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Booklet 1 :

Becoming an Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Environment (ILFE)

Inclusive
Learning-Friendly
Environments

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Tool Guide

Booklet 1 describes what is an inclusive, learning-friendly environment (ILFE) and what are its benefits for teachers, children, parents, and communities. It also will help you to identify the ways in which your school may already be inclusive and learning-friendly, as well as those areas that may need more improvement. It will provide you with ideas about how to plan for these improvements, as well as how to monitor and evaluate your progress.

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Tool 1.1
What is an ILFE and Why is It Important?

Inclusion is really about practical changes that we can make so that all children, including those with diverse backgrounds and abilities, can succeed in our classrooms and schools. These changes will not merely benefit the children we often single out as children with special needs, but all children and their parents, all teachers and school administrators, and everyone from the community who works with the school.

What Do We Mean by "Inclusive" and "Learning-Friendly"?

What is "Inclusive"?

Over the years, the term "inclusive" has come to mean "including children with disabilities" in "regular" classrooms for children without disabilities. In this Toolkit, "inclusive" means **much** more.

"Inclusive" does include children with disabilities such as children who have difficulties in seeing or hearing, who cannot walk, or who are slower to learn. **HOWEVER**, "inclusive" **also** means including ALL children who are left out or excluded from school. These children may not speak the language of the classroom; are at risk of dropping out because they are sick, hungry, or not achieving well; or they belong to a different religion or caste. They also may be girls who are pregnant, children affected by HIV/AIDS, and all girls and boys who should be in school but are not, especially those who work at home, in the fields, or elsewhere (migrants) and who have paying jobs to help their families survive. "Inclusive" means that as teachers, we have the responsibility to seek out all available support (from school authorities, the community, families, children, educational institutions, health services, community leaders, and so on) for finding and facilitating ALL children to learn.

Moreover, in some communities, all children may be **enrolled in school**, but some children still may be excluded from **participating and learning in the classroom**. For instance, they may be children:

- for whom a lesson or textbook is not written in their first language;
- who are never asked to contribute;
- who never offer to contribute;
- who can't see the blackboard or a textbook or can't hear the teacher; or
- who are not learning well and no attempt is made to help them.

These children may be sitting at the back of the classroom and may soon leave altogether (drop out). As teachers, we are responsible for creating a learning environment where ALL children can learn, ALL children want to learn, and ALL children feel included in our classrooms and schools.

What is "Learning-Friendly"?

Many schools are working to become "child-friendly," where children have the right to learn to their fullest potential within a safe and welcoming environment. The aim is to improve each child's participation and learning in school, rather than concentrating on the subject matter and examinations. Being "child-friendly" is very important, but it is not complete.

Children come to school to learn, but as teachers, we are always learning, too. We learn new things about the world to teach our students. We learn to teach more effectively—and enjoyably—so that all students learn how to read or do mathematics, and we learn new things from our students as well. This Toolkit is one step in this direction.

A "learning-friendly" environment is "child-friendly" **and** "teacher-friendly." It stresses the importance of students and teachers learning together as a learning community. It places children at the centre of learning and encourages their active participation in learning. It also fulfils our needs and interests as teachers, so that we want to, and are capable of, giving children the best education possible.

Action Activity: Understanding Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Classrooms

Which classroom below do you think is inclusive and learning-friendly?

Classroom A.

Forty children are sitting on wooden benches behind desks with their exercise books open and their pens in their hands. The teacher is copying a story on the chalkboard from the Grade 3 textbook, making sure that she writes it exactly as it is written in the textbook. The boys, who are sitting on the right side of the room, copy what the teacher has written into their exercise books. The girls, who are sitting on the left side of the room, wait for the teacher to move so that they can see what she has written and copy it into their exercise books. As she writes, the teacher asks, "Are you copying the story that I am writing?" Everyone answers, "Yes, teacher."

Classroom B.

Two groups of children are sitting on the floor in two circles. Both groups contain girls and boys. The Grade 3 teacher is teaching shapes to the children. In one group, the children are talking about circles. The teacher has shown them some common round objects that she had asked the children to bring from home. The children handle the objects and then work together to make a list of other objects that are circular in shape. In the other group, some of the children are holding rolled up newspapers that look like long sticks. The teacher calls a number, and the child with that number places her stick on the floor in the centre to begin forming a square. One child with hearing difficulties adds her stick to form a triangle and smiles at the teacher. The teacher smiles back at her and says "very good," making sure that the child can see her lips as she speaks. A parent, who has volunteered to be a classroom helper for a week, pats her on the arm, and then turns to assist a student who is confused about where to place his stick in order to form a new shape.

Now, answer the following questions:

- Which one of these classrooms do you believe is inclusive and learning-friendly?
- In what ways is it inclusive and learning-friendly? Brainstorm your list below.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Compare your list with a colleague's. What items on your lists are the same? What items are different? You may have many different answers. Some of your answers may include how the children are seated, the teaching materials that are being used, who is in the classroom, and the ways they interact with each other (their relationships). These characteristics are very different in the two classrooms, and they tell us what kind of learning environment it is.

The table below presents some of the characteristics of a learning-friendly classroom. You may think of many others. Particularly important is the "Relationships" section. In an inclusive classroom, we need to form close relationships with our children and support them as much as we can, so that each child can learn as much as possible.

Characteristics of an Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Classroom

	Traditional classroom	Inclusive, learning-friendly classroom
Relationships	Distant (the teacher addresses students with her back towards them)	Friendly and warm. The teacher sits next to and smiles at the child with a hearing impairment. The parent-helper praises this child and assists other children.
Who is in the classroom?	The teacher as well as students with quite similar abilities	The teacher, students with a wide range of backgrounds and abilities, and others such the parent-helper
Seating arrangement	Identical seating arrangements in every classroom (all children seated at desks in rows; girls on one side of the room, boys on the other)	Different seating arrangements, such as girls and boys sitting together on the floor in two circles or sitting together at tables
Learning materials	Textbook, exercise book, chalkboard for teacher	Variety of materials for all subjects such as math materials made from newspapers, or posters and puppets for language class
Resources	The teacher is interacting with children without using any additional teaching materials.	The teacher plans a day in advance for the class. She involves the children in bringing learning aids to the class, and these aids do not cost anything.
Evaluation	Standard written examinations	Authentic assessment; Observations; Samples of children's work over time such as portfolios (see Booklet 5)

Reflection Activity: What's Our Situation?

