Advancing Participatory Methodologies in Education:
The Case Study of Mosaic Learning Center in Thailand.

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Acknowledgments

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Abstract

Participatory methodologies offer an alternative approach to widespread conventional methods of education adopted in Thailand. With the latter failing to provide adequate educational outcomes according to international standards, alternative education could represent a valid response to this long-lasting national problem. Concurrently, the paper engages with Thai socio-cultural factors to advance solutions to students’ lack of motivation and interest in learning. Exploring the unique approach of Mosaic Learning Center, an international school in Thailand, this qualitative study offers first-hand insight into adopting participatory methodologies in the classroom. Analysing data collected through semi-structured interviews, the research aims to explore the effects of promoting student-centred, holistic, and self-directed learning, while framing participatory approaches in education within the interdisciplinary field of Communication for Development. Bridging pedagogical studies with the thematic of development and social change, the research addresses cultural questions of structural social injustice, emancipation, and children’s rights in Thailand, by advocating for liberating pedagogies based on inclusion and participation.

Keywords: alternative education, participatory methodologies, Thailand
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1. Introduction

The research offers an in-depth analysis of the implementation of participatory methodologies in education. Drawing from non-conventional teaching methodologies of a learning centre in Thailand, the paper aims to explore participatory approaches as a case study for social change.

1.1 Research Context

Amongst the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) pledged to be pursued by all United Nations Member States in 2015, Goal 4 aims to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (United Nations, 2022). By 2019, the world was already falling short of its reading and maths goals and the onset of COVID-19 pandemic has cast a further shadow over the situation, reversing the progress made in education over the last two decades (United Nations Statistics Division, 2022). While education spending has decreased considerably throughout the globe, historical inequities have re-emerged. The entire world faces the challenge of restoring the damages of unfinished learning, with underprivileged groups suffering the most from the effects of the crisis (Dorn, et al., 2021).

In Thailand, after months of distance learning, the Ministry of Education confirmed the reopening of schools starting from November 2021. Provided their readiness for COVID-19 measures, educational institutions were finally allowed to welcome back students. With onsite learning being restored and classrooms steadily running again, the spotlight redirects to the quality of education, with schools now required to make an additional effort to overcome the learning losses (Sangiam & Angskul, 2021).

The pandemic added pressure to an existing delicate situation as the Thai education system has often been contested over the past 20 years. Members of the American Chamber of Commerce pinpointed the teaching of English and critical thinking as inadequate, with students’ skills in science, maths and Thai language also
dropping below international standards. The traditional school system is at the centre of the debate, with a lack of classroom interactivity and a model based on memorization as a standard method of learning. As a result, students lack the ability to innovate, be creative, and think critically (CIRDAP, 2016).

In addition, culture plays a critical role in the Thai education system. Thai culture and traditions constitute highly regarded assets of the country, and the concept of a *Thai Identity* has been developed and strengthened over the past 70 years to protect Thai values from the expanding Western worldview. Among these values, the respect for elders and superiors is part of a system of social hierarchies strongly embedded in Thai society.

Stemming from Buddhism in the concept of *kwam kreu jai*,¹ these values define Thai culture and students’ behaviour alike (Cavanagh, 2022). Thais are expected to show respect and loyalty to those who have a higher position or are older than them. People of greater standing, for example, will be addressed with respect, as in the example of *wai*,² the traditional form of greeting in Thailand (Willan, 2018). Furthermore, Thais will not express their minds openly and will not dare to make a recommendation or provide an idea to someone in a higher position than themselves. Communication in Thailand is therefore regulated and hierarchical (Cross culture American Thai, n.d.).

In the national school system, the presence of these Thai mores is equally diffused, with traditional values and social hierarchies being observed and respected. Typically, Thai students don’t take initiative in learning, but prefer to wait for the teacher to give them instructions. They often hesitate to express their opinions and display a passive style of learning (Settachai, 2018). These cultural

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¹ A moral code by which individuals become conscious of other people’s feelings and treat them with respect and consideration.

² The greeting consists of a slight bow of the head with the palms of the hands joined in a prayer-like gesture to convey respect. There are different degrees of showing respect according to the status of the person greeted, with monks ranking on top.
elements often lead to a one-directional way of communication inside the classroom, with teachers ranked above students. Students are expected to comply with this structural system, refraining from questioning or debating teachers, or even expressing their own ideas, if controversial. The observance of this status quo inevitably leads to a form of oppression towards the students. Despite involuntarily accepting the subjugation of the school system, students often develop a sense of reluctance towards education, proven by low grades and a general feeling of apathy or indifference towards learning (CIRDAP, 2016).

1.2 Study Aims

The research explores educational methodologies apt to promote democratic classroom practices. The analysis focuses on the nine years of basic education in Thailand. Divided in six years of primary and three years of lower secondary school, compulsory schooling accompanies pupils from the age of 6 to 15. In Thailand public schools are traditionally based on conventional practices of education and only few international schools avail themselves of participatory methodologies. Following different pedagogies, participatory methodologies still constitute an anomaly in the national school system and have adapted to being niche players in a highly competitive market.

The aim of this paper is to investigate participatory methodologies in education and examine strengths and limitations that participative learning approaches contrive. The objective of the paper is two-fold. First, the paper analyses participatory practices to understand whether they could represent a good response to the lack of creativity, critical thinking, and English proficiency, previously disputed. Second, the paper explores participatory methodologies in the context of communication for development (C4D) as a means to democratise classroom practices and promote social change.

The study is therefore relevant from a pedagogical perspective, for it can be used by other educational institutions and teachers to consider adopting participatory methods to improve students’ outcomes. At the same time, it is
pertinent in a C4D discourse, as it engages with topics of power relations, culture, and children’s agency.

1.3 Research Design

Combining multiple areas of studying in an interdisciplinary project, the discourse of this paper is constructed around the following research question:

1. How can participatory methodologies revamp the Thai education system?

Concentrating on the role of teachers as research angle in the analysis of these methods, the paper focuses on two further sub-questions:

1.1 How can teachers enhance the learning of English and foster creativity and critical thinking in young students?

1.2 How can teachers partake in the process of students’ liberation, promoting classroom interactivity and empowering young learners, while considering conventional elements embedded in Thai culture?

To answer these questions the research draws from first-hand experiences of teachers who make use of participatory methods in their daily teaching practices. Data is therefore collected through semi-structured interviews with the participants coming from Mosaic Learning Center, a non-conventional international school in Thailand. Whereas other alternative schools usually identify themselves with one selected pedagogical method (e.g., Montessori, Waldorf, etc.), the investigated school combines a variety of participatory methodologies in a unique and distinctive fashion.

In the developing of the discourse, the paper is structured as follows: first, the Literature Review juxtaposes participatory methodologies with conventional methods of education often adopted in the Thai school system and traditional values embedded in culture and society; the Theoretical Framework positions the research within a C4D context, introducing arguments pertinent to the fields of education, culture, communication, and development; the Research Methodology describes the
qualitative methodologies selected for the case study, including techniques for data collection, method of analysis, ethical considerations and limitations of the study; the Analysis examines the collected data and formulates a discussion around the research questions, offering interpretations and descriptions of the findings; and finally, the Conclusion provides a synthesis of the key points emerging in the paper, with reflections on the validity of the study and opportunities for future research in the field.

1.4 Personal Motivation

This project was inspired by my own work experience at Mosaic Learning Center\(^3\) between August 2016 and April 2019. During this time, I became acquainted with participatory methodologies, and gained a fresh perspective on education. Thanks to Mosaic’s methods, not only did I find passion in the profession of teaching, but I also became a fervent advocate for children’s rights.

At the beginning of my experience, Mosaic counted approximately 30 students and 4 teachers. After continuous upsizing, it has now become a community of approximately 120 pupils, 13 teachers and an overall staff of 24. As the school expanded, new challenges arose. How did Mosaic respond to the transformation, and how did they manage to keep the integrity of their creed?

Going back to the place that first inspired me to become a teacher and a practitioner was an exciting experience and gave me the opportunity to further reflect on the implementation of participatory methodologies in my everyday life as a teacher in Thailand.

\(^3\) For the rest of the paper, and in concordance to its common use, Mosaic Learning Center will simply be referred to as Mosaic.
2. Literature Review

This section investigates the nature of participatory methodologies in relation to the combined fields of education, culture, and social studies. By presenting the contextual framing and positioning the subject of study alongside more traditional practices adopted in Thailand, this chapter offers insight into participatory methodologies as a valid pedagogical alternative and an influencing factor in the context of C4D.

