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## The Implementation of Project-Based Approach at Preschool Education Program

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### Abstract

A two cycle collaborative action research project was carried out to facilitate the implementation of a new teaching method i.e. the project-based approach at preschool education program. This paper discusses the perception of the teachers involved about the process of the implementation and the impact of the approach to the children. At the beginning of the study, the teachers reported their grievances about the challenges and difficulties they faced in implementing the approach. However, at the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle, the teachers showed a higher confidence level in implementing the approach and reported a positive impact on children's cognitive and social development. The finding of the study also support the use of collaborative action research project as a tool for continues professional development program at workplace.

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### 1. Introduction

Literature review suggested that project-based teaching method can be applied to all level of education (Katz, 2000, Rinaldi, 2006). The use of this approach in preschool education is inspired by the early childhood education program as practice at Reggio Emillio, in Italy. Project-based approach is said to meet the nature of children who love to explore and investigate. This approach defines education as a creative inquiry process that provides a rich learning environment, full of fun and excitement to children. In this approach, the task of teachers is not to give answers but to facilitate the process of learning, listening, researching and learning together with the children (Rinaldi,2006). Project-based approach adopt a constructivist pedagogy that emphasis on deep learning process through inquiry method in which the child is preoccupied with issues and questions that are rich, alive and relevant to their daily live (Kats & Cesarone, 1994).

In early 2009, this approach was chosen to be implemented at the early childhood education centre at UKM. The teachers were exposed to the approach through a series of workshop and also a collaborative action research project

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to help them implemented the approach. This paper discusses the teacher's perception on the implementation of the approach and the impact of the approach to the children.

## 2. Methodology

This study used a collaborative action research project involving a collaborative effort between a group of researchers with a group of teachers at Tunas Permata, UKM. The participants of the study consist of three researchers at the faculty of education and six pre-school teachers at Tunas Permata. The three researchers are academicians at the Faculty of Education majoring in Educational Psychology, Computer Education and Technology Education. Two of them had attended courses on project-based approach at Reggio Emilia, Italy in November 2008. All the teachers are females aged between 35 and 48 years and have more than five years working experience in preschool education. None of them has the experience of using project based approach.

In the middle of 2009, a two cycles of action research were conducted involving five phases in each cycle namely: 1) the initial reflection phase, 2) the planning phase, 3) the action/implementation phase, 4) the observation and analysis phase, and 5) the reflection and assessment phase. These five phases are carried out and used as a tool to help the teachers improve the implementation of project based method. The phases were repeated for the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle.

The first cycle was carried out in July 2009 to December 2009; three series of focus groups meeting between the researchers and the teachers were conducted to discuss ways to improve the implementation of the project-based approach. The first meeting covers the first two phases, namely to: 1) discuss the problems faced in the implementation of the approach and 2) plan an action to overcome the problems or to improve the implementation of the approach. During the meeting, the teachers were asked to reflect on the implementation of the approach and identify the problems faced in implementing the approach. This information is then used to guide them to plan an action to improve the implementation of the approach. The second meeting involves the preparation to implementation of the action plan and the observation and data collection for the reflection phase in cycle one.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle of studies was conducted from January to August 2010. Based on the weaknesses and problems that are discovered in the reflection and evaluation phase in the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle, an action plan were discussed to be implemented by the teachers, followed by the observation and analysis phase and ended with the reflection and assessment phase of the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle.

The findings reported in this paper is based on data collected during the implementation of the collaborative action research project especially the reflection process at the initial phase in cycle one, the interventions, and the reflection at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle.

## 3. Findings of the study

The report on the findings of the study is divided into three parts namely: 1) The initial reflection and 2) The intervention and, 3) The reflection at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle.

### 3.1. The initial reflection

Data collected during the initial reflection phase is coded and analyzed to answer two questions: 1) What are the challenges they face during the implementation of the project-based approach that need to be addressed and 2) What are their suggestions to solve or improve the implementation of the project-based approach.

The findings revealed that the participants reported that they still facing difficulties to implement the approach and need guidance to effectively carry out the proposed approach. Among the responses by the participant are:

“...need more exposure on how to implement the approach...” (R1, R4 and R5)

“... to get guidance in planning suitable project for children...” (R1, R2, R4, R5)

“... need support and ongoing consultation with the expert...” (R3, R2)

“... feel inadequate to carry out project-based approach...” (R4, R5)

Among the problems raised in the implementation of project-based approach are:

“...need detail planning ...” (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6)

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