



The Integration of Intangible Cultural Heritage into Preschool Education Curriculum: Strategies and Practical Approaches

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ABSTRACT

Intangible cultural heritage can enter preschool as living knowledge rather than a decorative theme. The challenge is to keep cultural meaning, community authority and children's agency intact while linking heritage with ordinary curriculum goals. This paper develops an evidence-informed framework for that task. It combines a structured narrative synthesis of UNESCO guidance, early childhood curriculum research and developmental evidence with a secondary analysis of an open preschool dataset from Fujian Province, China. The dataset does not measure intangible cultural heritage directly. Its family cultural capital, concentration-empathy, peer interaction and executive-function scores are used only as a developmental anchor for processes that heritage-based learning may activate. A record audit found 177 unique child profiles in files presented as 354 rows because the full set had been duplicated once. In models based on the unique profiles, family cultural capital was associated with stronger concentration-empathy ($\beta = 0.296, p < .001$), stronger peer interaction ability ($\beta = 0.287, p < .001$) and fewer executive-function problems in the total-effect model ($\beta = -0.304, p = .002$). Concentration-empathy and peer interaction carried parallel and sequential indirect paths. Drawing on the combined evidence, the paper proposes four modes of integration—content, context, pedagogy and partnership—and a six-stage cycle that begins with community consultation and ends with reflection and return. Practical guidance is provided for stories, music, movement, craft, local ecological knowledge, family participation, assessment and safeguarding. The central argument is simple: heritage becomes educationally meaningful when children use it with people, materials, language and place. It should not be reduced to costumes, isolated festival days or copied products.

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Introduction

Intangible cultural heritage is conveyed through practices, expressions, knowledge and skills that are recognized by communities as part of their cultural life. It encompasses oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, craftsmanship and knowledge about nature and the universe. According to the Convention of UNESCO 2003 the documentation is not the only type of safeguarding. This includes the transmission via formal or non-formal education (UNESCO, 2003).

This work is often very effective in the preschool setting, as young children learn through participating. They listen, imitate, ask questions, deal with materials and repeat movements, negotiate roles and make meaning with others. These learning modalities are not far removed from the ways of many living practices which are passed down within families and communities. They also are integrated into developmentally appropriate teaching that engages play, exploration, inquiry and culturally meaningful experience (NAEYC, 2020).

Promising is easy, but it's not quite so easy in the classroom. Heritage can be pressed into a poster, a costume day and/or a copied craft. Content can be selected by teachers without consultation with those who practice it. While the community views the practice as evolving and innovative, children may be required to make a “traditional” copy and practice a fixed form. These tendencies can make culture visible, but also take away the relationships and choices that make it live (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004).

A more robust curriculum makes heritage a source of content, context, pedagogy and partnership. Children learn a story about a place in their community, but they also learn about the ways in which stories are shared, told, and remembered in a place. They might investigate a craft but the key areas are the choice of materials, hand movement, the need for patience, pattern, use and care. Music and movement to help rhythm, memory and group coordination. Floodways and ecological knowledge offer avenues of inquiry into seasons, measurement, responsibility and place.

This paper aims at filling the gap between general consensus of heritage education and everyday decisions in preschool. It synthesizes international guidance and culturally informed curriculum knowledge and developmental evidence. Also, an open dataset is used for cultural capital of the family and preschool self-regulation as limited empirical anchor. No direct ICH indicator is included in the dataset, so there is no way to test an ICH curriculum. It can, however, identify cultural resources that are correlated with attention and empathy, and with peer interaction and executive function issues, which may be tapped by well-designed cultural activities.

Three questions guide the paper. First, what principles keep ICH integration culturally responsible and developmentally suitable? Second, what practical strategies can teachers use across ordinary preschool learning areas? Third, what can the open dataset contribute to the developmental rationale, and where must interpretation stop?

Conceptual Foundations

Living Heritage, Transmission and Change

The term “living” is important. The intangible cultural heritage is not just an ancient tradition which has stood the test of time. Communities reenact it in terms of their surroundings and their historical and current needs. It should not then become one “frozen” form as the only true one, as would happen if the curriculum were only a single presentation of it. Children can have continuity and variation at the same time; for example, they can hear an elder play their version of the same song, hear their parents' version, learn their new version, and discuss which words should sound the same and which should be different.

UNESCO's education program views living heritage as a living inheritance to be protected and a resource for learning that is relevant. Local content is available from Heritage, but it can also alter the way in which teaching is structured. Learning can go beyond explanation to observation, apprenticeship, participation, and dialogue with practitioners. The educational relationship turns into a two-way street when, in addition, children receive performance and documentation from schools, or they ask questions (UNESCO, 2021).

This reciprocity shields from extraction. A school should not consider the knowledge of its community as free material that can be taken, simplified and displayed. Some practices are open and others are age, gender, family, season, and ritual-restricted. Some may be observation-only, rather than ones that can be reproduced in the classroom. There should be meaningful involvement of community members in determining what can be shared, how this is going to be named and how children's work can be documented.

