Enabling Education Review

Issue 9 - 2020: Inclusive early childhood development & education

EENET
Enabling Education Network

EENET
PO Box 422
Hyde
Cheshire
SK14 9DT
UK

www.eenet.org.uk
info@eenet.org.uk
+44 (0)330 058 3339

https://bit.ly/EENET-FB
@eenetglobal
@GlobalEENET
https://bit.ly/EENET-YouTube

Contents

Cover photo: Young learners in Ukraine (photo by EENET)
Edited by: Su Corcoran and Ingrid Lewis | Layout and design: Alexander Hauschild

This edition of EER was supported in part by a grant from the Foundation Open Society Institute in cooperation with the Early Childhood Program of the Open Society Foundations.

Editorial: What is early childhood education?

Karen Chesterton Khayat

The early years of life are often called the foundation years – the knowledge, attitudes, and skills learned in these crucial years form the basis for all future learning. Quality early learning has a life-long impact on children's health, behaviour, their ability to form relationships, and their success in education and employment. What is often misunderstood, however, is that for these benefits to happen, the approach and focus of early childhood education must be both **age-appropriate and appropriate to the individual child**.

- Age-appropriate play-based learning: Early childhood settings provide age-appropriate learning experiences where children are free to play, to explore and discover. Adult-directed instruction and academic learning are largely absent.

- Child-appropriate support: Nurturing relationships support children in their learning and development journey along individual pathways unique in style, pace and method.

Early childhood programmes are expanding and gaining support around the world. However, I have observed a concerning increase in emphasis on 'preparing' children for school, and programmes designed to give children a perceived head-start before reaching school age. I believe these programmes are **not age-appropriate**. My concern is that they can detract from the potential benefits children could gain in early childhood settings.

Schoolification vs play-based learning

There should be a distinction between practice suitable for early childhood settings and that which is more commonly associated with schools. This is the difference between child-led play and teacher-directed instruction; between discovery or exploration learning and predetermined curriculum objectives. You might have seen early childhood settings using school-like types of instruction meant for much older children: formal instruction, large-group teaching approaches, or a focus on the direct teaching of reading or maths.

This has been called 'schoolification' or turning early childhood settings into mini-schools. It might involve planned pencil and paper tasks, drawing with stencils, repeating the alphabet and numbers, 'letter of the week' activities, colouring-in, activity sheets, and long adult-directed group times. Parents might be interested in this type of teaching. Often it is promoted as a way to give children a better chance of academic success in school. Sometimes, it is suggested as a way to get children ready for school, or to make the transition into school easier.

Problems with early academic learning

For various reasons, this practice of introducing academic learning early to children does not translate into the hoped-for academic advantage. Perhaps even more concerning, particularly in the context of inclusive education, is that these types of approaches do not promote diversity and are at odds with inclusive education.

Research supports the conclusion that starting school-level academics early does not result in sustained academic advantage. Any positive impacts have been found to fade out during the first years of schooling.[1]

What about a bit of school-like instruction to get children ready for what they will find at school? Early childhood education should prepare children for school, but not in the way some might think. The lasting impact that early childhood experiences can have is well understood and widely studied. The core skills that children learn at this age will help them to learn other skills later. These can include social skills like cooperating, personal skills like managing emotions, physical skills like manipulating small objects, and many others. But young children who are busy learning academic skills can be **deprived of the age-appropriate learning and development** they are ready for in their early years.

These skills are also not best learned through teacher-directed instruction. Firstly, this is because children all have different pathways of development, and secondly because such skills are best learned when the child is interested and ready to learn them. The developmentally appropriate way of learning at this age is through play, not teacher-directed instruction.

Early academic learning hinders inclusion

Imposing curriculum objectives in early childhood is at odds with inclusion and does not leave room for the diverse learning pathways that we expect and celebrate in inclusive education. Successful inclusive learning involves child-to-child support, interaction between children and with the teacher, imitation and teaching one another. There is little room for these types of interactions in formal instruction. Play-based learning, on the other hand, allows children to relax and interact in a natural way.

A **sense of belonging** is a central part of ensuring that children, with all their diversities, experience inclusion. To belong, a child's individual interests, strengths, capabilities, and development are valued. In inclusive education, we expect to support and welcome a child who is developing at a different rate or pace. But formal instruction, with predetermined content to be learned, could set the same child up for alienation and a sense of failure. Imposed curriculum objectives assume that children learn in similar ways, at similar rates and similar amounts. This starts to paint children as capable or not capable.

I believe that early childhood settings should focus on supporting children's learning through play and exploration rather than attempting to make children ready for school through the schoolification approach. Schools should instead be making themselves ready for children – all children. Inclusive early childhood settings should be centred around age-appropriate and child-appropriate practices likely to bring about greater developmental benefits for children.

Quality early education

As with other levels of education, inclusive early childhood education is quality education. When education settings are improved with the needs of diverse learners in mind, the improvements benefit everyone. We all expect children in this age bracket to be very diverse – in their interests and preferences, in their capabilities and skills. So good early childhood education programmes should readily support the learning and development of children with disabilities and other diverse learners.

A lot is said about the long-term impact of quality inclusive early education. But we should remind ourselves that the early childhood years are not solely a preparation for later life or for school. Learning and development enables young children to engage with and enjoy everyday life, to know themselves, to build relationships with others and to face the challenges and joys in the here and now. Inclusive early education is about **being and thriving in the present**.

Different perspectives on early childhood development and education

The articles included in this review showcase a range of viewpoints and experiences of early childhood development and education (ECDE). We start with an interview with the staff of Vusumnotfo in Eswatini who share their advice for effective early years programmes and making videos to help other people learn about inclusive ECDE.

Dimi and Harriet share their experiences of training early years practitioners in the UK and Kenya, while Veronica explains Sightsavers' use of calendars to consolidate lessons learned in community workshops and practitioner training in Malawi. Lohis and Mina share first-hand experiences as teachers developing inclusive ECDE in Nigeria and Morocco, and the team from Chance for Childhood discuss their community-based programmes in Rwanda.

Effective ECDE is important in all contexts. The team from VVOB explain their work in urban centres in Vietnam, and Olivia outlines Kids Club Kampala's work in informal settlements in Uganda. Jodie and Julia from Humanity and Inclusion discuss supporting ECDE in refugee settlements in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Thailand.

Holistic approaches to ECDE consider issues beyond the classroom. James presents the values of using songs to teach public health messages that are important for reducing maternal and infant mortality in Zambia. Bidemi shares her experiences of using animations to teach young children about social safety in Nigeria.

Finally, three articles provide research summaries. The first provides an overview of Light for the World's research on investing in inclusive ECD. The second showcases Bridge of Hope's research on inclusive transition from pre-school education to primary schools, and the last summarises a literature review on inclusive ECD in emergencies, conducted by a team from Yale university.

Contact:
Karen is an education and disability consultant working with EENET. She can be contacted through the EENET office.
Email: info@eenet.org.uk

Age-appropriate learning

Age-appropriate practices recognise that young children learn through play. Different from adult-directed activities, play is child-led. It should not be misunderstood as the same as playful learning or fun activities which are still planned and initiated by the adult. Play happens when the early childhood setting is prepared with a range of resources and spaces, and the child is free to make choices about what and who they engage with, how they use resources and space, and all other decisions along the way.

Child-appropriate learning

A common misunderstanding about play-based learning is that educators sit back and leave children to play. On the contrary, the role of the educator and others in this space is crucial. When early childhood settings are play-based, it makes it much more possible to implement child-appropriate learning support in inclusive and natural ways. Children with disabilities and diverse needs can be offered the appropriate support they need and can learn and develop according to their capabilities and interests without being marginalised, singled out, or segregated. Individualised learning and support in a play-based setting is something offered to all children with or without disabilities.

To be child-appropriate is to recognise diversity, to value difference, and support the learning and development of children as individuals. This can happen when adults are not busy with leading activities, or directing large groups of children. Instead, they observe children at play and in small groups, they learn about their interests and capabilities, they engage with their families, parents, guardians or caregivers, and they use all of this knowledge to offer individualised support to children as they play and move through their unique learning and development pathways.

[1] Research shows little academic advantage through schoolification, for example: Professional Association of Childcare and Early Years (2013) What does 'school ready' really mean?. Bromley: PACEY. https://bit.ly/eer9-5

Interview: Inclusive ECDE in Eswatini

Vusumnotfo – a not-for-profit organisation in Eswatini (Swaziland) – was involved in the creation of the Inclusive Beginnings videos that EENET launched in 2020. In this interview, Vusumnotfo staff share their top tips for delivering inclusive ECDE.

What is your top advice about inclusive ECDE?

As we say at Vusumnotfo, the family is the client, not the child. Whether we are supporting a child with cerebral palsy in rural Eswatini or a child on the autism spectrum in the United States, we must recognise that the only way to be truly inclusive and do the best by that child is to actively engage with their family.

Secondly, it is important to recognise the trauma that families experience. They may blame themselves for their child's disability, or feel angry that their child has a preventable disability. To develop a relationship with the family so as to provide a holistic educational experience, you need to acknowledge and address this trauma.

Lastly, it is important to recognise there is no 'one size fits all' equation for inclusive ECDE. Every situation and child is different. Each child and family needs their own file, to be recognised as their own person with their own individual plan.

Tell us about working in inclusive ECDE

In rural Eswatini, we work with families to see the small progressions their children make, the more they engage in the exercises and stimulation activities. This creates a positive cycle of reinforcement so that families become their own engines.

We began our project by asking adults with disabilities to share their stories with community preschool teachers, to help them understand the need for quality education and open their hearts to including learners with disabilities. Working with children with special needs sharpens your understanding of child development and learning, which benefits your mainstream programme activities and ultimately every child.

After we have established a relationship with the family we facilitate ways for different family members to meet up. No one can understand their situation as well as another family member with a child with disabilities. This informal support has huge impact. We do this within the home environment but also at public settings like small eat-out shops.

You do not need to be a 'special needs organisation'. We have a broad-based programming strategy within a set geographical operation. We have no desire to go national or change who we are. Instead of piloting for roll out, we are now looking at creating a "positive demonstration at family level, for community awareness and national influence". Ensuring children with disabilities engage in community life and attend the community preschools, and parents share personal testimonies and results (e.g., through radio interviews), will have national influence.

