

# ARNEC CONNECTIONS

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Guiding parents to play at home:  
pilot implementation of the  
Home-based ECCD Program  
in the Philippines

# Guiding parents to play at home: pilot implementation of the Home-based ECCD Program in the Philippines

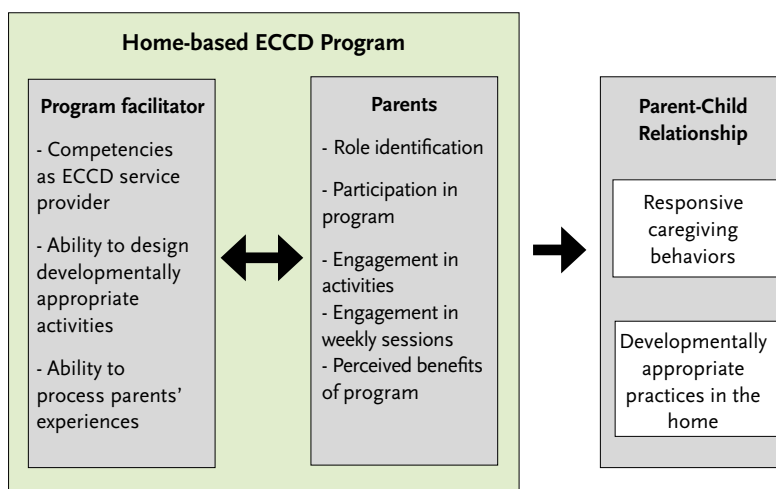
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## Introduction

In 2020, Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Council of the Philippines pilot-tested a Home-based ECCD Program designed for areas without regular access to ECCD services. The model framework<sup>2</sup> guides the capacity-building for parents, including primary caregivers or other family members in creating a home environment that is developmentally appropriate and responsive to children's needs. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic provided for the timely implementation, as centre-based ECCD services were put to a stop due to wide-scale lockdowns.

Figure 1. Model framework for the Home-based ECCD Program.



Weekly Plans are provided to parents through weekly sessions. These contain play-based activities (National Early Learning Curriculum [NELC], 2015), meant to help parents see how play can facilitate children's holistic development. In addition, the emphasis on play-based activities supports the idea that for young children, playing and learning are not separate but are integrated. It also aims to promote the home as a rich learning environment.

2. The model framework for Home-based ECCD Program was developed by the ECCD Council of the Philippines when it was implemented in pilot areas in 2020. It is the conceptual framework in the Final Report submitted to the Management of the ECCD Council.

## Method

The ECCD Council piloted its Home-Based ECCD Program in four sites in the Philippines, namely: Marikina City in Metro Manila; Antipolo City and Municipality of Taytay, Rizal Province; and Municipality of Bustos, Bulacan Province.

Due to lockdowns and limitations on transport services, the ECCD Council intentionally selected said pilot sites within, or geographically near Metro Manila, to ensure prompt delivery of materials and supplies. The sites provide for local government unit (LGU) general context where centre-based ECCD programs have been established but have yet to offer alternative delivery of ECCD services, specifically in the home setting. Moreover, the selection of sites considered the availability of internet access and communication lines of participating LGUs as all activities (e.g., orientations, workshops, technical assistance sessions) were done remotely due to health protocols brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there were limitations on account of the different levels of accessibility and connectivity of these program sites.

Before the Home-based ECCD Program implementation, the ECCD Council officers conducted capacity-building activities and orientation for program supervisors and facilitators in August 2020. The program facilitators also received training through a 3-day lecture and workshop on developmentally appropriate practice, early childhood assessment, and planning/modifying weekly activities for children and their families in September 2020. The program facilitators then conducted an orientation for the parents in October 2020 about the program and their roles, followed by the Home-based ECCD Program implementation. Table 1 below shows the number of participants involved in the project.

*Table 1. Distribution of participants per program site.*

Participants	Antipolo City	Municipality of Bustos	Marikina City	Municipality of Taytay
Supervisors (Local Social Welfare and Development Officer/ ECCD Focal Person)	2	1	2	2
Program Facilitators (Child Development Teacher/Worker)	3	3	3	3
Parents in Infant-Toddler Early Development (ITED) Program (for children aged 0-2 years old and 11 months)	5	0	5	5
Parents in Pre-K1 Program (For children 3-3 years old and 11 months)	5	0	5	2
Parents in Pre-K2 Program (For children 4-4 years old and 11 months)	5	9	5	4

With the set criteria of parents with children aged 0 to 4 years, Program Facilitators invited parents to participate in the pilot implementation. Those who agreed to participate voluntarily enrolled themselves and their children, aiming for the continued learning of their children. In addition, three sites

engaged two supervisors, where the LGUs had ECCD Focal Persons and Day Care Coordinators assisting their Local Social Welfare and Development Officer in implementing ECCD programs.

The Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) design elicited responses from parents on their experiences and opinions about the program. All FGDs conducted had an assigned Program Facilitator to establish rapport between the parents and ECCD Council officers. Parents, who consented to participate in the FGDs, were encouraged to share their experiences and their critical and constructive comments that would be used to develop the materials in the program. FGDs were conducted in Filipino and recorded via zoom, although parents' responses were a mixture of English and Filipino. From our observations, parents who participated in the FGDs shared their experiences without reservations despite the presence of the program facilitator.

Antipolo City and Taytay, Rizal sites participated in the first FGD in November 2020, only after at least three weeks of implementation, and the second FGD in December 2020. Marikina City and Bustos in Bulacan participated in the first and only FGD in December 2020 due to disruptions from Typhoon Vamco, known in the Philippines as Typhoon Ulysses. With Typhoon Vamco affecting the conduct of FGDs, Bustos and Marikina City completed only three classes under FGD 1 in December 2020. Since there was only one FGD in the pilot sites in Bustos, Bulacan and Marikina City, sharing of experiences by the parents was limited. Parents who participated in two FGDs established a baseline of expectations and were able to evaluate and assess themselves against the baseline. Table 2 shows the details of the FGD sessions.

*Table 2. Frequency of FGDs per pilot site*

Pilot Site	FGD 1	FGD 2	Remarks
Antipolo City, Rizal	(2nd Week of November 2020)	(Third week of December 2020)	Completed classes in Infant-Toddler Early Development (ITED) Program (0-2 y.o.), Pre-Kindergarten 1 (3 y.o.), and Pre-Kindergarten 2 (4 y.o.) under FGD 1 in November 2020  Completed the same classes above under FGD 2 in December 2020
Bustos, Bulacan	(Third week of December 2020)	-	Completed three classes (All Pre-Kindergarten 2) under FGD 1 due to Typhoon Vamco
Marikina City, Metro Manila	(Fourth week of December 2020)	-	Completed three classes in Infant-Toddler Early Development (ITED) Program (0-2 y.o.), Pre-Kindergarten 1 (3 y.o.), and Pre-Kindergarten 2 (4 y.o.) under FGD 1 in December 2020, but were delayed due to Typhoon Vamco
Taytay, Rizal	(4th Week of November 2020)	(Third week of December 2020)	Completed classes in Infant-Toddler Early Development (ITED) Program (0-2 y.o.), Pre-Kindergarten 1 (3 y.o.), and Pre-Kindergarten 2 (4 y.o.) under FGD 1 in November 2020  Completed the same classes above under FGD 2 in December 2020

Taking notes and transcriptions were produced based on the recordings. The similar and unique responses were clustered per FGD question and themes were identified for every clustered response. The assigned ECCD Council officers conducted a review workshop to identify common themes according to the parents' responses.

## Results from FGDs

### WHAT CHILDREN SHOULD LEARN

Generally, parents reported the importance of “starting to engage” in learning opportunities at an early age to prepare children for formal schooling. Parents added the importance of children enjoying learning and thought that those who experience too much pressure in their studies might feel burnt out at a young age.

The majority of parents' responses alluded to wanting their children to learn pre-academic skills, described as skills needed for formal schooling. These included wanting their children to learn the alphabet, body parts, colours, shapes, counting, writing lines or their names, and becoming familiar with stories.

Some of the parents mentioned starting to read with young children. Several parents, on the other hand, mentioned that engaging in the program gave their children the opportunity to gain pre-academic skills in advance. Alongside pre-academic skills, parents expressed that the program was good for developing study habits among children. Parents said that they wanted their children to learn to focus on assigned tasks.

According to parents, children need to learn to interact with others their age. This aspect was largely unmet due to the restrictions on social interactions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. For some groups who conducted online sessions, there was very minimal child-to-child interaction as Program Facilitators took up most of the time in the session. Parents were additionally interested in having their children learn good manners that could be practised daily at home. Some parents shared that older siblings helped in implementing certain activities at home.

### PLAYING VERSUS STUDYING

Three concepts were brought up during the FGDs: playing (*paglalaro*), studying (*pag-aaral*), and learning (*pagkatuto*). Parents shared that learning always happens when a child studies. Additionally, studying is reportedly associated with challenging activities related to their child's present age and skills.

