

THINK EQUAL EARLY YEARS PROGRAMME:
Framework Summary

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THINK EQUAL

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

Think Equal is a holistic Early Years Programme based on a commitment to social equality, gender, racial and religious equality, social and emotional health and well being and global citizenship, based in social-emotional learning. The programme views children as individual parts of a collective, global fabric and aims to support them as they begin a lifelong learning journey unburdened by the restraints of discriminatory mindsets. It endows them with knowledge and experiential understanding of values and life skills or competencies such as empathy, inclusion, self-confidence, emotional literacy, self-regulation, peaceful conflict resolution, and so forth. It encourages and empowers them in assuming responsibilities as global citizens, and becoming ‘upstanders’ and transformers of society through the use of critical, inclusive and creative thinking.

The Think Equal Early Years Programme consists of 36 topic areas, containing within them rich resources designed to foster positive later life outcomes, and the development of personal, social and emotional competencies and skills in the early childhood setting and through the extensive use of narrative and a focus on social cognition, in the wider context of the child’s life.

The need for social-emotional learning in early years education has been long supported by educationalists and forward thinkers in the global community. The founder of organization Roots of Empathy, Mary Gordon stated, ‘We will not have the capacity to solve intractable social problems, unless we have a citizenry that is capable of understanding multiple perspectives and acting on them’ (2013). Paulo Freire described education as ‘the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world’ (2000, p.34). Aristotle stated, ‘Education of the head without education of the heart, is no education at all’, and Nelson Mandela said that, ‘No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love’.

Think Equal calls for a systemic change in education. It constructs and delivers and international curriculum with a tangible programme of narrative books, lesson plans and resources. The Think Equal team collaborates with a Technical Review Committee in each adopting country, to translate and contextualise the programme to its cultural context, while maintaining the learning of children as global citizens. Think Equal directly

addresses nine of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and promotes values-based education.

By working in partnership with adopting countries, Think Equal supports the development of an intrinsic desire within education communities to implement social-emotional learning and values-based education and aims to be an integrated subject. This approach helps ensure the success of the programme (Women's Education Researchers of Kenya, 2015).

According to Irina Bokova, the Director-General of UNESCO: 'Changes in the world call for the development of a new humanism that is not only theoretical but practical, that is not only focused on the search for values, but oriented towards the implementation of concrete programmes that have tangible results' (Bokova, 2010).

PROGAMME AIMS

The implementation of Think Equal in the early years (3-6) aims to enhance children's learning experiences at their earliest start, while attitudes and behaviour are taking root, and ultimately influence these through their school life and beyond. Think Equal aims to 'endow... individuals with the necessary insights, skills, and responsive strategies that will offer a bridge to the understanding of their own culture' (Falik, 2013), as well as the readiness to assimilate and accommodate to the cultural values necessary to confront their own conditions of life' (Falik, 2013).

Think Equal also aims to correct narratives which may have been distorted due to prejudice, replacing these deviations with the internal logic of positive narratives focused on human dignity, diversity, inclusion, gender equality, justice, empathy and compassion.

At policy level Think Equal aims to:

1. 'Establish and encourage awareness, through closely monitored implementation and publication of results, that modifiability is possible.
2. Organise a critical mass of concerned and experienced individuals who are poised to influence decision-making processes, and directing of investment. It should be noted that the Think Equal resources and materials are given free of charge, with costs being limited to printing; it is thus incredibly inexpensive to implement.
3. Implement the Think Equal Curriculum on a global scale, beginning with a pilot program prior to either extended government-run pilot programme or government

led rollout in adopting countries.