Preschool Curriculum as Situated Practice

Cultural beliefs and values about childhood, learning, play, knowledge and adult responsibility influence early childhood curricula. Studies in Chinese kindergartens reveal that the process of curriculum change is not a straightforward process of “importing the model. Expectation, institutional requirements and new pedagogy learning concepts are negotiated between teachers and leaders at the local level (Yang & Li, 2018; 2019). This typically yields a blended curriculum instead of one method being completely supplanted by another.

This insight can be applied to heritage integration. A separate subject for heritage is not required for a preschool. It can integrate living practices into language, movement, art, mathematics, and science, social learning and outdoor inquiry. The main focus is coherence. The chosen practice should be clearly related to the learning goals and should have enough cultural context to not simply be a generic practice.

There are three checks for developmentally appropriate practice what is generally known about young children, what is known about each child, and what is known about the social and cultural context (NAEYC, 2020). The third check is required for ICH work. Understanding and who feels represented is shaped by how an activity is understood through children's home languages, family histories, migration experiences, disabilities, religious backgrounds and community ties.

Family and Community Knowledge as Curriculum Resources

Families have knowledge which is not necessarily documented in formal plans. It is possible to incorporate oral history, repair techniques, songs, planting procedures, customary greetings, weaving patterns, food preparation, local place names, and caring for younger children. The tradition of the funds-of-knowledge suggests that classrooms are enriched by teachers' learning about these household and community resources; it is not assumed that the most valuable knowledge is found in the classroom books or in a classroom building (Moll et al., 1992; Hedges et al., 2011).

Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital is another perspective. Families vary in access to materials, activities, forms and types of knowledge that are recognized by schools. However, a 'high culture' approach can serve to reinforce the dominance of elite or institutional practices. The perspective which is more appropriate for preschool is to consider local and practical knowledge and the intergenerational knowledge as assets, yet being aware of unequal access to books, transportation, cultural events, and adult time (Bourdieu, 1986).

Therefore, community participation should be used to expand the curriculum, not rank families. Anyone with a local story to tell, a craft person, a market person, a musician or a parent who recalls seasonal practices can contribute. There are other ways of participation that are not as intense. Families can leave a voice message or give an item, leave a word in a family language or assist with verifying the accuracy of a classroom description.

Developmental Pathways: Attention, Empathy and Peer Participation

It is not enough that the activity is cultural to be considered having developmental benefits. The benefit will vary with the structure of the activity. A story can stimulate extended engagement, memory, and perspective taking. Listening, inhibition and timing are important skills in group music. Collaborative making requires planning, flexibility in problem solving and fine motor control. Needs negotiation in Dramatic play, role changing and emotional awareness.

These processes are related to executive function: the set of skills that involves sustaining information in the mind, inhibiting an initial response and switching strategies when conditions change. Executive function is important for classroom learning and social adjustment and warm structure, guided participation and repeated practice can support executive function development (Blair & Razza, 2007; Diamond & Lee, 2011). There is also a strong relationship between emotional competence and peer interaction during the preschool years (Denham et al., 2003).

The conceptual architecture in this paper is outlined in Fig.1. Experiences are carefully designed to allow for the introduction of cultural sources. It is anticipated that their developmental value will come to them from the children's activities throughout the experience, and not from the heritage labels themselves.

Method

Design

The paper employs two intertwined lines of evidence. The first is a literature-based narrative synthesis. It is informed by the UNESCO Convention, early childhood curriculum research, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and funds-of-knowledge developmental research and early childhood self-regulation and peer competence. It isn't a comprehensive list of all ICH education publications, rather, it's about the practical integration.

The second part is a secondary analysis of two SPSS files provided on Figshare (Zhou, 2025) at the score level. The analysis was added in to investigate a limited developmental question: whether concentration-empathy and peer interaction/executive-function problems are related to family cultural resources. It does not show evidence that any particular heritage activity is effective.

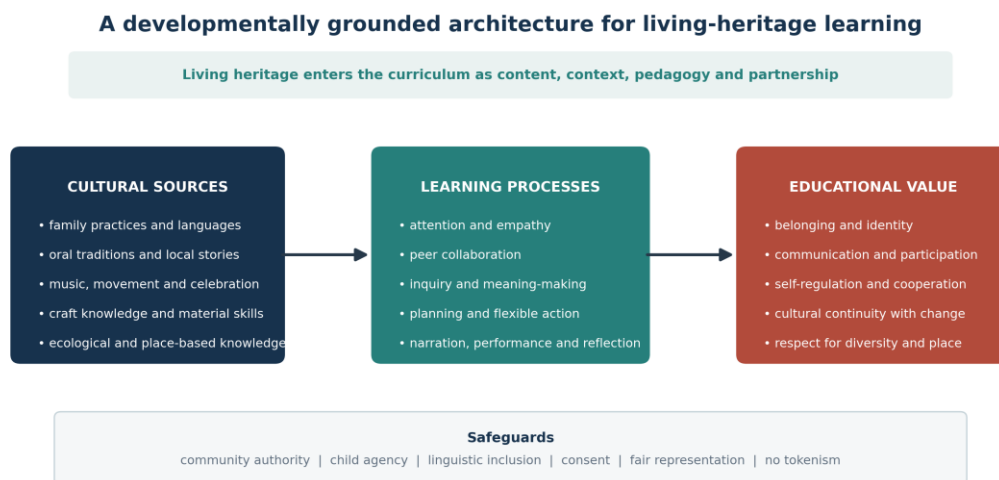


Figure 1: A developmentally grounded architecture for integrating living heritage in preschool