2.1 Participation as a Means for Social Change

‘Alternative Education’ is utilized to differentiate itself from mainstream and non-formal education, which are provided by the state and designed to be in one format with the purpose to dominate learners to succumb to the state as the sole ideological guideline formal education. (Kitcharoen, 2015, p. 11)

Kitcharoen argues how Alternative Education (AE) in Thailand is seen as part of a discourse that counters the educational system established by the state, and for the state’s domination, while promoting an educational system designed by the people, for the people (Kitcharoen, 2015). AE in Thailand, thus, addresses issues of structural social injustice, while also boosting learners’ comprehension of the world and life in general (Kitcharoen, 2015). Because “Children and young people’s participation cannot be understood in isolation from the social, cultural and political contexts in which it occurs” (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2009, p. 357) understanding some of the cultural and social aspects of Thai society becomes essential to develop a well-grounded discourse.

In August 2020 some leaked footage from Sarasas Witaed Ratchaphruek School, a famous private school in Nonthaburi went viral. The recording shows kindergarten teachers beating up children. A pre-schooler hit on the head, a toddler pushed down on the floor, a black plastic bag shoved over a child’s head and a student forced to strip down and change her clothes in front of the classroom after wetting herself, are some examples of the many cases of child abuse divulged
through the CCTV recordings. Eleven kindergarten teachers were charged with physical assault and child abuse (Meechukhun, 2020).

Unfortunately, these incidents are just some examples of “disciplining” methods that, throughout the years, have become so frequent they no longer shock. However, the scandal of Sarasas Witaed Ratchaphruek School destroyed the myth that expensive private schools are a safe place for children (Thitiratsakul, 2020). While the Ministry of Education prohibits corporal punishment, a survey conducted by the Thailand Development Research Institute in August 2020, reported that 60% of the interviewed students complained about receiving corporal punishment in various forms of physical violence (Thitiratsakul, 2020).

Sexual abuse of students is another notorious issue in Thailand with 159 cases of sexual abuse committed by public school teachers over the last 10 years and many more suspected cases never reported. The World Health Organization has estimated that about 18,000 girls, most of whom are students aged five to twenty, are sexually abused in Thailand every year (Gotinga, 2021). Nonetheless, sexual abuse in the Thai school system often goes unpunished. Sexual perpetrators receive protection from other teachers and principals, contributing to the diffusion of a culture of silence and victim-blaming while exacerbating the problem (Thitiratsakul, 2020).

An element of authoritarianism, strongly embedded in Thai culture and in the national school system is at the gist of the matter. Education policy and school management must undergo drastic reform to put an end to the iniquity of a corrupted and foul school system (Thitiratsakul, 2020). To alleviate the problem, four main interventions have been advanced. First, produce a new generation of teachers, whose competency and educational training ensure abidance to children’s rights and focus on the thorough development of the child. Second, decentralise the school monitoring mechanism, as the current top-down system has failed to respond to local needs. Instead, allow local communities to monitor and control teacher quality. Third, punish the violators. Finally, empower the parents. Parents play a key-role in the development of the child. However, many Thai parents spoil
their children, becoming an impediment factor to their growth and development (Thitiratsakul, 2020).

As all cultures are dynamic and therefore susceptible to social change (Liebel & Saadi, 2009), it is not just the school culture that needs changing, but the entire concept of education in and outside the school system. Home and school practices must synchronise and partner towards a common goal. Teaching methodologies, whether at home or at school, must be based on respect for human rights, and a child-centred approach, through the application of participatory methodologies, can work as the reading lens to see the change happen.

If effective participation lies at the intersection between social interaction and political activity (Sotkasiira, et al., 2010), then all parties need to be included in the discourse. Children participation is after all a political act with children challenging adults’ practices (van Krieken Robson, 2019). Earlier research offers insight into the need for an overhaul of adults’ perspective on children as to recognize, socially and culturally, the value of children’s sense of agency (de Sousa, 2019); nonetheless, consideration of cultural values is equally important and neither of them shall overshadow the other (Liebel & Saadi, 2009). Tension between children’s participation and culture is unavoidable. The word participation per se, comprises different connotations depending on geographical contexts. Studies have emphasised how in Asian countries, where collectivism is the predominant social value, participation is understood in correlation to a sense of responsibility to family and community rather than an individual right (Yokying & Floro, 2020; Mason & Bolzan, 2009). Not only should children’s participation be intended as a right but also as an empowering tool to redefine social relationships with adults and enabling children to become active citizens (Ray, 2009). It is only through this process of inclusion that adults and children can work together in the pursuit of shaping a better future.
2.2 Participatory Methodologies and Alternative Education in Thailand

Since the UN enacted the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, one of the most contested and researched areas of the Convention has been children’s participation. In the last 30 years, the discourse about children’s participation has intensified, touching upon concepts such as children engagement in social and economic analysis, research, education, community development, political dialogue, and democratic participation in schools (Lansdown, 2010). Discussion over the meaning of the term, though, has raised controversial opinions. If, on one side, participation can be intended as an act of recognition of children as active members of society, and the consequential consideration of their rights as such, on the other, it has been criticised as a ruse for political accountability and for creating an illusion of empowerment. Participation should not be limited to speaking and being heard, but actively include children in vital social processes, as they are as much a part of society as adults are (Liebel & Saadi, 2009). If children are to gain benefit for themselves and their communities, there is a need for them to become active citizens and for their values and perspectives to be included in decision-making processes. Although studies have shown that there has been an increased sensitivity towards children’s participation in the last 30 years, Thomas and Percy-Smith argue how “participation lacks its own distinctive theoretical framework and the theories that have been drawn upon are often not especially child centred” (2010, p. 3).

School systems that make use of participatory methodologies are commonly identified with the broad term of alternative education. AE comprises a variety of pedagogies and educational philosophies such as Montessori, Waldorf, Summerhill, and Reggio Emilia. As they differ from traditional methods, all these non-conventional pedagogical approaches do present common traits. In alternative schools, the most typical didactical reform includes four elements: individualising, activating, contextualising, and socialising (van der Ploeg, 2013). By allowing students to work at their own pace and tailoring instruction and assignments to their abilities and needs (individualising), stimulating exploration inside and outside the classroom (activating), linking learning objectives to their own interests
contextualising) and encouraging group work and students’ interaction (socialising), schools attempt to strike a better balance between the child and the curriculum (Norris, 2004; Rohrs & Lenhart, 1995).

Prior research on AE have shown how participatory methods favour the development of self-confidence and a sense of empowerment in the students (McGee & Lin, 2020), an understandings of citizenship and a sense of belonging to a community (van Krieken Robson, 2019), and an enhancement of cognitive (e.g. language, maths and reading) and non-cognitive (wellbeing, self-efficacy, and task motivation) abilities (Sins, et al., 2021). Conversely, AE has been contested exactly for allowing students to establish their own learning pace. With a lack of external factors that drive motivation in the learners and progressively accompany them along their academic journey to the attainment of a diploma, students are more likely to encounter difficulties in achieving academic goals (ExpertVillage Leaf Group, 2021). Furthermore, the same students who celebrate the supportive and inclusive characteristics of AE programmes, also express concern regarding post-secondary transition planning and segregation from their regular-education peers (McGee & Lin, 2020). This last concern, however, leads up to some further reflections. Is it AE, as such, called into question, or is its ostracism from a dominant discourse that penalises those who embrace it as a valid substitute?

In Thailand, AE offers a different option from the conventional system of education adopted by most public and private learning institutions. In 2007, AE was constitutionally recognised and validated in every level (Kitcharoen, 2015). However, as a form of education, AE in Thailand still represents an exception to the mainstream model of education. Alternative schools in Thailand are run by private organisations, which despite following the Thai curriculum, benefit from a great deal of freedom and creativity in the organisation of the content, teaching methods and use of textbooks (Choeybal, 2008). Combining innovative pedagogies to a student-
centred approach, these alternative schools, or learning centres, focus on the development of the student’s individual values, life skills, and teamwork, while delivering the core academic content (Choeybal, 2008).

Learning occurs through an integrated and holistic approach, in compliance with nature, society, community and resources (Kitcharoen, 2015). This process of active participation and engagement with the world eventually leads to the mental, physical, and spiritual development of the pupil. Within the system, students are respected, validated, and nurtured, while learning becomes an empowering and creative act (Power, 2012; Settachai, 2018).

2.3 Student-Centred Learning

Although access to education has substantially increased in the last two decades, the national education system has been pinpointed as one of Thailand’s main problems (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016). With Thai students scoring below the global average, overcrowded classrooms, poor monitoring of students’ progress and an outdated curriculum, the Thai educational system is still considered flawed and unsatisfactory (The Borgen Project, 2017).

