

Inclusive Pre-School Programmes

Webinar 9 - Companion Technical Booklet



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Inclusive Pre-School Programmes

Webinar Booklet

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What this booklet can do for you

The purpose of this booklet and the accompanying webinar is to assist UNICEF staff and our partners to understand the basic concepts of inclusive pre-school programmes, with an emphasis on children with disabilities.

In this booklet you will be introduced to:

- *Why inclusive pre-schools are important.*
- *How early identification and intervention can impact children's readiness for school.*
- *Key characteristics of high-quality inclusive pre-schools*.*
- *How inclusive pre-schools make a lasting difference for all young children and their families.*
- *Helpful resources.*

This booklet is not intended as a detailed treatise on providing inclusive pre-school programmes. It is intended to sensitise you to the issues and benefits of inclusive pre-school programmes in identifying children at risk for later school problems, working to make every child ready for school, and creating a more accepting and inclusive society for all through fostering interaction among very young children.

For information on the following related topics, refer to the other modules in this series:

1. Conceptualizing Inclusive Education and Contextualizing it within the UNICEF Mission
2. Definition and Classification of Disability
3. Legislation and Policies for Inclusive Education
4. Collecting Data on Child Disability
5. Mapping Children with Disabilities Out of School
6. EMIS and Children with Disabilities
7. Partnerships, Advocacy and Communication for Social Change
8. Financing of Inclusive Education
9. Inclusive Pre-School Programmes (*this booklet*)
10. Access to School and the Learning Environment I – Physical, Information and Communication
11. Access to School and the Learning Environment II – Universal Design for Learning
12. Teachers, Inclusive, Child-Centred Teaching and Pedagogy
13. Parents, Family and Community Participation in Inclusive Education
14. Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

*The terms high quality, quality and good will be used interchangeably in this booklet.

How to use this booklet

Throughout this document you will find boxes summarizing key points from each section, offering case studies and recommending additional readings.

If, at any time, you would like to go back to the beginning of this booklet, simply click on the sentence "Webinar 9 - Companion Technical Booklet" at the top of each page, and you will be directed to the Table of Contents.

To access the companion webinar, just scan the QR code.



Acronyms and Abbreviations

CEE/CIS	Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECI	Early Childhood Intervention
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

I. Pre-school is Important for All Children

Promoting School Readiness

What do we know about the value of Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes?

Key Points

- *ECD programmes are delivered in many ways. Centre-based pre-school is only one way.*
- *When children's readiness for school is a major goal, pre-school programmes are among the most successful interventions.*
- *Programme quality and duration are important in creating strong impact.*
- *The most vulnerable children are the ones who benefit most from participation in pre-school programmes.*
- *School readiness is not only pre-academic knowledge; and it is as much impacted by social and emotional skills as it is by cognitive skills.*
- *School readiness is impacted by interaction with others, family characteristics and neighbourhood and community characteristics as well as the child's innate characteristics and pre-school experiences.*
- *Self-regulation is an important skill that develops in the pre-school years and is crucial to school readiness.*

ECD programmes take many forms. Many are targeted toward all children and families of a specific age group; others are targeted toward a specific population such as children who have been abused or neglected, children with diagnosed disabilities, children who live in extreme poverty, or children who are malnourished. Some are provided within homes, some in community settings and some in specialized ECD centres. Some are provided in groups, some individually. Some target the child's development, some the parent-child interaction, some the family dynamics. Their timing, frequency, intensity and duration vary. Their goals also vary.

When the goal is children's readiness for primary school, centre-based high-quality pre-school programmes have been found to be among the most effective and cost-effective programmes available.¹ The quality of the programme has been determined to be a major factor in its success.^{2,3} In addition, when a child's cognitive and social development is the measure of success, duration of programming is a key factor.⁴ In replicating models, a key question is always whether the programme is delivered as it was intended to be delivered – with the key components, as frequently and intensely as intended, and with the quality of the original programme. High-quality pre-school programmes have several common features:

- They have teachers who are trained in how young children learn and develop rather than just in methods to teach young children and a curriculum to use. Teachers understand that all areas of development are important and that children learn and develop in a sequential pattern and at their

own individual rates. Teachers understand the critical importance of relationships to development and that early experiences have lasting impact.

- They have a good proportion of child-initiated activity in comparison to teacher-initiated activity. This is sometimes called child-centered programming.
- They have a number of different types of materials with which children can engage. For example, they use stones one day for counting and leaves another day, rather than stones every day. This helps children to generalize the concepts they are learning and makes the concepts more useful in everyday life.
- They address the integration of multiple domains of young children's development such as cognition, socio-emotional, language (receptive and expressive), and physical (i.e., gross and fine motor) skills.
- They have a good balance of individual and small-group activities rather than just large-group activities.
- They have much active learning and are play-based, as these are the primary ways young children learn. They do not promote rote memorization and recitation of facts, but help children to devise new strategies, solve problems and acquire information.
- They have teachers who promote children's thinking by asking questions and actively listening to children rather than simply giving information. They have teachers who challenge children, encourage them to stretch their capacities, and appreciate the roles of children's individual interests, strengths and motivation.
- They have teachers who encourage children to persist, model positive attitudes in the face of frustration and demonstrate strategies to overcome difficulties.^{5 6 7 8 9 10}

One thing we do know about high-quality ECD programmes is that the most vulnerable children are the ones who most benefit from participation in ECD. This has been clearly demonstrated for children who live in poverty. It has been found in multiple countries that children who live in poverty are far more likely to be significantly delayed in their development – especially in the areas of language and social skills (approximately 40 per cent of children who live in poverty experience these delays^{11 12 13}). This has often been attributed to the practices of their parents and the more limited educational stimulation within their home environments.¹⁴ In remote areas, pre-school programmes have been delivered effectively through parents with support from home visitors and with mailed or radio-based instructions. Despite this indication of differential importance for children, pre-school opportunities should be available to all children. An inclusive environment benefits all children and is the foundation of a more just and inclusive society. The early years are important in the development of children's attitudes and behaviours, their understanding and valuing of diversity, and their empathy toward others. These attitudes and behaviours are strongly influenced by the attitudes and behaviours of their parents and teachers.¹⁵

What Makes Children Ready for Primary School?