4. Work with Ministries of Education to ensure high training of master trainers and teachers, and high quality implementation of the program.
 5. Integrate Think Equal into educational structures, employing a top down approach.
 6. Adapt, improve, and elaborate programs to reflect changing needs and emergent outcome effects.
- (Adapted from Falik, 2013)

PROGRAMME PRINCIPLES

The Think Equal Programme reveres the child as a powerful being, endowed with full human rights as per Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Think Equal adheres to the full terms of the convention with particular emphasis on the following: That the education of the child shall be directed to:

- The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
- The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;
- The development of respect for the child's parents, their own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which they may originate, and for civilizations different from their own;
- The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, acceptance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups, and persons of indigenous origin;

The Think Equal Programme purposes to:

- Model appropriate behaviour for children in accordance with fundamental principles of the Montessori philosophy in order for them to develop grace, courtesy and respect for themselves, their peers, their families and others
- Co-construct the positive language of global diversity, and human rights and responsibilities in terms of gender, ethnicity, and ability
- Create space for imaginative/role play/ perspective-taking as foundational for Empathy.
- Encourage all children to explore all opportunities available to them
- Provide varied learning experiences and activities based on the process of narrative (the experience of, creation of and expression of stories), and to link this learning to other areas of the curriculum
- Provide learning activities which accelerate the learner's social cognition
- Develop the learner's emotional intelligence through fostering emotional literacy and strategies for self-regulation

- Develop the learner’s self-confidence and resilience through the use of positive, accurate language
- Develop the learner’s insight and search for logical evidence through activities which encourage critical and creative thinking, and problem-solving
- Develop empathy through the use of narrative and characters’ journeys through stories

Think Equal begins with the child and acknowledges the dispositions, culture, customs, knowledge, and experience the child brings to the learning environment. Think Equal believes that new learning can only occur once the child’s experiential, cultural and educational background has been acknowledged and respected.

PROGRAMME METHODOLOGY

Social-Emotional Learning Outcomes

At the core of the Think Equal programme are the 25 key social-emotional learning outcomes, which serve as the foundation of the programme’s lessons, narrative books and teaching. These outcomes are as follows:

Empathy; collaboration; self-awareness; resilience; emotional literacy; perspective taking; self-esteem; relationship-building skills; self-regulation; inclusion; self-confidence; kindness; gender equality; being an advocate for others – an ‘upstander’; problem-solving; moral and ethical values; communication skills; global citizenship; critical thinking; peaceful conflict-resolution; mindfulness; environmental awareness and action; creativity; celebration of diversity; goal setting

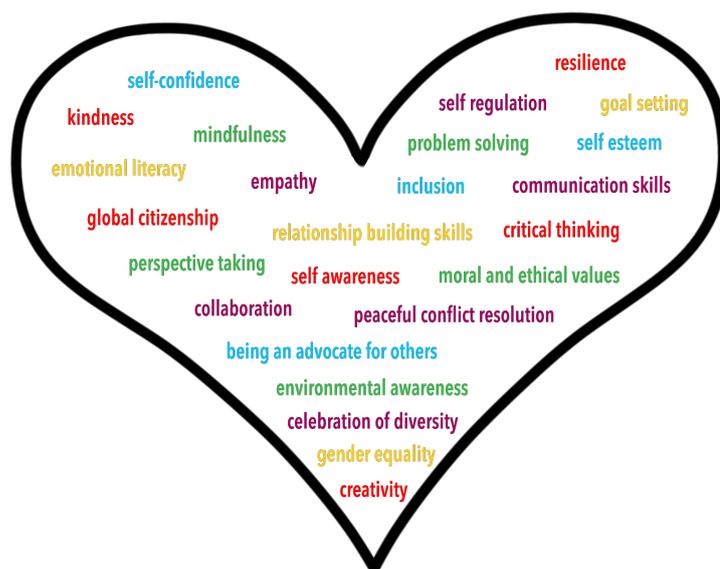


Figure 1: Think Equal SEL Outcomes (2018)

The Importance of Narrative

The Think Equal Programme is based on, and places, narrative at its centre, with further activities around this core. Think Equal believes that narrative is a fertile and all-encompassing foundation to effect positive change in the lives of children – on an individual level, and as a result of these individual changes, on a collective level, to effect social cohesion. Stories reflect the child’s own culture, and celebrate the diversity of the culture of others. They offer a safe world, which prepares the child to navigate and assimilate the complexities of the real world, and to safely learn about relationships, creating an environment where empathy, critical thinking, perspective taking, compassion, creativity, and empowerment can flourish. The goal of Think Equal Programme is to meet children at their Individual Narratives and, through stories, establish a positive Collective Narrative.