Note: The arrows represent a design logic, not a tested causal model. Community authority and child agency apply throughout

Evidence Selection and Synthesis

The sources considered were when they could meet some of four needs: definition of living heritage and safeguarding; explaining culturally-based early childhood curriculum; school/community integration; and clarifying developmental processes that can take place in relation to heritage-based activity. Normative concepts were based on official UNESCO material. For claims of curriculum and development, peer-reviewed studies and known scholarly books were utilized.

The synthesis was designed in the form of a design-question. For each source, the analysis examined what it suggests regarding the selection of content, community authority, children's participation, pedagogy, assessment, risk. Ideas that repeated were collected together and summarized into the following principles, which were then broken down into the six-cycle illustrated in later Figure 3. The resulting framework is evidence based. There's still a need for local co-design and field testing.

Dataset, Record Audit and Analytic Sample

The Figshare record describes responses from 354 children aged 3–6, their caregivers and lead teachers across six kindergartens in Fujian Province, China. It lists family cultural capital, concentration-empathy, peer interaction ability and executive function, together with gender and grade level (Zhou, 2025). Two files were supplied: a structural-model file and a measurement-model file.

A record-level check found 354 rows in each file but only 177 distinct profiles. Rows 178–354 repeated rows 1–177 in the same order. Inferential tests therefore used the 177 unique profiles. Treating duplicated rows as independent would leave coefficients unchanged but would make standard errors too small. Table 1 reports the unique-case sample.

Table 1: Profile of the analytic sample after exact-row deduplication

Characteristic	Category	n (%)
Gender	Boys	90 (50.8%)
Gender	Girls	87 (49.2%)
Class level	Junior (approximately 3–4 years)	59 (33.3%)
Class level	Middle (approximately 4–5 years)	54 (30.5%)
Class level	Senior (approximately 5–6 years)	64 (36.2%)
Completeness	Complete primary scores	177 (100.0%)

Measures and Statistical Analysis

The analysis used the construct scores available in the files. Family cultural capital was represented by the mean of cultural activities, material investment and time investment. Concentration-empathy combined the supplied concentration and empathy dimension scores. Peer interaction ability combined social initiative, verbal/nonverbal interaction and prosocial behaviour. The executive-function outcome was the supplied problem total; higher scores indicated more difficulty. Table 2 clarifies the direction of each score.

Standardised path equations controlled for gender and class level. HC3 robust standard errors were used because they perform well when residual variance is uneven and samples are modest (Long & Ervin, 2000). Indirect effects were estimated with 10,000 case-resampled bootstrap samples. The tested sequence was FCC → CE → PIA → executive-function problems, with parallel FCC → CE and FCC → PIA paths. Results are reported as associations.

Table 2: Constructs used in the secondary analysis

Construct	Components	Score used	Direction
Family cultural capital (FCC)	Cultural activities; material investment; time investment	Mean of three supplied dimensions	Higher = more cultural resources and practices
Concentration-empathy (CE)	Concentration; empathy	Mean of two supplied dimensions	Higher = stronger engagement and empathic responsiveness
Peer interaction ability (PIA)	Social initiative; interaction; prosocial behaviour	Mean of three supplied dimensions	Higher = stronger peer interaction
Executive-function problems	Supplied EF total	Repository summary score	Higher = more reported problems

Interpretive Boundary

The dataset contains no item asking whether a child participates in an ICH practice, no measure of heritage knowledge and no classroom intervention. FCC is broader than living heritage. It includes activities, materials and adult time that may or may not be heritage-related. The statistical findings therefore support only a developmental plausibility argument: cultural engagement may matter through attention, empathy and peer interaction. They do not validate the curriculum framework or establish effects of ICH integration.

Findings

Design Principles from the Evidence Synthesis

Four overarching themes emerged from the evidence. Firstly, living heritage should not be looked upon as a static object but as a practice involving people, purpose and change. Second, communities should have a say in what is shared and how it should be represented. Thirdly, children should engage in play, inquiry, making, movement, and storytelling and reflection rather than passive display. Fourth, heritage work should be related to specific learning objectives and fair access.

There are four modes of integration based on these principles. Heritage can include content of the curriculum e.g. a story or craft process. Can offer context for learning in number, language, ecology, social life. It can influence pedagogy, observed, demonstrated, through apprenticeship and through collective performance. It can also establish partnership in planning the curriculum by involving families, practitioners and local organizations.

The modes are most effective when combined. If content is not partnered, there's a risk of misrepresentation. Without curriculum goals the partnership can become a one-off visit. Contexts without children may be teacher talk. Unprotected pedagogy might replicate a limited practice or make use of community knowledge without permission.