This section deals only with what makes children ready for school and not the other two pillars of UNICEF's approach: 'schools ready for children' and 'families ready'. The issue of families is discussed later in this booklet, but the readiness of primary schools for children is not addressed.

There are many more factors that are associated with children's readiness for primary school and their primary school achievement than knowing the alphabet, being able to write their names and knowing how to count. In a multinational study, these factors have been demonstrated to be predictive of school success in addition to the broader cognitive skills of memory, attention and executive functioning.¹⁶ Executive functioning includes aspects of memory and attention, but also such skills as the capacity to plan an activity, to evaluate its success, to organize objects, ideas or activities in a sequence, to remember and use things in new ways, to adjust to changes in plans, and to generate ideas on our own. Of course, these skills are at beginning stages in early childhood, but they can be seen when children negotiate what they should play together, anticipate how the action will happen, and describe what they want to happen.

Although some cognitive knowledge and cognitive skills are associated with better school success, social and emotional competencies have been shown to be of great importance in school readiness and primary-school achievement.¹⁷ These social and emotional competencies include such things as being able to pay attention, even in the face of distractions or while in a group; capacity to control impulses, behaviour and emotions by yourself (often called self-regulation); ability to delay gratification; and capacity to engage in effective problem solving with others. Executive functioning and self-regulation are very intertwined, as the brain development that occurs so rapidly during the early childhood years affects both markedly.

School readiness has been demonstrated to be impacted by not only a child's inborn characteristics and experiences, but also by parent-child interaction, teacher-child interaction, family characteristics, and neighbourhoods and communities. The variety of factors that have been determined to put a child at risk of not being ready for school range from having a very young mother, low maternal education, having a depressed mother, being subject to harsh discipline and family poverty to coming from a neighbourhood that lacks shared values and mutual trust.¹⁸ Within those same environments, the types of factors that protect a child or help him or her to be more ready for school include such things as whether mothers provide encouragement, warmth and emotional support to their young children; whether mothers talk and read to their young children; whether children have access to educational materials in their homes; and if they receive child care, whether it is high-quality child care. In teacher-child interaction, the capacity and practice of the teacher in providing warm emotional support to young children is a strong factor in early school success. Children develop through relationships. A responsive caregiver (including a teacher) is a protection from many of life's worst circumstances and aids a child's resilience in the face of adversity.

Among the variety of programmes that have been developed and evaluated to address school readiness, high-quality pre-school programmes have been demonstrated to be among the most successful and cost-effective.

To learn more go to:

- *Early Childhood in Focus 4: Effective Early Childhood Programmes. Siraj-Blatchford, Iram and Martin Woodhead (eds.), found at http://issuu.com/bernardvanleerfoundation/docs/effective_early_childhood_programmes*
- *Early Childhood Matters, June 2008, Early Childhood Education: Questions of Quality, Bernard van Leer Foundation, The Hague, Netherlands, found at http://issuu.com/bernardvanleerfoundation/docs/early_childhood_education_questions_of_quality*

II. What Makes a Good Pre-School Programme?

Key Points

- *A good pre-school programme addresses the whole child and provides holistic developmental stimulation.*
- *A good pre-school programme is culturally relevant and respects diversity. It fosters understanding among children.*
- *A good pre-school programme engages parents and communities.*
- *A good pre-school programme is inclusive. It fosters children's rights – especially the right to participation.*

In addition to the fact that pre-schools fulfil a child's right to education, good inclusive pre-schools also address many other child rights – most importantly, the right to participation. High-quality pre-schools engage children in the planning, implementation and evaluation of daily activities. They encourage leadership of all children at various times and engage them in helping behaviour toward one another. They plan and provide opportunities for all children to recognize and use their strengths for their own development and on behalf of the learning community (their peers). Engaging children in the planning, implementation and evaluation of daily activities can happen in at least two ways. Children should be encouraged to reflect on their own work and their satisfaction with their achievements. A part of this may involve helping to choose what work will be stored in their portfolios. In groups, a morning meeting may be used to plan the day's activities, with children taking part in the discussion of plans. In an afternoon meeting, at the end of the class day, children can be engaged in discussion of how the day progressed, whether the goals and activities were successful and how they might be modified or taken further in future work.

High-quality inclusive pre-schools are gender-sensitive. At the stage of development when children are beginning to identify themselves with a specific gender, understand roles and relationships within their culture, and determine their own strengths and characteristics, gender-sensitive programming is crucial. As part of a child's exploration of self, an environment that allows free exploration of gender roles is a crucial step. In addition, a pre-school environment that encourages exploration of talents and challenges is vital to the child's understanding of self. Active involvement of all areas of development in an integrated programme helps children to establish identity.

A high-quality inclusive pre-school provides a safe and protective environment for all children. Its classrooms should have a balance of quiet spaces where children who need to relax can retreat and more active areas that may be noisy at times. A quiet area may have soft surfaces such as pillows and quiet activities such as books to look at. It should not be situated next to an area that is likely to be very noisy. It allows children to express themselves and has teachers who encourage thoughtful communication and active listening. At a time when children are developing empathy for others, self-regulation of behaviour and emotion, problem-solving in social situations, cooperation, and a variety of cognitive skills, high-quality inclusive pre-schools encourage the development of a sense of community, use peace-building strategies

with children, and encourage children to take the perspectives of others into account. This provides children with skills necessary for effective community participation and peace-building on a larger scale. High-quality pre-schools never engage in physical punishment or harsh verbal or emotional punishment such as name calling. Teachers use positive guidance strategies and model appropriate interaction when one is unhappy with the behaviour of another person.