Parents define play as experiences that children enjoy. They identified two types of play: One is the type where learning is not recognised, such as when children chase each other or play with toys. The other type is where adults target specific skills included in the weekly plan, like washing hands, brushing teeth, opening lids, and picking up things, which are considered learning experiences.

Parents characterised studying by engaging children in activities to learn, often partnered with adult supervision. The parents expressed that play can be a distraction to studying. However, parents shared that there are times when they combine playing and studying. This combination makes children happily engaged in activities and learn from them.

Parents also differentiated playing and studying by the skill highlighted in the activity. Gross motor skills and socio-emotional domains frequently relate to playing, such as playing with toy blocks, climbing up, and going down

the stairs. On the other hand, fine motor skills and cognitive domains relate to studying, such as tracing or writing letters and doing worksheets. These results highlight that some parents continue to see learning as separate from playing. They see learning that emphasises skills expected for formal schooling and playing that emphasises skills unrelated to school.

### **USING THE WEEKLY PLAN**

Program facilitators, who are child development teachers and workers with experience in implementing centre-based early learning programs, are the primary designers of the weekly plans, which contain activities based on the children's development and interest, and the NELC. Parents, on the other hand, are the primary implementer of the activities in the set weekly plans during the set week and share their experiences during the weekly session. As implementers, they provide possible revisions to activities based on their children's reactions and interactions.

Further, the parents described that weekly plans provide a step-by-step sequential guide to activities, explaining that these are easy to follow and provide flexibility to their schedules and children's pace to complete activities. However, implementation, according to them proves to be challenging, including capturing and sustaining children's attention and avoiding distractions that affect their disposition in doing the activities. The challenges include a lack of experience in teaching their children and limited knowledge of concepts to introduce in the early years.

According to the parents, activities such as mealtime, play, and family time are integrated with home routines. They consider them as regular routines rather than separate activities. This integration allows other family members to participate in activities, encouraging them to play an active role in their children's activities and development.

The parents reported that the guide observation questions on how children responded or performed the task for each activity in the weekly plan, allowed them to observe their children's development and interests, including tasks and skills they did with ease or with a challenge. Children manifest responsive behaviours as parents recognise the areas to introduce variation or receive assistance in implementation. Some parents reported implementing and designing additional activities based on their children's development, interests, and the week's concept.

### **PERCEIVED IMPACTS**

The majority of parents expressed that they felt closer to their children because of the program, which was the best effect they experienced. The parents mentioned that doing the activities with their children facilitated interactions between family members. The majority of parents were mothers; however, they tapped other family members, such as the fathers, grandparents, and older siblings, to step into the teacher or facilitator role when needed.

Parents' understanding of their child as unique, was shown through their keen observation of their child's preferred activities and the modification they made to suit their child's needs and interests. The role of play was an important discovery in parenting, especially in the traditional context of community attitudes, where play is perceived to be devoid of learning and development.

The parents reported time management as a major challenge in the program implementation. Their availability for their children proves challenging despite their busy schedules and prioritising tasks that require immediate attention.

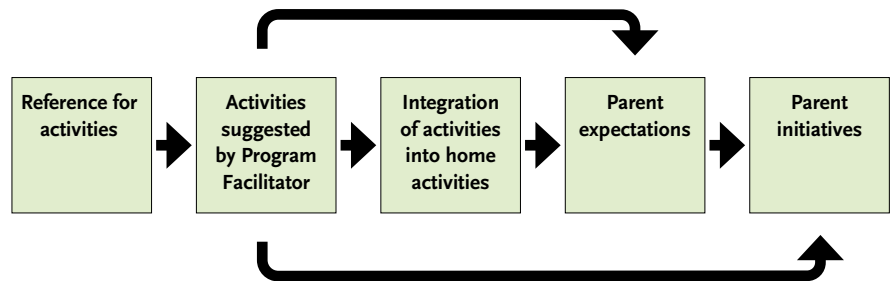
At the start of the implementation, the parents shared that they adjusted to their role in the program as they got to know their child as a learner

and themselves as a teacher. Eventually, children are more able to listen because parents can communicate more in a manner that their children can understand. By the third month of the program implementation, parents viewed themselves as their child's first teacher who actively took on the primary role of planning, designing, implementing, and evaluating developmentally appropriate activities. They felt capable of teaching and expressing continued support for their children's learning at home.

The parent communities created showed how the program can empower parents to support each other. During the pilot implementation, parents took the initiative to establish online communities through group chat platforms. The parents found themselves sharing resources, such as related worksheets, songs, teaching strategies, and practices through social media messaging apps like Facebook Messenger, using chat and video call options when necessary.

