

PARENTS GROW OLD, CHILDREN EMBODY OUR HOPE

*(Pha gee ba ta bu so)*

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How are Western theories and Bhutanese parenting philosophies harmonized in the  
Childcare Education programmes in Bhutan?

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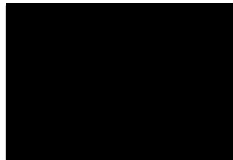
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*I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification. I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis and all sources used have been acknowledged in this thesis.*

Signature



## CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>PROLOGUE.....</b>	<b>7</b>

## CHAPTER ONE: THE CONTEXT

<b>1.1. Cradle of tenderness: my family.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1.2. The current state of childhood service in Bhutan.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>1.3. Literature Review .....</b>	<b>20</b>
1.3.1. Western ideas on the importance of early childhood .....	20
1.3.2. Western ideas – what is considered high quality practice? .....	22

## CHAPTER TWO: THE METHODOLOGY

<b>2.1. Conceptual framework.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>2.2. Research positioning and questions .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>2.3. Research Design (Methodology) .....</b>	<b>29</b>
2.3.1. Paradigm choice .....	30
2.3.2. Method .....	32
2.3.3. Sampling.....	34
2.3.4. Respondent sampling criteria .....	36
2.3.5. Recruitment .....	37
<b>2.4. Pre-testing Shedtho method .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>2.5. Data collection tools .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>2.6. Data analysis approach .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>2.7. Significance.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>2.8. Limitations.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>2.9. Ethics approval .....</b>	<b>47</b>

## CHAPTER THREE

### LIVING SO CLOSE BUT IN DIFFERENT WORLDS: RESULTS FROM THE FIELD

<b>3.1. Prelude to the two settings .....</b>	<b>48</b>
3.1.1. Setting one: Echoes from rural Bhutan .....	49
3.1. 2. Setting two: respondents from the maddening crowd.....	53
<b>3.2. Developmental niche of rural parents: Echoes of childhood in rural Bhutan .....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>3.3. Developmental niche of urban parents: Echoes of childhood in urban Bhutan. ....</b>	<b>68</b>

<b>3.4. Developmental niche of rural Bhutanese children of today: Bringing up children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century crossroad.....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>3.5. Developmental niche of urban Bhutanese children of today: Bringing up children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century crossroad. ....</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>3.6. Summary: key themes of the four developmental niches.....</b>	<b>86</b>
3.6.1. Key themes of the childhood experiences of the rural parents. ....	86
3.6.2. Key themes of the childhood experiences of the urban parents. ....	89
3.6.3. Key themes of the experiences of the 21 <sup>st</sup> century rural children. ....	92
3.6.4. Key themes of the experiences of the 21 <sup>st</sup> century urban children.....	94
<b>3.7. Views of the ECCD facilitators and officials from relevant organizations.....</b>	<b>95</b>

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE FOUR DEVELOPMENTAL NICHES: POINTS OF CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE**

<b>4.1. Developmental niches in the rural areas over time — comparison of rural children of the past and rural children today.....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>4.2. Developmental niches in the urban areas over time — comparison of urban children of the past and urban children today. ....</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>4.3. Developmental niches of parents—comparison of rural and urban children of the past</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>4.4. Developmental niches of 21<sup>st</sup> century children – comparison of rural and urban children of today .....</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>4.5. Key themes from the comparisons of the developmental niches .....</b>	<b>105</b>

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **PARENTING PHILOSOPHIES: EAST-WEST DIALOGUE**

<b>5.1. The structural nuance .....</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>5.2. Differences in parenting philosophies &amp; developmental goals .....</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>5.3. Outlook on beliefs on discipline .....</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>5.4. Stance on play .....</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>5.5. Perspectives on domains of child development .....</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>5.6. Inside the ECCD centre.....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>5.7. Summary of the East-West dialogue.....</b>	<b>122</b>

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ECCD IN BHUTAN**

<b>6.1. Policy implications .....</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>6.2. ECCD programme delivery implications .....</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>6.3. Research implications .....</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>6.4. Concluding remarks .....</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>EPILOGUE .....</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>150</b>

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If I remember correctly, the day was November 10, 2011. I could not believe it. My name was there in the list. I called my husband and shared it with him... He couldn't believe it either. But later when I shared the news about this opportunity that I have received, with my parents, relatives and friends, “*You lucky girl...*” were the comments from my friends. My parents assigned a deeper meaning to this opportunity and commented “This is the fruit of the merits that you had accumulated in your past life”. In Bhutan we call this *ley judray* (law of cause and effect) which in simple terms means ‘good begets good.’ I was excited...I had received Endeavour scholarship to pursue Masters with Research at the University of New England, Armidale, NSW, Australia. “Now you have to work with *tha damtshig*” advised my parents before my departure.

