

# Timor-Leste Kindergarten

## Jigsaw Project

*From little things ..... big things grow*

### Jigsaw Project

**Aim:** Every pre-school child in Timor-Leste having access to culturally appropriate jigsaws in order to help develop their critical thinking skills.

**"Now let me sort the pieces!"**



### Educational background

Jigsaws provide one of the best brain building exercises for young children:

- they help develop problem solving and logical skills, language skills and pattern recognition (for reading, maths and so much else)
- great also for concentration and
- they provide a sense of success and achievement. Have you noticed how children love doing the same puzzle over and over again?

Most children in Timor have not had access to jigsaws and as a result:

- have not played with them since they were babies, and
- have not had an adult talking with them about 'edges', 'corners', 'blue sky', 'green grass', 'what shape is this piece?' and 'where do you think this piece might go?'

### So what to do about it?

Tackle the problem head on by:

- producing jigsaws from Timorese photos
- offering the jigsaws to pre-primary teachers – **but with a catch:** "do a day's training on critical thinking and be rewarded with a plastic storage box containing 12 jigsaws for your classroom!"

### Jigsaws? Where from?

**WoodPuzzles.com.au** – a small family business operating out of a garage in Queensland has helped us out before and sure enough their generosity has again extended to them making the jigsaws for us at rock-bottom price – in fact 25% of their retail.

**Photos** – 14 high quality images were begged and cajoled out of people who have travelled to Timor. One professional photographer donated 3.



**There has to be a jigsaw of Timor!**

**Money** – My friends and family forsook Christmas presents and donated seeding funds to the tune of \$1,500 so that the first batch could be ordered.

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### **What next?**

On our recent July trip to Timor we worked with a number of adults to test our theories.

Yes, they all randomly picked a piece, tried it and then rejected it. Repeated the process ... and minutes later they were VERY frustrated.

No wonder teachers resort to disciplinarian methods and rote learning styles in their teaching. **If you are on shaky ground and don't really know what you are doing you need to hide behind 'your power'.**



**Traditional ceremony – good photo for a jigsaw**

The teachers we are training are learning that the real power of a teacher comes when they are comfortable within themselves – they know they have the necessary skills and can pass them on to the children in a friendly, activity based classroom. You have to be 'at least 2 chapters ahead of the students' as we used to say when we were new teachers ... in the old days!

**"Impossible!" they said, when we produced a 1000-piece jigsaw. We assured them it was achievable, but the challenge for now was to reach 100-pieces ... with the aim that their children could reach 24-pieces.**

### **Structured training**

I had taken over 8x24-piece jigsaws, 8x48-piece and 8x100-piece, as well as a number of simpler ones.

After we worked with the simpler ones. where we introduced them to some logical thinking, we moved to the first set of eight which were all dinosaurs. Their first attempts at 24-pieces took 10 minutes, but by the time they got to the last one in the set they knocked it off in a minute or two – they had built their confidence.

Then the same process with the 48-pieces, uncertainty at the beginning, but then they got the hang of it and by the last one they viewed that level as simple also.

Finally the 100-piece jigsaws and that was where we had to leave it – we ran out of training time – but they continued on in their breaks and even stayed on at the end of the day – forgetting the children waiting at home to be fed! One pair even got to a 500-piece jigsaw.



**They were very proud of their achievements**

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And all of this was achieved because we worked in a structured manner. We drilled them:

- in the vocabulary of the jigsaw
- then in the techniques:
  - \* Look at the pieces
  - \* Select the edge ones and then the corners, finish the frame and then to the middle.
  - \* Be alert to colour – blue for the sky, green for the grass
  - \* ... and don't forget to 'talk to myself' - such an important part of critical thinking.

We started with them working in pairs – a 'teacher' and a 'student'. The teacher modeled the thinking and asked the questions. They quickly caught on at which point nothing could hold them back.

No-one had ever shown them this way of 'weighing up the options'. How exhilarating it was.

You might be incredulous at this – but stop and think - so much of what we take for granted has not been available to them because they have been in a country occupied and neglected for over 500 years.



**And the baby has to wait till I finish!**

We are lucky as most of our children have easy access to developmental tools as well as an adult who talks to them from an early age, constantly 'modeling thought processes'.

### **So what did we learn?**

This half day of training was amongst the most successful we had ever done – in such a short time we had raised the teachers' confidence levels through the roof .... and with the added value that they were beginning to think critically.

### **This project has real potential.**



### **Rotary Club of Richmond**

On my return to Melbourne I was delighted to learn that Trevor (as International Chair), had gained the Board's approval to continue to support the project with a 'Resource Room' under which this venture sits. So we can start moving on the jigsaw project by ....

- Producing the jigsaws
- Designing the training
- Training Timorese to be the Trainers
- Identifying participants
- DOING IT!

The intention is to train and distribute jigsaws to 50 teachers.

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So shortly there will be 24 photos being made into 4x2, 3x3, 3x4, 5x3, 5x4 and 6x4 jigsaws.

An order has been placed to make the next batch and by next year we should have them over there ready to try it out.

### **And after that?**

Remember:

***from little things ... big things grow***

Hopefully the next stage will see someone with significant funding adopt the project and take it to the next level.

We were very surprised when the Minister of Finance dropped by our training one morning to see what we were doing. Of course we used the occasion to showcase the jigsaws and they received a very positive response – “what a great idea!”

A couple of samples are now on their way to China for costing. You never know!!!!!! By the time we have completed our *Richmond Rotary demonstration project* – maybe someone will be interested in taking this further!

And if they don't, at least 50 classrooms will have jigsaws with teachers who are confident about using them! And that, in itself, will be a great outcome.

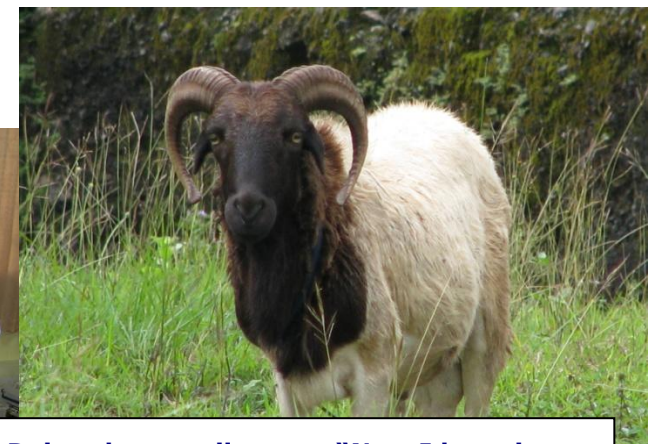
**1500 children will have access to jigsaws.**

### **Happy conclusion**

***A group of friends are very content in the knowledge that their sacrifices have sown the 'little seed' that, because of Richmond Rotary funding, will now grow and has the potential to grow even bigger.***

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**The Minister of Finance looks at our work**



**Doing the goat jigsaw – “Now I have just one piece of the frame to go!”**

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**What great jigsaws these photos will make.**

**And the children will be playing with something  
that is culturally appropriate.**

