

Staying Connected During a Pandemic:

Leveraging digital technologies for Vietnamese home-based care providers

Maya Bowen, Sandra Mak,
Daphne Feng, and Alice Wong,
OneSky

Imagine you are a parent moving from a tiny rural village in Vietnam to one of the country's large industrial parks to work in a factory. While you put in the long hours to earn an income, who is looking after your children?

Vietnam has been experiencing remarkable economic growth, which has brought about a mass urban migration. Today, over 80% of Vietnam's factory workers are women and 1.2 million children are living in 300 industrial parks in more than 30 economic zones.¹ Despite the large number of young children, there is no public child care for children under 3 years old and public kindergartens are out of reach for many families because of high associated costs and residency status requirements.² Given these barriers, an alternative of home-based care centers (HBCs) has emerged to fill the service gap. Largely operated by local women out of their homes, the HBCs are often overcrowded, with as many as 49 children being looked after for 12 or more hours a day. Lack of regulation means that these care services seldom provide opportunities for children to receive the stimulation so critical for development in those early years.

OneSky in Vietnam

In 2018, OneSky, in collaboration with the Vietnamese government, launched a program to provide training to home-based care providers in a Da Nang industrial zone. HBC providers participated in an 11-month training focused on responsive caregiving, nurturing, and promoting an appropriate learning environment that supports young children's developmental needs. The training takes a blended learning approach, with three components:

- **Face-to-face classroom training.** OneSky trainers lead 20 in-person sessions on various early childhood care and education (ECCE) topics using a variety of learning methods, such as demonstrations, role plays, discussions, and media.
- **Bi-monthly coaching on best practices.** Trainers visit home centers to give feedback to the provider while supporting them in applying what they learned in training.
- **1BigFamily online learning platform for continuous support and learning.** 1BigFamily provides discussion forums, access to ECCE professionals who will answer questions, homemade toy activity sheets, mini teaching videos, and other ECCE resources.

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Together, these three components create a learning experience that can meet the needs of any participant. The Vietnamese government recognizes the successful implementation of the HBC pilot training, and has since endorsed expanding the training to 19 additional provinces.

Digital Learning and Child Care Providers

Digital learning has become a popular medium of instruction due to its effectiveness in disseminating knowledge to anyone, anywhere, at any time.³ It can be especially useful for training and teaching busy child care workers who have little time to spare for professional development. With digital learning, trainees and students can learn through a variety of ways, including forum discussions, videos, access to resources, practice scenarios, and much more. With the ability to reach a greater number of people and ensure that they are receiving quality education on ECCE best practices, digital learning helps build the capacity of better trained and more skilled ECCE workers to provide quality care to young children.

While digital learning has opened many doors for education and training, it also has some limitations. Remote learning can lack the interpersonal interactions and real-time support provided through face-to-face learning. A preferred solution is blended learning, which provides a balance of face-to-face learning and digital learning. Depending on the program, the balance can be calibrated to meet the needs of specific learning groups. In OneSky's HBC training, we have the opportunity to teach not only in the classroom, but also at the trainees' homes. In order to help trainers and trainees develop better relationships, our blended curriculum gives more focus to the

in-person components, while the digital learning component is used as a learning supplement.

Impact of COVID-19 on the ECD Workforce

The COVID-19 pandemic had huge global impacts on children's education, affecting over 90% of the world's total enrolled student population.⁴ The effects on the early childhood education workforce were especially troublesome. Due to mass school closures, many child care workers lost their jobs or were asked to adjust to digital learning with little preparation or support.

In Vietnam, all schools, including HBCs, were required to close. OneSky surveyed 136 HBC providers who were attending our training in Quang Nam province and found they were experiencing very high levels of stress; they identified financial struggles as their greatest challenge.⁵ Approximately 36% reported that they stayed at home without engaging in any work; the remainder of the respondents reported trying various types of work, such as farming or selling goods online, to make some income. When allowed to reopen, many HBC providers were reporting lower enrollment, as unemployed families could no longer afford the costs for care. The physical and psychological adaptations necessary as a result of the pandemic had long-lasting harmful effects on the ECD workforce and, in turn, on the children.

OneSky's Use of Digital Tools During the Pandemic

Following the government safety measures, OneSky temporarily suspended all in-person components of the HBC training program. With no face-to-face training, it inverted the curriculum balance to focus more on digital learning. As a result





of our original blended learning approach, OneSky already had a platform in place for digital learning and our trainers had some digital literacy skills. While we had the foundation in place, the shift provided us the opportunity to enhance the digital learning component of our curriculum. We used digital learning to help trainers further develop their virtual educational expertise, creating an online community for HBC providers, and sharing materials for their use in supporting parents.