Think about the elements of an inclusive, learning-friendly classroom given in the table above, and ask yourself the following questions?

- What type of classroom do I work in?
- What changes can I introduce to make my classroom more inclusive and learning-friendly?
- How can I make the topics I teach more interesting for my children so they will want to learn about them?
- How can I arrange my classroom so that ALL of the children are learning together?
- Who can help me to create an ILFE (for example, the Principal, other teachers, my students, parents,and community leaders)?

What are the Important Elements of an ILFE?

ALL children have the right to learn, as set forth in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to which virtually all governments in the world have ratified. Moreover, all children **can** learn, without regard to their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions. This includes disabled and gifted children; street and working children; children of remote or nomadic populations; children from linguistic, ethnic, or cultural minorities; children affected by HIV/AIDS; and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups.[1] Furthermore, while all children can learn, they may not all learn the same things at the same time, and with the same results, but this is completely normal and acceptable.

With so many differences, children need to learn in a variety of ways—not just by copying information from the chalkboard onto a slate or into a notebook. Copying from the chalkboard is probably one of the least effective ways for children to learn. We'll learn more about this in Booklet 4 of this Toolkit on creating inclusive, learning-friendly classrooms.

[1] UNESCO (1994) The Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, p. 6.

Teaching children with diverse backgrounds and abilities is a challenge, so we need to understand **how** to teach such children. We are not born knowing how to do this, and we cannot learn everything we need to know in teacher training. We need to learn by observing and talking to experienced teachers, by going to workshops, by reading books, and by exploring other resources such as this Toolkit. We then need to practice what we have learned in our classrooms. An ILFE is thus important not only for the development of ALL of our children, but for our own professional development as teachers as well.

In an ILFE, everyone shares a common vision of how children should work and play together. They believe that **education needs to be inclusive, gender-fair (girls have the same rights and opportunities as boys) and non-discriminatory, sensitive to all cultures, as well as relevant to the daily lives of children and their families**. Teachers, administrators, and students respect and celebrate their different languages, cultural backgrounds, and abilities.

An ILFE teaches children life skills and healthy lifestyles so that they can make informed decisions and protect themselves from illness and harm. Moreover, in an ILFE there is no child abuse, no cane, and no corporal punishment.

An ILFE encourages teachers and school administrators, children, families, and communities to help children to learn within the classroom and outside of it. In the classroom, children—and not just teachers—are responsible for their learning and actively participate in it. Learning is linked to what children want to be in life (their aspirations), and it is meaningful for their daily lives. Learning helps children to develop new aspirations as their knowledge grows, and the can work towards a future life that may be better than the one they are living.

An ILFE also considers our needs, interests, and desires as teachers. It gives us opportunities to learn how to teach better; it provides the best resources possible for teaching; and it celebrates our successes through appropriate rewards and recognition.

Action Activity: What is an ILFE?

Brainstorm with your colleagues what you think are the important elements of an inclusive, learning-friendly environment, be it a classroom, school, or another place where children learn.

- On a large writing surface (such as a blackboard or poster paper), draw a large circle in the middle and write in the circle "ILFE."
- On the outside of this circle, ask your colleagues to write down one or two characteristics that they feel are most important in an ILFE.
- Compare your diagram with the one on the next page. Are any characteristics missing?
- Then ask yourselves, which characteristics do our school or classrooms have, and which do we need to work more towards? How can we improve our school or classroom to become an ILFE? List your ideas below.

ILFE Characteristics We Have:

_____

_____

_____

ILFE Characteristics We Need to Work On, and How:

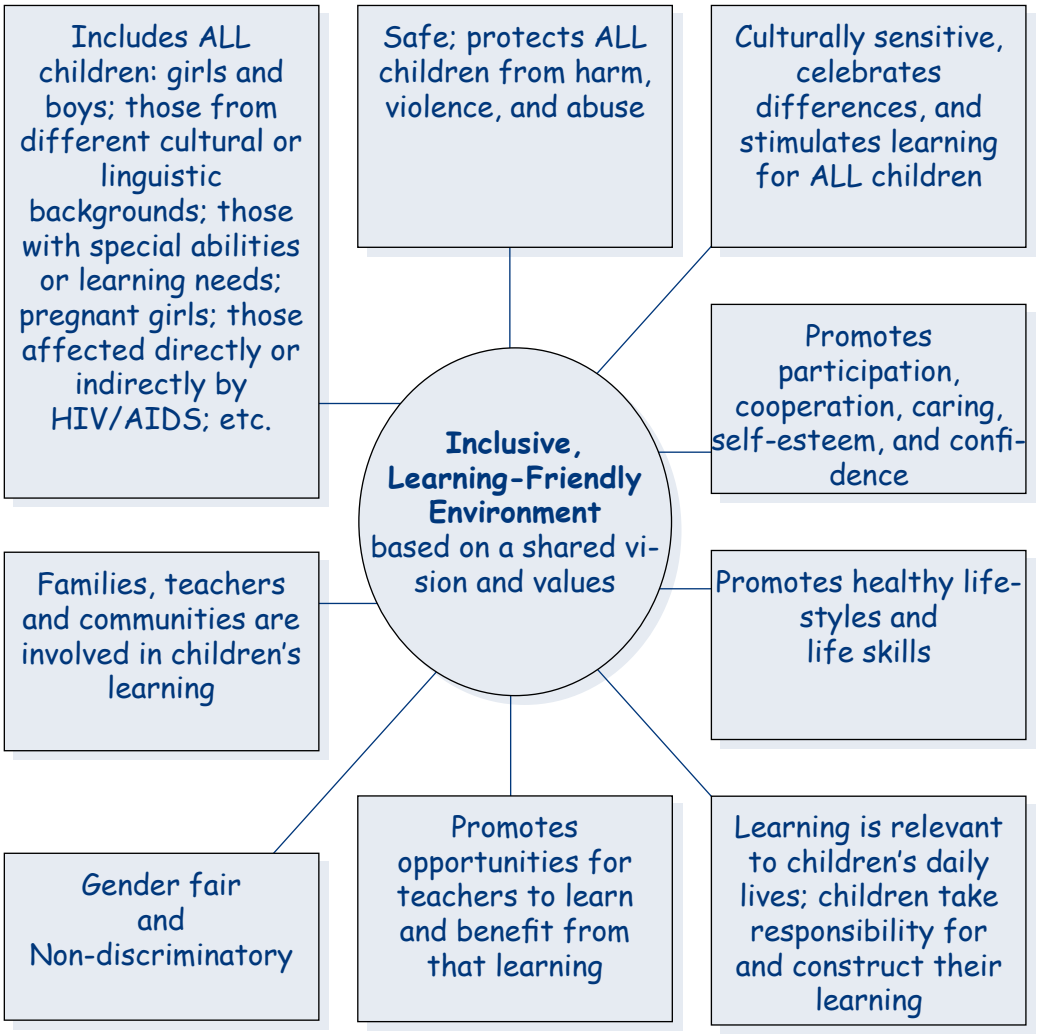
_____

_____

_____

Characteristics of an Inclusive, Learning-Friendly

Environment



Remember: Changing from a traditional school or classroom to one that is inclusive and learning-friendly is a process, not an event. It does not happen overnight. It takes time and teamwork. Yet, it can yield many benefits for us professionally and most importantly for our children, their families, and their communities.

What are the Benefits of an ILFE?

Reflection Activity

Please read the following case study.

A Papua New Guinea Village School

In 1980, parents from communities in a northern province of Papua New Guinea demanded a relevant education for their children, one that would teach children the values of the village and help them to appreciate the life, culture, language, and identity of the community. The provincial government, a university, and a non-governmental organization* (NGO) introduced the Viles Tok Ples Priskul (village vernacular pre-school), which enrolled children 6 to 8 years of age in a non-formal programme in the local language.

Tok Ples schools use locally gathered and inexpensive materials, so teachers can implement the teaching ideas of Tok Ples easily and without high cost. Local people write original stories in their own language. These may include traditional stories, legends, songs, or poetry. Students write stories based on real experiences and then make a book with local materials, complete with illustrations. This book is added to the class library and used during group reading time. Students also act out stories by themselves, use puppets that they create, and have story discussions in class.

Children come out of the Tok Ples schools with an appreciation of their culture and more able to function in their own language. They are more excited, self-confident, and curious about learning. They ask more questions. The children go on to do very well in the formal school system.

Teachers often recount their own memories of feeling confused and frightened when they began school and the teacher spoke to them in a language they could not understand. Most teachers are relieved that their students do not face the same difficulties. Some teachers report

mixed feelings, however. On the one hand, they feel that they had better control of their students when they were meek and passive; yet, on the other hand, they are excited that children are learning faster since the new concepts have been introduced.

By using the local language in their schools, Tok Ples is ensuring that Papua New Guinea continues to have wide cultural and linguistic diversity.

Dutcher N (2001) Expanding Educational Opportunity in Linguistically Diverse Societies. Center for Applied Linguistics: Washington, DC. and http:// www.literacyonline.org/explorer/index.html
*Summer Institute for Linguistics

Now, reflect on the Viles Tok Ples pre-school. How do you think children, teachers, parents, and communities benefit from these inclusive, learning-friendly environments? List your ideas below.

Benefits for Children

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Benefits for Teachers

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Benefits for Parents

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Benefits for Communities

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Compare your ideas with those of another teacher, then read the section below together. How many ideas did you come up with? Did you learn any new ideas and benefits?

Benefits for Children

Through an ILFE, children become more self-confident and develop greater self-esteem. They take pride in themselves and their achievements. They learn how to learn independently both inside and outside of school. For example, they can learn how to ask good questions. They learn to understand and apply what they learn in school to their everyday lives, such as in their play and in their home. They also learn to interact actively and happily with their classmates and teachers. They learn to enjoy being with others who are different from themselves, including how to be sensitive to and adapt to these differences. All children learn together and value their relationships, no matter what their backgrounds or abilities.

Children also become more creative, and this improves how well they learn. They learn to value their native language, to appreciate their cultural traditions, and to consider themselves as also being different from others, which is normal and something to respect and to celebrate.

Through an ILFE, children improve their communication skills and are better prepared for life. Children gain—or can regain—self-respect for themselves as they learn to respect others.

Benefits for Teachers

Teachers also receive important benefits from teaching in an ILFE. They have more opportunities to learn new ways to teach different kinds of students. They gain new knowledge, such as the different ways children learn and can be taught. While looking for ways to overcome challenges,

they can develop more positive attitudes and approaches towards people, children, and situations. Teaching becomes a joy, not a chore.

Teachers also have greater opportunities to explore new ideas by communicating more often with others from within and outside their school, such as in school clusters or teacher networks, or with parents and community members. By applying these new ideas, teachers can encourage their students to be more interested, more creative, and more attentive. As a result, the children and even their parents can give teachers more positive feedback. They also can receive increased support from the community and be rewarded for the good work they are doing.

Teachers can experience greater job satisfaction and a higher sense of accomplishment when ALL children are succeeding in school to the best of their abilities. Remember, however, that "ALL children succeeding" does not necessarily mean that all children successfully pass a written examination. It means accepting diversity in the different ways children learn as well as how they show their success in learning; for instance, when they can successfully explain and apply a concept to the teacher or to the class, instead of answering questions about it on an examination.

In schools that are inclusive and learning-friendly, teachers may have more volunteers working in their classrooms, which reduces the teaching workload. Under the teacher's guidance, these volunteers will more likely want to help when they understand how what is learned in the classroom is important for the lives of children and their families.