The National Education Act emphasises the importance of lifelong education and the need for learners to develop their creative abilities to succeed in an ever-changing global environment (Power, 2016). Its approval in 1999 set the theoretical framework for a seemingly education revolution. However, students’ results in disciplines such as English, science, maths, Thai, and critical thinking have all dropped below international standards. Since the country first took part in the

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4 ‘Learning centres’ was adopted as a general term for all types of non-formal education according to the National Education Act B.E.2542 (1999) in Thailand, section 18(3) of the Act.

5 The effect of a series of reforms aiming at addressing education challenges in support to the economic growth of the country, noticeably with the 1999 National Education Act ensuring near universal access in primary education and again in 2009 with the decision to extend free education to all children to the age of 15.
Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2000, Thailand’s score has been on a declining trend (Promchertchoo, 2019).

In 2015, the country ranked 54th out of 72 nations and economies in the PISA assessment, which included 540,000 students from 72 countries (Promchertchoo, 2019). Thailand’s score was below average in every category, whereas Southeast Asian neighbours Singapore and Vietnam rated first and eighth in the worldwide list. In 2016, UNESCO offered insight into the pursuit of an adequate educational framework apt to meet necessary criteria for better educational standards (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016). Touching upon features of the national education system that undoubtedly constitute a critical part of the issue, the framework overlooks participatory methodologies and alternative practices.

While conventional Thai schools are academically oriented and place the curriculum at the pinnacle of teaching methodologies, Thai learning centres differentiate themselves by focusing on making education engaging and fun to unlock students’ full potential. Despite adopting different practices, these learning centres share a core principle: human nature is heterogeneous, and education should be diversified and learner oriented (Tunmuntong, 2012). By shaping academic contents based on children’s interest, teachers stimulate students to engage creatively with school activities, increasing their participation and promoting active learning. Meanwhile, social relations are encouraged, and students develop interpersonal skills. Teachers thus, become facilitators. Their role is not to provide knowledge but encourage students to become active learners (Wei Li, 2016). Real life scenarios create the necessity for students to develop their own critical thinking and generate knowledge that would help them interpret, understand, and transform the world. The role of the teacher is therefore linked to the construction of these

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6 Amongst all: the inadequacy of the infrastructures and the curriculum, innovation and technology and teachers’ preparation.
enabling scenarios, wherewith students engage, exploring possibilities and constructing their own reality.

Participatory methods offer a valid alternative to more conventional approaches and their implementation in the system could help Thai students improve their contested academic results, along with sparkling creativity and critical thinking.
3. Theoretical Framework

Education has always been a controversial branch of study. Throughout the years, new pedagogies have spread and evolved and yet, there is still no agreement on what the best possible practices are. However, in the last decades, educational approaches have veered towards more democratic forms. This session explores the essential traits of participatory methodologies, how they have flourished in the last 50 years and why a discourse based on their employment is still relevant today.

3.1 Subordination of Teaching to Learning

Despite being labelled as non-conventional or alternative, from an historical perspective, participatory methodologies have been deep-rooted in education since ancient times. From the Socratic method, which tied up teacher and pupil through dialogue based on meaningful inquiry, to the cruciality of placing the pupil at the centre of the educational process in child development’s theories formulated by Jean Jacques Rousseau in the 1700s. The rise of capitalism and the establishment of the modern school system, structured to accommodate large classrooms, diverted learning to instructor-centred methods, distinguished by a one-way communication and the passive role of the students (Velarde, 2017).

In 1963, Caleb Gattegno published the book Teaching Foreign Languages in Schools: The Silent Way, countering standard language education techniques, in which teachers perform the majority of the talking and dominate classroom activities (Yüksel & Caner, 2014). According to Gattegno’s theories, teachers should challenge the students with learning objectives, achievable through creativity and cooperation instead of memorization and repetition. The-Silent-Way teacher does not transmit knowledge but generates a sense of awareness in students for “only awareness is educable in man” (Gattegno, 1963). Students thus, become problem solvers, “independent, autonomous and responsible” (Gattegno, 1976, p. 45) for their own learning.
Gattegno brings forward the idea of the subordination of teaching to learning, suggesting that “it is the learners’ responsibility to control and direct their own learning, while teachers are there to present essential structures in order to raise students’ awareness for learning” (Yüksel & Caner, 2014). Learning becomes a discovery, with the students creatively pursuing learning and the teacher facilitating the process.

In this learning process, Gattegno (1963) identifies four main stages: 1. the awareness stage, where the students, guided by the teacher become aware that there is something to be explored; 2. the exploration stage, in which students engage with the unknown and, through direct experience with it, gain an understanding and a thorough comprehension of it; 3. the transitional stage, in which the students practice on their freshly acquired notions to fully master them; 4. the transfer stage, in which the skills are assimilated and transferred to the students’ baggage of knowledge, ready to be used for further learning (Young, 1995).

3.2 Enhancing Students’ Capabilities

At the beginning of the 21st century, John Dewey’s innovative publications offered a vast contribution to the combined fields of education and democracy. Dewey argues how the purpose of education should be that of realising students’ full potential and that this goal can be achieved by providing them with the opportunity to be accountable for their own learning while experiencing and interacting with the curriculum. He notes that "to prepare him for the future life means to give him command of himself; it means so to train him that he will have the full and ready use of all his capacities" (Dewey, 1897). By actively engaging in their learning process, students come to share social consciousness within the society and education, therefore, becomes instrumental in creating social change (Dewey, 1897).

Participation is critical. Content must be presented in a relatable and challenging way for the students to fully engage with and assimilate it. However,
contrary to many child-centred pedagogies inspired by his theories, Dewey underlines the importance of content and of the role of the teacher in the learning process. Removing these attributes and relying solely on the child is, possibly, just as detrimental as abusing them (Dewey, 1902).

Dewey criticises modern schooling for neglecting the formation of the students in its most genuine and decorous definition. He argues that education should promote the development of skills that enable children to conduct their life as active and informed citizens, favouring their ethical participation in society (Dewey, 1916). Schools indoctrinate students instead, preparing them to comply with the established authoritarian system (Dewey, 1899). Creativity and critical thinking are hereby discouraged, together with any form of student participation.

Sir Ken Robinson (2006) argues that human intelligence is always diverse, dynamic, and interactive. In the construction of intelligence, creativity plays a vital role as it’s embedded in each of those elements. Robinson describes creativity as “the process of having original ideas that have value” and continues affirming that “creativity is just as important as literacy, and we should treat it with the same status” (2006). Children are naturally endowed with creative capacities, but by the time they become adults, most of them have lost them. Robinson (2006) attributes this loss to the modern education system. With the establishment, at the beginning of last century, of an education system modelled on the needs of the industrial revolution, schools had lowered the importance given to creativity and children are often educated out of it (Robinson, 2006).

Another students’ capability often overlooked by the standard education system is critical thinking. Robinson argues that “kids are capable of very sensitive profound assessments and judgments if they know they have a responsibility, and it rests on them to get it right” (AprendemosJuntos, 2018). Democratic schools provide a good example of it, basing their creed on including students in decision-making and promoting the development of selected skills. Communication and information, collaboration, thinking and problem-solving, and accountability and adaptability are essential skills for critical thinking (Joseph, 2019). Whereas conventional education
focuses on knowledge-based learning, primarily based on rote memorization of facts, alternative education goes beyond sheer knowledge, reaching for the next level of cognitive learning. At any stage of their learning, students are encouraged to climb up the pyramid of thinking, developing their full spectrum of intellectual abilities.

3.3 Education as a Practice of Domination

In 1970, Paulo Freire (2001) introduced the banking concept of education to contest the act of depositing knowledge, distinctive of conventional learning in a distorted dialectical narrative. Within this narrative, the teacher, as a Subject of the discourse, is the one detaining and transferring knowledge into a listening Object, the student. This perspective is at the root of a system of oppression wherein the subjugated student justifies the existence of the dominant teacher. Following this conception, students assume the role of subalterns (Spivak, 1988) in a hierarchical system where the dominant group (teachers) withhold power and the students are relegated to an alienating condition. Subalterns are unable to communicate; they don’t have agency or voice; they can’t speak, they are only spoken for - as in they are politically represented by other groups (Spivak, 1988). Education becomes an act of domination, wherein students are deprived of any creative power and indoctrinated to adapt to a world of oppression (Freire, 2001).

In his book Orientalism, Said (1978) analyses the subordination of groups of people in a post-colonial discourse. The process of hierarchical construction of differences between groups of people to legitimate colonial practices is referred to as othering (Said, 1978) and according to the author, it is based on false assumptions and a system of binary oppositions. The purpose of a binary system is to establish what is normal/good and what is abnormal/bad and to entail the supremacy of one group over the other (McEwan, 2018). Binaries like Self/Other, culture/nature, male/female have all been systematic to logics of historical domination (Haraway, 1991).
The process of othering formulated by Said, echoing with the Freirean banking concept of education, can be extended to the education field. In this case, the same constructed hierarchy along with the binary teacher/student, educated/uneducated can be easily identified as a requirement for an inherent structure of domination. Bhabha (1996) argues how dominant groups have an interest in employing the binary. The Other needs to learn from the Self, but at the same time remain in their category. This contradiction justifies the imposition of one upon the other. Consequently, where there is a student, there will always be a teacher.