Centres may provide parenting education and support. Some of these sessions may focus on discipline strategies, promoting positive discipline within homes and discouraging harsh physical punishment and the verbally degrading practices of parents. This extends the safe and protective focus to children's home environments and promotes practices that are in children's best interests. It is well-known that young children are the most likely age group to be subject to abuse and neglect of all types. Young children who face developmental challenges and those with diagnosed disabilities are the most at risk of abuse and neglect. Good inclusive pre-schools take this issue as a hallmark of best practice. They promote positive guidance in all aspects of community life for young children.

A high-quality inclusive pre-school is a community centre. It encourages active community involvement (including its child participants) in the determination of goals, curriculum, structure and maintenance of the building and outside areas, and in the daily management of the centre. High-quality pre-schools have an active parent-teacher council that may have representatives of other community leaders. They use community members to teach in areas where they have special talents such as music or traditional crafts. They encourage joint activities with other community agencies such as those who might be involved in disaster planning and relief efforts. They encourage active participation of all parents – welcome visits and observations, encourage parent participation in activities, and communicate regularly with all parents about child progress and development. They have agreements with community schools about transition practices, and encourage active transition planning among pre-school and grade-one teachers and the parents of each child. They share information actively with community resources as long as they have parents' permission to do so.

Most people would describe the curriculum in pre-school as developmental rather than academic. Its effectiveness can be seen through the lens of child development. A pre-school programme effectively promotes the holistic development of each child. It encourages children's development of such crucial school readiness skills as: attention despite distractions and self-regulation – control over one's own emotions and behaviour, persistence in the face of frustration, motivation for learning, and ability to work within a group.¹⁹ It uses methods that have been demonstrated to promote effective learning in young children such as play-based curricula, active learning, dialogic reading (engaging children in the act of being read a story through such strategies as asking questions, encouraging them to imagine what might come next in the story, or encouraging them to suggest alternative endings to the story), child-initiated and small group or individual activities, and diverse materials.^{20 21}

High-quality pre-schools teach health and hygiene practices. They encourage good nutrition, knowledge of nutrition and assure a nutrition component in the programme. They include active physical play times.²² They may partner with health-care providers to assure prevention practices take place at the pre-school, such as immunizations and micronutrient supplementation, or they may encourage these practices by requiring certain health mandates prior to enrolment. They may provide parent education and support at the centre in areas crucial to health. They may also provide such education and support in areas crucial to mental health. Parental mental health (especially mother's) has been demonstrated to have a strong impact on the successful development of young children. Young children need actively engaged and responsive caregivers. Parental mental health is vital to this engagement.²³

In addressing the critical role of parents, the following strategies in two countries helped communities embrace inclusive pre-schools:

In Latvia, the Wings of Hope programme established a parent support group that evolved into an officially registered NGO as it sought to educate the community about the need for inclusive early education and to foster positive attitudes toward children with disabilities.²⁴

In Belarus, Cooperation for Children's Future used socio-interactive theatre and youth bringing children with disabilities into community parks on weekends to stimulate community discussions on inclusion. They established inclusive playgroups for young children during parenting education groups for their parents. These activities led to increased support for inclusive pre-school education at the community level.²⁵

To learn more go to:

- See Bennett, John. *Results from the OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy 1998 – 2006, UNESCO Policy Brief on Early Childhood, November-December 2007.*
- *The series of UNESCO Early Childhood Policy Briefs at <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/strengthening-education-systems/early-childhood/policy-briefs-unesdoc/>*
- *Handbook of ECD Experiences, Innovations, and Lessons from CEE/CIS 2009, International Step by Step Association, found at http://www.issa.nl/sites/default/files/Handbook%20of%20ECD%20Experiences%2C%20Innovations%20and%20Lessons%20from%20CEE_CIS%20.pdf*
- *Early Childhood Matters, November 2011, Early Learning: Lessons from Scaling Up, found at http://issuu.com/bernardvanleerfoundation/docs/early_learning_lessons_from_scaling_up*



Activity One

A pre-school programme in rural Uganda takes place under a tree. A teacher who has not completed primary school leads the programme. He is aided by a parent council in determining the curriculum and in creating the materials used. He has 30 young children between the ages of four and six. There is a great deal of singing and dancing. Children appear joyful and he has a nice way of asking questions to gain the participation of the children. The community does not provide a feeding programme and whatever food children have is what they bring with them. Some children come without food each day. There is a nearby pit latrine, but no running water.

Make a list of the strengths and weaknesses of this pre-school programme. What things are not able to be assessed from the information given?

Sample responses to Activity One

Strengths

- There is an involved parent council.
- The teacher engages children with questions.
- The children appear joyful.
- Cultural activities such as singing and dancing are prevalent.

Weaknesses

- Lack of a feeding programme.
- Lack of running water and good sanitation.

Unknowns

- Is there a good variety of materials?
- Is there a place to store materials? (perhaps we can assume not as the programme takes place under a tree)
- How much and what kinds of pre-service or in-service training has the teacher received? (we need to be careful not to make assumptions based on the teacher's own formal education)
- Although there is parent involvement, is the curriculum a good and holistic one?
- Does the teacher always work with the large group?
- Is there opportunity for child-initiated activity?
- How does the teacher plan and evaluate the instructional strategies he uses?
- How does the teacher monitor the developmental progress of individual children?
- How does the teacher communicate to parents about the developmental progress of their child and how they can support the child's progress at home?
- What kind of supervision does the teacher receive? Does it enhance his skills?

