



Knowledge hub
-
Collection of best practices

Summary of the best practice

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) *

Think Equal (TE)

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented *

Think Equal is currently taught in early years settings across the globe, in 20 countries, supported by governments. In North Macedonia, Think Equal was mandated as part of the national curriculum in 2019, and it is taught in all schools. In South Africa, we have a partnership with the Eastern Cape Department of Education, which has endorsed the implementation of Think Equal for every single 5-year-old child in the province. We also implement in Colombia, Mexico, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, USA, UK, Australia, Botswana, India, Spain, Dubai, Singapore and Sri Lanka.

3. Please select the **most relevant** Action Track(s) the best practice applies to *

- Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools
- Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development
- Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession
- Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation
- Action Track 5. Financing of education

4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) *

UNICEF
Pratham
Enseña por México (Mexico)
Ntataise (South Africa)
Fundación Escuela Nueva Volvamos a la Gente (Colombia)
Kaivalya Foundation
UNESCO
Comunidad de Madrid

5. Key words (5-15 words): Please add key descriptive words around aims, modalities, target groups etc. *

Social and emotional education, early childhood, brain building, prosocial neuro-pathways, global citizenship, sustainable development goals, social justice, gender and racial equality, environmental stewardship, empathy, positive life outcomes, life skills

6. What makes it a best practice? *

The Think Equal Programme is a social-emotional education program designed for children aged 3-6 using as its archetypal model the hallmarks and features of impactful studies of the past 6 decades. It has thus modelled itself on best practice methodologies. It has been evaluated in multiple contexts, yielding positive and effective results in child development, teacher-child relationships and overall classroom culture. It contains best practice programmes from global thought leaders in neuroscience, psychology and education and human rights. Supported by governments in countries as diverse as North Macedonia, South Africa and Mexico, Think Equal is currently taught across 6 continents. Think Equal and its contents are extremely relevant to current global circumstances, directly addressing and deconstructing, through early childhood education, the cycle of violence so widespread in our global community. It places human rights, inclusion, celebration of diversity and equality at the centre of learning. The program challenge gender and other stereotypes and reshapes existing outdated gender expectations. Think Equal has been designed by experts in the field and includes best practice pedagogical influences such as Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, Vygotsky's Socio-cultural Theory of Development, and concepts of child empowerment, based in Montessori principles. Think Equal views the child as the agent of and vehicle for social change. The program is rooted in educational partnerships and collaboration, with activities integrating existing research-based best practice models, such as the RULER program from Yale University's Center for Emotional Intelligence; The Kindness Curriculum from University of Wisconsin-Madison's Center for Healthy Minds; and SEE Learning from Emory University's Center for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics. The Think Equal program is also designed with sustainability and scalability in mind. All books and resources last at least ten years, and we provide support on how to teach the program in the first year to ensure the teacher's questions regarding the implementation are answered. Our partners often have a pre-existing and ongoing presence in the project's target schools. When we leave, we fully expect the classrooms to continue to use the materials and teach Think Equal to future cohorts of children. There is no on-going costs associated with continuing the programme; the materials once delivered continue to be used and further / future teachers are trained without any further cost. Our long-term goal is a system change in education in which this subject (which we deem to be the missing 3rd dimension to education) becomes a critical and core purpose of early years education alongside numeracy and literacy. Our experience in other countries has strongly evidenced that children take the lessons learned home and influence their parents. We have many instances of parents asking the teachers for tools that the children have mentioned (e.g. the Mood Meter) so that their whole family can benefit from this 'new learning'. Thus, we believe that families and communities will be impacted over time as they understand the critical and urgent need for the intervention, competencies, and skills with which Think Equal empowers its young children.

Description of the best practice

7. Introduction (350-400 words)

This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the practice and address the following issues:

- i) Which population was affected?
- ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?
- iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? *

The Think Equal Programme targets children aged three to six across three levels, one per school year. Based on research surrounding brain sensitivity and the ability to adapt to new experiences at an early age, and particularly for quality early learning to have lifetime effects, this design aims to mediate social and emotional skills to children early, while behaviours are first taking root, co-creating prosocial neuro-pathways in their developing brain.

Many global settings are weighed down by a culture of gender-based and everyday violence, substance abuse, poverty, and broken communities. Early experiences of 0–6-year-olds are often adverse in such contexts, including poverty, exposure to violence, and negative (or no) interactions with caregivers. This inhibits brain development and the acquisition of social-emotional skills needed for positive relationships and wellbeing, including self-regulation, problem-solving, and empathy. Children who lack these skills grow into less resilient adults, struggle to maintain healthy relationships and are more likely to display emotional disconnection, anger, and prejudice. At a societal level, this limits productivity, leads to increased social tension and perpetuates cycles of violence.