Benefits for Parents

Through an ILFE, parents learn more about how their children are being educated. They become personally involved in and feel a greater sense of importance in helping their children to learn. As teachers ask them for their opinions about children, parents feel valued and consider themselves as equal partners in providing quality learning opportunities for children. Parents can also learn how to deal better with their children at home by using techniques that the teachers use in school. They also learn to interact with others in the community, as well as to understand and help solve each other's problems. Most importantly, they know that their children—and ALL children—are receiving a quality education.

Benefits for Communities

An ILFE can offer many benefits to the community, too. The community develops a sense of pride as more children go to school and learn. They discover that more "community leaders of the future" are being prepared to participate actively in society. The community sees that potential social problems, such as petty crimes or adolescent problems, may be reduced. Community members become more involved in the school, creating better relations between the school and the community.

Action Activity: Challenges to Becoming an ILFE?

With all these benefits, why don't all schools have inclusive, learning-friendly environments? Below is a short list of some of the obstacles (barriers) to becoming an IFLE that may affect some schools. For each obstacle, identify some ways to overcome it within your school.

1. Change takes energy, openness, and willingness. If teachers have many domestic responsibilities or many non-teaching administrative duties at school, such as attending frequent meetings, they may feel that they don't have the time or the energy to change.

   Ways to Overcome this Obstacle:

   a. _____

   b. _____

   c. _____

2. Teachers do not understand what an ILFE is, or think they do not have the resources, that are needed to become an ILFE.

   Ways to Overcome this Obstacle:

   a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

3. Parents and even teachers may not understand the benefits of an ILFE and are concerned that including all kinds of children in the school will affect their children negatively.

Ways to Overcome this Obstacle:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

Learning From Experience: Including Children with Disabilities

We have discovered that children are much more human and more honest than adults. During the last four years, they have not asked such questions as, "What is the matter with my friend?" or "Why is he behaving like this?" We have not had a case of a child unwilling to play. When a friend with disabilities has to be given a mark, there is absolute silence in the classroom, and after his answer, there is applause. Everyone is sharing the happiness of success. Friends do not differ in anything. They go together to the swimming pool, on excursions, parties, and birthdays. But I can quite freely say that in the classes where there are no children with disabilities, the children behave differently. Sometimes children with disabilities are laughed at, pushed aside, and stared at by others. Fortunately, there is an immediate reaction from the pupils from the classes where there are such children, and they defend their friends. Moreover, it is very important that all parents accept the children. At the beginning of the first grade when parents notice a child with a disability, most of them keep their distance, with such remarks as, "Why should my child sit next to such a pupil?" or "He will disturb my child during classes." Fortunately, these reactions last for only a month or two. When the parents realize that their children have accepted such friends, they begin to help them as well. They help

them get dressed, pack their bags, and take them home. The parents of the other children want me to hold a parental meeting where I will explain what kind of disability is in question. I can conclude freely that within a short period of time both the children and parents adjust, the class functions perfectly.

"Including Children with Disabilities, an interview with Katica Dukovska Muratovska."
http://www.unicef.org/teachers/forum/0100.htm

Tool 1.2
Where are We Now?

Is Our School Already an ILFE?

Many schools may be well on their way to becoming inclusive and learning-friendly, and they are seeing the benefits of doing so for their teachers, children, parents, and communities. In creating an ILFE, the first step is to determine the extent to which your school is **already** inclusive and learning-friendly. Thereafter, you will know what further steps your school still needs to take to become fully inclusive and learning-friendly.

The checklist below will help you to assess your school. Fill it out as honestly as possible. Place a checkmark beside each of the items that your school is already doing. Don't worry if many of the items are not checked. Through this Toolkit, we can work on these together. After completing this assessment, you will have information to begin planning and implementing an ILFE in your school. You will learn how to do this in the next Tool in this Booklet.

Action Activity: ILFE Self-Assessment

What is your school already doing to create an inclusive, learning-friendly environment?

School Policies and Administrative Support
Your school:

____ has a mission and/or vision statement and policies about inclusive, learning-friendly education, including a policy against discrimination;

____ has a master list of all children in the community, whether enrolled or not, and has individual records of why children have not enrolled;

____ conducts regular campaigns to encourage parents to enrol their children, ones that emphasize that ALL children should be enrolled and are welcome;

____ has copies of documents or resources at national or regional levels that address inclusive education for children with diverse backgrounds and abilities;

____ knows which professional organizations, advocacy groups, and community organizations offer resources for inclusive education;

____ shows in specific ways that school administrators and teachers understand the nature and importance of inclusive education;

____ has prepared a list of barriers that prevent the school from fully developing an ILFE and a list of ways to overcome these barriers;

____ is aware of and is changing school policies and practices—such as costs and daily schedules—that prevent some girls and boys from receiving a quality education;

____ provides flexibility to teachers to pursue innovative teaching methods for helping all children to learn;

____ has links with the community, is responsive to the needs of the community, and provides opportunities for exchanging ideas with the community to bring about positive changes in inclusive practices;

____ responds to needs of the staff and is not exploitative;

____ has effective support, supervision, and monitoring mechanisms in which everyone participates in learning about and documenting changes in inclusive practices, as well as in making future decisions.

School Environment
Your school:

____ has facilities that meet the needs of all students, such as separate toilets for girls and ramps (not stairs) for students with physical disabilities;

____ has a welcoming, healthy, and clean environment;

____ has a steady supply of clean, safe drinking water and serves or sells healthy, nutritious food;

____ has (or has a plan to develop) a diverse school staff (women and men with different backgrounds in race, ethnicity, physical ability, religion, language, socioeconomic status, etc.);

____ has staff, such as counselors and bilingual teachers, who can identify and help with the students' individual learning needs;

____ has processes and procedures in place that help all teachers and teaching staff, parents and children to work together to identify and assist with students' special learning needs;

____ focuses on teamwork among teachers and students;

____ has links with existing health authorities who provide periodic health examinations for children.

Teachers' Skills, Knowledge, and Attitudes
Teachers. . .