We do not provide medical and technical support. Instead we investigate professional partnerships. For example, we now work with a hospital doctor (who herself has a child with cerebral palsy); physical and occupational therapist in private practice; CERA, an NGO that makes orthopaedic devices; and they open their network to speech therapists, nutrition support, etc. We do not plan to employ any of these services, we would rather create partnerships.

What was your experience of being involved in the film-making project?

Our staff appreciated the sensitivity and practicality of Duncan and Oliver [EENET's producer and film-maker]. We appreciated the scouting visit a few months before hand as that made it so much easier to prepare for the filming.

What advice would you give to others who want to make practical videos about inclusion?

The best advice we can give is to always be inclusive, not just with disabilities but also with location, and access. One of the best parts of the EENET films is that we are shown inclusive situations from multiple nations that have very different experiences of access, education, disability, etc. Something that was amazing for the children and families we work with to see was that there are children with disabilities in the developed western world. It made them redefine how they viewed disability overall. Until we showed them the films, they honestly did not believe that there were children living with disabilities outside Africa.

When planning a film you should:

- Show people with various disabilities in richer and poorer contexts – don't perpetuate the myth that severe disabilities only exist in poorer countries.
- Always show the families engaging in the education of their child. We genuinely believe that the family is where the progress is made. We cannot only show the child at school.
- Be clear that what works for one student may not work for another one, even in the same school.

The Vusumnotfo staff are Katherine J Gau (Director), James Tsabedze (Programme Officer), Sikhumbuzo Mkhabela (IT and M&E), Breeanna Thompson (Programme Officer) and Nomcebo Shezi (Programme Assistant) Email: vusumnotfo@gmail.com

Inclusive Beginnings

New early childhood education videos from EENET

Inclusive Practice

Inclusive Transition

Filmed in Eswatini and Ukraine these two videos contain simple, practical ideas for use by early childhood educators.

Each video has a trainer's manual. There is also a guide on using the videos for advocacy.

Watch the videos online:
https://bit.ly/eenet-ib1

Download the manuals & guide:
https://bit.ly/eenet-ib2

Order the videos & manuals on flashdrive:
https://bit.ly/eenet-ib3

Listening to very young voices

Ingrid Lewis

About 14 years ago a disability NGO asked me to help document the views of children in some inclusive schools they supported in East Africa. The project had been formally evaluated, but the evaluator declared it was impossible to gather children's opinions about education. Their report featured no young voices. We therefore produced a video and book of photos entirely documenting the voices of primary, secondary and vocational learners on education and inclusion.

Thankfully, listening to learners' views is more common these days. But there is still a perception that pre-primary learners are too young to tell us about their experiences or views. In EENET we believe no one is too young to have an opinion or be supported to express themselves. During projects funded by the Early Childhood Program of Open Society Foundations, we worked with early education settings in Armenia, Eswatini and Ukraine using child-to-child approaches to hear the voices of very young learners.

Our approach

Older learners work with a facilitator to **discover action research participatory methods**.

They then adapt and design activities they think will work well with young children in their context.

They often **draw on their own memories of childhood and experiences with younger siblings** to come up with activities that are more child-focused, creative, fun and play-based than adults might use.

This has included ball games, singing and dancing, drawing, and much more.

They also **problem solve**.

If their idea does not seem to be working, they quickly make changes to keep the young children happy and interested.

The older learners **give presentations** to explain to their teachers and the pre-school teachers what the young children said about school or education.

Sometimes the pre-schools and primary or secondary schools decide the exchanges between their learners are beneficial. They want to **continue doing these mixed age group activities**.

The activities help older learners develop new skills, and provide young learners with new experiences and sometimes more confidence to transition to the next school.

Contact: Ingrid is EENET's Managing Director. Email: ingridlewis@eenet.org.uk

Teaching early years practitioners about inclusion, England

Dimi Kaneva

This article shares Dimi's experience of teaching an inclusive practice module on an early years undergraduate course at an English university. The course focused on practical aspects of working with children from birth to age 7. It covered curricula and practice in private nursery settings (Early Years Foundation Stage or EYFS) and the first stage of primary school (Key Stage 1).

Context

The Inclusive Practice module formed part of an undergraduate vocational course which aimed to develop students' professional practice. Some students were new to early years, others were more experienced and seeking a formal qualification. The module ran in the second year, after students had completed a first term of placement in an early years setting and started their second placement.

The placement experience ensured students could begin to relate inclusive values and principles to the practice they had seen in the settings and apply this to their own practice, planning and observations. The module covered understandings of inclusion and how children benefit from such approaches, the child's point of view, curriculum requirements, and working with parents and specialists who support children and families. The module encouraged reflection and self-evaluation of practice rather than just qualifying students as inclusive practitioners.

Principles of inclusive practice in the EYFS

Inclusive principles are embedded within the EYFS. This acknowledges that each child is unique and develops and learns in different ways and at different rates. Enabling environments and positive relationships are equally at the heart of early years practice. Every child, parent, and practitioner has the right to access and participate in high-quality settings and learning experiences.

Nevertheless, early years practitioners are guided by their own views, attitudes, and beliefs. Students' practice and views are often influenced by prior experiences of inclusive practice and children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). For example, they may remember how children with SEND were educated at their own school, or they may bring experiences of being a parent or relative of a child with SEND.

In developing knowledge and skills at university, students also saw themselves as growing their skillset and expertise, which was reinforced by the value of early years degrees for assisting career progression in the sector.

The child and family point of view

The module was influenced by the social model of inclusion and promoted a positive view of the child as capable and the parent as a partner. This was a difficult learning point for students who saw themselves as experts and wanted to 'fix' the child through their practice and compensate for the child's shortcomings. Part of the reason for this was a rigid reading of the EYFS requirements and developmental milestones in isolation from inclusive principles. There is also government pressure on practitioners to develop school readiness (i.e., early reading and writing skills). Students' attitudes were also influenced by their personal experiences with SEND, for instance if they had been told in the past that they could not do certain things because of their differences (e.g., dyslexia or not 'being good' with numbers).

To counter such stereotypes, the module steered students away from deficit views and stressed the importance of developing children's positive self-image and self-esteem and working relationships with parents. In the EYFS this is achieved by assigning a 'key person' for each child who observes, plans and records the child's individual progress. This ensures continuity of care and collaborative working between practitioners and parents.

Essentially, students would develop knowledge of the child, their environment, strengths and

weaknesses, and form a relationship with the parents. Being a 'key person' could then be interpreted as being an expert with regards to child development but also an expert in the child and their needs.

Partnerships with parents

The EYFS promotes partnerships with parents as a crucial aspect of inclusive practice. Parents know their children best but are not necessarily knowledgeable about theories of child development and developmental assessments.

Developing partnerships with parents is a balancing act for students. In teaching the Inclusive Practice module I encountered two issues. Firstly, students were often resistant to approaching parents and getting to know them during placements. Secondly, students increasingly began to see themselves as experts in early years education and care who potentially knew better than the parents.

These mindsets are problematic in developing inclusive practice, particularly when children are not meeting the expected milestones for their age and stage of development. Students need to be aware that children who are not meeting milestones in the education setting might be meeting them in their home environment – an insight that parents can provide.

Students were encouraged to see parents as equal partners, not least because of the immediate impact they have on the child's life. While no two families are the same, a child's parents know them best so students need to develop a level of sensitivity in dealing with parents and families. Often parents are not equipped with the skills to support their child with SEND, or they may not be ready to acknowledge that their child has a disability that impacts learning and development.

To address these issues, during the course we attempted to see inclusive early years practice through the eyes of parents. Students were encouraged to better understand the challenges parents face, such as feeling that they are not taken seriously by practitioners or not being listened to about their child.

Reflection

Teaching about inclusion involves developing students' awareness of their own understandings of inclusion and how these influence their practice. Their past experiences (e.g., their own education and dis/ability), values and worldview around disability (e.g., medical vs. social model), self-image and expertise shape practice and help determine outcomes for the children they work with.

Such factors cannot and should not be dismissed. Often students talked about being objective in their practice and informed by their expertise but is it possible to shake off our preconceptions and past experiences when dealing with children and their families? Rather than dismissing our own views and experiences, they should be acknowledged through reflection.

Some sessions therefore encouraged students to reflect on their own education, particularly negative experiences that may be having an impact on their practice. Focus was also placed on exclusion and their own dealings with it as a way to consider what is and is not inclusive practice. For example, many students favoured removing children with SEND from the mainstream group to provide support but in our sessions the inclusive intentions of this approach were questioned.

The Inclusive Practice module highlighted the need for reflective and sensitive practice. However, while all modules encouraged reflective practice, the Inclusive Practice module was a stand-alone unit. To further develop students' capacity to be inclusive and open-minded, inclusive values should be discussed across the whole course curricula to ensure inclusion is embedded into practice from the outset and not just as a second-year module.

Contact:
Dimi Kaneva is currently Senior Lecturer at the School of Education and Professional Development, University of Huddersfield. This article is based on experience at a previous university. She can be contacted through the EENET office. Email: info@eenet.org.uk.

Training early childhood development and education teachers in Western Kenya

Harriet Bell

In this article, Harriet outlines a practical training programme for early childhood development and education teachers. It supports the development of creative teaching and learning approaches and promotes collaboration between colleagues and with parents.

Background

Western Kenya is rural yet densely populated. Beyond the cities, most residents rely on subsistence farming and their families are large. Education is viewed as the 'route out of poverty' and huge sacrifices are made to send children to school, starting with their early childhood development (ECD). Many rural community schools (which receive no government funding) employ teachers who have no formal training and ECD lessons consist of copying letters and numbers from the blackboard into exercise books.

Pursue is a community-based organisation that works with these schools to run regular teacher development workshops and provide mentoring to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The seminars help teachers understand how they can better support all their students to learn in a variety of ways.

Seminars for teachers

The Teacher Development Seminars (TDS) programme runs for an academic year, consisting of weekly two-hour seminars during term time. These bring together teachers from primary schools across a geographical area. The training sessions cover topics such as questioning, differentiation, formative assessment, guidance and counselling, and improving literacy skills. Training sessions are practical and discussion-based, giving teachers plenty of opportunities to learn from each other and share experiences.

Every teacher on the TDS programme has an initial classroom observation when joining the scheme. Throughout the year, Pursue education staff visit the partner schools regularly to provide informal classroom observations and feedback. They also offer support in areas such as lesson planning or behaviour management.