The Individual Narrative Model begins with the child and their own story:

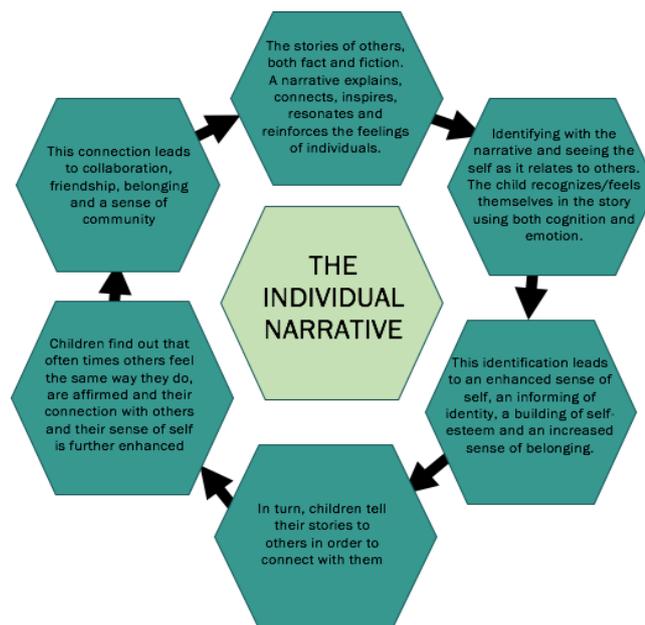


Figure 2 - The Individual Narrative Model (Lovegreen & Lumgair 2016)

The Collective Narrative Model reflects Think Equal’s aims to meet each learner where they are and, through story and collaborative learning, cultivate a positive and hopeful narrative that is shared class-wide.

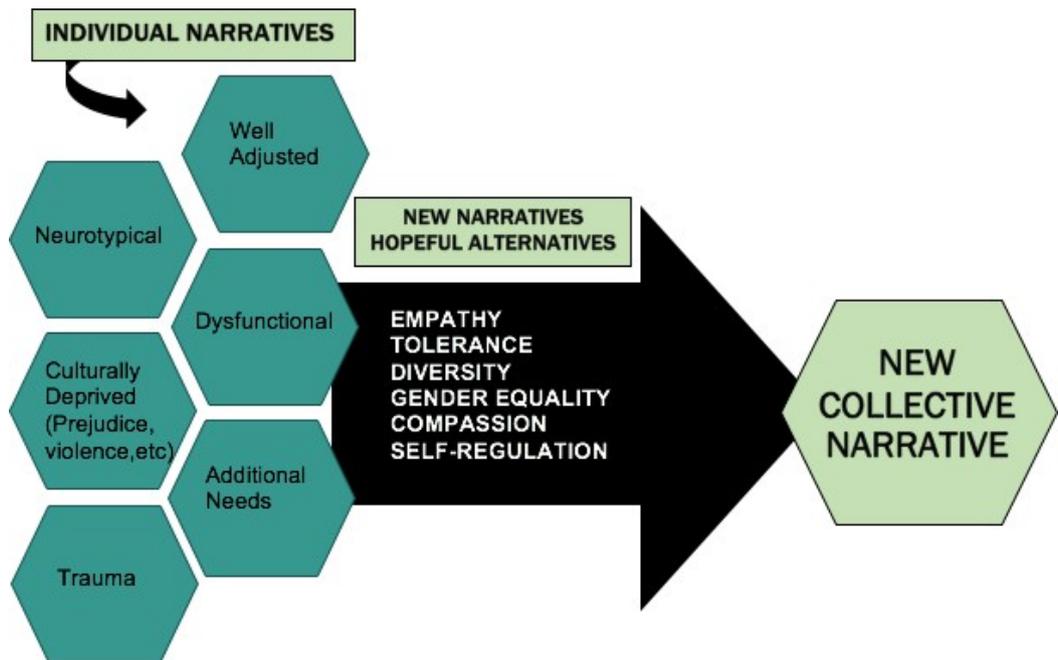


Figure 3 - The Search for a New Collective Narrative – A Model (Lovegreen & Lumgair 2016)