III. Creating Welcome from the Start

Key Points

- *There are many ways to create welcome on entry into programmes for both children and their parents.*
- *Visits to the centre and home visits help create welcome and set expectations.*
- *Written materials can be very helpful.*
- *Young children recognize visible differences and atypical behaviour, and form attitudes about others that may be long lasting.*
- *Young children may mirror the views and attitudes of their families.*
- *Stigma-reduction programmes for young children make a difference in their developing attitudes.*
- *Pre-school practices help set the stage for developing positive attitudes toward diversity.*

Many activities create a welcoming environment. Before entry into a programme, an invitation for children and their families to visit is helpful in establishing a sense of comfort for both children and their parents. This can be done as a joint visit with other families or a single visit time within the typical programme day. Visits are a frequent part of good transition programmes between home and school, or a pre-school programme and grade one. Often when there are two programmes involved, the programme staff make visits to each other's classrooms in order to help children form expectations about the next programme and to help teachers understand the approach of the programmes children are familiar with and that which they will enter. Visits can be especially useful for children with disabilities as it allows all involved to see how the environment will function for the child. It enables the child to get to know the setup and allows the programme to remove any potential barriers prior to the child's entrance.

Written materials also enhance a welcoming environment. Parent handbooks that explain programme policies, expectations about communication between families and programme staff, what things are required for a child within the programme, and how the programme operates (a typical day) provide a great sense of welcome. All people feel more comfortable when they understand information and know what to expect. This helps parents to set a positive attitude for children and enhances the capacity of children to enter programmes joyfully.

Many pre-school programmes also have teachers make a home visit prior to the child's entry into the programme. This enables the teacher to get to know a child and family individually, answer any questions they may have and set the tone for positive communication.

'Helper children' or assigning a child who has previous experience within the setting to each new child is a good strategy for creating a welcoming environment for children. This is possible if the centre has more than one age group attending. Children can help new children understand the programme and its structure and rules.

Fostering Positive Attitudes for a Lifetime

Attitudes toward others are often set during the early childhood years. It is during these years that children become aware of individual differences and develop an identity as belonging to a particular gender, country, ethnic or religious group, or family. They also develop a sense of empathy for others based on assumptions of shared experiences and emotions. At their best, pre-school programmes help children to develop a positive self-identity as well as a strong sense of community and empathy and compassion for all.

Although many of the best-known materials addressing stigma reduction for use with young children or addressing the needs of young children are those related to children who live in HIV- and AIDS-affected environments, their messages and strategies are useful in addressing the issues facing young children who have developmental challenges, those of ethnic, linguistic or religious minorities, and those who live in extreme poverty.²⁶

Research demonstrates that even in the pre-school years, children recognize and react to those with visible differences and those whose behaviour they do not find understandable or predictable. Some of their reactions may result from fear of people they don't understand; some from the behaviour of adults in their lives. If children come from families where name calling is common, or attitudes toward people with developmental differences are strong and negative, they will model these attitudes. Children with developmental challenges may face isolation and rejection as playmates if there is not a specific programme in place to address diversity and respect for diversity. Psychosocial support can be provided effectively within pre-school programmes through art activities, books and play. Materials that reflect the children in the classroom, for example dolls or puppets with visible disabilities, will allow children to process their experiences through play and invent solutions to problems. Teachers who are open to questions and who model acceptance and appreciation of all children set the stage for the development of positive attitudes toward those with developmental challenges. Celebrating the strengths of each child goes a long way toward acceptance of differences.²⁷

In Aynage, Ethiopia, strong inclusive education begins in pre-school. The Norwegian Embassy worked extensively with the community on attitudes toward persons with disabilities and strategies for including children with disabilities in pre-schools and schools. They succeeded far beyond what is seen in most countries throughout the world. Still, children with severe physical disabilities are far more present in pre-schools and schools than children with intellectual or emotional/behavioural disabilities. The challenge to include everyone is still a constant one. Stigma is still differentially present for many children and families.

Teachers can do many things to help children approach other children and to foster interaction with children who have obvious disabilities. For example, an activity described by a Comenius Foundation presentation discusses how a teacher introduced an interesting component to a pool that a child with a disability was playing in alone. She added a group of corks that bounced and floated. That interested four other children who then came to explore what was happening and interacted with the child as a result. As the teacher explained: "20 years ago we still had the ideal expectation of children always inviting others with special educational needs to their activities. But this often doesn't work and turned out to be rather the adult's desire. Therefore, we now try to offer something attractive to catch the children's interest for a common activity with the child that currently is in need of a special regard."²⁸

In a similar discussion of the importance of inclusive pre-schools in the development of friendships for children with disabilities, teachers are encouraged to look carefully at the natural interests of children. In one example, the interest in trains of a child with a disability was used to influence another child to play with him. A developing friendship was established through the resultant interaction. This interest was then taken by the team members and expanded into the programme's curricular activities in literacy (introducing books

on the topic) and expanded play opportunities by the teacher's introduction of additional materials about trains.²⁹

To learn more go to:

- *Mac Naughton, G.M. 2006. Respect for diversity: An international overview. Working Paper 40. Bernard van Leer Foundation: The Hague, Netherlands, found at http://issuu.com/bernardvanleerfoundation/docs/respect_for_diversity_an_international_overview*
- *National CAMHS Support Service, Tackling Stigma: A Practical Toolkit, <http://www.chimat.org.uk/tacklingstigma>*

Activity Two

An evaluation of Norway's efforts on inclusion in international development work³⁰ found that most inclusive education efforts had focused on children with physical disabilities and little emphasis had been given to children with sensory impairments or mental-health concerns. Likewise, a survey by Inclusion International³¹ found that 40 per cent of respondents felt that pre-schools were not preparing children with disabilities for their transition to primary school – a critically important issue. Transition programmes that include activities for children, partnerships and increased understanding among parents, pre-school teachers and grade-one teachers are crucial. Consider the potential reasons for such disparity of effort and focus toward children with different types of disabilities. How would you create better balance regarding children with different types of disabilities? What would you do with young children and in the classroom? What would you do in the community where the programme is? What would you want to see in government policy to address this concern?