Descriptive Associations in the Open Dataset

Table 3 shows means, standard deviations and zero-order correlations for the 177 unique profiles. Family cultural capital was positively associated with concentration-empathy and peer interaction. Each of the three resource or competence measures was negatively associated with executive-function problems. The strongest zero-order association with the outcome was concentration-empathy ($r = -0.486$).

Table 3: Descriptive statistics and correlations among the primary variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Family cultural capital	3.361	0.607	1.000	—	—	—
2. Concentration-empathy	2.996	0.902	0.301***	1.000	—	—
3. Peer interaction ability	3.808	0.553	0.406***	0.496***	1.000	—
4. Executive-function problems	2.571	0.566	-0.288***	-0.486***	-0.452***	1.000

Note: N = 177. *** $p < .001$

Path and Indirect-Effect Results

Family cultural capital predicted stronger concentration-empathy and peer interaction after gender and class level were controlled. Concentration-empathy also predicted stronger peer interaction. In the final outcome equation, both concentration-empathy and peer interaction predicted fewer executive-function problems. The remaining direct FCC path was small and not statistically significant. The total FCC association with executive-function problems was significant before the two process variables were entered (Table 4).

Table 4: Standardised path coefficients with HC3 robust standard errors

Outcome	Predictor	β	Robust SE	95% CI	p
CE	FCC	0.296	0.078	[0.144, 0.448]	< .001
PIA	FCC	0.287	0.074	[0.142, 0.432]	< .001
PIA	CE	0.407	0.075	[0.259, 0.555]	< .001
EF problems	CE	-0.337	0.092	[-0.518, -0.156]	< .001
EF problems	PIA	-0.245	0.086	[-0.413, -0.076]	.004
EF problems	FCC (direct)	-0.104	0.087	[-0.275, 0.066]	.230
EF problems	FCC (total)	-0.304	0.098	[-0.497, -0.111]	.002

All three indirect paths had bootstrap confidence intervals below zero (Table 5). The largest route passed through concentration-empathy alone. The sequential path through concentration-empathy and then peer interaction was smaller, but its interval also excluded zero. Together, the indirect effects accounted for about two thirds of the total FCC association in this model.

Table 5: Bootstrap indirect effects from family cultural capital to executive-function problems

Indirect path	Effect	95% bootstrap CI	Share of total effect
FCC → CE → EF problems	-0.100	[-0.162, -0.039]	32.9%
FCC → PIA → EF problems	-0.070	[-0.123, -0.022]	23.1%

FCC → CE → PIA → EF problems	-0.029	[-0.065, -0.006]	9.7%
Total indirect effect	-0.200	[-0.285, -0.107]	65.7%

Figure 2 displays the path model. Its role in this paper is deliberately limited. It suggests that cultural resources are linked with self-regulation partly through social and attentional processes. It does not identify which cultural activities produced those associations.

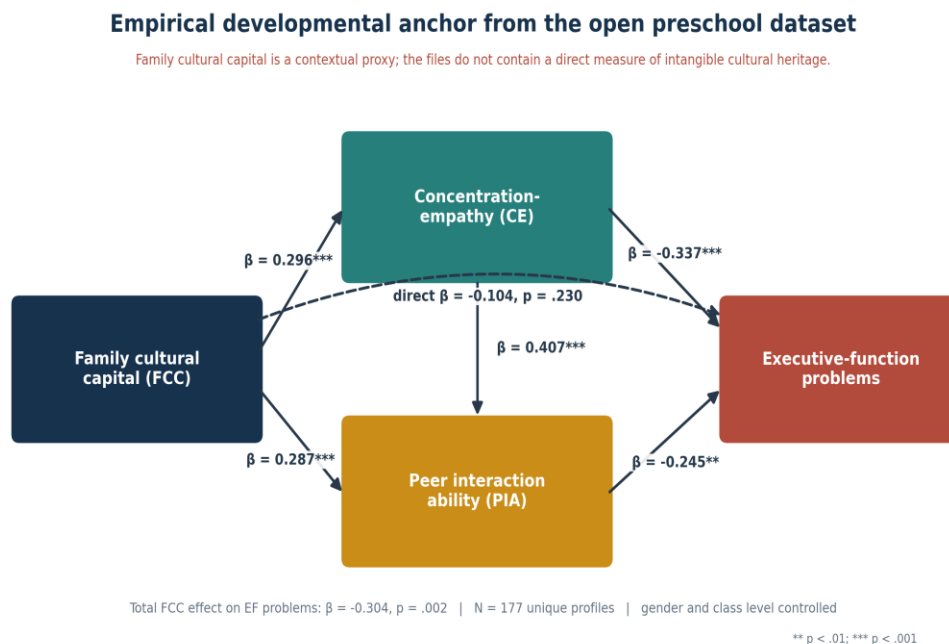


Figure 2: Empirical developmental anchor based on 177 unique profiles.
Note: FCC is broader than intangible cultural heritage. Dashed line = nonsignificant direct path after CE and PIA entered the outcome equation.