• Digital Creation by OneSky Trainers

The suspension of programs provided OneSky trainers the unexpected opportunity to shift from guiding existing learning content to becoming content creators themselves. Before the pandemic, a trainer's main roles were providing face-to-face teaching and sharing the digital content on 1BigFamily that was provided for them. After the pandemic, trainers had the opportunity to be more involved in the creation of the learning materials. Trainers created new digital resources, including COVID-19 reference materials, tutorials, and training videos. As they created these tutorial videos, trainers learned to use new digital equipment and developed a variety of techniques to create online content to meet the needs of their learners.

Trainers came up with many creative ideas to actively engage the learners, such as using props, implementing quizzes, providing breaks for brainstorming, using pre-recorded role plays, and developing guided questions for discussions. Collaboratively, the trainers created a media library of over 55 mini-videos. Having the trainers develop the content, present

the content, and film and edit the videos themselves gave them more confidence and ownership in their work. HBC providers connected more with the learning materials. Also, the trainer-created learning content was more relatable and relevant to the learners' needs. After watching one of the COVID-19 videos made by the trainer, an HBC provider was inspired to create a video herself.

• Digital Community for HBC Providers

HBC providers used digital tools, such as 1BigFamily and messaging platforms, to stay connected and share ideas to support each other throughout the shutdown. Trainers helped set up group video calls to check in with each other and share updates. Trainers also shared guidelines for reopening HBCs after the pandemic. Providers would ask questions and discuss tips or ideas on how they could follow the guidelines and prepare themselves for the return of their children. Providers were connecting on 1BigFamily, where trainers started discussion forums on proper hand washing, wearing and disposing of masks, and other tips for child caregivers during the pandemic. After an article was posted on keeping a classroom clean, HBC providers started sharing photos of the sanitation measures they were taking in their own classrooms. They maximized the use of 1BigFamily to share their experiences as they responded to the pandemic at their HBCs. Beyond that, providers organically started chat groups on social communication platforms to strengthen social relationships, which were needed more than ever during the pandemic.



• Promoting Play at Home

HBC providers were able to use 1BigFamily to continue supporting parents by providing ideas and resources on how to engage children in play. Making toys has always been a highlight during the OneSky training to promote play. A homemade toy competition was held on 1BigFamily. The HBC providers shared their creations made with inexpensive household recycled items, such as yoghurt cups, cardboard boxes, bamboo chopsticks, and water bottles. Trainers posted tutorial videos on 1BigFamily that relayed the joy of building positive attachment when collaboratively creating low-cost toys and playing together as a family. For example, a tutorial video on how to create a homemade “whack-a-mole” game was posted on 1BigFamily to inspire the HBC providers. The HBC providers shared the activity with parents who, in turn, created their own games. HBC providers shared the parents’ videos on 1BigFamily and encouraged other HBC providers to share with parents to engage families. HBC providers also used the discussion thread to share their own experiences connecting with children and families. With digital learning, we were able to not only provide learning and support to the HBC providers who were in our training, but also reach the parents and families of the children the HBC providers were caring for.

Moving Beyond the Pandemic

During the pandemic, OneSky used digital experience gained from a blended learning approach to develop our staff’s digital expertise, stay connected with the community, and support parents—all while social distancing. In the process, OneSky created a vast collection of curriculum materials, including videos, activities, and photos. While they were all created during the time of a pandemic, the materials are still useful and applicable for non-crisis times. Content such as the review videos could be used to help HBC providers who miss training due to late enrollment or to engage future graduating cohorts.

While digital learning opened many doors for continued education, it was also noted that technological tools and access to data needed for digital learning are not well developed in many low-resource communities. Therefore, solutions such as lowering video resolution were experimented with and we continue to explore ways we can make digital learning more accessible. In addition, our trainers and HBC providers started off with only basic to low technological abilities. Given the pressing need to use 1BigFamily to provide support and learning, our trainers stepped up and took on the challenge of developing those skills. The digital competencies they developed will be skills and knowledge they carry with them as they continue to train new learners. With the improved digital expertise and a library of online learning materials, we

were able to evolve our virtual learning component and bring it to the level needed as the program expands to new provinces and is eventually brought to scale.

Notes:

¹ General Statistics Office. (2015). *Viet Nam 2013-14 MIS final report*.

² UNESCO. (2013). *Out-of-school children in Vietnam: A country study*. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002343/234310e.pdf>

³ Philipsen, B., Tondeur, J., Pareja Roblin, N., Vanslambrouck, S., & Zhu, C. (2019). Improving teacher professional development for online and blended learning: A systematic meta-aggregative review. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 67, 1145–1174. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-019-09645-8>

⁴ ARNEC. (2020). *ARNEC’s webinar series: Young children amidst COVID-19. #7. The ECD workforce matters, too: Profiles, impacts, and support measures during and beyond the pandemic* [Webinar]. Retrieved from https://arnec.net/static/uploads/Webinar%207_The%20ECD%20Workforce%20Matters.pdf

⁵ OneSky. (2020). *HBC resuming training survey*. Unpublished internal OneSky report.

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