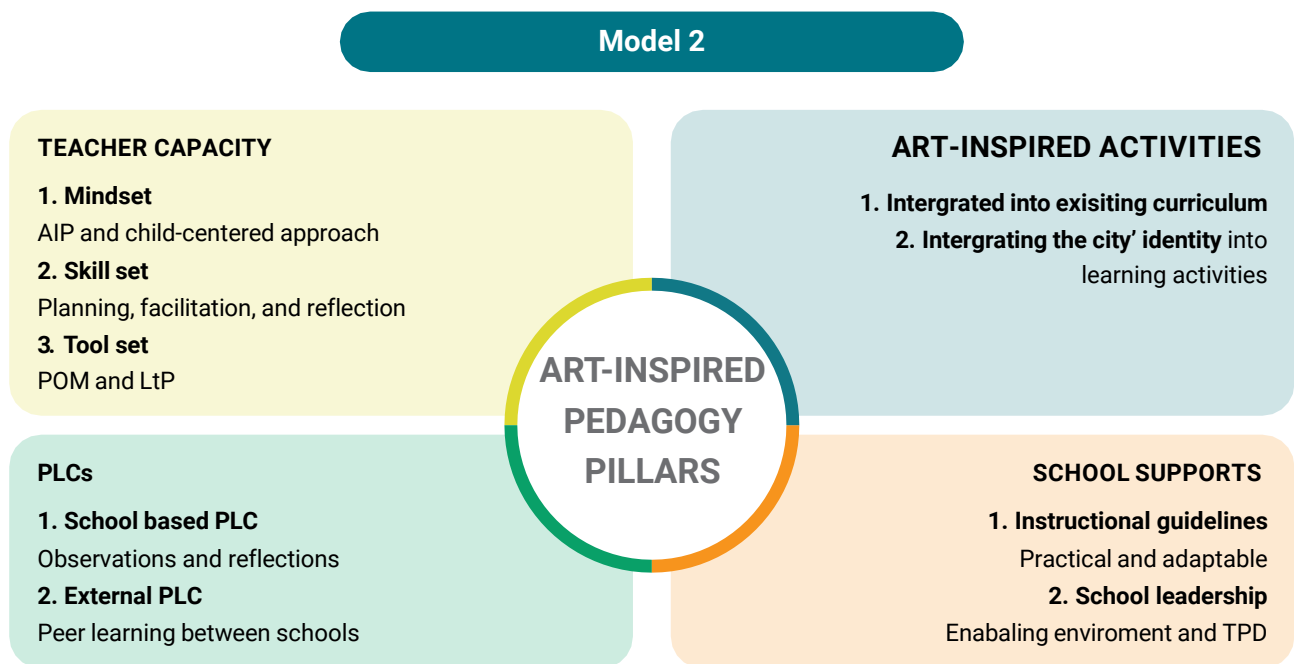
■ Integrating song, dance, painting, drama, etc. into the lesson while maintaining set learning objectives

■ Using open materials

■ Engaging in meaningful tasks

■ Using the 5 senses in activities

■ Using materials from the natural environment

■ Visiting cultural or art centers in the community

School support includes instructional guidelines and school leadership. The framework recommends that a set of guidelines be provided to schools that would give an overview of AIP and suggestive instructions on how to integrate in the TPD activities. In addition, examples of AIP application in preschool activities could be provided as preference for the teachers. The guidelines provide core steps to help schools applying AIP approach and at the same time will give space for the schools to adjust to suit the school and teachers' needs. The CITIES 8-activity toolkit could be used as the starting point for the creation of AIP guidelines for schools.

School leadership is also an essential component to the AIP framework. School leaders must also possess the mindset necessary for AIP as well as the tools to create an enabling environment for teachers to implement this. It is vital that school leaders create a healthy environment for learning, sharing, and reflecting for teachers. School leadership also includes the right policies and incentives to encourage the application and sustain AIP practice in the school based TPD system. For institutional change to take place, such guidelines and school norms must be firmly established.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are an essential component of this framework as they provide a platform for teachers and educators to share experience and knowledge in applying AIP in schools. PLCs can be created among teachers from a school, or between teachers, school leaders, and stakeholders in art education from different institutions.

Harvested results indicated the two most favorable learning channels of the teachers are learning from doing and from exchanges with colleagues. AIP is new to schools and teachers; therefore, PLCs will facilitate exchange and feedback between teachers as they try out these new methods.