*Tha damtshig* along with *ley judray* is one of the core social values and means different things in different situations. In this context my parents meant ‘to study hard’ and to show myself worthy of the Endeavour award by completing my studies successfully. *Tha damtshig* also means interdependence and reciprocity. During the course of my study period, I had the wonderful opportunity to interact and know many amazing people who shared my life space here in Armidale and my research journey and whose support is reflected in this thesis. Now, having come to an end, I would like to express my *drin len* (gratitude), and acknowledge them for their unfailing support:

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## Abstract

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Propelled by the will of the Bhutanese government to invest in the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) programme, the number of ECCD centres has risen from just 1 in 2005 to 94. However, in the perceived absence of local expertise, the Ministry of Education (MoE) depends fully on experts external to Bhutan who have very little knowledge of the Bhutanese cultural fabric and carry with them Western philosophies and theories of ECCD. Against this backdrop, this study will explore how contextualization of the ECCD programmes can be enhanced.

This study adopts qualitative methodology and an interpretive paradigm informed by Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2004) and the key Bhutanese values of *ley judray*, law of cause and effect and *tha damtshig*, reciprocity and interdependence (Phuntsho, 2004; Ura, 1994, 1997; Wangyal, 2004; Whitecross, 2008) that stems from the fundamental Buddhist worldview of interconnectedness. These have been combined to create a Bhutanese indigenous methodology.

The *shedtho* (relaxed conversation) approach which is similar to *yarning* and *dadirri* used in the study of Australian Indigenous society was applied in this study. The data collection used *bay zha*, the Bhutanese everyday mannerism, as it is necessary to set the *shedtho* (relaxed conversation) process right and to enter into the inner world of the participant. This culturally sensitive approach adapted the Western notions of focus group discussions and key informant interviews to suit the context. The data was analysed using an interpretive model to uncover themes. The findings are presented in a narrative style that blends well with *shedtho*.

The study was conducted in one rural and one urban ECCD centre in Bhutan. The participants were ECCD facilitators, selected parents of children attending the two ECCD centres and ECCD officials from Ministry of Education, and representatives from UNICEF and Save the Children Bhutan.

**Key words:** Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), parenting philosophies, *ley judrey* (law of cause and effect), *tha damtshig* (reciprocity and interdependence), interconnectedness, *shedtho* (relaxed conversation), ECCD centres, ECCD facilitators.

## Prologue

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Many may feel uncomfortable and surprised when they read my thesis – because the structure and the approach defy the commonly employed research conventions. I myself hesitated at first, struck by my own lack of confidence, consciously aware of my own research naivety and inexperience. I felt rather vulnerable and exposed to criticism and rejection, not only from the Western academy but more afraid of my own people - for there are many like myself who are Western ‘converts’ steeped in the Western knowledge and ways of doing that I feared my work might suffer misinterpretations or even dismissals. Had it not been for the Professor Margaret Sims’ unfaltering assertion and guidance I would not have the courage to forge on with my research journey. I thank Professor Margaret for lifting this veil and enlightening my world of academia - I can see more clearly now.

So let me from the very outset, inform you that in some part of my thesis, you will find plenty of ‘I’ and ‘my’ strewn over the pages, which gives my writing a rather personalized voice and a conversational edge. However as you move to other parts of the thesis, you will find I shift my voice to third person and the language and the tone become more formal and academic. This approach of blending the Western with the indigenous style of writing is recognised and used by many Indigenous scholars in their writing.

Thus, in the prologue, which you are reading now, I begin in first person voice as I introduce myself to you. I borrow the concept of using a prologue from Margaret Kovach (2009), in which I share essential information about myself to help my reader understand and follow the story that I narrate about myself. The prologue has a personal narrative about my research journey and experience. Through such a mixed approach, I wish to show you both the professional and the personal components so that when you read my work you will understand it more deeply and holistically. But before I begin my story, I need to convince you about my rationale for using this approach lest some of you find it self-indulgent and even narcissist in tone and style.