Within the wider TDS programme, in 2019 Pursue provided 5 ECD-specific training sessions. The ECD seminars focus on a range of topics: play-based learning and its role in child development; how to engage children through storybooks, such as using the pictures to stimulate discussion and develop language skills; and interactive methods of phonics teaching.

During the seminars, teachers are able to take part in the activities being discussed and understand their own learning styles. This helps them discover the value of using a range of techniques to teach ECD concepts and using resources that are readily available and cost nothing. In the classroom, teachers begin to use real-life objects like stones and sticks to teach counting. Students are encouraged to use role-play, and group work is included in lessons as teachers recognise the value of supporting students to collaborate with their peers.

In addition, seminars explore how questioning can help to develop children's thinking skills, even in ECD classes. Prior to the seminars, some teachers felt that ECD-age children were too young to engage with open-ended questions, such as "Can you think of some

words that begin with sound C?". After looking at how different types of questions can greatly aid learning for children, teachers are now seeking to integrate more open-ended questions into their lessons, and direct appropriate questions to specific learners.

Community collaboration

Parents at Pursue's partner schools often expect learning to involve writing; 'playing' can be viewed as a waste of time. Children are expected to show writing in their exercise books every day, regardless of their age. Consequently, Pursue organises parents' days at partner schools – providing parents with the opportunity to discuss how to assist their children's learning at home, and learn about the techniques that ECD teachers use to aid learning for all children.

At these community days, the assumption that learning all happens at school is challenged. Parents are encouraged to take a role in their children's learning, and we work together to help them understand that illiteracy does not mean they cannot assist their children. Pursue staff model how parents can engage children in learning at home, for example, counting the sticks when collecting firewood, or encouraging children's creativity by making patterns from beans or maize.

Putting it into practice

As part of the programme, teachers are mentored by Pursue staff for the duration of the year, after which they join the alumni programme which consists of monthly meetings with other alumni to share best practice. This mentoring is carried out by Pursue Education staff and involves regular coaching meetings and classroom observations, to encourage implementation of techniques learnt. Although the schools have severely limited resources (usually only a blackboard), teachers are encouraged to be imaginative in catering to the needs of all students by providing opportunities to see, hear, touch, question or discover as part of their learning.

Some examples of new techniques seen in the ECD classes include:

- Children worked in pairs to create triangle, square and circle shapes using maize kernels.
- Role play was used by children learning about different family members.
- Children created a visual mind map of domestic animals.
- The teacher gave children cards with numbers written on them. The children were challenged to sort the cards into order from the smallest to largest number.
- A school created a shop area, where children could pretend to be purchasing various items.

It has been encouraging to see the change in both mindset and teaching style among the ECD teachers, as they implement more engaging and play-based learning into their classrooms, catering to a range of different learning styles.

Ongoing support

By bringing teachers together for weekly seminars, the TDS programme enables small rural schools to forge connections with other similar schools, share best practice and learn from each other. Upon completion of the year, teachers graduate to the alumni programme. The alumni network encourages teachers to take more ownership of their professional development through activities such as peer observation or teachers leading parts of a training session.

Contact:
Harriet is Education Director at Pursue.
Email: info@pursue.org.uk.
Website: www.pursue.org.uk

Improving self-esteem in young children with disabilities in Morocco

Mina El Qalli

The childhood years are very exciting, filled with many changes and challenges. From early childhood, children develop their own style, their own social life and their own rhythm. The role of teachers and educators is very important at this stage. In this article, Mina shares her personal reflections on being an educator who specialises in supporting children with autism and other disabilities in Morocco.

Observing children

In my class, I work with children with disabilities. Over time, I have been able to observe the children, their reactions, their characteristics and needs. One of the things I noticed is that they all often had a tendency to devalue themselves, to pass negative judgments on their own worth, on their work, or on the image they see in the mirror.

They were very sensitive to the image that others had of them, especially the views of adults. I noticed some children in my class responded to being called 'bad', 'ugly' or even 'good for nothing' by using the same words to describe themselves. These reflections often returned in their little mouths, the children repeating adult words.

I wanted to know why the children were devaluing themselves. I wondered if it was related to their disability, whether it was due to their relationship with others, or if it related to the way they are educated within their families.

Each child is unique and therefore different, but I always ask myself if each child really knows his or her possibilities. How can I transform the perception of repeated failures in learning into opportunities of discovering themselves?

My approach

To help my students develop their self-esteem, I have adopted an inclusive approach to the activities I develop for them. I set up activity workshops that invite them to cooperate and share with their peers. These workshops are an opportunity for communication and exchange (of words, materials and help), and the students have a great time.

The workshops focus on creating educational materials and developing children's skills, such as fine motor skills or coordination. For example, one of the workshops involves puppet-making. Children with and without disabilities cooperate to create puppets using socks. Other examples of activities include using straws and cotton buds to create materials we can use for activities later on.

An inclusive approach requires that I help children break free from social comparison with their peers. At the beginning, children can hesitate to participate. After a while, they integrate more, join in with the activities and cooperate with their peers. With continued encouragement, they all gain in confidence about their own abilities.

In the classroom, each pupil must exist as a person and find a positive image of him or herself. My inclusive approach helps children to value themselves, in order to help them construct their personalities and develop a sense of autonomy as well as confidence to interact socially with others.

Children must be given a voice in education today. They need opportunities to express their difficulties. Learners need to be taken as they come and supported. They need to be allowed and enabled to show, flourish, and solidify their capabilities – as learners who have many emotional and physical possibilities.

Contact:
Mina El Qalli is a trainer in autism and educator for children with autism and other intellectual disabilities, and executive director of foreign relations at the Arab Media Centre for People with Disabilities, Morocco.
Email: amiqal@gmail.com

Leave no child behind: Invest in the early years

Helen Pinnock

In 2020, Light for The World published the Leave No Child Behind report. In this article, Helen summarises the key points: about good quality inclusive early childhood development (ECD), how it should be supported, and where more investment is needed.

What should everyone know?

Children's brains grow quickly in the first eight years. By age three, major cognitive gaps between the poorest and wealthiest children can result and worsen by six. These gaps often do not reduce later and contribute to high school dropout rates.

To reach their potential, a child needs nurturing early care in a safe and secure environment. This includes healthcare, immunisation, nutrition, learning, and supportive, stimulating interactions with adults and other children.

The most marginalised children, especially those with disabilities, face the biggest risks and obstacles to ECD. In 2018, donors promised to improve ECD funding but little of this has reached children with disabilities. From 2014 to 2018, projects targeting people with disabilities received less than 2% of aid spending.

COVID-19 has worsened ECD services and home environments. Before the pandemic, 43% of the world's young children were at risk of falling behind in development. Closures of schools, health services and feeding schemes removed even more support. The virus strained caregivers by causing illness and death of loved ones, cutting income, and reducing childcare.

What can we do to fix this situation?

Take a twin-track approach. Ensure system-wide improvements so that ECD provision is inclusive for all, and provide individualised responses for children with disabilities.

Increase young children's access to healthy food. Early malnutrition can severely damage physical growth and the capacity to learn later in life.

Encourage adults to help children interact and play with other children. Play builds skills across all developmental domains.

Improve early detection of disability through training community health workers in outreach, early detection and referral.

Provide rehabilitation - early stimulation and rehabilitation can reduce children's impairments.

Improve access to early childhood and preprimary education for children with disabilities and the poorest. Enabling children to interact develops critical social, cognitive and physical skills through play and learning.

Make ECD and pre-primary centres inclusive and nurturing environments to support children's needs, protect them from harm, and provide age-appropriate stimulation. Inclusive ECD centres are child-centred, play-based and integrated with health and nutrition services.

Expand parenting programmes. Parents often need help to create a nurturing, stimulating environment. Support includes giving families age-appropriate and ability-sensitive play and learning materials, including for distance learning.

Develop early childhood intervention (ECI). ECI systems provide multi-disciplinary services for children with disabilities from birth to age three to five, supporting them in their everyday environments.

Push for well-trained and well-paid ECD and pre-primary staff. On-the-job training and salary increases are needed for a skilled and motivated workforce.

Advocate for multi-sectoral early childhood development policy, which cuts across different ministries and prioritises marginalised children.

The report is available in accessible formats, and multiple languages: https://bit.ly/eer9-15

Helen is a consultant at EENET
Email: info@eenet.org.uk

Enabling access to early childhood education in Kampala's informal settlements

Olivia Barker White

Kids Club Kampala began over 10 years ago, organising kids clubs for children living in informal settlements in this Ugandan city. Today we run a range of projects to meet basic needs and bring about sustainable change for the communities in several informal settlements in Kampala. Access to education is one of our key focus areas as we believe it is critical in breaking the perpetuating cycle of poverty, which many of the families we support experience.

Background

Many children living in Kampala's informal settlements do not attend school at all. Primary school enrolment rates are declining each year and there is a high dropout rate for those who do register (64.5%).[1]

In our experience, out-of-school children are often left unsupervised during the day. Without a daily purpose or safe space to go, they are at risk from health and safety hazards. In some instances, children are required to work as a way of providing extra income for the family. Education, therefore, can be seen as not economically viable when basic needs are seldom met.

Kids Club Kampala is a community-led organisation that aims to empower local people to be active in their own development and to make a difference in their own communities. We believe in asking people what their needs are and how we can best help them, and giving people the space to come up with creative solutions themselves. We work closely with local authorities, community leaders, and beneficiaries to ensure that our programmes are appropriate and meet needs in the best way.

The Early Education for All project

Established in 2011, our Early Education for All project provides basic tuition to out-of-school children in three of Kampala's biggest and poorest informal settlements: Katanga, Naguru and Namuwongo. It gives vulnerable children aged 3 to 6 years old an opportunity to learn, interact and thrive and is flexible to the needs of the children who attend. The education classes are taught by Ugandan qualified teachers and are non-formal. They take place in the afternoon as girls are required to help their mothers with chores in the mornings according to local traditions and societal norms. The classes run from Monday to Friday every week throughout the year.

Children participate in structured play, singing, drawing, moulding, painting and other activities that aid their learning and the development of:

- numeracy skills;
- literacy skills;
- social skills;
- physical education.

The lessons are designed to follow the Ugandan ECDE curriculum. The flexibility of a non-formal approach allows teachers to tailor learning to the different ages and educational needs to each child and fosters inclusivity. However, the programme encourages a positive classroom environment and provides children with clear routines and goals.

