

**Request for support**  
**for the creation of e-material about Play in Rwanda**



*Uwase plays with blocks and builds a house.*



*Shema and Victoria play kitchen and pretend to be cooking a meal.*

### **Summary**

Playing stimulates young children to learn in a natural way. By learning through play, children develop specific and important life skills. In Rwanda, the understanding of the importance of play for young children is a fairly new concept. Pre-schools and early development centres are currently starting up, and pre-school teachers and caregivers often have no formal training for their job. They do not know much about the developmental stages of children, how to observe children and the importance of play for children.

The training challenge is enormous: Pre-primary enrolment in 2015 was 90,135 (private and public schools) with 2,618 pre-school teachers (statistics [MINEDUC 2015](#) ). All these teachers have to be trained how to use play by offering a mix of challenging environments and structured games targeting specific areas of development (physical, cognitive, social, etc..).

Parents in Rwanda also have limited knowledge about the importance of play for the development of children. Studies show that two-way conversations between parents and children are rare, and few families expose children to printed text. Parents are not used to reading books with small children and are not used to engaging in play with their children.

The government of Rwanda has recognised this challenge and has adopted a new curriculum in which the importance of play for early childhood development is acknowledged. Rwanda Education Board has published a [General Syllabus for Pre-Primary Education - REB - 2015](#) in Kinyarwanda.

Many NGOs and private initiatives support the implementation of the new curriculum. They produce training materials and provide face to face training to both pre-school teachers and care givers and parent groups. These initiatives are scattered. Coordination is undertaken by the educational sector working group and initiatives such as Rwanda Education NGO Coordination Platform RENCPC.

Chameleon resources and Three Mountains learning advisors propose to join forces with the most important stakeholders in pre-school teacher training and of parent support groups. We propose to jointly develop localised visual and interactive training material on the use of play as a teaching tool and make it freely available online as well as offline. In this way all related training initiatives in the country can access this material (videos, e-learning modules, hand-outs, cartoons and exercises) to increase the effectiveness of their training.

Our proposal is to make a small initial pilot and produce two online training packages in English and Kinyarwanda to test the usefulness for trainers in the field. If the training material is found to be helpful, more material can be developed based on the curriculum using a similar format.

With this concept note we are seeking support for this idea. At the end of the concept note you will find a list with ways to support this idea.

A demo of how an e-module of Three Mountains learning advice on play will look like can be found [here](#).

## The importance of play

Play is the main way small children learn and develop their motor, social-emotional and cognitive skills. Children use fine and gross motor skills in their play. They react to each other socially. They think about what they are doing or going to do. They use language to talk to each other or to themselves and they very often respond emotionally to the play activity. The integration of these different types of behaviours is key to the cognitive development of young children. Because children's play draws upon all of these behaviours, it is a very effective vehicle for learning.

There are various types of play:

1. Dramatic and fantasy role play: Children take on roles in pretend games about familiar experiences — going to the market, sharing a family celebration like a wedding. Children create props and use these as they engage in fantasy adventures.
2. Exploratory: Children explore the properties and functions of materials, equipment and objects — experimenting with a tool to find out how it works; following insects to see how they move, play with sand and water to find out how water flows.
3. Manipulative and construction play: Children manipulate and explore objects, parts and materials — threading beads, building towers and cities with blocks, playing in the sand.
4. Physical: Children explore movements and ways to combine movements — running and playing ball, jumping, climbing and dancing.
5. Games with rules: Children follow or create rules to reach a shared objective in a game — playing outdoor games, following child-created games with rules, playing computer, board and card games.
6. Creative play like drawing, painting, modelling, satisfies the need for self-expression and develops manipulation skills. Children use different materials to explore and develop their senses. Creative activities include: visual art, music, dance, poetry, etc.

It is important that both pre-school teachers, care-givers and parents recognise these types of play and are able to observe their children while they play. Observation and recognition from adults enables them to support their children in play. Adults may engage in the play with their children.



Example: Peter and Fred are playing that they are taking a long trip to visit their relatives in another city. They hired a taxi for the trip and they have their friends pull them.

Having created imaginary characters, children explore familiar experiences as they take on the roles of other people in their family or community.

Dramatic and fantasy play provides opportunities for children to imagine, create and experience a sense of wonder.

Although play is most important in early childhood years, it remains an important learning strategy for adults in work, sports and social life. Play stimulates an explorative, outgoing attitude and a sense of humour.

## Play in the Rwandan school system

The school system in Rwanda is traditionally based on one-way teacher-children communication: the teacher tells them what to do and the children absorb and obey. This way of teaching does not build

on the most effective learning strategy for children: PLAY! This is a missed opportunity, as with the same resources Rwanda can achieve much better standards in education by using play as the prime learning strategy especially with young children.