Think Equal believes in using the process of narrative to:

- Teach concepts
- Help children begin to understand perspectives that differ from their own, to begin to visualize and imagine a story through the eyes of multiple characters within it.
- Enable children to identify emotions and emotional themes in narratives
- Enable children to identify with the emotional and experiential journey of characters in the story and to empathise with them
- Encourage children to make global connections, honour differences and celebrate similarities
- Enable children to seek alternative endings through collaboration, analysis and discussion
- Enable children to analyse the past, challenge the limitations imposed by history - gender bias, prejudice, racial and/or religious discrimination
- Equip children with newly constructed knowledge to create the future, by beginning to model modified behaviour in order to present an optimistic alternative to their wider community

Think Equal proposes that it is through the use of these hopeful narratives which focus on a regulated self, the development of social and emotional learning, and a knowledge of

and respect for equal rights, that the individual stories of children will change, and that these children will in turn begin to effect the stories of others in their world, ultimately leading to a positive and concrete change in the collective narrative of society.

The Six Core Tenets

The design of the Think Equal curriculum is centred around six core pedagogical tenets, manifested in programme activities, which in turn lead to direct outcomes/competencies.

The tenets are as follows:

1. *The Child as an Empowered Being*

Think Equal considers the child to be ‘rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and, most of all, connected to adults and children.’ (Loris Malaguzzi cited by Penn, 1997).

2. *An Active, Constructive Learning Environment*

Think Equal considers learning environments as an essential part in the construction of new ideas, and proposes that learning through action and constructing ideas through play is an essential teaching tool.

3. *The Use of Positive Language*

Think Equal considers the use of positive and accurate language to be vital in the establishment of healthy, balanced self and social development

4. *The Concept of Ubuntu*

Think Equal considers the concept of ‘Ubuntu’ – humanity towards others - to be a precept, which underpins all other learning, instruction and resource and that links them together.

5. *The Process of Narrative*

As detailed in the section above, Think Equal considers the process of narrative as central to early years social-emotional education and social cohesion.

6. *Social Cognition*

Think Equal ascribes to the idea that children learn in a social context, and believes that the ‘reciprocal relationship between the individual person and the social context’ (Blades et al., 2003) as per Lev Vygotsky’s model of cognition is the means by which the child ‘acquires the ‘tools’ of thinking and learning.’ Social Cognition involves recognising feelings, using humour as a positive tool, hypothesis formation and using empathy

The image below sets out the tenets visually:

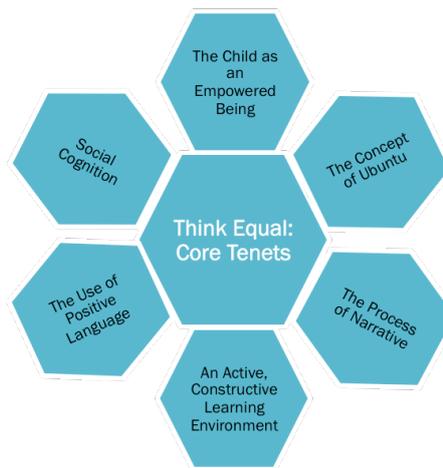


Figure 4 – Think Equal Early Years Curriculum Core Tenets (2016)

To expand on this and move into a more tangible implementation of the programme, Think Equal’s educational content is organized through six ‘I Am’ precepts, which begin with the child as an empowered being. These child-centred precepts are as follows: (1) I Have A Strong Sense Of Who I Am; (2) I Am Able To Look After Myself; (3) I Am Able To Look After Others; (4) I Am Able To Communicate; (5) I Am Able To Contribute; (6) I Am A Critical Thinker.