Hannah, aged 7, in her own words, describes the benefit of the Early Education project for her:

"I attend Kids Club Kampala's Education project every day in my community. I really like going because it has boosted up my brain. I have always hoped to go to school and now I am learning a lot. My teachers have helped me with learning how to read and write and many other things. Thank you Kids Club Kampala for supporting children like me who do not go to school."

Free to all

The programme is free for all children attending. They are not asked to provide any materials for learning, which means that these classes are completely free and thus accessible to the poorest and most vulnerable children. This project also provides a safe place for children to go each day with responsible adults to supervise them, thus protecting them from harm when their parents are at work. Children from the poorest families who would have no other way of accessing early education are specifically targeted to enrol in the project, identified through a needs assessment.

Engaging parents

In addition to our work with the children, we aim to develop close partnerships with parents to help cater to their children's needs. We hold regular parents meetings to foster parental engagement with the project. They are updated on their child's progress and invited to provide feedback as to how they think the project could be improved. Parents are also provided with training around children's rights and the benefits of their children gaining an education.

Supporting basic needs

Our project fosters inclusivity, welcoming all children aged 3 to 6 years old. The centres are located in the heart of informal settlement communities so that they are easily accessible and remove transport as a barrier to learning. Additionally, parents are incentivised to send their child to the education centres each day as we provide each child with a hot, nutritious meal to help meet basic needs, tackle malnutrition, and provide the children with a better start towards a prosperous future. School feeding programmes also improve children's concentration levels, which enables them to learn new skills and grow.

Disability inclusive

This project caters to the needs of children with disabilities. The community classrooms are fully accessible and the teachers and teaching assistants receive relevant and frequent training on practical day-to-day ways they can help and support children with disabilities and special needs. This training is provided by partner organisations in Kampala, such as the Uganda Society for Disabled Children (USDC). Our teachers also work closely with social workers to identify at-risk children and get them the support they need to assist their early childhood development.

COVID-19

More recently, during the COVID-19 crisis, our teachers provided workbooks and stationery and support for parents so that children could continue to access the project and learn from home. The crisis provided an unexpected opportunity for us to expand our reach to more out-of-school children and, as such, we are hoping to expand this approach further in the future.

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on informal settlement communities has been far reaching and has forced families further into chronic poverty. We anticipate that even more children will drop out of school due to poverty and thus the need for this project will dramatically increase. As Uganda begins to transition out of lockdown and our classes return to normal, we anticipate there will be increasing poverty levels in the informal settlements, and children currently in formal education may drop out due to their families falling into poverty. There will be an increased need for this project.

Contact: Olivia is the CEO of Kids Club Kampala. Email: olivia@kidsclubkampala.org

[1] http://bit.ly/eer9-17

Overcoming urban barriers to learning in Vietnam

Lieve Mieke Leroy, Thi Chau Nguyen and Dinh Khuong Duy Nguyen

Fast urban growth is a major challenge for large cities such as Da Nang in Vietnam. It puts pressure on education systems and exhausts the capacity of state-run schools. In this article, VVOB explains a project that explores how growing up in a city affects learning and participation for preschool children, and how education needs to be adapted to address this.

Background

Rapid urbanisation creates social and spatial changes, such as less interactions among community members, and less green, open space for play which can impact children's development. City services need to safeguard the full potential of urban development to benefit all citizens, including newcomers from rural provinces. Sustainable urban development is increasingly recognised as a key development challenge, but few organisations have dedicated programmes.

VVOB - Education for Development, a nonprofit organisation, is working with the Da Nang Department of Education and Training (DOET) to deliver the 'Communities of practice Inspiring Teaching Innovations in the early Education System in Vietnam' (CITIES) project from June 2019 until February 2021. The project focuses on the Son Tra District of the city, an industrial port district with many seasonal and migrant workers.

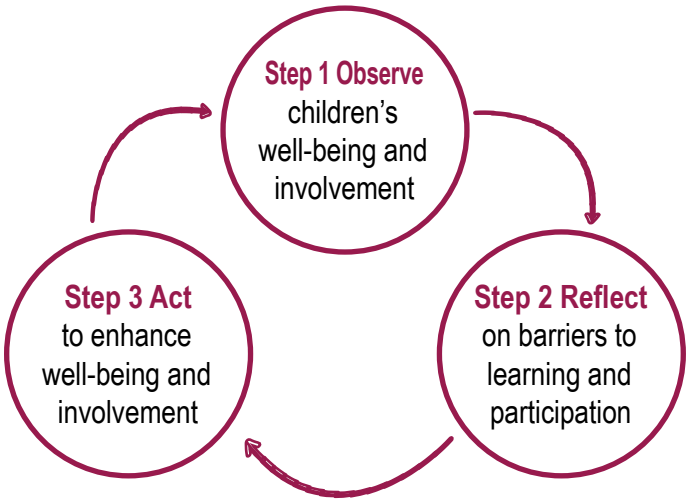
Observation

We trained teachers and government officials for 8 preschools (6 state-run, 2 private) in Son Tra district to observe and measure children's well-being and involvement, indicators that children are learning (see diagram). We used methods including training, workshops, onsite coaching, collaborative learning and exposure visits. Due to COVID-19 social distancing measures, we delivered some training online.

The teachers and government officials identified potential barriers to learning and participation. These included teacher-led didactic methods, classes with high pupil-teacher ratios, and scarce, unattractive materials and resources. Limited parent-teacher contact was also identified as well as parental pressure on teachers and children, leading to children attending many academic extra-curricular activities and private tutoring. Beyond school, urban-specific barriers include parents working long hours and experiencing poor well-being; insufficient clean, green, safe spaces for playful learning; new technologies replacing meaningful human interactions; and changes in social relations compared to rural life – less interaction with neighbours and peers, distrust, and weakened social ties.

To address these barriers, teachers implemented 8 action points:

1. Rearrange the classroom in appealing corners or areas.
2. Check corners to replace unattractive materials with more appealing ones.
3. Introduce new materials and activities.
4. Discover children's interests and find related activities.
5. Support ongoing activities with stimulating impulses and enriching interventions.
6. Widen possibilities for free initiative, support with rules and agreements.
7. Explore and improve the relation with each child and between children.
8. Introduce activities that help children explore the world of behaviour, feelings and values.



The child monitoring approach supports teachers to become reflective, continuously improving education quality.

By modifying preschool activities, materials, interactions, and environments, they moved away from a one-size-fits-all approach to a more differentiated pedagogical approach.

Developing creative pedagogies

We piloted an innovative methodology using applied artistic practices and interactive theatre methods to build children's socio-emotional skills and resilience. A group of international and national artists worked with teachers to develop these methods, analyse their local relevance, and their impact on the children's well-being and involvement.

'Action Paint' – children close their eyes, listen to music and feel the rhythm. They start painting using different tools. The product is not predefined, but the result of what children feel.

Providing teachers with opportunities to try out, reflect, share, and adapt these methods helped them understand the objectives of using the methods for children's holistic development. Such approaches to teachers' professional development go beyond cascade and knowledge driven trainings and provide teachers with opportunities to reflect on and learn from their own practice.

These pedagogies stimulate children to create, to express, and to reflect on their experiences, and they build self-confidence and create opportunities for interaction. This supports the national Ministry of Education and Training's aims to deliver child-centred learning and learning through play. When schools reopened after COVID-19 closures, teachers commented on the benefit of using their newly developed pedagogies to welcome children back to school.

Public versus private

Due to limited public service capacity, private schools increasingly cater for disadvantaged learners in urban contexts. The project's start-up phase revealed a difference between teaching staff in private and public schools. Private schools have more teacher turnover and less professional development, affecting the quality of education. Private schools also have less time for in-service training and participation in the project. Guaranteeing quality education for all children, however, is a core government responsibility. These initial lessons are very relevant for local government officials, as it makes them reflect on the role they can or should play.

Conclusion

Growing up in a city offers opportunities but also specific barriers to learning and participation that may increase inequalities especially for the most disadvantaged. Teachers and government officials often lack awareness of the specific challenges facing learners in urban contexts. Our small intervention created awareness of the need for specific approaches in the classroom and across the education system. It developed the capacity of teachers to apply reflective and adaptive pedagogies. In the next phase, teachers will explore how to use these opportunities to mitigate the barriers.

Watch a video of the project: https://youtu.be/Do-IgUJUI_o.

Contact:
Thi Chau Nguyen, Education Advisor. Email: chau.nt@vvob.org
Lieve Mieke Leroy, Education advisor. Email: lieve.leroy@vvob.org
Nguyen Dinh Khuong Duy, Project Coordinator. Email: duy.ndk@vvob.org

VVOB Vietnam, 3-5 Nguyen Binh street, Hai Chau dist., Danang, Vietnam
https://vietnam.vvob.org; www.vvob.org

The authors thank Wouter Boesman, Hans De Greve, Filip Lenaerts and Ly Thi Kim Tran for contributions to this article.

Addressing poor ECD enrolment among children with disabilities in Rwanda

Felicien Turatsinze, Stephane Nyembo, Christopher Harris

Chance for Childhood's (CfC) extensive experience of inclusive education has found that community knowledge is an essential building block within our programmes, especially where resources to provide standard pre-school services are limited. In this article, we explore how CfC's Inclusive Early Childhood Development (IECD) project, challenged the mindset of caregivers to enable a more inclusive approach to early childhood development (ECD).

In Rwanda, only 1% of children aged 0-3, and 20% aged 3-6, have access to ECD services like state maintained and private pre-primary schools, or home and community-based ECD.[1] Children with disabilities have even less access, with only 8.8% of 3-6-year olds attending pre-primary schools.[2]

Children growing up in poverty are more likely to have disabilities due to poor health care, and children with disabilities in turn are more likely to live in poverty due to social stigma and poor access to government safety nets. The cycle can be difficult to break, as Claudine's[3] story shows:

Claudine has two children. Her four-year-old has delayed development due to birth-related problems. Claudine's family are unable to access paid work or support for malnourished children provided by the governments' *ubudehe* social assistance programmes due to their household income being misclassified in official records. Social stigma and financial barriers prevented them from enrolling their child in their local community-based ECD centre.

In 2018, CfC started the IECD project in Musanze District, providing pre-primary education for children with disabilities.