Starting to make effective use of the natural learning strategies of children in early childhood education however requires a mind-shift not only of pre-school teachers, but also of the parents and the trainers of pre-school teachers in the colleges of education.

In Rwanda, children ideally start primary 1 at the age of 7. Before this, parents are encouraged to send their children to pre-primary. This is relatively new to Rwanda.

Organisations that run pre-schools state that they have great difficulty in attracting pre-school teachers who understand the concept of play and are able to run a classroom with a setup of different corners where children can engage in different forms of play. When pre-school teachers do understand this concept and are able to run pre-schools accordingly, they are much sought after by other employers.

### **Efforts of the Government of Rwanda**

Fortunately, over the past three years' early childhood development has emerged as one of the priority areas for development in Rwanda. The Cabinet approved an early childhood development policy in May 2016. This policy provides a framework to ensure a holistic and integrated approach to the development of young children. The policy calls for inter-sectorial coordination and a community-based approach. The leadership for early childhood programming and coordination within the Government of Rwanda has been assigned to the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF).

In 2015 the Rwanda Education Board published a [General Syllabus for Pre-Primary Education](#), which is the guideline for competency based teaching in pre-schools.

Pre-primary Education is organised in nursery schools for a period of three years. Official admission age to nursery is 3 and the official completion age is 6.

Pre-primary enrolment in 2015 was 90,135 (private and public schools) with 2,618 teachers while Primary enrolment in 2015 was 1,213,966 with 2,752 staff (statistics MINEDUC 2015).

Based on DiFID figures currently 23.7%<sup>1</sup> of children attend one year of pre-school. Aside from the still relatively small number of children in pre-primary education, assuring the quality of pre-primary education is even a bigger challenge. The concept has only recently been introduced and most pre-school teachers have not yet received any proper training.

The government of Rwanda is striving to increase the number of schools as well as the enrolment in pre-schools, meaning that the challenge to get all pre-schools teachers properly trained is enormous.

### **Efforts of private sector and NGOs**

There are many NGOs, projects and initiatives stressing the importance of play and play based learning. Many of these organisations have produced training manuals for pre-school teachers and information packages for parents. Parent groups are set up and supported by volunteers who have received a basic training on child development and play.

Recent findings from the Save the Children randomised control trial "Intera za Mbera", the holistic parenting education program, show that communication skills, fine motor skills, problem solving

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<sup>1</sup> Information from Paul Atterthin at a rencp meeting.

skills and personal-social skills of small children can be improved by teaching mothers and fathers in parent groups how to deal with small children. However, volunteers who run these groups feel they need additional knowledge and incentives to keep this work going.

### **The difference proper e-learning support could make**

Given that:

- effective use of play in early childhood education in Rwanda requires a mind-shift of pre-school teachers, parents and the trainers of pre-school teachers in the college of education,
- many pre-school teachers have to be trained and parents have to be informed about the use of play as a learning strategy,
- pre-school teachers and parents are scattered over the country and their schools and their training is often funded in different ways by different partners.

All trainers involved in the training of pre-school teachers and parents could benefit from well designed, localised, interactive, visual training support about the use of play as a teaching tool. High quality trainer support packages will allow less-experienced trainers to deliver high impact training to preschool teachers, caregivers or parents/ volunteers.

This support in the form of short videos, e-learning modules targeting the participants of the face-to-face training, handouts with exercises and cartoons could best be made available online on a central website (e.g. TCOP) as well as offline on USB stick for use in remote areas.

***Properly designed locally produced videos and e-learning modules in Kinyarwanda on play as a method of teaching would be a great help to all trainers in this field in enabling the desired mind-shift and the development of new competencies for pre-school teachers and parents alike.***

### **The proposal**

[Chameleon Resources](#) and [Three Mountains Learning Advisors](#) propose to develop electronic trainer support packages on the importance and use of play in early childhood development for two target groups:

- Trainers of pre-school teachers and professional caregivers
- Trainers of parent groups

The package for trainers of pre-school teachers and professional caregivers would focus on:

- Milestones in the development of children.
- The importance of play in early childhood development.
- How to use play as a teaching tool.
- Various types of play.
- How to recognise the stages of development of a child and how a child can best be stimulated in his or her development.
- How to organise a classroom for play (timetable, set up of play corners, etc.).

The package for trainers of parent-groups could focus on:

- What is play?
- Why is play not a waste of time?
- Play activities parents can do with children.
- Play materials available around the house.

- What happens in a pre-school?
- How can parents cooperate with the pre-school?

The exact content of support packages will be determined together with the stakeholders supporting the project. In the design of the support package existing audio-visual material and information from various partners can be adapted and used.