In many places, children who use wheelchairs or crutches for mobility are more obvious in their communities. Some of them have acquired disabilities as a result of illnesses such as polio, or violence such as war acts or existing landmines. People in their communities may not attach as much stigma to these acquired disabilities as they do to disabilities that are less visible and understandable. For example, it is difficult for a person who does not realize a child is deaf to communicate effectively with him or her. That makes developing a relationship difficult. A child who has mental-health concerns may exhibit behaviour that is hard for adults and children to anticipate and respond to effectively. This also makes developing fulfilling relationships difficult. Parents may be afraid that their children will mimic what they see as incomprehensible or unacceptable behaviour so they may discourage children's attempts at interaction or friendship.

Discussion of Activity:

Community awareness campaigns of many types are one possible approach to be taken. People are less apt to be fearful of and to reject that which they understand. Parent meetings and education sessions at the pre-school programme may help. This can be accompanied with a curriculum for children addressing developmental differences, empathy and collaboration. Assessing the pre-school environment for its welcome and accessibility is important. Parents may be more afraid to send children who cannot see or hear into unfamiliar environments. Specialized counselling and encouragement may help. Mental-health concerns may be more difficult to identify in young children and may also be a source of greater stigma in the community. Parents may be very reluctant to allow these children outside their homes. Again, supportive counselling may help. Welcoming parents to visit programmes with their children prior to enrollment may be important. Welcoming them to accompany children for the first few days, work within the pre-school classroom as volunteers, or visit as they desire are possibilities that will help. Similar measures may be taken in preparing children and parents to make a good transition to a primary-school environment. In addition to that, pre-school and primary teachers need joint understanding of each other's expectations and agreements forged about information sharing.

Early identification measures may also be needed. Screening and assessment for low-incidence conditions may be necessary. Government policy needs to support early identification, and the provision of any specialized services needed and family support services. Most of all, inclusive pre-school education must be an expectation for all children.

IV. Curriculum

Key Points

- *A curriculum may be a document, but its implementation is the crucial feature.*
- *A good inclusive pre-school curriculum focuses not only on cognitive and language skills, but also on social/emotional competencies.*
- *A good pre-school curriculum addresses the integrated nature of young children's development.*
- *Activities are linked by units or themes in good pre-school programmes.*
- *Active learning is best practice in early childhood.*
- *Child participation in planning, implementing and evaluating activities is a best practice.*
- *Child choice is a crucial feature in high-quality pre-school programmes.*
- *Some adaptations may be necessary in order for a child to participate in a given activity.*

The curriculum of a good inclusive pre-school has several important characteristics. It includes areas relevant to all domains of child development. It recognizes that development in early childhood is very integrated and no one skill or activity belongs solely to one developmental domain. Later, development becomes more differentiated and skills can be identified as resting in one area. A good pre-school curriculum is not only balanced among various domains of development, but also recognizes the incredible pace of change in young children's language and communication, development of symbolic thought, social competence in interacting with peers and adults, emotional and behavioural self-regulation, self-help skills and precision of gross and fine physical movements.

A good curriculum focuses on areas known to be important in future school achievement: cognitive and language skills and social/emotional competencies. These same skills are important life skills and valued at all ages: the capacity to solve problems in both social situations and in cognitive areas such as mathematics, the ability to express thoughts and feelings so that others understand, to form and maintain relationships, and to reflect on issues with a variety of strategies.

Activities – Carrying out a Curriculum

Teachers in good pre-school programmes plan activities around themes or units that bring together stimulation of various developmental skills in children. Activities should be planned with universal design principles considered and should seek to address the interests and developmental strengths of all children. Children can participate in planning individual activities, both as a group in morning meetings or as one individual in determining what and how he or she will engage in an activity or with materials set out by a teacher. Themes or units are often planned as a week of activities with daily plans accompanying the goals each day. For example, if a weekly theme was the number two, a teacher might plan to put out two colours for children to colour or paint with each day, present two options for a snack each day, read two stories each day, put out blocks of two sizes to play with, read a story where the number two was prominent, such as

a story about two friends, ask children to find two of each item on a scavenger hunt, sing songs with the number two, and practice writing the number two and placing two objects with the number. Each day might have different objects and stories, but they would all be associated with the number two. Some children might choose the more challenging activities; some the less challenging. At the end of the day, a meeting to discuss the day's activities and their success might be held.

Active learning – that is, learning by children through active manipulation of materials and use of multiple strategies and senses – is crucial in high-quality pre-school programmes. Children should not be passive recipients of information. Activities should be designed so that children solve problems, expand concepts, think and reason, gather information, explain their activities and think and learn in multiple ways. They should be encouraged to reflect on their own activities as well as on those within the classroom.

Some adaptations may be necessary for an individual child in order to participate fully in all activities. These might include making a pencil or crayon have a larger diameter by wrapping tape around it several times so that it will be easier to grasp, making the printing on a blackboard or story larger, assuring a child a seat close to a person who is speaking, or making sure pictures are high-contrast. These adaptations can be made without any explanation to others and in no way need to be identified with one child.

All children have uneven development in the early childhood years. They may focus their attention strongly on a skill they are attempting to master and appear to stall in other areas of development during that time. Regardless, all children have areas of relative strength, individual talent and interest as well as areas of relative weakness. Individualizing educational strategies help parents and teachers to share views of the child and to focus education efforts effectively in a child-centred manner.

Notes

V. Grouping Children for Classrooms or Activities

Multi-Age Grouping

Key Points

- *Multi-age grouping can be especially beneficial to inclusion in good pre-school programmes.*
- *Ability grouping is not a good pre-school strategy.*
- *Developmentally appropriate practice is a best practice in pre-school programmes.*
- *Developmentally appropriate practice takes into account developmental skills of children, the individual child and the culture and context of the child's background.*
- *Age-appropriate practices are especially important for children facing significant delays in their development.*
- *Teachers' creativity is needed to consider how to create age-appropriate activities for all.*

Inclusive pre-schools may be organized so that children of the same age are grouped together in a classroom (for example, all five-year-olds or all four-year-olds in a group) or they may have classrooms that have multiple ages of children within one group. When multi-age grouping is used, there should not be too wide a spread of ages, such as five-year-olds grouped with one-year-olds. However, groups spread across two years offer children the continuity of having a teacher for more than one year as well as the opportunities provided by having mentors who are much more sophisticated developmentally as well as those provided by being mentors of less skilled or developed children. This is often very valuable in including children who have significant disabilities as all children will have experience with being the 'helper' as well as the one who is 'helped'. These skills are enhanced when there are children who have special needs that may require more frequent helping.