The Think Equal program directly addresses the problem of discriminatory mindsets that perpetuate racial, gender-based, religious and ableist stereotypes, allowing children to deconstruct the foundations of these mindsets and form inclusive, empathetic and open mindsets.

Think Equal contributes to fostering Social and Emotional Learning in the early years through two types of intervention. Materials include over 60 narrative picture books, 270 lesson plans with prescriptive instructions, and over 200 resources covering 25 essential skills and competencies, provided to teachers implementing the program. Think Equal also provides comprehensive training sessions for educators and Master Trainers, either online or in person. For each of the three age-appropriate levels that are available, the classroom implementation occurs over 30 weeks. The program is taught in three 30-minute sessions per week.

Short-term outcomes that have been identified through various evaluations include an increase in positive social and emotional behaviours, including empathy, critical thinking, collaboration, emotional literacy, resilience, inclusion, self-regulation, self-esteem, kindness, peaceful conflict resolution and creativity.

Long-term outcomes include healthy relationships, global citizenship, gender equality, reduced depression, reduced inequalities, emotional intelligence, reduced violence, increased self-worth and environmental awareness.

The expected long-term government outcomes include increased GDP, peaceful communities, increased racial, religious, and gender-equal labour force, reduced spending on health care and social costs and reduced spending on containment of violence.

8. Implementation (350-450 words)

Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:

- i) What are the main activities carried out?
- ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?
- iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?
- iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation?

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The main activities carried out are preparation, planning and program logistics, training, implementation and monitoring and evaluation. Please see below for a summary of each.

1. Preparation - Secure funding, build a relationship with a local implementation partner and other relevant stakeholders (including government personnel) and finalize possible language translations.

2. Planning and Programme Logistics - Create an implementation timeline and delegate responsibilities with our local partners. Sort material printing and delivery. Finalize a list of implementation settings.

3. Training - Either in person across 1-2 days and/or on a self-paced online training platform which consists of fifteen 20-minute videos.

4. Implementation - The program is taught across 30 weeks by trained preschool teachers, 3 times a week in 30 minutes sessions. Each classroom receives a set of materials which includes narrative picture books, the 3 lesson plans/activities per week based on each book and accompanying resources.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation - MEAL tools are developed and adapted to assess the program's impact over the years. Our tools include regular check-ins, focus groups with teachers, direct child assessments and an end-of-program review.

Since 2016, we have implemented 53 projects in 20 countries, reaching over 180,000 children worldwide. Below are some examples:

- Eastern Cape, South Africa - since 2021, over 26,000 children have been reached so far, with approximately 40,000 more reached during 2022 and a total of 168,000 over the following 2 years.
- Guerrero, Mexico - 2020 pilot in 400 ECD settings (200 indigenous)
- Monterrey Mexico - every 3-6 year olds child in Mexico's second biggest city to receive the TE Program by 2024.
- Colombia (Antioquia, Bolívar, Córdoba, Magdalena, Sucre) - 2021 to 2022 (closed) - over 1,500 children reached in the first year of implementation.
- India - The program is implemented across 11 states: Maharashtra, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Telangana and Rajasthan, with different implementation partners. We have reached 28,355 children in India since 2017 and will be impacting another 45,000 children in 2022.

Think Equal works in public-private partnerships in each country. Key stakeholders include Imaginable Futures, FEN, IADB, Teach for Mexico, UNICEF, DGMT, Echidna and UNESCO. Once partnerships for each program are identified, each implementing teacher receives a Think Equal set of materials, including 22-24 narrative picture books, a lesson plan booklet with 90 lesson guides and a resource booklet with 50+ resources.

The cost per sets of materials follows an economy of scale:

- Less than 500 = \$290
- 500-1000 = \$230
- 1000+ = \$190

This is a one-off cost to last as long as the resources last- which we approximate ten years. This covers training, printing, shipping, delivery and Think Equal staff costs. Additional funds are required for translations of materials, implementation partners, and deeper evaluation if required.

9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below:

- How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies, impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);
- What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?
- Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? *

Our larger projects in Eastern Cape South Africa, Guerrero Mexico, North Macedonia, Rajasthan and India have led to positive relationships and endorsement by the government Departments for Education, ensuring sustainability and longevity of the Think Equal program at a large scale.

Monitoring, evaluations and assessments are embedded in the implementation to measure the success and impact of the Think Equal program on primarily the children but also educators, caregivers and the wider community.