In conclusion, the binary teacher/student implicit in the banking concept of education is the precondition of a dichotomy between human beings and the world, where ‘a person is merely in the world, not with the world or with others; and the individual is spectator, not re-creator’ (Freire, 2001). In this scenario, students are denied participation and excluded from the discourse. Their passive condition is a prerequisite to their alienation.

3.4 Education as a Practice of Freedom

According to structuralism, meaning is constructed in terms of binary oppositions, and elements of human culture can be understood in relation to one another (Marinaro, 2015). To understand the role of the teacher, there must be a student, and vice versa. Post-structuralist approaches are based on the deconstruction of the binary. Jacques Derrida argues that “one of the gestures of deconstruction is to not naturalise what isn’t natural, to not assume that what is conditioned by history, institutions or societies is natural” (Derrida, 2002).

Deconstruction theories challenge hierarchical, binary oppositions demonstrating how the two terms are not mutually exclusive but rather intertwined and linked (Lentricchia & McLaughlin, 1990). To counter the banking concept of education and the consequential condition of oppression that this brings about, deconstructing the teacher/student binary and re-assigning the two distinctive parts into the narrative, become essential.
Students must overturn their part in the narrative, shifting from listening objects to Subjects and losing their condition of subalterns. As Subjects, they can confront the problems of the world and understand their own position in relation to these problems (Spivak, 1988). The emancipation of the students stems from their engagement with reality. Reality is then perceived as a process undergoing constant transformation and students play an active role in it.

According to Freire (2001) liberating education is a cognitive act and not a transfer of information. Liberation, as a process of humanization, is a praxis: it requires people’s action and reflection upon the world to transform it. This practice, expressed by Freire with the concept of conscientização (2001), is the developmental process of an individual that becomes conscious of his/her own potential in the world as a human being. This process has transcended education and has become critical in a development context. Concepts such as liberating pedagogies and participatory communication are often the driving force in collective action in the struggle for social justice, inclusion, and human rights (Tufte, 2017).

With the liberation of the students comes the liberation of the teachers. By sharing decisional power with students and becoming facilitators, teachers also free themselves from the oppression of the binary. Both teachers and students turn into Subjects and take equal part in unveiling the reality. This process of co-intentional education allows both Subjects to re-create knowledge through combined action and reflection (Freire, 2001). By losing their dominant position and privileges, teachers are gifted with the opportunity to learn anew and gain knowledge of others (Spivak, 1988). Teachers become students themselves as they learn with and from their students. Teachers and students are now interconnected through dialogue. Dialogue implies participation and mutual understanding of one another, in an act of humility and love for the world and the people (Freire, 2001). Dialogue operates as a balancing force in power relations and has a pivotal role in the establishment of a horizontal communication necessary for participatory development (Beltrán, 2006).
4. Research Methodology

Considering the uniqueness of Mosaic in the context and their commitment to delivering high-quality education through participatory methodologies, a case-study design was selected as the research method of choice. This interpretive research offers teachers’ perspectives on the implementation of participatory methodologies in education. Introducing innovative practices, the case study aims to address the problems highlighted in the research questions, whilst providing a contribution to the research in the field.

4.1 The Case Study

Mosaic Learning Center is an international school in Bang Phra, located within Daruma Eco-Farm, an international community in the province of Chonburi, Thailand. Established in 2012, the school offers an alternative education option for the compulsory schooling years of a child (Mosaic Learning Center, 2022). Fully registered by the Thailand Ministry of Education and covering the required national curriculum, Mosaic claims to be “Thailand’s first (and only) English-language based alternative learning center” (Daruma Ecovillage, 2022).

According to the 2021 final numbers, by the end of the year Mosaic counted 107 students, all local as in coming from families that are established in Thailand rather than expats temporarily living in the country, with five international students as both parents are not from Thailand. Most of these families would be upper-middle-income, with a few middle-income and a few high-income. The student-teacher ratio is around 10:1, with 13 teachers enrolled, including full-time and part-time. Out of these 13, three are Thai, five Asian and five Western foreigners.

Mosaic uniqueness lies in its distinctive teaching methods. In fact, the school does not affiliate to any pre-existent pedagogical approach, but claims to have forged its own, combining alternative approaches with a more communitarian dimension. Based on relevant academic research while still understanding the societal requirements, Mosaic differs from any other schools in the area by putting
children first and using a holistic, comprehensive, and integrated approach (Mosaic Learning Center, 2022). Employing a student-centred, integrated curriculum while focusing on developing intellectuality and creativity, Mosaic’s intent is to instil and cultivate in the students a sense of self-discipline, personal responsibility, and an appreciation for learning.

4.2 Data

The collected data consist of video-recorded, semi-structured individual interviews with teachers. As the project requires the participation of human subjects for the collection of data, an official endorsement from Malmö University was received in the form of an information letter (Appendix A).

The qualitative interview was selected as the method of data collection for the study. The interview was preferred to other techniques as it provides highly qualitative data with the advantage of having participants sharing their own perspectives, emphasising what they believe is most relevant in their everyday life as teachers. As the flexibility of semi-structured interviews favours a genuine contribution from the interviewees without the constraint of an agenda, it also guarantees a certain amount of accountability. In fact, at any time, the researcher could redirect the conversation towards those issues the interview aims to address and ensure that the data collected are functional to the research questions (Brinkmann, 2008).

4.3 Participants

After obtaining official permission to conduct research from the directors of the Learning Center (Appendix B), participants were presented with the information letter regarding the nature of the project and asked to sign an informed consent (Appendix C) in accordance with research ethic codes (The Swedish Research Council, 2017). Special consideration was given to ethical questions concerning the position of the teacher (The Swedish Association of University Teachers and Researchers, 2005) and ethical principles in research involving children (Powell, et
al., 2013). In addition, any personal information was removed in the attempt to prevent the dissemination of sensitive data and minimise any risk of association for the participants (The Swedish Research Council, 2017).

Considering the size of the school, the selection of the sample population for the interviews was extended to the whole teaching staff. Eleven teachers eventually agreed to participate, including the two principals, all the homeroom teachers, the P.E. teacher, the maths teacher, and the special education teacher.

4.4 Research Design

The Research Design complies to the standards of qualitative research by being naturalistic, emergent and purposeful. In fact, the study refers to a real-world situation as it unfolds naturally; considers and welcomes new discoveries as the understanding of the study deepens; and presents new innovative perspectives on the points at issue (Labaree, 2022).

Whereas many studies agree on the importance of classroom methodologies that are apt to promote creativity and critical thinking, this research contributes to the field by revealing some unique participatory methodologies designed, developed, and implemented by teachers at Mosaic. The paper deeply engages with teachers’ personal experience, providing a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon under study. Adopting a critical and reflexive approach, the study probes Mosaic’s unique practices to discern how participatory methodologies can positively impact the academic formation of the students.

In this qualitative study, the data collected were highly relevant for the purpose of the paper, for the interviews strongly intertwined with the research questions. By unveiling Mosaic’s unique participatory practices, the study aims to offer a fresh take on teaching methods that can contribute to the existing literature, providing new pedagogical perspectives and addressing those social issues related to culture and society presented in the Literature Review.
4.5 The Process

The first stage of the process required thorough preparation for the interviews. A list of 10 key-questions was drafted. These key-questions would strongly engage with the research sub-questions of the study, while being highly relevant for the participants, as they probed their personal teaching experience at Mosaic. Meanwhile, interviews were scheduled according to teachers’ availability.

During the second stage of the process, the interviews were conducted. The questions were predominantly open-ended, giving the participants the opportunity to engage with them in the way they deemed most appropriate. The interviews, therefore, produced different outcomes. Whereas some participants enthusiastically provided reflections and practical examples about their experience, others preferred to express themselves more concisely. Consequently, the amount of data collected, and the length of the recordings varied between participants, with the shortest recording being approximately 30 minutes, and the longest more than 3 hours. Data were eventually transcribed.

In the third phase, thematic analysis was selected as a qualitative method of choice in the interpretation of data. As “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79), thematic analysis offered the opportunity to discern data and distinctly address the two sub-questions. Themes helped the researcher understand and navigate across the large amount of data collected, understanding the aspects of the phenomenon and the nexus between those aspects (Statistic Solutions, 2022).