Assessing the need

The project began with a scoping study of 10 caregivers and 96 parents to understand the reasons why children with disabilities were not accessing ECD services. We found that:

- 36.5% of parents preferred to keep their children with disabilities hidden;
- 27.8% said children with disabilities do not need to attend ECD services or school;
- 18.8% felt they should access ECD services, but in a separate class from others;
- 16.9 % felt that including children with disabilities in ECD services involved more work for caregivers.

In order to change attitudes towards children with disabilities, we worked with village, cell, sector and district level authorities to convene workshops with parents, ECD caregivers and the wider community.

Changing parents' attitudes

To identify the parents of children with disabilities, we trained volunteer Community Health Workers (CHWs) and ECD caregivers in 65 villages on child development stages and milestones and using disability screening tools. During a door-to-door mapping exercise all the children of ECD age (0-6 years old) in each household were screened to identify any disabilities.

CHWs were trained in the risks and causes of disabilities, counselling sessions, toy-making, and how to support parents to respond appropriately to their child's needs. Two 5-day trainings were conducted by CfC Rwanda team, who are inclusion trainers, community mobilisers and social workers mentored by the Disability and Inclusion Advisor. The tools used in the trainings were co-designed by Helen Barrett, a Disability and Social Inclusion Advisor, and the CfC Rwanda team.

The CHWs passed on information over the next six months, through bi-weekly home-based sessions with families of children with disabilities under three years old, using the tools from their training. Parents reported significant benefits to the way they now care for their children. For example, instead of locking them inside the house or tying them to a rope

to prevent them from wandering off, they now spend time each day playing with their children and include them in their home rituals.

"I could never believe that Amos* can make it and learn just like his peers in baby class, but I am now surprised that he knows how to count up to ten and knows some songs. He makes us laugh at home" – Father of Amos[3] a wheelchair user.

Changing attitudes of ECD caregivers

ECD caregivers at Centre d'Expérimantation des Activités Prés-scolaire (CEAPS) and Rwaza ECD centre were given 10-days' initial training and another 5-day refresher on how to identify children with disabilities and/or other learning needs, how to include them in their teaching and learning practice, and how to produce inclusive learning materials and form constructive playgroups. The training was conducted by CfC inclusion trainers.

"I used to think that children with disabilities can cause disruption to other children and caregivers but have realised that it all depends on how you set your class as I am now convinced that it can work as it has started working well here" – CEAPS headteacher.

Changing community attitudes

Community advocacy events to raise awareness of the rights of children with disabilities were attended by 1,900 participants. These meetings covered a diverse range of issues including the risks and causes of disabilities for prevention purposes, children's rights and helping parents to understand that all children need their parents' support to develop and achieve their full potential in life. We also used the meetings to signpost parents towards existing support structures in the community and how to use them while referring their children to support options.

The need for long-term approaches

Much of the success of the project depends on the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of the community. Altering firmly held prejudices takes time and is difficult to evaluate within normal project cycle timeframes.

Community-based solutions are effective in delivering positive outcomes for marginalised children with disabilities. However, there is a need to assess whether using Rwandan home-grown solutions, community engagement, and feedback platforms alone are enough to change community perceptions about disability in the long term. Changing society's attitudes towards inclusive practice involves more than giving a community new knowledge. Supporting them to act on this information requires interventions that focus on more than the short project cycles currently delivered by donors. In addition, there is a need to address current gaps in provision and support for households of children with disabilities living in poverty, like Claudine's, to give their children the best start in life. This can be achieved by encouraging parents to work together, be trained on business development, for example, and come up with business ideas that attract initial investment. Supporting such initiatives should go hand in hand with provision of IECD services.

Contact:
Felicien Turatsinze, is the Disability and Inclusion Advisor for CfC Rwanda. Email: felicien.turatsinze@chanceforchildhood.org

Stephane Nyembo (MA), is the country representative for CfC Rwanda. Email: stephane.nyembo@chanceforchildhood.org

Chris Harris is the Global MEL Officer for CfC. Email: chris.harris@chanceforchildhood.org

[1] https://bit.ly/eer9-21a
[2] https://bit.ly/eer9-21b
[3] Names have been changed to protect privacy.

Using calendars to promote inclusion in Malawi

Veronica Stapleton

Access to early childhood development and education (ECDE) is limited for children with disabilities in Malawi for many reasons, including negative social attitudes, inaccessible learning environments, and a lack of investment. In 2016, Sightsavers, a UK-based non-governmental organisation, launched a project in the Ntcheu and Chikwawa districts of Malawi to promote disability inclusion in ECDE programmes. This was funded by Comic Relief and delivered in partnership with the Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi (FEDOMA), the Catholic Health Commission (CHC) and the Centre for Children's Affairs (CCA). Veronica outlines the project in this article.

Community-based childcare centres

In Malawi, early childhood education is delivered through a network of community-based childcare centres (CBCCs) which are established, funded and run by local communities. The CBCCs are open for children aged 3-6 years. They provide a foundation in early childhood education before progression to the local primary school. We supported 20 existing CBCCs, working with local communities and volunteer pre-school teachers known as caregivers. The caregivers have limited access to training but do a great job in challenging circumstances.

Our project focused on enabling children with disabilities to attend the CBCCs. We supported their families and local community members through training, mentoring and guidance on how to make CBCCs more accessible for young children with disabilities. By the end of the project, 179 children were able to attend their local CBCC and make the vital first step into formal education.

From meetings to calendars

As part of our approach, we conducted regular meetings in four clusters of villages about disability, inclusion and the value of all children with disabilities attending the CBCCs. The meetings were well attended. We saw positive changes in the centres and increased enrolment of children with disabilities. However, not everyone was able to attend and those who did could quickly forget the messages in their busy lives.

We began to explore ways to disseminate information after the events to help keep it in parents' minds. We developed calendars that contained key messages about inclusive ECDE to enhance the capacity of a range of stakeholders to support children with disabilities. Calendars were ideal as most households in the area have one hanging on the wall and it is common practice for larger businesses to provide them free to customers.

The calendars were designed to last for three years and each page contained simple messages about supporting young children with disabilities. They were written in the local language, Chichewa, and a local artist completed the illustrations. The calendars were the focal point of the meetings (two were held in each village cluster).

Participants looked at the illustrations in groups, discussed what they meant, and shared their learning with the whole group. The meetings lasted 2-3 hours, demonstrating a high level of commitment from the local communities. Over 300 people attended during a six-month period.

We printed two versions of the calendar: one for parents and families, and one for caregivers.

The **caregivers' calendar** was linked to the school year and based around the National Syllabus for Integrated Early Childhood Development. For example, September/October covers Language, Literature and Communication, one of six domains contained in the ECDE syllabus. Each page contains a simple message and 2-3 points to remember.

September / October

'Communicate with the children and encourage them to communicate with you'

- Speak clearly in short, simple sentences.
- Use gestures and facial expressions to communicate meaning.
- Use the child's name to get their attention and ask questions to test their understanding.

In the **parents' calendar**, each page presents one key message and two things to remember. The messages are supported with positive illustrations to help parents understand the message and think of ideas to put it into practice.

May / June

'Include your child with disabilities in all family and community activities'

- Expect your child to take part in all family activities.
- Ask your child to complete simple household chores.

Did the messages have an impact?

We wanted to ensure that the calendars were useful in supporting children, not just another picture on the wall. In addition to focusing on them during the meetings, caregivers were trained in the key messages and links to the syllabus.

There were children with disabilities who could not regularly attend the centres. They were supported at home by Health Surveillance Assistants (HSAs) as part of the home-based care strand of the project. We encouraged the HSAs to discuss the calendar messages with parents during home visits.

During regular monitoring and support visits over a six-month period, we noted that:

- All observed caregivers were able to explain at least 2 key messages from the materials.
- All trained caregivers could apply at least one key message from the calendars in their teaching
- All interviewed parents of children receiving home-based care (27) and all parents of children with disabilities who attended the CBCC (108) could explain at least 2 key messages.

This was not in-depth research and we do not know yet whether the messages will have a long-term impact, but we do know parents and caregivers learned from the calendars. More importantly, they were a resource around which discussions could be focused to ensure that the needs of children with disabilities were remembered. Parents reported that they liked the pictures, understood the messages, and were happy to display the calendars in their homes.

Conclusion

We have found the calendars to be a valuable resource to raise awareness of children with disabilities and their rights to education and having their needs met. They are only one tool of the many that we use in our projects, but they can easily be produced and are more likely to be kept and displayed in the home than leaflets or pamphlets. We have since reviewed and updated the calendars for use elsewhere in Malawi to encourage the inclusion of children with disabilities in education.

Contact: Veronica is Global Technical Lead for Education (East, Central and Southern Africa) at SightSavers. Email: vstapleton@sightsavers.org.

Life-saving lullabies: Using song in public health education in Zambia

James Reid

In this article, James introduces a research project led by Huddersfield University. It promotes inclusive, community-led approaches to accessible and sustainable public health education to reduce maternal and infant mortality and improve child development. Using songs to promote public health education and increase interaction between mothers and their children is part of a holistic approach to early childhood development and education.

The context

In Zambia in 2018, up to 15 women per week lost their lives in pregnancy due to preventable non-communicable causes. In May 2019, the president declared a public health emergency in Zambia. He called for 'heightened interventions' in maternal and child health (MCH) to ensure no woman or child dies, seeking new approaches to MCH that are sustainable and can be scaled up.

The reasons for maternal and infant mortality in Zambia are complex and involve a wide range of economic and social issues. These include significant differences between the services available in rural areas and urban centres, high rates of illiteracy, stigmatisation of unmarried pregnant women, and the availability of and distance to clinics. An important colonial legacy has also negatively affected the provision of MCH care. In the 1970s, various NGOs from the northern hemisphere sought to retrain traditional birth attendants (TBA) – women in the community who help pregnant women during pregnancy, especially when giving birth.

Although many TBA practices were inappropriate to the health and wellbeing of mothers and children, the desire to upskill TBAs ignored the intimate cultural, community and social aspects of their work. As a result, the intervention was only partially successful as the majority of TBAs did not complete their training and the sustainability of the programmes was affected by finite funding cycles and NGOs leaving the country.

Today, the cultural and social aspects of the TBAs' work has been incorporated into Safe Motherhood Action Groups (SMAGs) so that MCH education continues to be provided in local communities, alongside clinical care, by local women, with local women. The Ministry of Health has contracted local NGOs, including St John Zambia, to develop the *Mama na Mwana* (mother and baby) project where volunteers are specifically trained to provide basic healthcare check-ups, advice and support. Nonetheless, recent gains in reducing the incidence of maternal and infant mortality have stalled.