### **Two pilot training packages**

Chameleon Resources and Three Mountains Learning Advisors propose to produce two pilot training packages each consisting of:

1. An e-module full of audio-visuals which will take learners about 1 hour to complete on a PC, tablet or smartphone, (this e-module can be used by the trainer as a complement to his/her face-to-face training).
2. A description of group and individual exercises a trainer can deliver in relation to the e-module,
3. A set of short videos demonstrating the use of play which can be projected in a classroom for training purposes in combination with some of the exercises.
4. Downloadable and printable material (posters, flyers, cartoons) to be used in relation to the exercises and in environments where there is no computer or projector available.

Depending on where and with whom the pilot packages will be tested in the field, a forum or WhatsApp group can be added to exchange experiences.

### **About e-modules**

The e-modules target the participants of the training. The trainer can use this e-module either as “homework” for the participants to be better prepared for the classroom sessions or project the e-module in the classroom allowing the participants to discuss how to answer the questions and study the feedback as a group.

Please click on [demo](#) to experience an e-module of Three Mountains Learning advisors on PLAY.

This demo will take you about 10 minutes to complete. The method of teaching is formative assessment. You are asked to reply to questions. With each reply, there is immediate feedback. This method of learning is very interactive and thus triggers interest in the topic.

### **The development of the training materials**

Three Mountains Learning Advisors usually develop training materials in conjunction with partners who provide the content and expertise on the relevant subject.

As well as Chameleon Resources, we are looking for support from as many stakeholders in pre-school teacher and parent training in Rwanda as possible.

Although funding is key for this project to take-off, organisations and individuals can pledge their support in many different ways, from participation in the ‘development group’ and reviewing draft material to sharing existing resources and promoting the use of the final product. In annex 2 you will find a form to pledge support for this project.

Once funding has been acquired, the idea is to create a ‘development group’ of experts and major stakeholders (funders) to jointly refine project goals and deliverables and to safeguard the quality of the created material. Review links to draft material will be made available on a wider scale.

## **Distribution of produced material**

The primary target group for the training materials are people involved in the training of pre-school teachers and parent groups. For this group of users, the material will be available online on a professional website (e.g. TCOP) whilst off-line distribution of the materials will be available through USB sticks.

Parts of the material, notably the e-modules should be made available to all Rwandans interested in the role of Play in Early Childhood Development by publishing links to the material on websites of various EDC organisations.

An e-course on “play for parents” might qualify to be used in the recently launched “positive parenting” campaign. It might even be the case that a certification Course could be considered.

*Kigali  
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## **Annex 1: Who are Chameleon Resources and Three Mountains Learning Advisors?**

[Chameleon Resources](#) is a Rwanda based company making educational play-based products available for early years' development in Rwanda. Chameleon has vast experience in teaching in pre-schools, both in the Netherlands and in Rwanda. This experience had led to the conviction that children deserve quality toys to play and learn. Currently Chameleon is producing and selling these toys in Rwanda.

Chameleon focusses on three main groups of play-based learning materials: toys for mathematical play, materials for role play and materials for language play.

Chameleon supplies pre-schools and projects, and often finds, that, upon delivering the materials, teachers have no clue how to use them. Chameleon fears quality toys being locked away, or teachers "demonstrating" the toy instead of making the toys available to children for their development.

At times, Chameleon is requested to give a workshop demonstrating the use of toys, and will readily do so. However, they often find that the people put forward by the organisation for training are not the people who do the daily work in the pre-schools. Chameleon is therefore looking for additional ways to explain the use of toys and the importance of play.

[Three Mountains Learning Advisors](#) is a Rwanda based company producing on- and off line courses. Combined, we have more than 60 years experience in training adults and 14 years experience in producing e-learning, both in the Netherlands and in Rwanda. We feel strongly about localising learning materials and adapting them to the local situation.

Three Mountains learning advisors work from practice. First they investigate by capturing the situation in shorts video's or drawings, and transforming the material in a series of questions a learner has to answer. The learner thus reflects on current practice. With each question, there is immediate feedback. This system of learning is called formative assessment. Since this way of learning is highly interactive, it is a very attractive and effective learning strategy. The short e-modules they make are available online as well as offline (USB).

**Annex 2: Form to pledge support**

**YES, I see the added value and I support the creation of  
Play in Early Childhood Development training materials  
in an E-learning format in Rwanda**

You can contact me for:

<b>Cross</b>	<b>Activity</b>
	Sharing possible useful training materials and videos my organisation has already developed
	Participating in the development group (3 x 2-hour meeting and review links)
	Advice and referrals for developing this project
	Reviewing draft material (online review link will be sent to you)
	Assuring the use of the developed material in our training
	Adding a link to the finished material on our website / resource centre
	Assisting in finding funding for this project
	Funding (part of) the project
	Other:

**Name:**

**Organisation:**

**E-mail:**

**Mobile number:**