I am tempted to start with a prologue and talk a little about myself for two reasons: firstly it serves as a “bridging function” and a “precursory signal” for those readers who are new to my culture (Kovach, 2009, pp. 3-4), and secondly by introducing



myself I am acknowledging and honouring my own cultural, genealogical and ancestral roots. In other words, I am re-kindling this ancient fire of wisdom and keeping it lighted as I re-claim my ancestry. I see locating myself as both an affirmation of my own cultural grounding and self-awareness. And to be honest, deep down, through this research journey I wanted to introduce Bhutan, unravel the richness of the Bhutanese traditions and culture and make my culture count.

Further, in the process of portraying my world, I assist the other (reader) to locate me in my space, draw meaningful connections and contextualize my work to my world. Here then it would be befitting for me to echo the words of Moreton-Robinson through Karen Martin (2008) that introducing oneself is to “to *provide information about one’s cultural location, so that connection can be made on political, cultural and social grounds and relations established....*’ (p.19). Research grows from our own personal experiences and situating self involves ‘clarifying one’s perspective on the world’ (p.110). It is important that I assist the ‘other’ to see the totality of my make-up – as a Bhutanese woman, a daughter, mother, a sister, a wife, a friend, an aunt, and an educator, and the researcher that I am. I’m the product of all that make up my world - my culture, my tradition, my belief, my environment, my people, my upbringing, my places and the spaces that I live in. As articulated by Bruner, “The very shape of our lives-the rough and perpetually changing draft of our autobiography that we carry in our minds- is understandable to ourselves and to others only by virtue of those cultural systems of interpretations” (1990, p. 33).

More essentially, speaking in first person narrative allows me to connect myself more deeply and intensely with my research topic. I feel I can reach out to my readers and let them hear the authenticity and genuineness in my voice as I share the joy and pain of growing up as a child as much as that of the joy and pain of motherhood and of an educator. Then I will weld these two experiences together so that you are able to see my research story holistically. This demands that I dig deep into my memories and bring forth the past history of my childhood days, the culture and the time that I grew up in, the people and the events who constituted my world and shared my spaces and places and prepared me for the adult I am. Thus, this prologue is a special space for me. Herein I talk and reflect on myself and share my world with you.

The process of introducing oneself involves looking back and recollecting stories and conversations, past events, lived experiences and people who filled up my life space.

To the Bhutanese, as with other indigenous society, storytelling, oral histories and traditions have become integral part of our culture and come naturally. To respond to a question is to simply reply in narrative. Each story is powerful in contributing to the collective stories in which each one of us has a place. For us, storytelling is a way of life. It tells who we are. It is a way of passing down the ancient beliefs and cultural values to the newer generation so that the storyteller connects the past and future (Smith, 1999). Sharing my story is my way of connecting myself with you and my research.

There is a Bhutanese adage which says that “*in the absence of conversation, even parents and children turn into strangers*”. Figuratively, it underscores the importance of interaction between people and of talking about yourself so we can share the in-depth stories of the people in our environs. If I want to look at the Bhutanese parenting philosophies, it is essential that I reflect on my childhood experience and introduce myself so that my audience will know from which perspective I am talking.

To me, a subject such as this, which involves children and childcare, parental goals and philosophies, childrearing beliefs and practices is a subject, highly personal and intimate. It goes beyond love and affection to feelings such as hopes and anticipation, tears and joy, fear and anxiety, personal dreams and beliefs. It is an endearing subject, which calls for a heart-to-heart talk and which obviously will carry an emotive tone. Thus speaking in third person voice would surely disconnect me from the subject and to use a formal academic medium for a subject like this is just unthinkable as the tone of the language would make the subject distant, impersonal and devoid of feelings. So what could be a better way to discuss quality childcare philosophies than reflecting on my own childhood days, my upbringing, the environment in which I grew up, the people and events which influenced my life.

Although it's a self-constructed world that I build in this thesis, the construction is founded on Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2004) blended with the developmental niche of (Super & Harkness, 1986). I will introduce myself using his bio-ecological system to talk about my own childhood as well as parental niche and the people who shared my lived experiences. I will talk about this theoretical model in more depth in the later chapter but here through my own reminiscences and reflections, I would like you to see how my growth and development has been influenced and shaped by my relation with my

home and family, school, neighbourhood and community and the society at large as well as interactions amongst these environments.

This thesis has a prologue (which you have just finished reading), six chapters and an epilogue. The first chapter sets the context by reviewing Bhutanese and Western literature. This is followed by the methodology chapter. Then, chapter three presents field findings while chapter four captures the key themes of the field findings. Chapter five is the discussion chapter and chapter six provides recommendations. Finally, the epilogue picks up from where the prologue has stopped.