Developing a local sustainable approach

The research team from Huddersfield University developed a partnership with St John Zambia, to define, develop and deliver a zero-cost, sustainable innovation strategy that could be scaled up. We wanted to start from an understanding of the everyday work of the MCH volunteers to avoid the colonising mistakes of the past. During 2019 we explored the work of the volunteers and clinical staff, all of whom were women, at two clinics in Lusaka in a one-day arts-based workshop,.

The workshop began with a discussion to assess the cultural and social efficacy of the 'baby box', a concept that is gaining interest globally as a tool for reducing maternal and infant mortality. We did not promote the box as appropriate. It is too expensive and the contents and design promote very specific notions of

motherhood and 'desired' mothering practices that come from the global north. Instead, we explored how westernised practices compare to local experiences. The participants' critiques of the baby box included it being made from inappropriate materials, it cannot be used to carry a sleeping baby, and it resembles a coffin!

Taking a context-appropriate approach

Following the women's lead we explored items in everyday Zambian culture and practice. We considered using traditional *chitenge* – a piece of printed fabric – for communicating health messages in their design. The women identified 22 practical uses for *chitenge* as clothing, a blanket, a baby swaddle, a tablecloth and a wrapper for gifts. However, although the *chitenge* was culturally appropriate and ubiquitous, concerns emerged about the affordability and sustainability of using *chitenge* for health messaging, since the cloth may be produced and printed outside Zambia.

This led us to consider lullabies and songs instead. When women shared their experiences as mothers they mentioned singling lullabies and traditional songs to babies. We were also aware of an experience in Malawi where clinicians had taken to singing their new system of clinical standard operating procedures because their clinics lacked paper, ink and printers to print them out. By the end of the workshop, the St John volunteers began to develop songs that provided important health messages for pregnant women and new mothers.

During our later fieldwork 70% of young mothers we spoke to said they had sung contemporary, religious or made-up songs to their child. All the mothers agreed that they would enjoy singing to their child because it would be fun. We also know that singing can help build the relationship between mother and baby, and is highly correlated with good child development outcomes and mother and child mental health. This includes benefits to mother-child attachment, cognitive development, developing language and expressive capacities, and combatting post-natal depression. All of which benefit children's later experiences in education.

Mothers and MCH volunteers were pleased to hear about the positives of singing to babies. They embraced the use of song as culturally appropriate, linked to traditional practices and because it can be shared within the community. They also accepted singing because they enjoyed making new songs together, felt empowered to share their experiences, and also found songs memorable, easy to pass on, and adaptable.

The volunteers have currently produced about 60 songs of various length and focus, they do this individually and in groups. One song, for example, is sung as a welcome to the new mothers as they arrive at the clinic, another is used to communicate the different services available at the clinic on different days. Shorter songs are used to inform new mothers of the benefits of breast feeding or their right to contraception.

The songs therefore, have become effective methods for communicating and learning important health messages. The next stage of our work is for the volunteers to create songs with young mothers and we hope to create a short documentary.

Adapting to Coronavirus

The adaptability of using songs was highlighted during the spread of coronavirus as the St John volunteers quickly, without cost, produced and performed songs focused on preventing the spread of the disease to women attending clinics. In September 2020, this frugal approach to inclusive public health education was awarded best in class for 'social impact' by Good Design Australia. The judges said it was:

"A really creative and well-designed solution… to produce a positive social and health outcome. The simplicity and very human nature of this solution to a deeply embedded cultural challenge is really inspiring."

Contact:
James Reid is a senior lecturer at Huddersfield University.
Email: j.reid@hud.ac.uk

Delivering social-safety child education through animations in Nigeria

Bidemi Nelson

As parents, caregivers and/or teachers we want to keep children safe from harm, but there may be times when we are not there and children must rely on their own decision-making skills to stay safe. In this article, Bidemi describes how the Shield of Innocence Initiative is developing creative ways of delivering social-safety education to very young children.

Social-safety education

A lack of social-safety child education increases child victimisation.

When children do not know the basic rules of socially safe interactions with their physical and social environments, the dangers of them being accidentally injured, abused or traumatised are increased. However, the availability of social-safety education to help children navigate situations that might threaten their safety and well-being is hugely dependent on whether parents and/or schools both understand its importance and have access to training.

We feel that social-safety education should be an integral part of a child's education, but it is not often prioritised by parents and schools in Nigeria. When it eventually is, it is usually in response to situations where children have already been victimised. Other reasons for the non-prioritisation of social-safety education include:

- increased parental absenteeism at home leading to lack of information on the importance of this kind of education;
- a lack of this form of education in the school curriculum;
- ignorance of the dangers that children can face in their physical and social environment;
- a shortage of experts in this area of child education;
- insufficient funding for this type of education by government, schools and relevant stakeholders.

Using animations

Animations can help to disseminate social-safety child education. They can be critical tools when it comes to entertaining and educating children, especially when they are used to stimulate further discussions or activities around the topics shown. Animations are a child-friendly means of engaging children and have the potential to keep their attention for longer.

Animations have already been used in a number of countries to disseminate social-safety child education. Perhaps the most familiar are the animations that teach children about road safety and the rules that keep pedestrians safe near traffic.

In Nigeria, there are many topics that could benefit from being covered in a social-safety child education programme. These include how to navigate interactions with strangers and what to do if children find themselves in a situation of violence and child sexual exploitation. While such topics can be difficult to broach due to their sensitive nature, there is still the need for children to remain safe and animations can provide an effective way for these topics to be presented to children.

Animations can be expensive, but the returns are usually recouped within a short time (depending on viewership). Social-safety animations also have the potential to reach many children with life-saving information and can help fine-tune their interaction skills.

Early years social-safety education

The Shield of Innocence Initiative is an NGO based in Nigeria. It works to prevent all forms of child abuse by raising awareness. We have been investing in the development of animations for the purpose of disseminating social-safety child education to young children.

For example, our subtitled animated short film named 'Don't Wait' tells the story of a little girl whose mother left her in the company of her friends when she was not around. Before her mother's return, a male neighbour sends her on an errand to get him a drink. When the little girl returns from completing the errand, he invites her into his apartment to share the drink as a reward, but he adds a bit of alcohol to her drink to make her vulnerable.

The little girl gets tipsy and wants to go home but the neighbour refuses. This leads to an altercation between them and the girl narrowly escapes unscathed. The animation teaches lessons about relating with strangers, the dangers of taking recreational drugs, and the dangers of being abused when a child is not in the company of trusted family members.

The film comes with a song also titled Don't Wait, which contains social-safety tips that children can sing along to with their family members. Songs are an effective way to deliver important messages and children can remember these messages by learning the songs.

Future aims

At the moment our workshops involve showing the children the film and then discussing important issues from the film with them. This enables us to emphasise the social-safety skills that children need to handle and gives the children and their teachers an opportunity to ask questions. We then sing the social-safety song together.

However, this method of teaching social-safety skills is not ideal for the learning needs of younger children and we need to engage their parents, care-givers and teachers for much more successful learning. We are therefore developing more creative methods of working with the animated film. These include using activities that focus on visual art, dramatisation, and more music.

We are looking for collaboration opportunities to expand the impact of our work with children, as we know that the need for children's social-safety skills will continue. We have already visited primary schools, residential childcare centres, religious organisations and children's departments and hope to continue our work in schools and social centres in the future. We are also exploring the use of social media to disseminate the films we create and enable our work to reach more children and child-friendly organisations.

Bidemi's love for poetry motivated her to write this poem to reach out to parents, caregivers and teachers about the importance of prioritising social-safety education for their children or advocating for it in schools, child-friendly organisations and their communities.

Children, Children, Children

We wanted a world where children could be free
Running the course of childhood on dainty feet
Alas, twas only wishful thinking because I watch them flee
Many hurt and lost for lack of wisdom needed for the street

Children in hordes will continue to prance
Away and away they go, hands and feet in tow
But how long can they go without that fearful glance
If knowledge of social-safety, from them we slow

Children can be ready for the world
Take away the ignorance and set them free
Let them explore and not remain curled
That's the way to see in life's sea.

Contact: Bidemi is the CEO of the Shield of Innocence Initiative, in Ibadan, Nigeria, working to mitigate child abuse.
Email: shieldofinnocence@gmail.com
Video URL: http://bit.ly/eer9-27

Bridging the early childhood education gap for low-income families in Nigeria

Lohis Salami

In this article, Lohis recounts her personal experience of improving her practice as an early childhood educator. She also explains how she is now supporting other teachers to ensure children from low-income families can access better quality early education.

Background

Not every household in Nigeria believes that a child's first 5 years are crucial to their overall development and outcome in life. Many think that at this age they are too young to learn and it is a waste of hard-earned resources to enrol them in an early childhood centre.

Early childhood education in Nigeria is provided by both the public and private sectors. Low-income families can only access early childhood education in public schools or private schools charging low fees. Often, these schools are over-subscribed and under-resourced, so there is a limit to the number of children who can be enrolled per school year and pupil-teacher ratios are high. The quality of the teaching is varied.

My experience

My teaching experience in one school changed my perspective about early years education. Unlike the schools where I had taught before, learning outcomes in this school were positive. I observed that each child was treated as a unique individual and this was evident from the relationship between the teacher and the children. According to the parents, the children were happy and eager to come to school.

The teachers were professional, warm and had a passion for teaching. They used teaching and learning resources that were age-appropriate. The children had access to, and could explore indoor and outdoor learning spaces, which was very effective for teaching and learning.

Learning was differentiated. The uniqueness of each child was a major guide to differentiating each child's class activities. There was no rote learning. Instead, the approach to teaching and learning was like laying a foundation for a house. Each concept was taught in such a manner that the child could relate to these concepts – even outside the classroom. The children were encouraged to interact and socialise. During this period of development, their language is still evolving so opportunities were created for children to interact with their peers and the adults in their setting throughout the day.

Learning through play was a major component of the teaching and learning process. Play is a beautiful way of reinforcing learning in an integrated way. Children can, for example, learn numbers, colours and shapes all in one lesson by sorting, counting, etc.

The entire school climate was generally positive. Thanks to teachers who know their onions! Each teacher was equipped through continuous professional development during the course of each academic session.

