

Professional Development Priorities of Early Childhood Educators

'SKIP Research Bites' is a series of short summaries based on findings from the Singapore Kindergarten Impact Project.

What does research tell us?

Recent research on teacher professional development (PD) has shown that for PD to be truly effective and transformative, it needs to be designed in response to the perceived needs, motivations and interests of teachers. PD that is not aligned with what teachers want to learn tends to be ineffective (Desimone, 2009).

Contemporary pre-school education curriculum frameworks emphasise the importance of promoting **children's holistic development**, thereby focusing on both academic and non-academic domains. In Singapore, the NEL Framework focuses on...

- **Aesthetics and Creative Expression:** allows children to express themselves through art and music and movement
- **Discovery of the World:** allows children to explore and make sense of the world, making observations and asking questions
- **Language and Literacy:** develops children's ability to listen with understanding and communicate with others
- **Motor Skills Development:** allows children to develop gross and fine motor skills to improve their sense of balance, physical coordination, and spatial awareness
- **Numeracy:** allows children to understand and apply mathematical concepts, skills, and processes in their daily experiences
- **Social and Emotional Development:** guides children to express and manage their feelings, thoughts and behaviours in appropriate ways, and build positive relationships with others

To Learn More:

- ☺ Ministry of Education (2012). Nurturing Early Learners: A Curriculum Framework for Kindergartens in Singapore.
- ☺ Bautista, A., Ng, S. C., Munez, D., & Bull, R. (2016). Learning areas for holistic education: kindergarten teachers' curriculum priorities, professional development needs, and beliefs. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, 10:8.
- ☺ Desimone, L. M. (2009). Improving impact studies of teachers' professional development: Toward better conceptualizations and measures. *Educational Researcher*, 38(3), 181-199.

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What is this study about?

In this study, we wanted to know...

- 1) How do Singapore kindergarten teachers **prioritise the importance** of the learning areas of the NEL Framework?
- 2) What are Singapore kindergarten teachers' **PD needs** regarding these various learning areas?

Participants were 123 K1 and/or K2 female teachers from kindergartens. All participants ranged in age from 20 to 62 years and held qualifications in early childhood education. Their teaching experiences ranged from 0.3 to 25 years. Data were collected using an online survey.



What did we find?

To explore how teachers prioritised the importance of the learning areas, we asked:

We know all curriculum areas are important. However, if we ask you to rank their importance, how would you do it? Please rank the following areas from 1 (most important) to 7 (least important).

The average priority ranking obtained was:



To explore teachers' PD needs, we asked:

Please indicate the extent to which you need to learn further about each of the following learning areas, using this scale: 1) No need for further training; 2) Low need; 3) Moderate need; and 4) High need.

Teachers indicated having moderate to high levels of need for further training in all learning areas, in the following order:



What does it mean for teaching and learning?

Consistent to NEL's idea of holistic and integrated development, Singapore kindergarten teachers do not necessarily prioritise academic over non-academic learning areas. PD plays a key role in boosting teachers' confidence in all learning areas.

- Academic and non-academic learning areas were found to be intertwined in teachers' priority rankings. *Social and Emotional Development* was the top learning area. *Numeracy* and *Aesthetics and Creative Expression* were the least important.
- Teachers reported moderate to high PD needs in all learning areas, especially in *Discovery of the World* and *Aesthetics and Creative Expression*.
- To be effective and transformative, PD needs to be responsive to teacher's own motivations and needs.
- Initial teacher preparation programmes should provide practitioners with more preparation in certain learning areas.

