

Using Educational Media to Support Early Childhood Education in Cambodia

The **Cambodia Educational Media Initiative (CEMI)** promotes the use of a range of media to strengthen efforts in Cambodia to promote quality education for youth of all ages. Members of the Initiative include WGBH Boston, one of the premier public radio and television institutions in the United States, and World Education, Inc., whose Cambodia-wide portfolio of formal and nonformal education programming is built on the foundations of its nearly 16-year presence there. The CEMI approach to designing educational media links the expertise of local education advisors with research-driven program design and quality creative talent, to produce media that fits the learning needs of Cambodian youth.

Under CEMI, World Education has joined efforts with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS), UNICEF and others to strengthen the quality of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Cambodia through the adaptation of an educational children's television show called *Peep and the Big Wide World*. Activities under this project include the localization and national broadcast of the show, and the development of accompanying materials that will be utilized within current ECE efforts with parents and teachers about the importance of, and techniques for, promoting the school readiness of young children. *Peep and the Big Wide World* has been adapted for Cambodia with funding support from UNICEF and technical assistance from the Early Childhood Education Department of MoEYS.

The Potential of Quality Educational Television to Promote School Readiness in Cambodia

Limited coverage of ECE in Cambodia: The last few years in Cambodia and globally has seen a growing recognition about the importance of ECE, backed by a large body of international research which confirms that children need to attain certain cognitive and socio-emotional competencies before first grade to enable later educational retention and achievement. However, in Cambodia most children's access to quality ECE remains extremely limited, and the most socio-economically disadvantaged children come to school the least equipped with the necessary competencies.

Soaring rates of access to television in Cambodia: A number of studies indicate that television ownership among rural Cambodian households has nearly doubled since 2000 and that at least 85% of the population regularly watches television. As was recognized in the US and other countries almost forty years ago, the increasingly ubiquitous nature of television in Cambodia makes it well positioned to help compensate for the limited ability of disadvantaged young children to access appropriate early learning opportunities.

Evidence of the educational impact of quality television programming: Over a thousand international studies, in countries ranging from Bangladesh to Palestine, have shown that pre-school aged children gain cognitive and socio-emotional competencies from locally-adapted educational shows, such as *Sesame Street*. These include increased critical and analytical thinking skills, early literacy and numeracy skills, and self-esteem. In addition, research has suggested that from watching such educational children's shows, teachers and parents change their attitudes and practices around fostering young children's learning. Research carried out by CEMI in Cambodia has similarly indicated that children who watch educational television gain important school readiness competencies ranging from numerical awareness to problem solving and perseverance.

Bringing a Curriculum-based Show to Preschoolers and Parents across Cambodia

Introducing *Peep and the Big Wide World*: *Peep* is the first curriculum-based locally adapted television program which targets Cambodia's preschoolers (children aged 3 to 8). *Peep* celebrates being curious and the joy of discovery. Young viewers join a chicken named "Peep," a bird (a robin) named "Chirp" and a duck named "Quack" living in a large park, filled with wonder and mystery. Each half-hour episode of *Peep* contains two animated stories in which the characters explore a phenomenon in the world around them, such as water, light or gravity. Following each animated segment is a short film of real Cambodian children investigating the same phenomenon at home or in their community. *Peep* is broadcast nationally at children's viewing prime time on TV5 (Sundays from 7:30 to 8:00 am), which is one of the most frequently watched stations in rural Cambodia.

Why *Peep*?: With its clear focus on life skills and foundational school readiness competencies, the relevance for the Cambodian context of this WGBH-produced US pre-school show was immediately clear. *Peep* models inquiry,, nurtures curiosity and encourages discovery learning. The humor of the show appeals to adults and it models concrete examples of how they can help their children engage in hands-on learning. The real children featured in the short films investigate phenomena in realistic, easily replicable ways. The recipient of several prestigious international awards (including an Emmy), *Peep* has been shown through research both in the US and Cambodia to positively impact children’s learning and behavior and influence parenting practices.



The paramount factor influencing the selection of *Peep* for Cambodia was the identification by MoEYS and the National Advisory Group for Children’s Educational Television of the alignment between *Peep*’s curriculum and the National Learning Standards for Children Aged 5 and 6.

Calling Parents to Action

In addition to directly targeting young children, *Peep* has been adapted by CEMI to assist parents in developing their abilities to support their children’s school readiness.

A two-minute spot broadcast before each episode of *Peep* features a Cambodian parent explaining the educational value of the show and how parents can extend the lessons demonstrated on the show to benefit their children’s learning.

The live-action sequences featured in each episode of *Peep* depict ordinary Cambodian parents engaging with their children in simple discovery learning games at home. They provide an important vehicle to model positive parenting practices. The films talk to Cambodian parents head on about how to help their children develop essential skills and learning behaviors.

Additional accompanying materials for parents have been developed that include practical tips for parents to promote their children’s problem solving, curiosity and perseverance. These are followed by several step-by-step activities that engage children in discovery learning using objects around the home. Materials designed for ECE educators and teachers present the educational principles behind discovery learning, and give teaching tips and detailed lesson plans. CEMI has worked closely with MoEYS and key ECE agencies to identify routes for integrating the show and the materials into existing ECE interventions, complementing ongoing efforts to promote school readiness across Cambodia.



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