Acme Education Resource

My experience in this school ignited my passion to seek opportunities to become a better early years school teacher. I began to research child development, how children think and learn, as well as what makes a great early years programme. Such programmes must follow a pathway that enables holistic learning and supports the overall development of the child. In most of the schools that provide early years education for low-income families in Nigeria, much emphasis is laid on cognitive learning at the detriment of other learning domains.

I started the Acme Education Resource with the aim of familiarising teachers with global best practices in teaching and learning. School owners that cater for the learning of low-income households do not charge high school fees so invest less in the school facilities and professional development of their staff. The teachers can be ill-prepared and unaware of what the expectations are. The result is an unequal society where only some children have a great head start in their learning and life journey.

Acme's focus is on providing opportunities for children from low-income households to access quality early years education. We aim to bridge the learning gaps among children from low-income households, which is so much more important now that COVID-19 is increasing inequality and challenging our ability to build inclusive societies.

Acme's approach

Acme offers its services to low-income schools at no cost but charges a fee for schools charging high tuition fees. We want these teachers to understand their pivotal roles in the children's learning journey. Schools either request our services or we approach them to ask for an opportunity to train their teachers.

First we spend time understanding their approach to teaching and learning, observing the teachers, looking at the curriculum and how it is put into practice in lesson plans. Training is tailored towards the needs of each school.

I developed a teaching curriculum and training manual that focuses on the real work that teachers do in the classroom. The curriculum includes, but is not limited to:

- **Classroom management:** Class size is often large so we inspire teachers to think of ways they can manage their settings. For example, doing activities in teams. Acme's approach is to not spoon feed teachers but to challenge them to think outside the box. There is always room for improvements when we challenge ourselves as teachers.
- **Inclusive classroom:** Children are unique in how they learn. We challenge teachers to leave no learner behind. They often complain of lack of resources but there are creative ways to improvise with natural resources that are abundantly available around us. For example, teachers can teach shapes to 3 year olds using natural resources as much as possible. Teachers need to provide opportunities for children to hear, see, and feel these shapes. They can form these shapes using cut sticks from the trees around them, draw the shapes in wet sand, look around them to see where in their environments they can see these shapes and so on.

Towards the end of a training workshop, there is a breakout session. Here teachers work in teams to come up with novel ways to tackle their observed challenges. Using the training as a guide, they come up with solutions. Because the solutions come from them, they are motivated to take actions and seek for ways to improve their effectiveness.

Much work still needs to be done so that no child is left behind and, more importantly, that the learning process sets the foundation for a great future for these children.

Contact: Lohis is an Education Specialist at Acme Education Resource, Abuja, Nigeria.
Email: acme16edu@gmail.com

‘Growing Together’: Promoting parents’ clubs and play in refugee contexts

Jodie Nguy and Julia McGeown

Children living in refugee camps and host communities all over the world face a multitude of challenges including crowded conditions, high levels of poverty and disease, and difficulty accessing services such as schools and healthcare. Issues such as a child’s right to a holistic development, to play, to develop self-esteem, and to promote their well-being are sometimes neglected in favour of life’s ‘essentials’ (like food and shelter). But inclusive play and the development of early learning skills are crucial, as a fundamental right and to help them thrive in educational settings and have a more productive future. In this article, Jodie and Julia share project highlights from Humanity and Inclusion.

Parents’ clubs make a difference

From 2016 to 2020, the Growing Together project worked in 11 refugee camps and 52 host communities in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, the Thai-Myanmar border, and in Peshawar and Nowshera districts in Pakistan. It was led by Humanity and Inclusion (HI) and delivered by local NGOs.

Parents’ clubs were a key feature. They ran weekly or fortnightly, depending on the country context and local provision. They focused specifically on inclusive play and early learning activities to promote child development. We established 147 clubs for parents of children with and without disabilities using an inclusive approach. Over 3,000 parents attended the sessions to help their young children play and to learn tips about how to promote early learning. They learned about early childhood development intervention, including nurturing caregiving and inclusive play and learning.[1]

Although project staff helped to facilitate the sessions, there was a strong focus on empowering parents to lead on different aspects and to share their own knowledge and experience. Because the clubs include parents of children with and without disabilities, this was a powerful way to break down the stigma of disability and meet other caregivers in a non-threatening way.

The parent’s clubs also provided a space to practise activities with a facilitator and share tips and challenges. For example, the ‘Blue Box’ is an early child development tool (adapted and revised by HI) and used to promote children’s physical, cognitive, communication and social-emotional development in a structured way. It is a series of cards with simple activities for parents to work through at home, based on their child’s age and stage.

One of the aims was to promote development for children at risk of developing cognitive impairments due to a wide variety of potential risk factors (e.g., malnutrition, prematurity, infection, extreme poverty, violence, forced displacement, maternal mental health, etc). The system includes a chart to monitor the child’s developmental milestones and a set of cards with activities for the families to use to promote the achievement of each target.

The cards also include descriptions to guide parents on how the play activities can be adapted to support children with specific disabilities, such as children who are deaf, blind or have physical disabilities.

The importance of outdoor play

Whilst the parents' clubs encouraged children to start developing early learning skills, it is also crucial to allow children to play outdoors together, to develop their imagination, language, socio-emotional, co-operation and problem-solving skills – all crucial prerequisites to formal learning. Therefore, the project also created 50 inclusive play spaces, including a number of outdoor play grounds located in communities.

The play spaces were designed and constructed according to key criteria so as to be inclusive and participatory of all children, families and communities.[2] Creating play elements as accessible as possible meant that ramps and pathways were included, as were different seating options where children could have a break from play or participate in quieter activities. Swings with different types of seating options allowed children with different physical needs to access the play facilities.

Sustainable and environmentally friendly approaches were promoted, using low-cost and locally available materials and involving the community. This included working with local artists or having children involved in painting, art projects or taking care of the garden, and sensitively addressing the barriers to play that can prevent the inclusion of girls.

What was the impact?

Overall, caregivers involved in the parents' clubs became much more actively involved as the project went on, and an increased proportion of mothers have engaged fully in the groups compared to their passive engagement when the project started. There has been a cultural shift to some extent and increased access to play-based opportunities for caregivers. There has also been a noticeable improvement in the amount of time caregivers spend playing with their children and supporting early learning.

As a result of the project, caregivers not only recognise play as important for child development, but they also actively practise child development and early learning activities with their children. Parents could see positive changes which encouraged them to continue with these sessions. The approaches were easy to use, easy to replicate and had a strong focus on community support and cohesion. However, some caregivers, particularly in Thailand, did not see the value of play for the sake of play. This emphasises the need for more advocacy and awareness among communities in displacement contexts in order to change attitudes towards play and early learning opportunities for all children. In Pakistan, the parents' clubs have been taken on by the community since the project ended.

The link to learning

Early learning and child development go hand in hand with a child's access to play in all forms. When we give young children access to play – from targeted structured play in small groups supported by caregivers, to the freedom of outdoor play to help develop a range of independence, imagination and co-operation skills – we are supporting all aspects of early learning. Any early years learning curriculum should include activities to promote communication, socialisation, problem-solving, listening, attention, thinking and memory skills in addition to fine motor and gross motor skills. By focusing on inclusive play development, in the early years, and working hand in hand with caregivers, this helps to lay the foundation of future success in education.

[1] https://bit.ly/eer9-31a
[2] https://bit.ly/eer9-31b

Contact:
Jodie is Inclusive Education Specialist (currently with HI Myanmar). Email: j.nguy@hi.org

Julia is Global Inclusive Education Specialist (based in London). Email: j.mcgeown@hi.org

Inclusive early childhood development and education in emergencies

Kathryn Moore, Divina Varghese, Karishma Sethi, Majd Al-Soleiti, Alice Tenjiwe Kabwe, Sascha Hein, and Angélica Ponguta

We carried out a review of open-source literature from organisations working in early childhood development and education in emergencies (ECDEiE) as part of a larger Dubai Cares funded research project conducted by Yale University. In this article, we focus on 30 publications to explore how inclusion in ECDEiE is reflected and what these observations tell us about future areas of focus.

The documents came from UNICEF and:

- four networks (Child Protection in Crisis Learning Network, Child Protection Cluster, the Early Childhood Development Action Network, and Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies);
- two think tanks (Brookings Institute, TheirWorld);
- three funders (Bernard Van Leer Foundation, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, Education Cannot Wait);
- six NGOs (Arab Resource Collective, BRAC, Catholic Relief Services, International Rescue Committee, Plan International, Save the Children).

Emerging lessons from the literature

1. Inclusive targeting

Most organisations agree it is important that services target vulnerable groups during crises. These comprised ECDEiE-specific services aligned with World Health Organization's Nurturing Care Framework or the provision of inclusive sector-services (e.g., protection, health, education) which also target young children.

2. Broad framing of inclusion

Many organisations frame inclusion broadly, focusing on all learners. Some funding and implementing organisations focus on a specific marginalised group. For example, Plan International's literature suggests it prioritises gender equity and girls' needs. ECHO's literature emphasises the importance of language of instruction for promoting equitable school readiness of linguistic minorities.

3. Variety of inclusive ECDEiE interventions

Interventions included:

- adapting ECDE materials for children and caregivers to ensure cultural relevance;
- adapting programmes to meet linguistic minorities' needs in host communities;
- emphasising how to support children with disabilities in parenting support programmes;
- instilling values related to positively promoting inclusion and diversity;
- providing equitable access to pre-primary education for marginalised learners.

Not all organisations implementing ECDEiE work broadly on inclusion. Some only appeared to focus on cultural adaptation of play-based materials. The information was limited with regards to how interventions met broader inclusion targets.

4. Limited focus on inclusive ECDEiE implementation

Some organisations highlighted publicly available guidance on how to implement inclusive programmes, yet there was limited information on specific inclusive programme models and/or intervention examples, case studies, or outcome and evaluation data.

Such information is necessary to understand how existing inclusive ECDEiE approaches have been implemented in crisis settings and whether they can be adapted elsewhere or scaled up. For example, how have learners benefitted from these interventions, services and approaches? Which interventions or combinations of interventions are most effective? Are interventions integrated as part of comprehensive ECDE interventions, sector-specific interventions, or as part of systems responses?

Some documents reviewed did not specifically mention inclusive ECDEiE interventions, despite recognising the importance of inclusion generally. Others focused on alternative provision for learners, such as specific services

for children with disabilities, but lacked information on how they were later included in regular classrooms and the wider education system.