Further expanding on these ‘I Am’ concepts are the subcategories of learning, which can be found listed in each lesson plan where the concept is addressed.

1. **I Have A Strong Sense Of Who I Am** – Global Citizenship – Self-Esteem – Resilience – Empowerment – Self-Acceptance – Diversity
2. **I Am Able To Look After Myself** – The Things I Can Do – Self-Regulation – Emotional Literacy – Self-Awareness – Finding Positive Solutions – The Choices I Make and Their Outcomes
3. **I Am Able To Look After Others** – Kindness and Friendship – Inclusion – Perspective-Taking – Taking Care of Nature, Animals and the World I Live In – Using Empathy – Being an Up-stander
4. **I Am Able To Contribute And Create** – Self-Expression – Creativity – Collaboration – Turn-Taking – Sharing Ideas – Using my Head, Heart and Hands to

Help others

- 5. **I Am A Critical Thinker** – Creating Strategies – Problem-Solving – Self-Knowledge – Similarities and Differences – Peaceful Conflict-Resolution – Gender Equality
- 6. **I Am Able To Communicate** – Recognising Feelings – Self-Confidence – Listening to Others – Role-Play – Story Telling – Being Kind and Considerate of Others

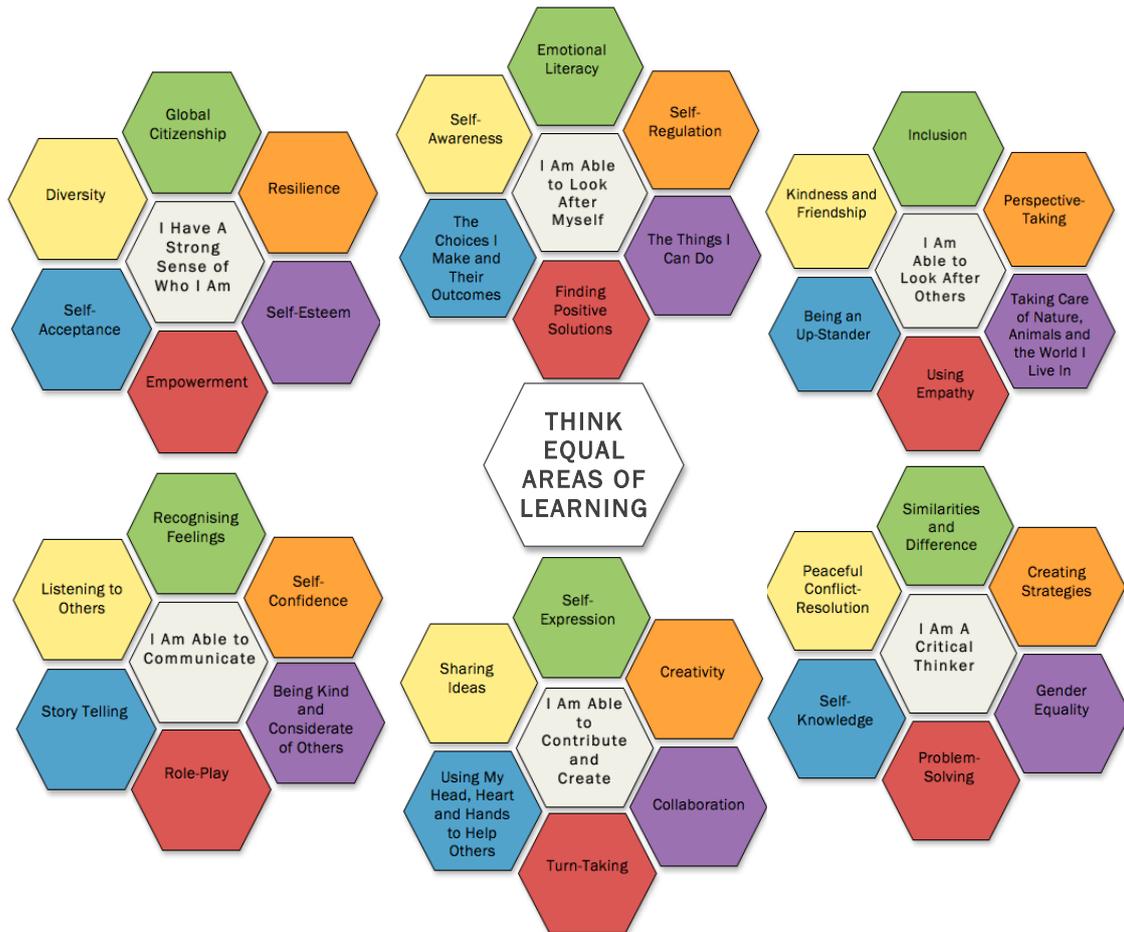


Figure 5 - Think Equal Areas of Learning (2018)

CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION

Aims

Aligning with findings from the Women Educational Researchers of Kenya (2015), Think Equal promotes the creation of a whole school ethos to support the success of social-emotional learning and values based education. This model places the learner at the centre and recognises the significant role of the ‘stakeholders’ (from parents to policy-makers).

For teaching staff to model:

- Honour and respect for all – Honouring and Respecting Ourselves and Others
- Autonomy and personal power – Knowing Our Rights and Responsibilities, and the Rights and Responsibilities of Others
- Reciprocity and trust – A collaboration between learning partners that is relational and reflective and that utilises positive factual language and attitudes which empower and encourage the learners – focused on connectedness and sustained, shared thinking
- Application – The constant application of learning to life beyond the classroom through making links to other areas of learning and life

Lesson Plans

The effectiveness of the program depends on a clear, didactic structure with elements of the lesson plan carefully identified to meet the goals of the training. Each LEVEL of Think Equal learning consists of 90 30-minute lessons, taught three times each week over the course of a school year. Teachers are advised to use the lesson plan as a template for all exercises and activities. The lesson plans represent the minimum requirements to mediate the desired outcomes and objectives to the learner. Teachers who are well trained, confident and comfortable doing so, are encouraged to make the lesson plans their own by using them as a ‘basis’ for their own style, extension, and embellishment.