Model 2

TEACHER CAPACITY

1. Mindset
AIP and child-centered approach
2. Skill set
Planning, facilitation, and reflection
3. Tool set
POM and LtP

ART-INSPIRED ACTIVITIES

1. Intergrated into exisiting curriculum
2. Intergrating the city' identity into learning activities

ART-INSPIRED PEDAGOGY PILLARS

PLCs

1. School based PLC
Observations and reflections
2. External PLC
Peer learning between schools

SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. Instructional guidelines
Practical and adaptable
2. School leadership
Enabaling enviroment and TPD

4.4 AIP and the ECE National Curriculum

In the ECE National Curriculum, art is included as a means of aesthetic education for preschool children. According to the theoretical framework of using AIP in early childhood, art is not only for aesthetic education of children, but can also be used for language, physical, cognitive, social-emotional skills. Administrators and preschool teachers can use it to effectively implement the goals and contents of the current educational program. The CITIES project found that AIP can fit well with the MOET ECE curriculum. According to one BOET,

"The schools made plans and allocated funds for the activities so that the teachers had opportunities to apply activities in parallel with the MOET's curriculum that focuses on the child-centered approach" (VVOB, 2021).

The theoretical framework for AIP was reviewed by a Da Nang DOET official to assess the relevance and feasibility of this framework into the current system. She stated that the framework supports the current curricular which promotes the empowerment of ECE preschool teachers and school leaders to "supplement educational contents and methods" to ensure the best learning outcomes for their students. She finds the framework highly feasible in this context and stressed the importance of teacher capacity and motivation to respond to the individual needs and interests of children (Le Thi Dieu Thuy, 2022).

4.5 Limitations

Within this study and the theoretical framework, two main limitations have been identified: (i) research gaps particular in SEA; (ii) the project scale of the CITIES programme.

The research team used some extended key words: "education through art" OR "Art-related pedagog*" OR "Music pedagog*" OR "learning through art" OR "learning with art" yet there is limited research focused on documenting what AIP looks like in actual preschool classrooms, particularly in SEA countries.

Regarding the project scale, most activities were conducted in Da Nang, a central coastal city of Vietnam which may not be representative of all urban environments in Vietnam. The fact that the scale of this project (29 schools) is quite small and no baseline and endline studies were conducted, makes it insufficient to make conclusive or casual statements regarding effectiveness. Full impact research would need to be conducted to provide conclusive and casual evidence to answer this research question fully. Further research and consultation with other policy makers would also make more conclusive statements to answer the above research questions.

5. CONCLUSION

Art-inspired pedagogy, a branch within learning through play methodology, and its connection to the mitigation of urban barriers is a topic with still a lot to be discovered. In Vietnam, where rapid urbanization is underway and the effects this is having on the early childhood sector is becoming more and more pronounced, governments and schools must begin to try new models and expand research on how the school system can best support the ECE students.

The teachers and school leaders in Da Nang, through CITIES, were able to identify some of these effects of rapid urbanization on children. While this may not be representative of every urban environment in Vietnam, it provides a starting point for the discussion on the effects of urbanization on children. One commonly accepted challenge of the urban environment is the high level of stress and through this research, evidence was found that art-based practices can reduce stress levels in children. Those who participated in CITIES have positive perceptions of the effectiveness as well as practicality of AIP in their schools, leading us to believe that this framework could be an effective way to implement the child-centered ECE curriculum in urban schools in Vietnam.

The current trend shows that the population and economic growth in Vietnams major cities will continue into the next decade. The education system must be prepared to recognize its effects on the ECE system and provide school leaders and teachers with practical tools to support their students. The above proposed framework, including the CITIES activities tool kit provides a starting point for teachers, school leaders and government officials to explore the possibility of AIP to integrate the child-centered approach in the new ECE curriculum, standards and policies and mitigate the urban barriers that rapid urbanization induces.

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ANNEX 1: RAPID REVIEW INCLUSION CRITERIA

1. Date: published in the period 2000 to 2022

2. Language: articles in English

3. Type of studies: quantitative, empirical studies within scholarly peer-reviewed journals

4. Study design: following the pyramid of methodological trustworthiness which at the top starts with meta-analyses, systematic reviews, or high-quality single studies such as controlled and/or longitudinal studies and then gradually moves down to lower trustworthy designs if the higher quality designs are not represented in research.

5. Measurement:

   a. studies in which the relationship between art and child-related outcomes were quantitatively measured.

   b. studies in which the relationship between art and the urban-related environments were quantitatively measured.

   c. studies in which the effect of moderators and/or mediators on the outcome of art-inspired pedagogy was measured.

6. Outcome: child development in general

ANNEX 2: SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

The below supporting documents can be provided upon request.

- KU Leuven Rapid Review

- VVOB Harvesting Report

- Feedback from Ms. Le Thi Dieu Thuy (Da Nang DOET, ECED) on the feasibility and relevance of this framework