Areas for practitioners to consider

1. Examine how broad definitions of inclusion are reflected across the humanitarian programme cycle.

A broader definition of inclusion helps us ask questions during humanitarian needs assessments that take account of the voices and urgent needs of marginalised young children and their caregivers. This may reveal information crucial for designing inclusive ECDEiE interventions and strategies that respond better to their needs, for upholding accountability to the most marginalised, and evaluating the relevance, effectiveness, quality and impact of inclusive services.

2. Consider how to make inclusive ECDEiE programme information, tools and guidance, and research more accessible.

There is much publicly available guidance on inclusion and humanitarian action, and our review highlighted some ECDEiE guidance which touches on inclusion. However, the 30 items we reviewed suggest a lack of publicly available research and guidance on holistic and inclusive approaches as part of humanitarian responses. Such information would help us assess impact and inform future investment in national ECDE interventions and across the ECDEiE sector. In particular, we need to understand the costs and immediate and longer-term benefits of different inclusive interventions.

It is important to share information and lessons learned across contexts to understand better how to strengthen an inclusive ECDE workforce before and during crises. An inclusive workforce ensures inclusion efforts are not 'add-ons' but inherent within education in crisis and development contexts. Guidance and resources are needed on how to implement broad inclusive ECDE pedagogical approaches and curriculum adaptations on a larger scale before and during crises to help us:

- support learners' needs in formal, non-formal and home-based ECDE settings;
- understand attitudes and behaviours towards inclusion among young children, parents, ECDE service providers, and the larger community affected by crises;
- promote cultures of acceptance of diversity, and knowledge, skills, attitudes and practices related to broadly inclusive ECDE systems and programmes before and during crises.

3. Map national and local organisations and ministries providing inclusion-related ECDE services pre-crisis. Identify the extent to which they are equipped to transition to providing inclusive ECDEiE services during crises.

The 30 documents did not provide information about inclusion-focused community-based organisations such as disabled persons organisations (DPOs), women's and girls' rights organisations, and associations of ethnic minority groups. DPOs and health centres, for example, are often responsible for providing screening intervention services and assistive devices for learners with disabilities. Such sector-specific organisations could collaborate with ECDE stakeholders working across sectors. Multiple 'layers' of coordination and communication between inclusion-related organisations and ECDE need to be facilitated during humanitarian crises.

Bolstering the voice of inclusion and ECDE actors in a coordinated way will help ensure existing resources and services are equitably available to all crisis-affected young children and their caregivers, particularly those from marginalised groups. Such coordination helps reveal where the most significant needs are, how to reflect them better in policies and programmes, and what resources are needed. Despite programmes and investments in inclusion generally, our review flags that more attention is needed to reach all marginalised groups equitably and with dignity during crises.

The 30 publications reviewed are listed online here: https://bit.ly/eer9-33

Kathryn and Divina are independent research consultants. Karishma is an ORISE fellow at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Majd is a medical doctor and a researcher. Alice is an independent ECD and disability consultant. Sascha is a professor at the Free University of Berlin. Angelica is an associate research scientist at Yale Child Study Center. Email: angelica.ponguta@yale.edu.

Supporting transitions from pre-school to primary school

Su Lyn Corcoran

Bridge of Hope created a guide to support inclusive transitions of children from pre-school to primary school using findings from research funded by the Open Society Foundations' Early Childhood Programme. In this article, Su summarises the key principles of smooth transitions from the guide.

What do we mean by transition?

Transition should be understood as a process, not simply a one-off event. A move into a new education setting happens over time, from when the child begins to get ready to start a new setting to the time when they feel that they have adjusted to this new situation. Therefore, transition programmes supporting children should help them to feel comfortable, secure and confident in their new environment.

When they move from pre-school to primary school settings, children may need to adapt to leaving the home and/or pre-school environment and moving to different environments with different toilets, classroom layouts, cafeterias, outdoor spaces, approaches to teaching and learning, and potential friendships.

Children may feel excited and proud to be making such transitions. They may easily adapt to new surroundings and conditions or feel nervous and uncertain. Some face serious stress and anxiety when small changes happen in their usual routine, which can have an impact on their behaviour and understanding.

Regardless of how a child feels about their transition, it is important to ensure that what is familiar to them supports their move as they enter a new environment. If they are in need of additional educational support, the smoothness of the transition becomes even more important.

Guiding principles of transition

Smooth and effective transitions require careful planning before, during and after the move, with a clear understanding on the part of all involved of the key principles which guide the transition processes.

1. **All children have a right to education and to be included in decisions** affecting them. They and their parents should have the opportunity to visit the setting they are moving to in advance. The class teacher should visit the pre-school settings and conduct home visit for learners with additional needs.

2. **Relationships are key** and effective transitions require mutual trust and respect.

3. **Each child develops in their own way** and needs a flexible individual transition plan that is responsive to their individual needs.

4. **Interagency working is essential.** All staff in pre-schools and primary schools should work together, and with other agencies based on the child's needs, to support effective person-centred planning.

5. **A cooperative, enabling environment** should support open, trustful communication between all parties, through meetings set up well in advance, to review the setting the child transitions into, and discuss and agree special supports and classroom adaptations

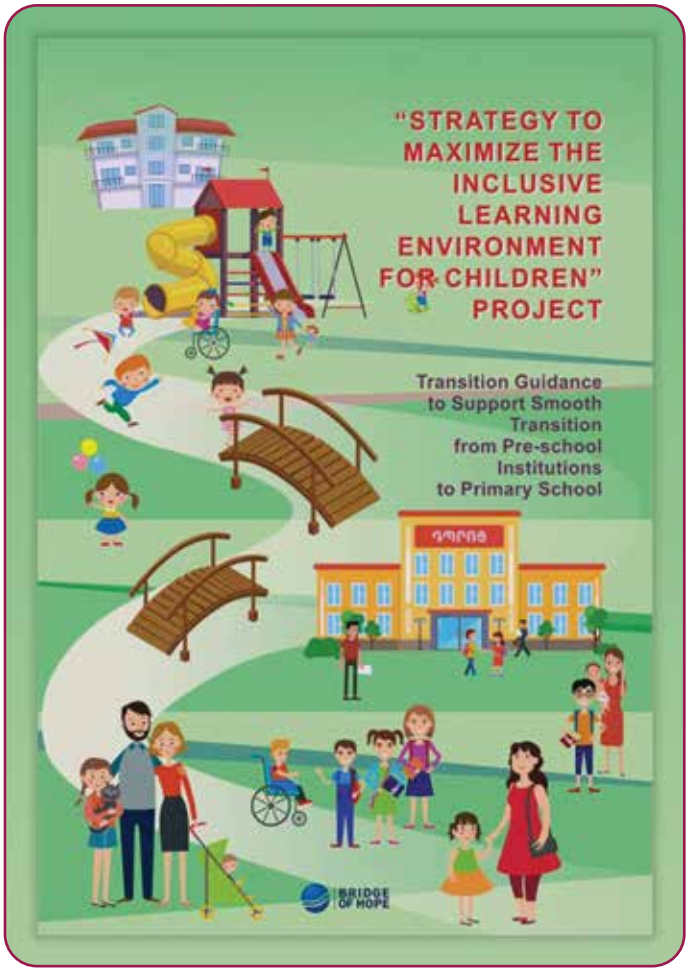
6. **Allow time for the child to be included in the transition** and for pre-school and primary school staff to work closely with families to understand what the child needs.

7. **Even very young children have a view on what they need** and what works best for them. Children communicate in different ways, not always verbally. Time should be taken to seek children's viewpoints, to make sure that they know that these views are important and can lead to change.

8. **Parents are a crucial source of information on their children** and should be involved in transition arrangements. The information they can share can be valuable and important for drawing up the child's plan.

Perhaps the best possible transitions are those where the ending of one education stage and the beginning of another are merged to create a seamless move between the settings. For example, using familiar resources from the pre-school to support familiarity in primary school. Strong plans map out the process and ensure that key partners are included, communicate and collaborate. Strong and supportive relationships can be established between all those involved, including: parents/caregivers, pre-school staff, school staff, management of both settings, health professionals, and school or community social workers.

No single approach to transition is correct. The guiding principles for effective practice enable a range of potential approaches to be developed that pre-school and primary school settings can explore together to find what is best within their contexts to best meet the needs of their children, families and communities.



Further reading

Research report: Education Transition for Children with Disabilities in Armenia, https://bit.ly/eer9-35a

Manual: Transition Guidance to Support Transition from Pre-school Institutions to Primary School, https://bit.ly/eer9-35b

Poster: Inclusive Transition (available in 14 languages), https://bit.ly/eer9-35c

Contact: Su is programme officer at EENET and a research associate at Manchester Metropolitan University. Email: sucorcoran@eenet.org.uk

Useful publications

Guidelines

Give your child the best start: Laying the foundation for quality learning
International Step by Step Association, no date
https://bit.ly/eer9-36a
This short guide explains the ISSA key principles together with helpful advice for parents to help them work together with educators to advocate for quality education provision for early childhood development.

UNICEF Education Kit Handbook: Early Childhood Development Kit Guidance
UNICEF, 2013
https://bit.ly/eer9-36b
This is part of the UNICEF Education in Emergencies Handbook and provides training and curricular guidance in support of UNICEF pre-packaged education kits.

Young Voices in Inclusive Education. A guide to help young researchers conduct action research with peers and younger children
EENET, 2018
https://bit.ly/eer9-36c
This guide focuses on how to prepare and support older children to work with their peers and with younger children on 'child voice' activities and research projects.

Research

Getting it Right (Vol. 2). Inclusive Early Childhood Development and Education Rights. Disability-inclusive responses, lessons and policy considerations from Southern Africa.
Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA), 2020
https://bit.ly/eer9-36d
This report was commissioned by the Open Society Foundations Early Childhood Programme and the Open Swwociety Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) to showcase a series of Learning Stories to capture changes and best practices of organisations working with children with disabilities and special educational needs in Southern Africa.

Videos

Communities of practice Inspiring Teaching Innovations in the Early Education System (CITIES), Vietnam
VVOB, 2020
https://bit.ly/eer9-36e
This video describes VVOB's project that aimed to equip educational practitioners in Da Nang and Vietnam with a deeper understanding of the urban barriers to learning in the early years. The video is in Vietnamese with English subtitles.