Within the thematic analysis, a deductive approach was preferred to an inductive approach in the determination of themes. The selected themes hence reflect preconceived considerations and theories discussed in the Theoretical Framework. The selection of a latent approach instead of a semantic approach helped the researcher focus on assumptions and social context underlying the data (Caulfield, 2022).
The six steps of thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) allowed the researcher to present the data in a succinct yet detailed argument, coherently dispensed and in line with the Theoretical Framework. After a first familiarisation with the data, the researcher identified and highlighted codes, which were later analysed in the searching for themes and subthemes. During this stage, the idea of structuring the Analysis in two main parts emerged, one offering technical and pedagogical insight into the school system, the other discussing empowerment, children’s rights, and power relations. Data were then selected and allotted to themes and subthemes. With a concept map drafted, the researcher named the themes first, then reported the results according to the arranged structure, ensuring the pertinence of the analysis to the research questions and the theoretical framework.

The findings were presented describing the broad range of experiences emerged, while including multiple perspectives. A combination of writing styles guaranteed a concise yet faithful report of the findings, alternating between a traditional written format and the integration of quotes to support it (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Ultimately, pseudonyms were digitally generated to replace the names of the participants.

4.6 Findings

Embracing alternative approaches to education, which, per se, represents an innovative act in correlation to mainstream education in Thailand, Mosaic further distinguishes itself for methods that are unique in their genre. While the Analysis strongly engages with the two sub-questions, a more general answer to Question 1 is framed in the Conclusion, where the author critically reflects on the outcomes of the study, identifying strengths and weaknesses of the paper and offering an interpretation of the results. While the findings confirm the pertinence of the paper to the problematics presented in the Introduction, emerging scenarios project the study to wider contexts. The discourse becomes relevant to circumstances where similar educational and cultural dynamics are present, transcending Thai frontiers and expanding to the Global South.
4.7 Limitations

As a direct consequence to the methodologies and research design of choice, the study presents inevitable limitations that need to be acknowledged.

The first limitation concerns the selection of one single case study to address the research questions. Although intensive case studies are excellent tools for understanding schools’ complexity (Cook, 2001), they hardly provide a well-grounded basis for the generalisation of the results to a wider audience. Another factor that might influence the case study lies in the researcher’s interpretation of the results (researcher bias). Since a case study is based on the analysis of qualitative data, concepts could be misinterpreted, leading to distorted results (McLeod, 2019). Furthermore, direct exposure to the study of the case might affect the researcher bias, as for the case in question. Lastly, as the case represents a unique phenomenon, the interpretation of the finding can apply only to that particular case (Eugene & Lynn, 2021).

Another limitation can be identified in the selection of only one sample group for the interviews. Although the two sub-research questions are specifically intended for teachers, as they aim to unveil participatory methodologies adopted by teachers in the classroom, students’ opinions are entirely overlooked. Despite a willingness to include children’s voice in the research, the author eventually opted for limiting the study to teachers’ perspectives, considering the difficulties in conducting research with children in connection with the scope of a 15-credit thesis. Nevertheless, this negligence leaves some leeway for the conduction of further studies in the field, where children can take centre stage in the discourse.

Ultimately, a limitation concerning the studying of an international school. Considering the predominance of foreign teaching staff, the research is strongly conditioned by a foreign perspective. With only one Thai interviewee, the study fails to provide an adequate representation of Thai teachers.
5. Analysis

This section presents the empirical data collected from the interviews. During the coding two main themes emerged. The first one, named The System, describes the three main teaching methods adopted at Mosaic. During the interviews, participants constantly referred to these methods as pillars of their teaching life at Mosaic. Every participant discussed at least some aspects of each of these methods, which are analysed separately. The combination of these methods defines the school system, hereby the name of the theme. Most of the information about the methods was provided by one of the co-founders and accurately reported.

The second theme, named The School Culture, describes the ethics and moral values embraced by teachers at Mosaic. The name of the theme was selected as often used by the participants, particularly to highlight a distinction between Mosaic and conventional schools. Within this theme, two salient points distinctively emerged, originating the subthemes. The first one, Be Your Own Teacher, captures the concept of encouraging students to become independent learners; a concept that, although worded in different ways by the participants, appeared in 10 out of the 11 conducted interviews. The second subtheme, Growth Mindset, stems from the concept of encouraging the development of life skills in the students. Strongly emphasised by one of the principals, adopting a growth mindset language emerged from all the interviews, with participants discussing the importance of challenging students and developing skills other than knowledge.

5.1 The System

This theme originated from the need of providing the reader with a pragmatic understanding of the participatory practices adopted at Mosaic. The theme engages with the questions in a pedagogical way, exploring the system the school is built upon. Constantly summoned by the teachers during the interviews, these distinctive methods were conceived in the minds of the two co-founders in the early stages of the school and are employed and promoted daily. Inspired by alternative education and developed in an empirical and original style, these
methods represent the foundation of Mosaic and define the school’s identity. During the interviews, teachers constantly referred to these methods as guidelines in their teaching practices and they are hereby presented in no order of importance, as they all play a pivotal role in the system.

5.1.1 The Learning Journey

The Learning Journey is an alternative and integrated method of teaching. Contrary to conventional schools, which focus on subjects, Mosaic concentrates on a theme. The theme changes over time, making the Learning Journey a temporary event with a pre-established starting and finishing date. Running for the time of a trimester and cycling regularly throughout the academic year, one single Learning Journey provides thorough and comprehensive teaching of all the different areas of learning, without the segregation of teaching into subjects. Ms. Maxwell explained:

We choose a topic collectively; under that umbrella we incorporate all the directions of learning. We get to teach what we love to teach! It keeps the teachers engaged; we are encouraged to really teach what we love.

The idea of the Learning Journey originates from holistic and integrated learning, where teaching occurs across the curriculum. It’s a student-centred method, wherein teaching is the natural response to a human need, the interest of a student to learn something they don’t know enough about. From this concept originated the idea of embracing a theme to kindle children’s curiosity and use that sparkle to reach all the areas of learning.

Whereas alternative schools sometimes argue against adhering to a curriculum, Mosaic includes the Thai national curriculum in the Learning Journey. Re-organised in 8 directions of learning, the curriculum works as a guideline for

7 Interview with Ms. Maxwell, April 13, 2022.
8 The 8 directions of learning are: Art and Creative Expressions; Ecology; Economics; Geography; Literacy and Communication; Natural Science; Tools, Technology and Design and Worldview.
teachers and is essential in the validation of Mosaic as an effective school in compliance with the regulations provided by the Ministry of Education of Thailand. Mr. Shaw argued:

The Learning Journey is this idea that kids don't know what they don't know, and you must get them excited and introduce them to a topic or a subject. Kids are naturally inquisitive and, maybe, without being too critical of the conventional school system, a lot of the ways and the means of a conventional school are stifling that being inquisitive.\textsuperscript{9}

Influenced by ships and pirates at the time of its creation, and in line with the learning process formulated by Gattegno (1963), the Learning Journey is divided in four stages (see Figure 1):

1. **Discovery.** Represented by a telescope, it’s the conceptual idea of sailing across the sea and finding an unexplored island. During this brief initial stage, the theme is introduced to the students usually through games or by giving out clues until they find out what the Learning Journey is. It’s at this stage that their curiosity is triggered, and students start getting excited about what they are going to learn in the next couple of months.

2. **Exploration.** This stage is the gist of the Learning Journey and represents the time when students symbolically land on the island and explore what this has to offer. The compass is the symbol of this stage and illustrates the concept of exploring the 8 different directions of learning, each of them corresponding to a cardinal direction. It is also the longest of the 4 stages, lasting between 3 and 8 weeks. During this time, students have the chance to engage with the curriculum creatively, bridging the theme to the different areas of learning. Since integration is one of the core aspects of teaching at Mosaic, the compass best describes the correlation between these 8

\textsuperscript{9} Interview with Mr. Shaw, April 14, 2022.
directions of learning often overlapping with one another, similarly to what can be observed in a compass with its secondary intercardinal directions.  

3. **Investigation.** With the magnified glass as a symbol, this stage represents the close-up look that the students want to get about something they found particularly interesting during *Exploration* and wished they could have learnt more about. This stage is pure self-directed learning. Students identify what they want to further explore and take full responsibility for their own learning. Monitored and guided by teachers who make sure their topic of choice is relevant and challenging, students choose their own investigation. Encouraged to reflect and think through all the implications related to the investigation process, students gather information and acquire a thorough understanding of the subject studied.