## Discussion of Findings

Figure 2. Model for educating parent expectations and parent initiatives



The weekly planned activities influenced the parents' expectations of their children. The parents showed complete trust in the program facilitators and viewed their recommended activities as the ideal activities to give to their children.

The same goes for parents' expectations and the implementation of learning experiences. Parent initiatives are activities provided by parents outside the suggested weekly plan, such as related stories, worksheets, and activities. The parents reported using the weekly plan as a basis for additional activities, following its themes and the nature of its suggested activities.

In addition, the parents' expectations and observations of their child's learning are influenced by the number of suggested activities integrated into home routines. Suggested activities integrated into home routines helped parents become more observant of their children during specific routines. Also, the parents are more able to see their children's progress in the skills required by these specific routines even when done during other home routines. Meanwhile, skills from activities, not integrated into home activities, were only observed through the repetition of the same activity.

Parents who enrolled in the Infant-Toddler Early Development (ITED) Program proved to be more likely to report expectations that activities should be integrated into home activities and routines, and less likely to report a focus on pre-academic skills, rather than parents in the Pre-K programs. These expectations may be attributed to ITED activities being guided by NELC Learning Resource 3, which lists activities done in the home setting. Meanwhile, Pre-K activities guided by NELC Learning Resources 5 and 6, list activities done in the classroom setting. Overall, ITED groups in the pilot implementation reported experiencing and initiating more activities that were integrated into home routines.



Noting these, two critical entry points for technical assistance are identified: (1) the Weekly Plan suggested by program facilitators, and (2) the references provided for program facilitators in designing suggested activities. Resources provided during the implementation are the NELC - Learning Resource Package and Core Developmental Milestones of Filipino Children.

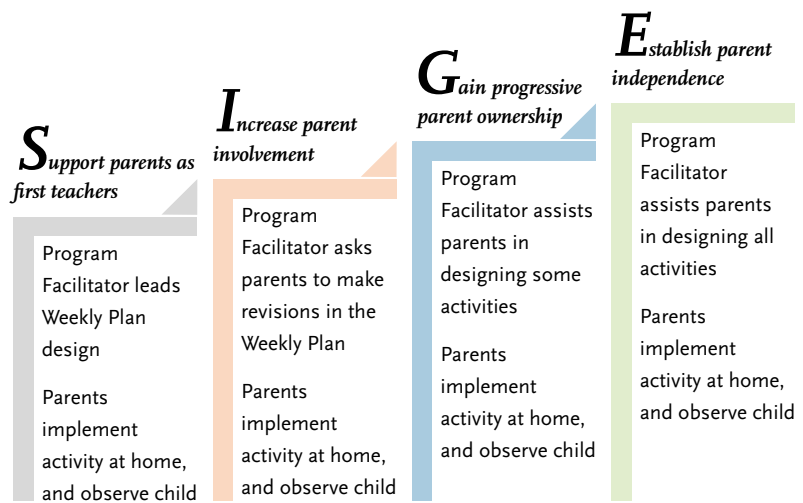
How a weekly plan is designed, influences parents' ideas about their child's development and the extent of support they should be providing as parents. Therefore, regular capacity-building activities for program facilitators, who design weekly plans, should focus on developing knowledge in child development (holistic development, developmental milestones, and the like) and developmentally appropriate practices. Through regular capacity building, there is an increase in understanding and, eventually, proficiency in the principles of early childhood development and developmentally appropriate practices of program facilitators.

The provision of reference materials containing age-specific and appropriate activities that can be integrated with the home routine allows program facilitators to design and adapt to the children's specific needs and interests, and the available resources in the home environment. It is important to highlight home activities as a rich source of learning opportunities for children, simultaneously promoting parents' learning about their children.

Program facilitators then are more equipped to develop appropriate and responsive weekly plans, implemented by parents. Through practice and transfer of knowledge from program facilitators to parents, parents are led to responsive and appropriate caregiving behaviours and developmentally appropriate practices at home.

## Conclusion

Figure 3. SIGE: Four phases of the Home-based ECCD Program.



From the Pilot Implementation, the ECCD Council has been able to revise the program model that guides participants to gain parental independence—the ability to make developmentally appropriate decisions and design play-based learning activities in the home and community independently. A four-phased process was designed to gradually educate parents to become knowledgeable and comfortable in their role as the child's first teacher. Following the development of the Guidebook for its implementation, the program is set to be rolled out to other local government units to replicate and adapt, specifically for areas without regular access to centre-based ECCD programs and services.

# References

Early Childhood Care and Development Council. (2015). National Early Learning Curriculum - Learning Resource Packages (LRPs) for Pre-Kindergarten. In ECCD COUNCIL. <https://eccdcouncil.gov.ph/nelc-2/>

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