What the Findings Mean for Curriculum Design

The statistical pattern brings attention to the quality of the activity. Children will be more likely to sustain attention, read social cue, take turns, explain choices, manage frustration and coordinate with peers to support development when a heritage topic asks these things. A teacher-led display can contain cultural information but will have lower possibilities of these processes.

The pattern also enables frequent and continuous experiences and not just one celebration. Time and activity, as well as objects, are part of family cultural capital in the dataset. Curriculumally it is pointing toward story circles that are repeated over several days, making projects that are continued over days, shared songs, and continued peer roles and family contributions over days. Repetition enables children to recall, compare, enhance and self-manage.

The model must not be followed to instrumentalize heritage. A community practice can have more than just an impact on executive function. Educational goals of cultural continuity, dignity, identity, language and intergenerational connection are valid goals.

Strategies and Practical Approaches

A Six-Stage Curriculum Integration Cycle

The practical framework is organized as a cycle rather than a fixed lesson template. The sequence begins with listening and returns to the community after classroom work. This structure helps teachers avoid selecting a visually attractive practice first and asking questions later. Figure 3 summarizes the six stages.

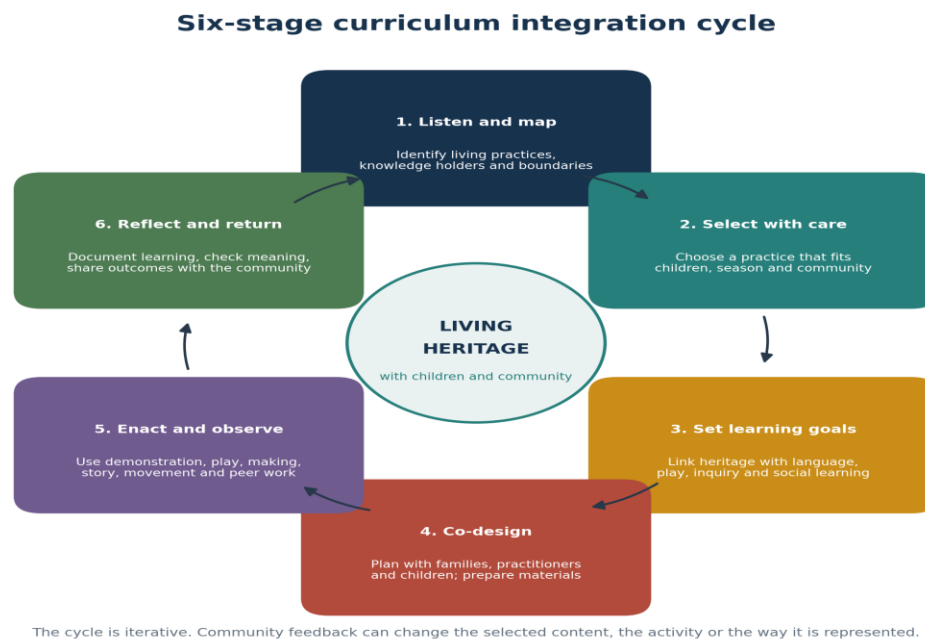


Figure 3: Six-stage cycle for integrating living heritage into preschool curriculum.
Note: The stages can overlap. Feedback may send the planning team back to an earlier stage.

1. Listen and map. Begin with families, community members and local practitioners. Identify practices that remain meaningful, the people who carry them, and any boundaries around access or representation.
2. Select with care. Choose a practice that is safe, suitable for the children's age and connected with the season, place or current curriculum. A small, well-understood element is better than a broad cultural theme.
3. Set learning goals. Name the intended language, social, physical, creative or inquiry outcomes. Heritage should deepen the learning goal rather than sit beside it as decoration.
4. Co-design. Plan the activity with a knowledge holder where possible. Decide who will demonstrate, which words and stories matter, what materials can be used, and how children may adapt or create.

5. Enact and observe. Use short demonstrations, open-ended exploration, guided practice, peer collaboration and reflection. Record children's questions, strategies and language rather than judging only the final product.

6. Reflect and return. Check the meaning of children's representations, share documentation with contributors, correct errors and discuss what should happen next. Return copies, recordings or displays to the community when appropriate.

Integrating ICH Across Learning Areas

Living heritage can support the whole curriculum without becoming a separate subject. Table 6 shows how common heritage forms can connect with preschool learning. The examples are deliberately generic. Local knowledge holders should supply the actual practice, terminology and boundaries.