4. **Mapping.** Indicated with the picture of a map, this stage concludes the Learning Journey. After completing *Investigation*, the students need to demonstrate that their study produced an outcome. This outcome, which in conventional school would be measured with a test, is instead, proven by some evidence of learning. There is no restriction on what this evidence can be, so students are encouraged to choose different methods every time. These methods include essays, photos, interviews, surveys, artistic representations, models, or any other authentic creation, either individually or collectively manufactured, that can be validated as a student’s learning portfolio. This will sometimes produce a sharing event, where the students have the chance to share the results of their work with the community, being this the entire school, but also friends and family who attend the event. On this day, students present what they have learnt in a variety of ways: a PowerPoint presentation, a play, a song, a poem, a performance, a fair exposing their creations, and so on.

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10 Eight shortest points in the compass rose, placed between cardinal (N, E, S, W) and intercardinal (NE, SE, SW, NW) directions.
The Learning Journey benefits from the combination of different teaching methods and engages with all the four domains of student development. Incorporating traditional, independent, experiential and play-based learning, this method offers a comprehensive and vibrant solution to the needs of a child, who is placed in the most natural state of learning.

The nature of the Learning Journey eliminates the problem of dealing directly with subjects. Since subjects are integrated in the theme, students don’t have the perception of school as the place where to learn maths, science, or geography. Instead, school becomes the Learning Journey, being this Challenge, Travel, Happiness, etc. Whether they like the theme or not, eventually it will come to an end, and a new Learning Journey will start. Mr. Shaw added:

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11 Examples of some of the previous themes of the Learning Journey.
Whatever the theme is at the end they get tired of it; everybody starts to look forward to the next Learning Journey; Discovery is like rebirth. That doesn't happen if you have maths class every single semester.  

5.1.2 The Clock

The Clock is a method that allows teachers to use their time effectively throughout the day. Since teaching comes in different forms and not necessarily all teaching happens at the board, Mosaic students can learn with a teacher, independently, under the supervision of a mentor or with their peers. Following this notion, the Clock equally divides school time in four different learning activities for the students:

1. **Personalised Learning Time (PLT).** PLT can be associated with conventional teaching, with students being part of a class led by a teacher. Though, the word *personalised* ensures that every single student receives bespoke teaching. This does not necessarily mean one-to-one teaching with all the students, but that every student receives adequate attention in correspondence to their learning needs and that these are equally understood and addressed by the teachers. Needs-based learning is shaped by tools and strategies, at teacher’s disposition, apt to facilitate personalised learning. Amongst them we find:
   - **Collective learning.** The process of learning as a team, where knowledge is shared amongst students, who work collectively in the pursuit of a goal.
   - **Streaming.** Students are grouped by abilities and teachers work with them in smaller groups.
   - **Mentoring.** A student is assigned to one or more other students to help them with their learning.
   - **Resource preparation.** Appropriate resources are dispensed according to the abilities of the students.

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12 Interview with Mr. Shaw, April 14, 2022.
2. **Project Work (PW).** PW is Mosaic’s answer to homework. While giving homework is highly discouraged at Mosaic, PW is individual work that needs to be done by the students at school daily. Depending on their age and level, students engage with what they learn by being assigned a research project, a follow-up activity, or a task, either given after a session of learning or as part of a project list. With teachers monitoring PW as it happens, students are solicited to be responsible for their own learning and encouraged to work independently.

3. **Community and Mentoring Time (CMT).** During CMT students become directly involved in the learning process of other scholars. Older students learn how to take care of younger students, facilitating their learning. At the same time, young students are guided by those that have already gained expertise in a particular task or skill. CMT spans from duties such as serving lunch, cleaning, doing chores around the farm, etc., to tutoring where the learning needs of younger students are addressed, as it could be for reading practice, maths, or grammar abilities. In each of these situations, older students act as mentors and supervisors for the younger students. While putting into practice their skills and abilities, and serving the community, mentors take the role of teachers, role models, trusted advisors, or allies for the mentee.

4. **Expedition.** Expedition is the time when students can choose to do what they like. It’s a positive response to recess, which meaning denotes a temporary break from learning. Expedition stems from the idea that learning occurs at any time and any situation, therefore *Expedition* is also learning. During this time students learn life lessons by playing together, sharing toys, engaging in conversation with their friends, dealing with situations of conflict, and so on. With teachers monitoring, students are encouraged to engage in social interaction and improve their soft skills.
5.1.3 The Crew Code

Stemming from a survival skill training lesson, the Crew Code is a conceptual framework of directives with the goal of helping students learn life skills. Amongst these skills emerge problem solving, leadership, decision making, critical and creative thinking, communication and interpersonal skills, self-discipline, and emotional intelligence. The Crew Code simplifies the complexity of these concepts in a symbolic and comprehensible step-by-step guide that inculcates in the children a sense of responsibility for their own actions. In this regard, Ms. Maxwell explained:

All these words meaning a thousand words; when combined, the children can hold it and understand it.13

Teachers at Mosaic use the Crew Code at any time and in any given situation by presenting one (or more) of its five main key points to the child. The student will then engage critically with the Crew Code, reflecting upon the meaning of the concept called to attention, while considering the cause-and-effect relationship of his/her own actions. The desired outcome produced by this reflection is the adjustment of student’s actions in pursuing a virtuous behaviour. It is worth mentioning that teachers do not offer a solution to a problem, or influence the student, who instead, comes to a conclusion independently, after being solicited for a reflective practice.

The five key points of the Crew Code are:

1. **Place.** Where are you? What is the situation you are in? Determine where you are. Assess the situation. It’s a call to awareness.
2. **Destination.** What is your goal? Where are you trying to go? Stay focused on what you want to achieve. It’s thinking critically, planning.
3. **Path.** What’s the best way to go? Is it the right way to get where you are headed to? The safest, the easiest, the fastest way? It’s problem solving and decision making.

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13 Interview with Ms. Maxwell, April 19, 2022.
4. **Spirit.** How do you face this challenge? Keep a positive attitude. Keep yourself motivated. This point is related to the emotional realm. It’s emotional intelligence, self-discipline.

5. **Crew.** Take care of yourself, but also the others. Share. Help each other. It’s sense of community, teamwork, communication, and interpersonal skills.

Originally developed with the purpose of aiding students in an emergency setting, the Crew Code was then integrated to the entire school system. It is, in fact, employed in different situations as a method that teaches how to think. It is so embedded in the school culture that no other words rather than the Crew Code key point in question is needed. Teachers use the Crew Code as a tool to remind students to think of what is expected from them or what their best options are. Children wandering around the school during lunchtime could be simply asked about *Place* as to raise their awareness about the location in which they are when they should be at the canteen ready for lunch. At the hearing of the word *Destination*, a distracted child could find focus on the work, while *Path* could be used with a student taking the long way to a class just to go see or bother some other students. *Spirit* would most likely be used when a child gets discouraged over a challenging task and *Crew* could be uttered in a playing scenario where children forget about sharing. These are all examples of how the Crew Code is implemented in naturally occurring situations at Mosaic.

The Crew Code, in its authentic form of regulating tool for teaching survival skills, is still adopted on a weekly basis. On Friday afternoon, all students in the school come together for Crew activities. During this time the pupils are divided in four ships, each ship including students of different age levels, ranging from kindergarten to high school. Ranks comprising a pathfinder, a scout, a guide, and a navigator would determine the role of some students within the ship, with some other students offered a positional role as captain, co-captain, and section-leader. Crew activities are planned to develop the leadership and the followership of the students according to their age and characteristics. Students learn how to solve
problems collectively and co-operate in these real-world scenarios, apt to develop long-lasting skills that will guide them through their life.

5.2 The School Culture

In this section, the paper provides an overall understanding of the philosophy of the school. Exploring participatory methodologies in education through the words of Mosaic teachers, the theme engages with the concepts discussed in the Theoretical Framework.

5.2.1 Be Your Own Teacher

This theme focuses on the concept of cultivating independent learners and the relationship between students and teachers at Mosaic. During the interviews, participants often discussed the importance of students becoming responsible for their learning and the key role of teachers in facilitating the process.

Starting from the analysis of Mosaic Vision and Mission, it is possible to discern a correlation between pedagogy and the interdisciplinary field of C4D.

Vision

Citizens and communities that recognize global responsibility and are empowered through life-long learning to make a thoughtful, intelligent, and positive impact on the world around them.

Mission

To instil and cultivate self-discipline, personal responsibility, and an appreciation of learning by employing a student centred, integrated curriculum, rich in both intellectual development and creative expression.