____ can explain the meaning of "inclusive" and "learning-friendly" education and can give examples of ILFEs;

____ believe that all children—girls, poor or wealthy children, language and ethnic minority children, as well as those with disabilities—can learn;

____ are involved in finding school-age children who are not in school to see that they get an education;

____ know about diseases that cause physical, emotional, and learning disabilities; and can help unhealthy students to get proper care;

____ receive annual medical examinations, along with other school staff;

____ have high expectations for **ALL** children and encourage them to

complete school;

____ are aware of resources that are available to assist children with more individual learning needs;

____ can identify culture and gender bias in teaching materials, the school environment, and in their own teaching, and can correct this bias;

____ help students learn to identify and correct gender and culture bias in learning materials and correct it in a culturally sensitive manner;

____ adapt curriculum, lessons, and school activities to the needs of children with diverse backgrounds and abilities;

____ use content, language, and strategies in their teaching that help all students to learn;

____ can assess children's learning in ways that are appropriate to the children's abilities and needs;

____ are reflective and open to learning, adapting, experimenting, and changing;

____ are able to work as a team with other teachers, children, parents and community members, as well as education authorities.

Teacher Development
Teachers. . .

____ attend workshops or classes on developing an ILFE classroom and school, receiving advanced professional training on a regular basis;

____ give presentations to other teachers, parents, and community members on developing an ILFE classroom;

____ receive ongoing support for improving their understanding of subject matter content (such as mathematics);

____ receive ongoing support for developing teaching and learning materials related to ILFE;

____ receive ongoing support from school administrators through regular observation and a written supervisory plan;

____ have a work area or lounge where they can prepare lesson materials and share ideas;

____ can visit "model" ILFE schools.

Students

____ ALL school-age children in the community attend school regularly.

____ ALL students have textbooks and learning materials that match their learning needs.

____ ALL students receive regular assessment information to help them monitor their progress.

____ Children with diverse backgrounds and abilities have equal opportunities to learn and to express themselves in the classroom and at school.

____ ALL children are followed up if their attendance is irregular and corrective actions are taken.

____ ALL children have equal opportunities to participate in all school activities.

____ ALL students help to develop guidelines and rules in the classroom and in the school regarding inclusion, non-discrimination, violence, and abuse.

Academic Content and Assessment

____ The curriculum allows for different teaching methods, such as discussion and role-play, to meet different learning rates and styles, particularly for children with special learning needs.

____ The content of the curriculum relates to the everyday experiences of ALL children in the school whatever their background or ability.

____ The curriculum integrates literacy, numeracy and life skills into all subject areas.

____ Teachers use locally available resources to help children learn.

____ Curriculum materials include pictures, examples and information about many different kinds of people, including girls and women, ethnic minorities, people of different castes and social/economic backgrounds, as well as people with disabilities.

____ Children with learning difficulties have opportunities to review lessons and improve upon them, or to have additional tutoring.

____ Curriculum and learning materials are in the languages children use in and out of school.

____ The curriculum promotes attitudes such as respect, tolerance, and knowledge about one's own and others' cultural backgrounds..

____ Teachers have various assessment tools to measure students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes (including student self-assessment), rather than only depending upon examination scores.

Special Subject Areas/Extra-curricular Activities

____ Children with physical disabilities have opportunities for physical play and development.

____ Girls have the same access to and opportunities for physical play (such as equal time on the football field) and other extracurricular activities as boys.

____ All children have opportunities to read, write, and learn in their own language when they first enter school and, if possible, continuing thereafter.

____ The school shows respect for children of all religions; children have opportunities to learn about different religious traditions, as appropriate, during the school day.

Community

____ Parents and community groups know about ILFE and are able to help the school become an ILFE.

____ The community helps the school reach out to ALL children who have been excluded from school.

____ Parents and community groups offer ideas and resources about the implementation of ILFE.

____ Parents receive information from the school about their children's attendance and achievement.

This self-assessment checklist will help you and your colleagues to begin planning and creating an ILFE in your school. The next Tool in this Booklet will guide you in how to do this, so don't forget this checklist! Remember also that implementing an ILFE is an ongoing process. You, your colleagues, parents, and community members will want to review this checklist at different times of the year to monitor whether you are moving at an acceptable rate toward becoming an ILFE.

How Can Our School Become an ILFE?

How would you answer a teacher from another school who asks, "What do we need to do to become a school that has an Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Environment?" Reading and discussing the text below will provide you with ideas for answering this teacher.

Action Activity: Becoming an ILFE in a Thai School

In 1950, Meanprasatwittaya ("M") School was founded on the outskirts of Bangkok, not far from both skyscrapers and slums. Its mission was to serve all children, no matter how poor or rich their families. In 1986, the school Principal introduced active, child-centred learning into the school. She invited all teachers in M School to attend a four-day workshop led by an educator with years of experience in this kind of teaching and learning. The workshop was participatory and activity-based. The focus was on improving teaching and learning in the classroom. Many of the teachers were excited about the active learning. They began to make creative materials and to try new ways of teaching in their classrooms. The Principal viewed ongoing supervision as one of her most important tasks, and she encouraged teachers to observe and share their ideas with each other. This sharing of ideas fostered creativity and increased teachers' confidence. They began to give workshops for each other. They visited other schools to learn new things, and they invited teachers from all over Thailand to visit their school.

M School works hard to use the resources that are around them and to find new resources to support the school's development. They have developed a school mission, vision, and culture around ILFE that celebrates their Buddhist religious and cultural traditions. For example, teachers and students take time for daily meditation and reflection.