Table 6: Curriculum integration matrix for living-heritage experiences

Heritage form	Preschool experience	Learning focus	Teacher move	Safeguard
Oral traditions and local stories	Listen to two versions; sequence events; retell with props	Narrative, memory, perspective-taking, home language	Ask who tells the story, where it belongs and why versions differ	Credit the teller; do not expose restricted stories
Music, song and movement	Copy a rhythm; take a group role; create a child verse	Listening, timing, inhibition, vocabulary, cooperation	Move from imitation to guided variation	Check words, context and permission for recording
Craftsmanship and making	Explore material; watch a process; make a simplified functional object	Fine motor control, pattern, planning, persistence	Name tools and decisions, not only steps	Avoid sacred designs; pay or acknowledge practitioners
Social practices and celebrations	Map roles, preparations, greetings and shared responsibilities	Belonging, social rules, dramatic play, empathy	Compare participation without ranking cultures	Do not stage ritual elements out of context
Foodways	Sort ingredients; measure; discuss season, work and sharing	Science, mathematics, vocabulary, health, cooperation	Focus on process and relationships, not exotic display	Check allergies, dietary rules and consent
Nature-related knowledge	Walk, observe signs, record local names and care practices	Ecology, classification, place, responsibility	Invite prediction and repeated seasonal observation	Do not collect protected materials or reveal sensitive sites

Storytelling and Oral Tradition

Work with stories should start with a storyteller and a setting. A teacher may present the name of someone who told the story and the location of the story and if the story varies from family to family or location to location. Children can hear for words that are repeated, sequence events and discuss what they think a character might know or feel. Children can participate without having to speak before the group using props, shadow play or dramatic retelling.

A good follow-up does not look for one “right” text, but compares texts. Children might notice variations in the end, name or information. The teacher can explain that people are the vectors of living stories. This allows for variations to be clearly seen, but without implying that accuracy is of less importance. It is still important for the community contributor to ensure that the classroom retelling does not ‘misrepresent’ the central meaning of the story.

Home languages are entitled to a real place. Families may record a message, a non-verbal sound or a short section. The teacher can print the words in different fonts and ask children to observe their sound, rhythm and meaning. Translation should not exclude the language of origin.

Music, Movement and Performance

Music and movement are appropriate for brief, frequent involvement. Creativity and participation opportunities can include children echoing a rhythm, responding to a call, learning a simple movement sequence or coordinating instruments in small groups. The teacher can vary speed, pause signals and group roles. These changes provide practice of attention/inhibition, and maintain the cultural form.

It is not okay to have costume mimicry. Children and teachers may not be aware of the meaning of clothing and/or the arrangement of gestures and stage. A knowledge holder can be able to determine what to use in the classroom. If performance is adapted, the adaptation should be identified as a classroom performance and not as the community's full practice.

Children should also be given the freedom to make. Once they have learned a pattern, one can add a pattern, or they can create a new line or a design for a pattern response section. It is 'safe' to discuss the difference between inherited form and child created variation. This is a double-blessing of continuity and creativity.

Craft, Material Knowledge and Making

The tendency is that craft activities will not work if the object of crafting is only to create an object. A heritage-centred approach slows down the process. Children explore the material, observe how an expert uses a tool, check out pressure and direction, look for patterns and discuss how it might be used. If a child cannot perform the entire technique, he or she can participate in one authentic decision.

Teachers should not copy protected motifs or de-skill the task to a single-use piece of paper. A task can be simplified to emphasize structure – over-under weaving using wide strips, repeating units in a pattern, joining materials, balancing form and function, or selection of natural and reused materials. It should be evident in the documentation that the practitioner knows how to do their job.

Making also provides a natural peer environment. Children can talk through a step and problem solve together, or share tools and materials with each other. Roles should be rotated, so that the confident children are not in control of the process. Children with other motor or sensory needs are included with adapted grips, larger materials and sensory alternatives.

Place-Based and Ecological Knowledge

Living heritage can contain knowledge about seasons, plants, weather, water and animals, as well as land use. A preschool can start with the same walk and observation but move on to a second fact lesson. Local names may be learned, seasonal cues may be observed, and recollections of elders may be compared with current circumstances and practices of care may be discussed.

This is a work that links culture to environmental responsibility. It also helps to keep sustainability 'real'. A tale of water, a planting tradition, or a way of reusing material can result in immediate observation and joint action. Teachers will identify community knowledge from a universal scientific claim and will give them the opportunity to guide questions for inquiry.

Caution is needed with sensitive ecological knowledge. Never reveal or publish information regarding the location of protected species, sacred places or resources that might be exploited by the school. It is community contributor's choice what children can document and what stays within the community.

Family and Community Partnership

Partnership is most effective when it is planned, available and time respectful. Invitations need to give an option to: visit the class, send an object, record a message, join a planning call, review a caption or suggest someone else. Schools should not presume that all families want to put their culture on display.

Practical support matters. Contributors may require transportation, flexible time, translation services, and/or an honorarium or materials. The teacher should let the children know their age, the learning goal, and how many children there will be in the group and how the photographs or recordings will be used. Participation and display should be consented to.

When multiple traditions are included in the curriculum, a community advisory group is helpful. The group doesn't have to be big. The annual plan can be reviewed by two or three family members, a local practitioner and a teacher, who may identify sensitive themes and make connections between themes covered in school and local events.

A Sample Five-Day Learning Sequence

Table 7 gives a sample sequence called "A Story, a Skill and a Shared Place." It is not tied to one named tradition. Teachers should replace the placeholders with a locally approved practice. The sequence shows how a project can move from listening to participation and return.