Even when multi-age grouping is not used, ability grouping should be avoided in inclusive classrooms. *All* children benefit from participating with children whose strengths and developmental needs are different from their own. This mirrors the society in which they will live. It helps them establish a sense of self, empathy and compassion.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices – Good Early Childhood Practice

Developmentally appropriate practices are those practices that are guided by children's developmental skills and realistic expectations given the development of the child. They take into account what is known (the evidence) about young children's development and learning. They appreciate the individual child, his or her strengths and challenges. They respect the role of culture and context in promoting development and learning.³²

Age-Appropriate Practices

Age-appropriate practices are important to all children, but perhaps especially appropriate to children with significant developmental challenges. All too often, when a child's development is significantly delayed and he or she behaves as if he or she were a much younger child, the child is presented with toys, objects and activities that are appropriate for a much younger child. Although it demands creativity at times, a child whose development and interests are similar to a much younger child can be included in age-appropriate activities with his or her age mates. For example, a child who is interested in making sounds with a rattle and can grasp a rattle can use the *majorcas* in a rhythm-band activity. This object is both age appropriate and likely to be used by other age mates in the band. It engages the child's interest and allows the child to participate in an age-appropriate classroom activity while still addressing the child's own development.

To learn more go to:

- *National Association for the Education of Young Children Position Statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practice, 2009, found at <http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/PSDAP.pdf>*

Notes

VI. Early Assessment and Identification

Key Points

- *Pre-school programmes address inequities and discrimination.*
- *Pre-school programmes offer opportunities to identify children whose development is faltering and provide intervention.*
- *Parent participation in screening and assessment is crucial.*
- *Ongoing assessment while in programme is important.*
- *Children may be assessed in a variety of ways.*

Participation in an ECD programme is an effective way to decrease the marked differences between marginalized and disadvantaged children and those with more affluent and privileged backgrounds when they enter primary school. Pre-school participation is a cost-effective way to address inequities that plague children who live in extreme poverty and its frequently accompanying malnutrition; those who face discrimination due to ethnicity, gender, health impairment or disability, or by being in a religious or linguistic minority; those whose parents have little education; and those whose families live in violence, or with substance abuse and other environmental hazards.

Pre-school programmes offer opportunities to identify children whose development is delayed and those who are at high risk due to the above-mentioned factors. They also present an opportunity to identify children whose development indicates a disability. All of these children will benefit from the better capacity of programmes to devise approaches that will foster the child's optimal development and most successful experience in pre-school. In the pre-school age group it is important to remember that many disabilities cannot be determined. Developmental delays may be indicative of a lifelong disability or may be eliminated through programming.

Screening on entry into pre-school provides not only the opportunity to identify a child's developmental strengths and needs, but also to refer for any needed follow-up evaluation with other specialists, such as health-care providers or therapists, and to individualize a programme to address the child's learning.

Participation of the child's parents and information-sharing with the parents is crucial to the success of all screening and assessment. Parents have intimate knowledge of their own child's behaviour, daily functioning and individual characteristics. They provide valuable information that leads to the best picture of their child's skills and to the best structuring of a screening or assessment process that will provide the most reliable and accurate information. They are also good judges of whether the child's performance during the assessment is typical of the child, whether he or she accomplished things they do not see the child do in a typical day, or whether he or she did not do things the child does regularly in his or her home or other familiar environments.

In addition to the above type of assessment, ongoing assessment is a crucial part of all high-quality pre-schools. It provides the opportunity to adjust the child's programme as success is achieved or to revise strategies based on outcomes. This ongoing assessment provides an opportunity to partner with parents

VII. The Unique Situation of Pre-School Teachers

Key Points

- *Pre-school teaching is very different from teaching at primary or secondary school.*
- *Pre-school teaching is often not a focus of university training programmes.*
- *Pre-school teacher training may not happen in university departments of education.*
- *University faculty in pre-school education may not be trained in pre-school education nor experienced in teaching on the pre-school level.*
- *Pre-school teachers often do not receive enough training about special needs and other populations that should be considered in good inclusive pre-schools.*
- *Pre-school teachers often lack pre-service training in interacting with other teachers, interacting with families and interacting with specialists. All are critical to effective inclusion of children with special needs.*
- *Pre-school teachers need practical training.*

While all agree that having good early childhood teachers is important to high-quality inclusive pre-school programmes, how much training teachers need and whether training is the single most important factor is a question that remains open. One significant difference between pre-school teachers and teachers of children at other ages is that pre-school services are often delivered within child-care settings that have a far longer day and, in many countries, require less background and experience of staff working with young children. That is, it may be assumed that care is the primary role and education the secondary role for teachers of young children. Innate capacity to appreciate children and interact with them with respect and caring may be just as important a factor in quality of teaching very young children as is prior training. What is known is that pre-service and in-service training for teachers is only one factor in the provision of high-quality inclusive pre-schools. Other key factors are the quality of the work environment and the ongoing support and mentoring teachers receive.

Teacher Training

Even in most developed countries, training for early childhood teachers is often less well-funded in universities and has fewer human resources devoted to it than does training of primary- and secondary-school teachers. In many situations, early childhood teacher training sits outside university schools of education and is found in departments of child development, human development, and child and family studies, etc. In many cases, early childhood teachers are trained by those who have never had practical experience themselves in an early childhood classroom, or who have been trained in teaching older children rather than in the teaching of young children. This is especially important since methods and curricula appropriate for older children are not appropriate in early childhood. Best practice in early childhood teaching recognizes that development at this age is integrated and that play is the most basic method

through which children learn. A focus on large-group instruction or activities is not best practice in early childhood teaching and child-initiated learning activities are crucial. Higher education teachers who have never taught in an early childhood classroom are not in the best position to offer 'real world' advice and to supervise good practicum experiences.