As part of its mission, one objective of M School is to show Thai society that all children can study well together. In the 1990s, the Principal, the school-parent committee, and teachers gathered information on how to serve **all** children in the community. They invited and began to admit children with autism, Down's syndrome, hearing impairments, hyperactivity, and learning disabilities into the school. Before the children began to enrol, teachers again received special training in techniques and strategies to use in their classrooms. They have seen and they believe that in this inclusive, learning-friendly environment, all children—everyone—benefits. When a new highway was built in front of the school, M School invited the children of the

construction workers who were not attending school to come and learn with all the other students. Parents donated school uniforms for the workers' children and the school fees were waived.

Change—both active learning and including all children in the school—was introduced step-by-step over several years. The Principal knew that everyone needed time to change from old to new practices. Now every three to five years the school writes a new charter that focuses on school priorities for student learning. Everyone at school works to develope the charter. The school takes a collaborative, team approach to the change process: "everyone participates; everyone is a learner."

After reading this case study, what steps of change did "M" School take to become more inclusive and learning-friendly? List some of the major ones below, and then share your answers with your colleagues.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Reflection Activity: What's Our Situation?

Now, reflect on changes that have taken place in your setting that may be helping you to become an ILFE. Recall a positive change in your classroom, school, or community. List the steps or important elements that you or others took to achieve this change.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

How to Create and Sustain Change

The items below are important in bringing about lasting change in schools. Which steps listed below match those on your list above? Which steps are different? Discuss why they are different with your colleagues, and how they can be promoted in your school.

1. **Leadership** for change is essential; without it, nothing will change. Someone—the head teacher, senior teacher, or the teacher who is most interested and committed to change—needs to be the "change agent," the one who is responsible for organization, supervision, and leading the way.

2. **Workshops and other learning opportunities** for teachers that are participatory and activity-based are needed to introduce and sustain change. For example, begin with Staff Development Days that allow teachers to experience child-centred teaching. Give them opportunities to discuss openly their questions and concerns about an ILFE. Encourage teachers to observe each other and give constructive feedback. As children with different needs are enrolled in the school, hold additional workshops that help teachers: (a) to understand how these children learn; (b) to learn new ways of teaching; and (c) to identify changes within the school that will help these children to learn. Be sure to follow up on the workshops in terms of how well they have helped teachers, what areas need additional support to promote changes in teaching and learning, and what future workshops should be held.

3. **Improving teaching and learning in the classroom** is the focus of change in becoming an ILFE. Remember that the school itself **IS** a classroom. But while the school represents the overall environment, you and your classroom are the closest to the children. You see them most often, you work with them most closely, and your teaching methods have the greatest impact on their learning.

4. **Information** collected in the school and community, as well as information about ILFE need to be used to manage and make positive decisions in an ongoing manner. We'll look at some of the ways to collect and analyze this information later in this Toolkit.

5. **Resources** need to be mobilized and used effectively. Families and communities can be especially important here, as we will learn in Booklet 2 on working with families and communities to create an ILFE.

6. **Planning is crucial.** A flexible, long-term plan (3-5 years) can serve as a guide for step-by-step change. It should allow teachers, the school staff, and the community time to change from old to new beliefs and practices. Teachers and parents should participate in setting objectives. The more involvement from everyone in the beginning, the better.

7. ***A collaborative, team approach*** to the ongoing change process is needed. "Everyone participates; everyone is a learner; everyone is a winner." This attitude can foster creativity and confidence, and it promotes the sharing of duties and responsibilities.

8. **The mission, vision, and culture** of the school need to be developed around the key characteristics of an ILFE as discussed in the first Tool in this Booklet. Everyone—teachers, administrators, children, parents, and community leaders—should be involved in developing the school's mission and vision.

9. **Ongoing contact and communication** with parents and community leaders is necessary in order to gain their confidence, to make sure ALL children are in school and learning to their fullest abilities, as well as to increase the community's sense of ownership and the sharing of resources between the community and school.

Action Activity: Dealing with Resistance

Not everyone will want to change, and some people may actually resist changing their long-standing beliefs and practices. Discuss with your colleagues some of the major reasons why schools—even your own school—may resist becoming an ILFE. List these below. What are some of the ways this resistance can be overcome?

1. Point of Resistance: _____

   Ways to Overcome It: _____

2. Point of Resistance: _____

   Ways to Overcome It: _____

3. Point of Resistance: _____

   Ways to Overcome It: _____

4. Point of Resistance: _____

   Ways to Overcome It: _____

5. Point of Resistance: _____

   Ways to Overcome It: _____

Tool 1.3
Steps to Becoming an ILFE

How to Plan on Becoming an ILFE

After assessing where your school is on the journey to becoming an ILFE, and recognizing how the change process takes place, you will want to decide what steps to take next to create a more inclusive and learning-friendly environment, be it a classroom or an entire school. Below are suggestions for steps to plan and implement an ILFE.[2] These steps need not be sequential, and they can be seen as elements that will help your classroom and school to become an ILFE. You can work towards developing these steps according to what you see as appropriate in terms of your time and situation. Moreover, there can be more ways of achieving each of the steps, and you may discover some of them. The important thing is to have a positive attitude towards change and creating an ILFE.

Step 1: Set Up an ILFE Team

Identify the people who will play a role in planning and implementing an ILFE and set up a coordinating group.

These people will make up the ILFE team. The team may include a few teachers, the head teacher, and two or three parents, or it may be larger. The coordinating group may include teachers, administrators, and other school staff members; educators and health care providers; people from marginalized groups; persons with disabilities; older students; parents; members of the community; and local organizations.

[2] The steps in this section were adapted from The All Children Belong Project, www.uni.edu/coe/inclusion/decision_making/planning_steps.html, and from Booth T, Ainscow M, et al. (2000) Index for Inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools (Bristol, CSIE).

Step 2: Identify Needs

What do people already know and what do they need to learn?

1. Explore the knowledge of the coordinating group. What do the ILFE team members already know about the characteristics and benefits of an ILFE? What do you and they need to learn and how will everyone learn it (for instance, inviting guest speakers, visiting resource persons and resource centres)?

2. Explore the knowledge of students, staff, parents, caregivers, and members of the local community. Once the coordinating group is knowledgeable about an ILFE, decide what questions to ask others. This may involve simple individual interviews or group conversations, or you may design a short questionnaire.