Table 7: Sample five-day preschool sequence for a locally selected living practice

Day	Main experience	Adult role	Child action	Evidence of learning
1. Meet the practice	A community contributor shares a story, object, song or short demonstration	Introduce the contributor; protect listening time; record questions	Observe, listen, name prior experience, ask questions	Attention, vocabulary, links to family knowledge
2. Explore materials and meaning	Children handle safe materials, images or sounds connected with the practice	Model respectful use; explain origin and purpose	Sort, compare, imitate, describe and predict	Descriptive language, classification, memory
3. Learn one process	Contributor or teacher demonstrates a small authentic sequence	Break the process into visible decisions; provide access supports	Practise in pairs; take turns; help a peer	Planning, persistence, coordination, cooperation
4. Create and discuss variation	Children make, perform or retell within agreed boundaries	Prompt choices; distinguish inherited elements from new additions	Adapt, explain choices, solve problems and negotiate roles	Flexible thinking, narrative, peer interaction
5. Reflect and return	Class shares documentation with the contributor or families	Invite correction; name learning; agree what may be displayed	Revisit questions, express thanks, choose next inquiry	Metacognition, cultural respect, belonging

Observation, Documentation and Assessment

Assessment should follow the learning goals, not test whether children can reproduce an adult performance. Useful evidence includes the language children use, the questions they ask, how long they remain engaged, how they coordinate with peers, the strategies they try and whether they can explain a purpose or relationship. Photographs and products can support interpretation, but they are not sufficient by themselves.

Learning stories, brief observation notes, child dictation and annotated work samples are well suited to heritage projects. A teacher might record that a child waited for a rhythm cue, changed a plan after a material broke, used a home-language word from a family recording or explained why an object should be handled carefully. Such notes show process and meaning.

Cultural accuracy also needs assessment. Before a display is finalised, the teacher can ask: Is the contributor named correctly? Are words spelled and translated with care? Does the caption separate community knowledge from the child's own idea? Has permission been granted for images and recordings? Table 8 combines educational and safeguarding checks.

Table 8: Implementation and assessment checklist

Area	Questions for the teaching team	Possible evidence
Community authority	Who identified the practice? Who approved the classroom use? Are any parts restricted?	Consent record; contributor notes; approved captions
Developmental fit	Can children participate safely through play, inquiry, movement or making?	Access plan; adapted materials; observation notes
Learning coherence	Which language, social, creative, physical or inquiry goals are being pursued?	Planning record; child questions; work samples

Child agency	Can children ask, choose, adapt, refuse and contribute their own interpretations?	Choice records; child voice; varied products
Representation	Are differences within the community acknowledged? Is the practice shown as living and changing?	Multiple voices; version comparison; reflection notes
Equity and access	Can families contribute in different ways? Are costs, time and language barriers addressed?	Participation options; translation; lending materials
Documentation ethics	Who may be photographed or recorded? Where will material be stored or displayed?	Media consent; storage plan; deletion date
Return and continuity	How will outcomes be shared back? What relationship or inquiry continues?	Community feedback; returned copies; next-step plan

Discussion

From Cultural Display to Participatory Curriculum

The framework focuses less on what is in the classroom and more on what is happening in the classroom by children, teachers and community members. This is the main difference between a heritage theme and heritage integration. A theme can be used to populate the room with symbols. The learning relations, materials, questions and sources of authority are transformed in integration.

The four modes (content, context, pedagogy and partnership) offer a practical diagnostic. A content plan alone is probably a skim. Place, purpose and people are explained by adding context. Pedagogy includes opportunities for children to learn in culturally relevant ways of observing, practicing and contributing. The community has influence over selection, representation and continuity, through partnership.

This would align with culturally sustaining pedagogy, which calls for schools to affirm instead of supplanting linguistic and cultural pluralism (Paris & Alim, 2017). It also helps with work on funds of knowledge, where the practices of the home are considered intellectual resources for curriculum (Moll et al., 1992; Hedges et al., 2011). The need for participation in the preschool context expands to include embodied, playful and relational forms of participation.

Interpreting the Developmental Evidence

The open data findings are helpful because they are indicators of process. Concentration-empathy and peer interaction were the most significant factors linking family cultural capital to fewer executive-function problems in the tested model. This pattern can be used when activities involve listening, trying to see things from the other person's point of view, working together and being flexible. Doesn't believe in the addition of heritage content to a worksheet and the belief that self-regulation will improve.

Indirect effects should not be interpreted as causal mechanisms. The data are cross-sectional and teacher ratings were added to several constructs. Better self-regulation skills can enhance the participation of children in family and peer activities. The complete pattern may also be influenced by family resources, classroom quality and the temperament of children. More studies on longitudinal research and intervention research are required.

The duplicate-row audit is important as well. If all 354 rows had been considered independent, the coefficients would have been the same, but the uncertainty would have been artificially small. High quality curriculum research includes transparent data screening as it can make a good idea seem more solid than it really is.

Teacher Knowledge and Professional Learning

There is more to it than just a bank of activities. They require listening and questioning and demonstrating respect; the ability to acknowledge diversity and provide developmentally appropriate participatory design. Local case planning can be utilized in professional learning. A team chooses one practice, identifies who the stakeholders and boundaries are, connects the practice to the curriculum goals, and discusses the plan with a knowledge holder.