From the interviews emerged that Mosaic’s pedagogy embraces education in its wider interpretation: the acquisition of all those elements necessary to an
individual to construct a personal and social identity in global society. Ms. Maxwell claimed:

Our focus is to make sure that these people become good global citizens, thoughtful kind and caring, and learn about culture, rising skills, resilience, critical thinking [...]; in short preparing them for the world instead of preparing them for another academic setting.¹⁴

Often overlooked in the schooling system, these elements include knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, habits, and personal development (UNESCO, 2021). Commenting on the goals of a Mosaic teacher, Mr. Hopson claimed:

It’s a people-focused concept. In education we need to teach 1+1, etc. At Mosaic, that’s not what we need to teach. That’s what kids need to learn and understand, but as adults and teachers, as mentors, we need to teach them life. We need to let them start to think and interact and experience things. Rather than kids sitting down and be taught by teachers, they are there engaging in their own learning, in a sense that they are learning to be responsible for their own learning.¹⁵

Teachers explained that achieving this goal is possible only through the establishment of a good environment. Mosaic is a growing, yet small community of people. From this family-like, nurturing environment, children are fostered on humanitarian principles of respect, tolerance, collaboration, and solidarity, while offered learning solutions tailored to their own interests and abilities. Given their naturally inquisitive predisposition, when immersed in a respectful and encouraging setting, children thrive. Ms. Law explained:

At Mosaic we teach the core aspects of education, emotional, physical, spiritual, and mental, while in traditional schools, teachers mostly focus on knowledge. At Mosaic you are the parents of those children, the second parents. Every single minute you

¹⁴ Interview with Ms. Maxwell, April 13, 2022.
¹⁵ Interview with Mr. Hopson, April 19, 2022.
should know where your kids are. [...] We prepare our kids, not for the next level of education, but we prepare them for life.\textsuperscript{16}

At Mosaic, teaching is intended as a student-centred, integrated, and holistic practice. Mr. Shaw argued that learning can’t be split into small pieces, as in maths, science, etc., for life doesn’t work that way.\textsuperscript{17} Instead, starting from the genuine interest children have for life, teachers help them engage with the world around them. As discussed by Spivak (1988), with the engagement with reality, comes the emancipation of the students. Students get a deeper understanding of the world and its complexities, but also develop a desire towards learning, as this becomes the natural response to curiosity. Learning therefore, occurs naturally and its effects on the child are amplified, when stimulated by an innate human feeling. Using the words of Mr. Watts:

Almost half of the students coming from conventional schools go to college. Even when they go to college and get a diploma, they are still ‘blank’, they have no idea what to do next. Mosaic children have a desire for what they want to do [...] it’s a mindset. Mosaic teaches students to be responsible for their learning.\textsuperscript{18}

Mr. Harris explained that in this process, Mosaic teachers act as facilitators, encouraging students to discover and explore what they are passionate about and grow a sense of appreciation for learning.\textsuperscript{19} First, students become aware of what they want to learn, and then, guided by teachers who challenge and provide them with the right learning tools, they achieve their learning objectives. In line with the previously discussed concept of subordination of teaching to learning formulated by Gattegno (1963), students become responsible for their own learning. Endorsing this notion, Ms. Gallagher added:

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\textsuperscript{16} Interview with Ms. Law, April 13, 2022.
\textsuperscript{17} Interview with Mr. Shaw, April 14, 2022.
\textsuperscript{18} Interview with Mr. Watts, April 13, 2022.
\textsuperscript{19} Interview with Mr. Harris, April 21, 2022.
When they come to Mosaic, they first experience this complete freedom, and it takes them a couple of months to realise that is all about themselves. It’s your choice, your responsibility, your thing to learn. Start doing it.\(^\text{20}\)

In reference to Freire’s concept of liberating education, dialogue allows teachers and students to free themselves from the oppression of the binary (2001). Ms. Law affirmed that the student-teacher relationship is based on mutual respect and collaboration:

We got to work together: you listen to me, I listen to you; you speak, I speak.\(^\text{21}\)

As argued by Spivak (1988), when they obtain the ability to speak for themselves, individuals lose their subaltern condition. With teachers sharing decisional power with students, the hierarchy embedded in the student-teacher relationship is removed and the binary is deconstructed (Derrida, 2002). With dialogue working as a liberating tool, students are encouraged to participate and express their opinions. Ms. Cherry explained that:

Every child is given a chance to choose what they like, and that choice is respected.\(^\text{22}\)

Ms. Gallagher explained how students and teachers continuously discuss every aspect of their life at Mosaic, considering and respecting everybody’s opinion, questioning and reflecting on the validity of everyone’s actions and words. She argued that children at Mosaic are confident to express themselves and their voices are included in the decision-making process:

There are times when children question the systems and that’s what we want them to say. “Why do we do it like this? It’s raining today we can’t do the normal system”

\(^{20}\) Interview with Ms. Gallagher, April 20, 2022.

\(^{21}\) Interview with Ms. Law, April 13, 2022.

\(^{22}\) Interview with Ms. Cherry, April 30, 2022.
and we have a chance to discuss with them to say “ok, it’s not going to work today, what could we do instead?”  

Dialogue is promoted in and outside the classroom, with teachers welcoming questions, but at the same time, questioning students back at any stage of their learning to encourage the development of independent learning and critical thinking, as opposed to providing answers and telling them what to do. This concept aligns with The-Silent-Way method developed by Gattegno (1963), by which instead of transferring knowledge, teachers generate a sense of awareness in the students. Here’s a practical example from Mr. Shaw:

If they come over to you and say: “my ball is in the bushes”, [...] you can say “well ok, what are you are going to do?”, and this is not about teaching them how to get the ball, it’s teaching them how to get ready for second-grade type of problems, and high school, and life.  

Students are therefore pushed into problem-solving mode. Through these practices they realise that their learning doesn’t necessarily depend on teachers, since they can be their own teachers, and everybody in the school community can be a teacher for somebody else. Ms. Gallagher explained that from this idea originated the motto of the school: *Everybody is a teacher*, as in everyone in the community is endowed with some unique skills that can be shared with others.

### 5.2.2 Growth Mindset

With participants often debating the importance of promoting a growth mindset in their methods, data are presented through the analysis of Dewey’s concept of developing useful skills that allow students to unlock their potential and

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23 Interview with Ms. Gallagher, April 20, 2022.
24 Interview with Mr. Shaw, April 14, 2022.
25 Interview with Ms. Gallagher, April 20, 2022.
become active citizens (1897), and Robinson’s notions around critical thinking and creativity (2006).

As it emerges from the Mission, Mosaic focuses on the development of a growth mindset in the students. Once the children attain the ability to think critically and take responsibility for their own learning, the development of other skills will follow. As argued by Dewey (1897), schools should encourage the development of skills that enable children to realise their full potential. According to Mr. Shaw, at Mosaic, all students are individually nurtured and provided with life skills that allow them to respond confidently and independently to the many challenges life will present them.26 Ms. Butler explained:

We do a lot of fun stuff that enables the children to develop their skills, so they can use them in their daily life. Most of our teaching is based on real-life experience. It is not just academic skills, but physical skills, mental and social skills: all those things that we use every day in our life.27

Embracing the farm-life culture, within settings Mosaic is located, learning happens inside and outside the classroom. Students engage with real life scenarios, getting an understanding of the world through experiential learning. Here’s an example shared by Ms. Maxwell:

We have gone out to pick up trash and we found a dead dog, and some of the kids got really scared and nervous about it [...] so, we decided to give this dog a burial.28

Through projects and collaborative activities based on real life situations and guided by teachers, students work together and apply their knowledge, skills, and expertise to find solutions to naturally occurring problems. Robison (2006) argues that this type of learning activates children’s intellect critically and creatively, while

26 Interview with Mr. Shaw, April 14, 2022.
27 Interview with Ms. Butler, April 17, 2022.
28 Interview with Ms. Maxwell, April 13, 2022.
favouring their emotional and social development. Ms. Gallagher elaborated on how Mosaic teachers promote this type of development:

Even if you teach kindergarten, you don’t want kids just to remember things, you want them to analyse things. Instead of telling them to put their shoes on, we tell them to get ready, they need to figure out what to do.²⁹

This type of learning embraces the concept of conscientização formulated by Freire (2001), by which students become aware of their potential as human beings. Ms. Smith further described the importance of inviting students to think critically and creatively to form their own opinions:

In Thai schools, teachers always have the path for the students to follow. At Mosaic we let them do what they think. For example, we give them some materials, they plan what materials they are going to use, and use their creativity to make their own work.³⁰

In this community-based environment, teachers focus on all four domains of childhood development: physical, cognitive, language, and social-emotional (Fraser-Thill, 2021). Students are therefore treated as unique, and their development is handled accordingly to every aspect of their own individual needs. Discussing student-centred education, Ms. Maxwell stated:

A lot of typical schools don’t do that, [...] they don’t have teachers that are trained to come up with a single plan for a single student, they must come up with a general plan for a big group of students and it leaves a lot of people out in the cold. The Mosaic method does not, every single one of these children has different goals than the student sitting next to them.³¹

Another element that promotes the development of a growth mindset is the absence of tests at Mosaic. Students’ work, collected in portfolios, accounts as

²⁹ Interview with Ms. Gallagher, April 20, 2022.
³⁰ Interview with Mr. Smith, April 15, 2022.
³¹ Interview with Ms. Maxwell, April 13, 2022.
evidence of learning. However, teachers still evaluate learning by constantly monitoring and addressing each student’s individual learning objectives. Mr. Harris explained:

If a student turns in a piece of work and it’s not satisfactory, we give it back to them and ask them to do it again. [...] Students are expected to push a little hard. Revise your writing, try again. And in the end, there is never really a score given.32

By reviewing their own writing and being encouraged to improve the level of their work, Mosaic students learn from their own mistakes as they progress in their learning curve. As discussed by Dewey (1902), teachers play a conductive and critical role in students’ learning process. Mosaic teachers help students identify their learning objectives as they challenge and inspire them.