Learn about the school and the community's children.

1. Review (or complete) the ILFE self-assessment checklist included at the beginning of the previous Tool on "Where are We Now." Make a list of what your school is doing already and what needs to be done to become an ILFE.

2. Find out which children in the community are not coming to school. Tools for doing this are presented in Booklet 3 on "Getting All Children in School and Learning."

3. Identify the educational needs of your students, AND those of traditionally excluded children in your community. Team members need to understand these needs as completely as possible in order to make good classroom and school plans for including these children. The team may need to complete an evaluation of students' learning needs if one has not been completed already. Parents can give the team any helpful information they have about their children.

4. Identify existing resources in your school and community. List all supports and services required for children with various backgrounds and abilities. These may include government services, NGOs, health clinics, and private agencies.

5. Describe the current education programme and the school environment. This description should clarify what facilities, furniture, and materials currently are available and in use. Are these accessible by ALL children? If not, how can they be made more accessible?

6. Identify and describe teaching and learning processes in classrooms. Visit classrooms and describe exactly what you see teachers and students doing. Are the classrooms inclusive and learning-friendly? Why or why not?

Analyze this information. Describe the changes that need to be made to make classrooms inclusive and learning-friendly. Consider class size, instructional strategies, teaching styles, teacher-student relationships, classroom assistants, and materials used.

Collect further information. The information you have gathered may raise new or additional questions. Gather additional information so that you can make your decisions based on all the relevant information, not on opinions or ideas.

Step 3: Create a Vision

Describe your desired classroom environment, or even your "Dream (Ideal) Classroom." When you and your children walk inside the classroom, what will it look like? What kind of furniture will it have? What will the teacher be doing? What will the students be doing? What will be on the walls? Consider girls and boys; those who do not speak the dominant language; those who have visual, hearing, or intellectual impairments; children of different religious or caste backgrounds—**ALL** children. If all school-age children in the community are in school, what will their different learning needs be and how will these be met? Write down as specifically as you can your "vision" of your "dream classroom," which will serve as your goal in creating an ILFE.

Next, describe your desired education programme and school environment. Consider the resources described above. What kind of support do you need ideally from the community, from local government,

and from education officials? How can you get this support? Who can help you to raise this support? How can children become involved? Write down these actions. They will help you to realize your "vision."

Step 4: Produce an ILFE School Development Plan

Develop a schedule of activities for creating and implementing your ILFE. You will need to describe in detail the changes that will be needed and when they will be implemented. You should also list materials and services, people responsible for providing these services, and any other resources that are needed. Your schedule should include realistic dates for implementing changes. It should have solid targets, but it should also be flexible to meet changing needs and conditions.

Provide for additional resources as needed. Prepare in advance to add needed resources (such as budgeting for an instructional aide, developing a peer tutoring system, or establishing a special parent-teacher committee for resource development).

Consider minds and hearts. Developing education so that it encourages the learning and participation of all learners takes place in two ways: through detailed analysis and planning, and through changes in people's hearts and minds. You can use the ILFE self-assessment checklist and these guidelines to do the detailed analysis. What will you do to try to bring about change in people's hearts and minds? For instance, how about starting by increasing the participation of parents and community members in your classroom. In this way, they can learn for themselves about the benefits of an ILFE, and they can help you more in your teaching and the children's learning. Booklet 2 on "Working with Families and Communities to Create an ILFE" will give you more ideas to try.

Step 5: Implement Your Plan

Provide technical assistance for staff as needed. Is technical assistance needed, such as workshops on special topics that are given by experienced persons? If so, what type of assistance is needed and who will provide it? How it will be implemented, and how often will it be provided?

Train school staff (teaching and non-teaching) and students as needed. Training topics can cover children's rights and their implications for education, gender inequality and gender equity, cultural and linguistic differences and similarities, disability awareness, specialized care instruction, clarification of personnel responsibilities, cooperative teaching strategies, and so forth.

Promote active parental involvement. The planning team should develop a system for parent/teacher communication. Who will be responsible for regularly communicating with parents? Parental input should be encouraged and seriously considered throughout the planning and implementation process.

Plan how you will deal with resistance. At "M" School, the Principal allowed teachers to change at the pace with which they were comfortable. Most teachers quickly adopted learner-centred teaching, but some did not. Most parents supported the school's decision to become more inclusive, but some were concerned about how many children with disabilities would be admitted. They didn't want the school to become known only as a "school for children with disabilities or special needs." The school solved this problem by setting a specific percentage. Use the information from the activity at the end of Tool 1.1 (Activity on Challenges to Becoming an ILFE) to identify what possible resistance may arise and the ways to overcome it.

Step 6: Evaluate Your Plan and Celebrate Your Success

Monitor progress and modify your plan as needed. The ILFE team is an ongoing resource to be used throughout the school year. Prepare a schedule of follow-up meetings. Decide how monitoring will be done and who will do it. Observe how the existing programme is going; decide if existing supports are adequate or need to be improved or eliminated.

Celebrate Your Successes! Achieving significant changes in an education programme—especially one that has included an investment of human and material resources—deserves to be celebrated! Since hopefully you have involved the community every step of the way, invite the community to celebrate the changes in your school by holding a fair, a festival, or an "Open School Day." In an Open School Day, parents, community members, and even officials are invited to the school.

Representative work from ALL children is displayed along with new teaching materials; teachers demonstrate their new skills of assessment and teaching; and children of all abilities demonstrate what they have learned.

How to Monitor Our Progress

What differences are we making? Are our classrooms and schools becoming more inclusive and learning-friendly? To find out whether you are successfully developing an Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Environment, you will want to ask two key questions:

1. Are we "inclusive and learning-friendly" in the ways we set out to be? (How can we improve on what we have done?)

2. What difference have we made, especially in improving children's learning?

You can evaluate the process (#1) and the outcomes (#2) of an ILFE both informally and formally. You and others inside the school can conduct informal evaluations, and then use the information you collect to shape or make changes in the programme. In addition to informal evaluation, it is wise to have trusted outsiders come in on a regular basis to conduct a formal evaluation. This evaluation may be part of a school accreditation visit, or just as a way to view the school through "fresh eyes." At "M" School during their annual Open School Day, parents fill out questionnaires to evaluate the school's facilities, performance, and the children's learning, as well as to recommend any improvements. They get many good ideas this way. Remember also that children are also good monitors and evaluators, and we should ask them too!