The Think Equal Lesson Plan structure is as follows:

- Areas Of Learning
- Objectives
- Resources
- Vocabulary
- Action



Figure 5 – Think Equal Lesson Plan Structure (2018)

Care Takers as Partners

The Think Equal Programme acknowledges that not all households consist of two parents and therefore refers to those looking after the child as care takers. Think Equal encourages teachers to work in positive partnerships with care-taker communities, employing open lines of communication and willingness to expound on any/all teaching strategies, resources and outcomes. Care takers are acknowledged as the child's first educators and are encouraged to co-operate with the Think Equal program in supporting their child's development and learning.

Think Equal believes that what care takers have a significant impact on young children's development. There is a range of activities that care takers undertake with young children, which have a positive effect on their development. For example, reading with the child, teaching songs and nursery rhymes, painting and drawing, playing with letters and numbers, visiting the library, teaching the alphabet and numbers, taking children on visits and creating regular opportunities for them to play with their friends at home, were all associated with higher intellectual and social/behavioural scores (Melhuish et al, 2014).

CONCLUSION

Enabling Children In The 21st Century And Beyond

In conclusion, Think Equal proposes that we shift the focus of the learning of our children to a more character driven, social construct with an understanding that 'The desire to share knowledge with another human being is a fundamental one. It is at heart a desire to make your thoughts known to the other and to learn whether they are understood, even shared – always with the chance that I will mean more than I meant before because of the way the other has understood what I have said. The process is one that truly works from both the inside out and the outside in, as we each become different persons through our interaction with one another' (Kuhn, 1997, p. 258). Think Equal proposes that it is through the fostering of this understanding that gains will be made across the board – in terms of children's well being and social development, and their academic achievement. For further information on studies supporting this, please refer to Think Equal (contact@thinkequal.com).

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