Teachers need practical advice and experience. In addition to obtaining this through education, teachers can obtain much practical advice from parents. This is especially true in dealing with the challenging behaviour of children since parents have a great deal of experience with their own children. Parents and teachers who partner on solutions will create security in children. Children benefit from joint expectations of parents and teachers. In the case of a child with special needs, parents have experience with obtaining advice from many sources and a wealth of personal experience with their children. Joint problem-solving and information-sharing is invaluable for teachers. Early childhood teachers have expertise in their field of training, but parents have expertise in their individual children. Working together will enhance the capacity of both to meet children's needs.

In a meta-analysis in the United States, it was found that early childhood teachers did not receive enough training regarding children with special needs, children who live in poverty and children with cultural and language differences. They also did not receive enough training in language acquisition. These gaps have a multiplicative impact since language is the most likely area of delay in children who grow up in poverty, young children with special needs or disabilities are more likely to live in poverty, and those with cultural and linguistic differences are more likely to be marginalized. These training gaps will hinder the ease and success of full inclusion of young children who have special needs. Similar issues were found in a study in Turkey.

Skills in Partnering and Teaming with Others

In addition, early childhood teachers were not likely to have pre-service training in how to interact with colleagues, how to interact with families, and how to interact with other specialists who may be providing service to children in their classrooms. This is a critical area of need since inclusion requires that teachers perform well as members and leaders of teams, regardless of the type of teaming model used. Best practice in including children with special needs, and really in working with all children in an early childhood setting, requires that teachers be especially skilled in working with parents and families. They must be skilled at eliciting information about children and family beliefs and practices. They must respect and encourage family values and good practices. They must work jointly with families in children's best interests in areas as distinct as child assessment, programme implementation and transitioning to further services. They must be skilled in making parents feel welcomed in every process and at any time in the classroom environment. The same skills that enable teachers to be good team members and leaders within the pre-school are necessary in working with other specialists who may be involved with children in their classrooms. In addition to these skills, they must have knowledge of the specialties and roles of other specialists. Open communication, joint problem-solving and a welcoming attitude toward other professionals increases the likelihood that children with special needs will be included well. Inviting other specialists into the classroom to observe and to work will help all and make teachers better trained and more successful. For example, a teacher may feel uncomfortable moving a child out of a wheelchair and back into it because no one has shown him or her how to do it, or allowed him or her to practice and receive feedback. Teachers' discomfort leads to discomfort for children and a sense that they are not accepted. Providing hands-on experience regarding individual children is as crucial as having better pre-service training about types of special needs and special education methodology. Joint work leads to forming realistic expectations and respect for the contributions that others can make to the lives of young children and their successful functioning in society.

The Importance of Practicum Experience in Teacher Preparation

Another clear gap in early childhood teacher training evident in both the CEE/CIS region as well as in many high-income countries is the amount of practicum experience available during teacher preparation programmes. The more experience teachers have under the direct guidance of a master teacher, the more likely they are to obtain high-quality teacher performance. This includes planning, implementation and evaluation of teaching efforts.

In short, early childhood teachers are often likely to be trained by those with less relevant intensive background and experience, have fewer opportunities to gain the necessary experience they require for teaching excellence, and have less-focused study on topics that will enable them to include the most vulnerable children successfully.

In a project being undertaken in Georgia by the Georgian Portage Association titled ‘Multidisciplinary Team for Inclusive Preschool Education’ a teacher explained: “Initially, I was very nervous because of his behaviour and constant vocalizations, as I was worried that other children would copy him, making it impossible to manage the group. So I decided to ask the specialist for assistance. The Georgian Portage Association multidisciplinary team member advised me to be less emotional and try to observe (the) child’s behaviour in a more focused way and then develop a plan of action.”

To learn more go to:

- *See Booklet 12 of this series.*
- *Diversity in early childhood education and training available at www.decet.org. Office of the Minister for Children (2006).*
- *Diversity and equality guidelines for child-care providers, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Ireland, available at www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/childcare/diversity_and_equality.pdf.*

Notes

VIII. Children with Disabilities and the Role of Other Specialists

Key Points

- *Other specialists may be crucial to the success of children with disabilities in an inclusive pre-school classroom.*
- *Specialists working within the classroom, not tied to work with one child, is a best practice.*
- *Specialized advice and conversation about an individual child should happen outside the classroom.*
- *Specialists may be associated with the pre-school or come from other programmes such as an early childhood intervention programme.*
- *When an early childhood intervention programme is involved, joint activities such as joint community screenings or joint assessments of an individual child are best practice.*

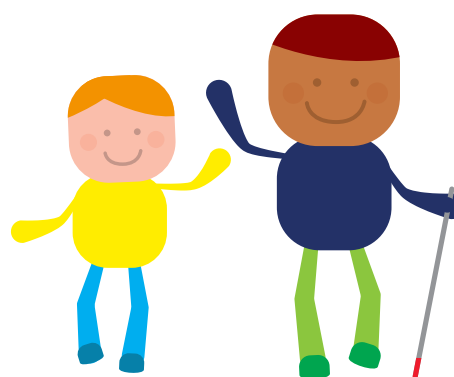
In many countries a child with a disability may be involved in an early childhood intervention programme at the same time as he or she is enrolled in a pre-school programme. In this situation, it is optimal for the two programmes to interact extensively. They should jointly develop strategies in collaboration with the child's parents. In many situations, they should work together within the classroom environment. These specialists might include: speech/language therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, nurses, psychologists, social workers, special-education teachers, teachers of the visually impaired and teachers of the hearing impaired. When a child reaches primary school, these specialists may be part of the school staff. Teachers and any specialists who work with a child with disabilities must have agreements about how such work will be conducted within the classroom. The best possible situation is when all adults work together, including many children – rather than singling out a specific child and removing the child from his or her desired activity or removing the child from the classroom for specialized help. This is best accomplished when they plan classroom activities together and the specialist acts as a classroom participant. Specialized advice regarding a particular child should be given to the teacher in separate meetings outside of classroom time and not within the classroom in front of children. If a teacher needs to practice using a skill with a child such as seating a child appropriately in his or her wheelchair, this can be done at a set time with a specialist and/or parent with the teacher. It should not take over the teacher's attention during time when they are responsible for all children. Because in the pre-school years these staff members will be responsible to different supervisors and organizations, clear inter-agency agreements will be necessary – rather than just good working relationships between individuals.