Overall, evaluations have shown an increase in children's prosocial behaviours and decreased antisocial behaviours. To date, three RCTs have been conducted on TE's programs in Colombia, Botswana and Australia, all showing statistically significant positive outcomes. Researchers at Federation University Australia and Yale Centre for Emotional Intelligence measured changes in children's social-emotional behaviour before and after participation in the TE program. Post-participation, children were more emotionally regulated ($d=0.38$), less anxious ($d=0.33$), and had greater effortful control ($d=0.45$), concluding there is "strong evidence-based validation for the extensive benefits of the TE program." In Botswana, Yale also found that children who participated in TE experienced reduced anger, aggression, and anxiety and increased prosocial behaviours with up to 1.5 standard deviations difference. In Colombia, IPA recently concluded evaluation with 1500 children and 1000 caregivers echoed these findings, showing positive self-awareness and prosocial behaviour results. Positive effects are also evidenced in Early Childhood Development workers' pedagogical, social and emotional skills and mental health. Studies have also shown profound qualitative evidence of impact. For example, Koko Koreng, Director of Botswana Education Ministry of Kgatleng (where TE was implemented to full saturation), noted that as a result of TE, "not only have children been transformed, but levels of violence in the community have reduced." Additionally, a caregiver in Mexico reported that a child with spina-bifida who had been excluded from play was included daily and helped by other children after the book "Helping Hands" was studied. A Colombian caregiver noticed children felt safer expressing their identities with the reduced stigma around non-adherence to gender stereotypes.

10. Lessons learnt (300 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:

- i) What were the key triggers for transformation?
- ii) What worked really well – what facilitated this?
- iii) What did not work – why did it not work? *

A key trigger for transformation is stakeholder engagement, including local governments. Think Equal projects with the highest success correlate with strong government relationships.

Through RCTs conducted in Botswana and Australia, a key finding was that the greater the baseline deficit in social and emotional learning, the greater the impact of the Think Equal program on that child. This highlights how vulnerable communities of children with poorer foundations in SEL are impacted more significantly by Think Equal.

Outside of positive results yielded from evaluations, several components of the Think Equal program have proven to work well. For example, teacher feedback has noted that the narrative picture books are a key component of the Think Equal program. The interactive and visually stimulating picture-based content has been successful in many settings and populations, especially those with high illiteracy rates.

While the teacher training has also contributed to success, the materials themselves are easily implemented and understood by educators from any background. Due to the prescriptive nature of the lesson plans, teachers continue to train as they teach the program, resulting in over 90 hours of direct engagement with the content and methodology of this new subject.

Due to the nature of our approach, the project deliverables and outputs expected from the Think Equal team in the different projects are similar across multifarious settings. Therefore, we know how to tackle the various operational challenges. For instance, when the Covid-19 pandemic affected our work in Colombia with the closure of preschools, we developed a digital alternative to the program to reach 1,500 children who could have missed out on the opportunity (in partnership with FEN). We also developed an online teacher training platform in response to the difficulty of providing face-to-face training during the pandemic while simultaneously helping adapt to our increasing scale of projects.

11. Conclusions (250 words)

Please describe why may this intervention be considered a “best practice”. What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented “best practice” or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? *

The Think Equal program integrates best practice strategies from existing resources (RULER, Kindness Curriculum, SEE Learning, theories of pedagogy, etc.) and meets the criteria of ethical soundness, partnerships and collaboration, relevance, effectiveness, sustainability and scalability. The program is research-based, easy to implement and yields positive prosocial outcomes in children and their surrounding communities. The high-quality materials are also available in multiple languages (18 to-date), and multiple channels alongside what is described here, including home-based interventions, animated stories, a trauma-informed programme for refugee and IDP settings, and an upcoming TV series. It is an inexpensive approach to bringing SEL into the lives of children and is easily customized to adapt to various cultural contexts. A turnkey solution in developing brains to supporting positive neural pathways. Think Equal requires little training and does not require subject experts to be implementing in any setting. Think Equal has begun to transform the lives of hundreds of thousands of children and looks to a hopeful and positive future as a result.

12. Further reading

Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information on the “best practice” for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the beneficiary group/s. *

Yale Botswana RCT - <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t7CIITi8BEkiODHAcPceQI0vXj6q5Brs/view?usp=sharing>

Yale Australia RCT - <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bCh1t0dc3Bs8C6ADmihjS7WlsBIBg5iG/view?usp=sharing>

Botswana Qualitative Report - <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1N1L1SJOolxvgAuNPi1fi99ENdwUz7mY0/view?usp=sharing>

UK Qualitative Report - https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CZpzccHQmp671_AKymQKG-YrUvmUU3ri/view?usp=sharing

Teacher Feedback - <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Q40wyY-Rfe5IRmug6-5qegZ-iLfxPNZw/view?usp=sharing>