As these practices occur, English is never the focus of teaching. Mr. Shaw argued that Mosaic teachers concentrate on the national curriculum and incorporate English as a method of delivering, almost exclusively.33 English is therefore ever-present at Mosaic, with children being immersed in an English-speaking environment. We don’t teach English; we teach in English is a cornerstone of Mosaic philosophy. Mr. Hopson added:

I don’t teach the kids English. I correct their English, I help them with English, I explain words to them, but English is never the focus on anything we are doing, and they are all fluent in English.34

As Mosaic values differ from those of conventional Thai schools, so does the mindset of Mosaic students. With a solid understanding that there is no right or wrong in the learning process, children at Mosaic don’t normally display that
passivity or indifference towards learning, noticeable in conventional settings.

Discussing the stance of students at Mosaic, Mr. Shaw argued:

They are maybe less formal with us, but we didn’t try to find a workaround for this problem of shyness or overly respectful students. We didn’t design a solution to this, the solutions just came about because of other things, the problem kind of went away.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{35} Interview with Mr. Shaw, April 14, 2022.
6. Conclusions

The Analysis offers a thorough answer to the two sub-questions. Through teachers’ testimonies, it emerges how Mosaic participatory practices favour students’ acquisition of practical skills and a progressive mindset. The school culture and the system are, per se, likely to promote social change. At Mosaic, a sense of children’s agency is promoted by including students’ opinions in decision-making and encouraging children to take responsibility for their own learning. With participatory practices that foster students’ ability to think critically and creatively while being immersed in a nurturing environment, students bloom in every aspect of their social, emotional, and intellectual development.

Addressing the main key points raised in the Introduction and Literature Review, the Analysis presents some innovative methodologies in education, while answering questions related to empowerment, power relations and social change, as it cross-refers to the Theoretical Framework. However, some criticism can be advanced.

First, despite the seemingly effectiveness of the system, it can be argued that the implementation of those practices designed to help students think critically, could eventually lead to systematic students unable to think outside the system. Second, the absence of an actual method of evaluation makes the assessment of students’ learning open to interpretation. It can be argued that any form of evaluation is designed by somebody and therefore biased. It is also arguable that having a standard method of evaluation could help teachers understand the effectiveness of their teaching methods, and gauge students’ learning. Lastly, some thoughts around empowering children. Despite including students’ opinions in decision-making, Mosaic teachers constantly monitor and moderate the viability of children’s perspectives. Whereas this behaviour is still, by far, more liberal than what conventional schools concede, it can also be interpreted as a tokenistic and illusory form of empowerment.
After careful consideration of the Analysis and addressing the main research question, how can Mosaic participatory methodologies offer a valid solution to the contested practices of the Thai education system, and how is this relevant in a C4D perspective?

It can be argued that participation, in itself, works as a teaching tool. The Analysis shows that when empowered and given a sense of agency, students are motivated, involved and more inclined to perform well, as learning becomes the natural response to a human need. Participation, therefore, could be a solution to Thai students’ lack of motivation and indifference towards learning discussed in the Introduction, becoming instrumental in bringing about social change.

Another argument that can be sustained regards the furtherance of a community-like school environment, where teachers and families work together, pursuing children’s development as a common goal. Establishing a participative culture based on respect in and outside the school would address the cultural issues presented in the Literature Review. As it emerges from the Analysis, students thrive when nurtured, supported, and guided. With dialogue working as a liberating tool and adopting a student-centred approach, teachers can facilitate students’ learning and enable children to become active citizens and empowered individuals. On this assumption and if applicable, similar considerations can be extended to the Global South and the Global North alike, challenging conventional practices as a prevailing form of education.

Although the paper contributes to the field by offering new interpretations on the implementation of participatory methodologies in education, it is worth underlining that there is the need for more research, particularly including children’s voice on the matter. However, the findings of this study seem to validate the effectiveness of participatory methodologies in education and in promoting social change.

After further reflection and considering education from a wider perspective, additional stirring questions arise. Can participation assume a predominant role in
education, or will it always represent a niche in the field? will alternative education eventually dethrone traditional education and rise to become the mainstream model? why is traditional education so reluctant to change?

Participatory methodologies have enormous potential for rejuvenating the education system and promoting social change. Besides providing evidence supporting this argument, this paper carries within the hope that participatory methodologies in education could eventually spread like wildfire, contributing to shaping a better world for future generations.
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# Appendices

## Appendix A (1/2)

**Information letter MA thesis project Lorenzo Bonvini**

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<th>MA thesis project title:</th>
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<td>Participatory practices in the classroom: a case study on empowering students within the primary education system in Thailand.</td>
<td>3 March 2022</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associate Professor Tobias Denskus, DPhil</td>
<td>Education: Communication for Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your e-mail: <a href="mailto:Lorenzobonvini84@gmail.com">Lorenzobonvini84@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>Level: Master’s programme</td>
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Dear respondent,

My name is Lorenzo Bonvini and I am a student in Communication for Development at Malmö University. Under the supervision of Dr Vittorio Felci, I am currently conducting a research study on educational practices as part of my master’s thesis.

The purpose of this study is to investigate participatory methods within the primary education system in Thailand. The application of participatory methods is considered uncommon in the Thai education system. The research study aims to explore these methods as a means of empowering students and promoting classroom equity on one side and fostering students’ curiosity and critical thinking while enhancing the learning of English on the other. It is my understanding that you are part of a school system where the use of participatory methods is encouraged, and you, as a teacher, include these methods in your teaching practices. The results of this study will hopefully contribute to raising awareness of the advantages of adopting participatory methods in the Thai education system.

The study will be carried out through interviews, which will take place after mutual agreement with the participants, sometime between March and May 2022. The participants will be selected according to their experience and involvement as teachers in the designated learning center.

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. Under no circumstances you are obliged to participate in the study. If you wish so, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time and no explanation is necessary. The information collected will be treated as confidential and used for informative purposes in relation to the study. Finally, all efforts to protect your identity will be taken.
We strive to guarantee confidentiality in the study in that no unauthorized person may have access to the material. The material is stored so that it is only accessible for the individual or individuals leading the study. In the reporting of results in the form of a degree project paper at Malmö University or in another form of publication, the respondents will be unidentifiable, and it will not be possible to link the results to individuals.

Once completed, the degree project will be digitally stored and made publicly available at the university’s digital repository.

You are hereby asked to take part in this study.

I approve the letter

TOBIAS DENSKUS
Tobias Denskus, DPhil.
Associate Professor Development Studies
Program Coordinator MA Communication for Development
Kont, kultur och kommunikation, K3 | School of Arts and Communication, K3
Malmö Universitet | Malmö University
205 06 Malmö, Sweden
## Permit to conduct research MA thesis project Lorenzo Bonvini

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<td>Education: Communication for Development</td>
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<td>Your E-mail:</td>
<td>Level: Master’s programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lorenzo <a href="mailto:bonvini84@gmail.com">bonvini84@gmail.com</a></td>
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Hereby, I offer the following student/students permission to conduct the above-mentioned study in my working area.

Name: Lorenzo Bonvini

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Informed consent MA thesis project Lorenzo Bonvini

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<td>Communication for Development</td>
</tr>
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| Level: | |
|--------| |
| Master’s programme | |

I have been verbally informed about the study and read the accompanying written information. I am aware that my participation is voluntary, and that I, at any time and without explanation, can withdraw my participation. The person/s leading the study will strive to guarantee confidentiality in that no unauthorized person may have access to the material. The gathered material will be stored properly and used for research purposes only.

I hereby submit my consent to participate in the above survey:

Date: ……………………………………………………………………………

Participant’s signature: ………………………………………………………