The ILFE self-assessment checklist that was given earlier in this Booklet can be used as a monitoring tool so that you can follow your school's progress towards becoming an ILFE over the course of one year, two years, several years, or even a decade or more.

In addition to the checklist, here are five ways to gather information in order to find out whether the school is moving towards becoming an ILFE.

1. **Keep diaries and records.** You and your fellow teachers can keep a short diary each month of what you have achieved in developing an inclusive, learning-friendly environment. This will include keeping records of activities, and of meetings in the school and the community. Class monitors or other pupils can also keep a simple diary of what has taken place and can discuss it with the teachers and the whole school each month. Community leaders or parents can visit regularly and keep records.

2. **Talk to other people.** Much of this activity is done informally as your ILFE programme develops, but sometimes you need to plan special occasions when you look for answers. You can do this by using a list of questions and recording answers. Talk to pupils, parents, and other teachers either individually or in groups. It is important for you to ask questions that gain information and bring out opinions, rather than answers that the people think you want.

3. **Assess knowledge and skills through essays.** What do other teachers and you know about the diverse student population in the school? You may want to ask other teachers to write an essay about what they know, and to list the questions about what they think they still need to know. This is also a good activity for students to do.

4. **Observation.** Whom and what do we observe? Head teachers need to observe teachers' instruction in classrooms as part of overall professional development. (Keep records of how often the head teacher visits the classroom and what the discussion is about.) Peer observation also is useful particularly as part of team teaching. Teachers from one class can observe pupils from other classes. Keep records of these observations and comments, and discuss them periodically in groups consisting of the head teacher and teachers.

Look at the buildings and the surroundings. Has your ILFE activities made an impact on the appearance of the school? Is it "barrier free"? Are the girls' and boys' toilets in different areas? Do girls and boys of all abilities have equal access to the playing fields?

Observe changes in the way pupils act and behave. Do they help each other in ways they did not before?

5. **Documents.** Examine various school documents, such as newsletters, letters to parents, progress reports, and lesson plans. Do the written documents from your school that go out to parents and to the community reflect the inclusive learning environment you are trying to become? Do teachers' lesson plans and the curriculum syllabi reflect the Inclusive, Learning-Friendly environment of your school?

Tool 1.4
What Have We Learned?

You have come to the end of this Booklet, but you still have one more activity to do. Let's start by finding out what you have learned about inclusive, learning-friendly environments from this introductory Booklet? Can you complete the following tasks?

1. What is an ILFE? Explain what it means and describe what it looks like in a classroom (such as considering seating arrangements, learning materials, relationships).

2. List five characteristics of an ILFE.

3. List two benefits of an ILFE for each of these groups: children, teachers, parents, and other members of the community.

4. Why might some of these groups resist the change to becoming an ILFE?

5. List the important steps for introducing and maintaining change in schools. Describe the ways in which you have observed these steps in the process of change going on at your school.

6. What are the five major Programme Planning Steps for developing an ILFE? At what point in the change process is your school? What have you already done to become ILFE? Since it is an ongoing process, what do you still need and want to do?

Developing an Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Environment is a great way to go. In fact, if Education for All is going to come true, it is the ONLY way to go! It requires commitment, hard work, and the openness to learn many new things; and it brings with it the satisfaction of seeing all children learn—children who have been in school learn things from children newly enrolled in school who have been excluded, and the children who were

excluded come to know the joy of learning.

This Booklet has asked you to think about the ways in which your school already is inclusive and learning-friendly, and has helped you to explore ways in which your school can become more inclusive and learning-friendly. Now ask yourself, **"What changes can I make in my classroom/ school tomorrow?" Come up with three personal targets and compare and discuss them with your colleagues. After one or two weeks, compare how you are progressing.**

Where Can You Learn More?

The following publications and Web sites are also valuable sources of ideas and information.

Publications

Booth T, Ainscow M, Black-Hawkins K, Vaughan M and Shaw L. (2000) Index for Inclusion: Developing Learning and Participation in Schools. Bristol: Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education.

Dutcher N. (2001) Expanding Educational Opportunity in Linguistically Diverse Societies. Center for Applied Linguistics: Washington, DC.

Pijl SJ, Meijer CJW, and Hegarty S. (Eds.) (1997) Inclusive Education: A Global Agenda. London: Routledge.

Slavin RE, Madden NA, Dolan LJ and Wasik BA. (1996) Every Child, Every School: Success for All. Newbury Park, California: Corwin.

UNESCO (2001) Open File on Inclusive Education: Support Materials for Managers and Administrators. Paris.

UNESCO (1993) Teacher Education Resource Pack: Special Needs in the Classroom. Paris.

UNESCO (2000) One School for All Children. EFA 2000 Bulletin. Paris.

United Nations (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child. Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989, entry into force 2 September 1990, in accordance with article 49.

Web Sites

Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE).
http://www.inclusion.uwe.ac.uk

Enabling Education Network (EENET).
http://www.eenet.org.uk

International Labour Organization.
http://www.ilo.org

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
http//www.oecd.org/els/education

UNESCO.
http://www.unesco.org/education

UNESCO/Inclusive Education.
http://www.unesco.org/education/sne

UNICEF.
http://www.unicef.org

UNICEF Teachers Talking About Learning.
http://www.unicef.org/teachers

World Bank.
http://www.worldbank.org

World Health Organization (WHO).
http://www.who.int/home-page

Many national governments have Web sites that provide information on their inclusive education policies and activities. An easy way to access government sites through the Internet is through 'Governments on the Web' at http://www.gksoft.com/govt/en