In the Georgian Portage Association Project described earlier, one teacher describes the benefit of working in a team this way: “When Lado came to my group, I knew beforehand I had to overcome difficulties. He didn't play with children, couldn't recognize colours, couldn't count, draw, cut out the figures, he didn't even walk properly, often fell down from the chair, never showed he wanted to eat or to go to the toilet; he used diapers. Lado never said good morning or goodbye to anyone, took others' things without permission and never apologized for doing so. Without help he couldn't get upstairs or downstairs. He talked with short phrases, was fond of playing with the ball and music lessons. During the day he often asked about

the music teacher, wanted to know when she will come and leave, get to the room. He was able to eat independently, but somehow I never gave him a chance to do it. Doing everything myself and supporting him in everything, initially, I thought I was helpful, but it appeared to be my mistake. The kindergarten psychologist and the specialist from the Georgian Portage Association helped me to realize it. It was an advantage to work in a team.”

Early childhood intervention programmes typically begin prenatally or at birth, but many children become involved as their developmental delays are identified –often after age two years in the case of speech and language delays. In some countries, where there is not a law or regulation about pre-school services for children with disabilities, early childhood intervention programmes for infants and toddlers and their families are expanded to address the needs of young children until they are school age. Early childhood intervention is always an important service at any age as it both works to identify children who should receive developmental support and, in some cases, identifies children who, by receiving such support, will function well in the future without specialized education or therapeutic services. It can prevent lifelong disability. Early childhood intervention programmes develop individualized child and family support plans. These plans should specify assessment information that identifies children’s strengths and areas of need, identify goals and objectives for the child, specify what services are needed by the child and how those services will be delivered, indicate how the success of the plan will be evaluated and the dates the plan is in effect, and signify the agreement of the child’s parents. In addition, individualized child and family support plans should identify any needs the family has, especially as they relate to providing a good home environment for the child, and what information and material supports they may need, and specify support services that will be provided to the family. When a child in a pre-school programme is participating in an early childhood intervention programme, any individualized plans should be merged and services delivered in a collaborative manner. When a child has previously participated in an early childhood intervention programme, but the child’s age makes him or her no longer eligible, the early childhood intervention team and the pre-school teacher and specialists who will now provide services should meet in order to share information. Early childhood teachers or special educators are often members of early childhood intervention teams and can provide much information to the receiving pre-school teacher. The other specialists, such as speech and language therapists or physiotherapists, can provide the same skilled help to the pre-school programme specialists.

Both programmes may join to provide community developmental screenings for infants, toddlers and young children. In addition to any screening done by health-care providers, these community screenings are important not only for the early identification of children in need of special developmental help, but also as places where parents who are concerned can receive important information about their child’s development, their strengths and areas of relative weakness and suggestions for what they might do at home that will be helpful for their child, even if the child does not need skilled developmental support.



Activity Two

Imagine that you are responsible for establishing an MOU for a community pre-school centre-based programme and an early childhood intervention programme. You have heard from pre-school teachers that parents often rely on the early childhood intervention programme staff for feedback about the pre-school programme. Parents are typically involved first with the early childhood intervention programme staff. The pre-school programme is just beginning to include children with disabilities. What factors do you think are crucial to be included in the MOU?

Discussion points for an MOU

This MOU should focus on how the two programmes will work together. Early childhood intervention programmes focus on both young children with disabilities and their families. They have goals and services that address both children and families. Inclusive pre-school programmes are targeted toward child development and involve parents, but do not target services toward parents. This focus needs to be stated. Joint assessment of children, planning programme services and implementation are best practice so the MOU should indicate how this will be accomplished – who will create schedules, who will call meetings and who will attend, how early childhood intervention staff will work within the pre-school environment (if Early Childhood Intervention [ECI] continues until children enter primary school) or how they will help the child and staff adapt if ECI ends at age three, and how the programmes will work with primary-school staff around transition of children to primary school (if the ECI programme works with children until that transition).

IX. Summary

Although inclusion in the pre-school years is typically seen as more easily achieved because the focus in pre-school education is on the holistic development of all children rather than subject area mastery, it remains a challenge to accomplish everywhere. Good pre-schools should by their very nature be inclusive. We know that pre-school attendance helps all children to be ready for school and that schools must be made ready for all children. For children with disabilities and their parents there are many challenges to face in striving for full inclusion.

Good inclusive pre-schools are welcoming environments for all children, parents and community members. They have teachers who have the support they need in training, supervision and supportive specialists who can be consulted about challenges teachers and children face in the pre-school classroom. They encourage active interaction and cooperation among children. They recognize children's rights - especially to participation. They use practices that are developmentally and age appropriate.

Good inclusive pre-schools have curricula that address holistic development. The activities promoted are developmentally and age appropriate. The curriculum encourages active learning strategies and places as much importance on young children's social and emotional development as it does on their cognitive development and knowledge.

Inclusive environments provide opportunities to identify children whose development is not moving along the expected lines early so that they may be helped at a time when some difficulties can be overcome and lasting disabilities prevented. Good inclusive pre-schools collaborate with other community resources to address the best interests of all young children.

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Notes