The teacher needs to be permitted to say that he/she doesn't know. Confidence is worse than a sincere question. A note like "This is the classroom version shared by." can identify where the source is and convey only a part of the story, rather than an all-encompassing one. Aside from what children learned from the activity, what did the teacher learn from the contributor?

Documentation skills are also essential. Process can be celebrated in a display by claiming materials, decisions, local terms and contributors. It can demonstrate to children that plans are changed, that plans are shared with others and/or that plans are compared. This is more robust than a wall filled with products that are the same, since it presents learning and cultural meaning in tandem.

Policy and Leadership Implications

Preschool leaders can support this work by making space for local curriculum decisions within broader standards. A small community partnership budget, flexible visitor procedures, translation support and clear media-consent rules remove practical barriers. Annual planning should include time for mapping local knowledge, not only purchasing commercial resources.

Curriculum guidance should avoid compulsory lists of cultural symbols. Such lists can encourage tokenism and can quickly become outdated. A better policy sets principles for community participation, child agency, safeguarding, learning coherence and documentation. It can also require that schools acknowledge variation within cultural groups rather than treating each group as uniform.

The UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education places access, inclusion, cultural diversity and sustainable futures within the same policy space (UNESCO, 2024). Preschool ICH work can contribute when it is inclusive and connected with living communities. It can undermine those goals when it stereotypes, commercializes or excludes.

Equity, Inclusion and Difficult Knowledge

Not every child has the same relationship to local heritage. Families may be recent arrivals, multilingual, displaced, mixed in background or distant from a practice that the school treats as local. Children should not be asked to represent a group or prove cultural knowledge. Participation should allow curiosity without forcing disclosure or performance.

Some heritage carries conflict, loss or unequal power. A practice may have been discouraged, commercialized or claimed by competing groups. Preschool treatment must remain age-appropriate, but silence is not the only option. Teachers can use simple language about respect, fairness, multiple memories and the right of communities to name their own practices.

Inclusion also concerns disability and access. Music can be felt through vibration, story can be supported by objects and symbols, movement can be adapted for seated participation, and craft materials can be enlarged or stabilized. The goal is not identical performance. It is meaningful participation in the shared inquiry.

Limitations and Future Research

The curriculum framework is not an assessed program, it is a design synthesis. It is based on international guidance and scholarship, but must be piloted in actual preschool settings to assess feasibility, workload and time demands, and outcomes for children. The safeguards and teaching modes for each heritage domain might differ.

ICH participation is not measured by the secondary data. The construct of family cultural capital was rather general and its factors were supplied scores. The files provided do not have school and classroom identifiers, and therefore, multilevel dependence was not modelled. The public records are also exact duplicated and there is no complete, suitably labelled set of items for independent measurement reconstruction.

Further research is needed to co-design a heritage curriculum with knowledge holders within the community and to record educational and safeguarding outcomes. A good pilot should have at least three types of evidence, namely, direct observation of child participation, family and practitioner feedback and developmental measures gathered by more than one method. Baseline and follow-up data should be collected and be correlated with implementation data to allow the measurement of outcomes to be linked with what occurred.

Long-term studies might be conducted on the effect of multiple heritage projects on attention, storytelling ability, group work, sense of place, and a commitment to the natural environment during a school year. Comparative studies should not assume homogeneity within a national or ethnic group. They should share their selected practice, the involvement of community partners, language considerations, permission processes, adaptations, and any conflicts they faced with the design process.

Community benefit should also be explored in research. A school may assess the learning outcomes of the children, but neglect to record the time and knowledge that practitioners invest. Questions that can be useful are: Was there an accurate representation of the children, were children's documentation helpful to the community, did the partnership continue, and were there fair compensation and credit?

Conclusion

Intangible cultural heritage should be integrated into the preschool curriculum while it is linked to people, purpose, place and change. The best integration is not a festival corner or a similar craft. It is a process of listening, co-design, participation, inquiry, reflection and return.

In this paper, the practical scheme allows teachers to transform their broad intention into a daily course. Heritage can offer content; offer context; inform pedagogy; and build partnership. When activities are carefully planned, stories, music and movement, craft, foodways and ecological knowledge can link to language, mathematics, science, creativity, self-regulation and social learning.

It suggests a developmentally safe open-data analysis. A total of 177 unique profiles were linked to cultural resources, which in turn were associated with concentration-empathy and fewer executive-function problems. The data do not assess education of ICH but it can support the attention to social and attentional processes that take place in meaningful cultural activity.

The final criterion is educational and moral. Children have to learn, communities must keep their power and representation must be accurate enough to maintain trust. Under these circumstances, preschool is not only a venue to showcase living heritage. It is met, exercised, pondered and passed on.

Declarations

Ethics statement: This paper includes a secondary analysis of de-identified data made publicly available on Figshare. No new participant contact or data collection occurred. The curriculum framework involves no human-subject data.

Data availability: The two SPSS files used for the secondary analysis are available under a CC BY 4.0 licence at <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.29833127>.

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