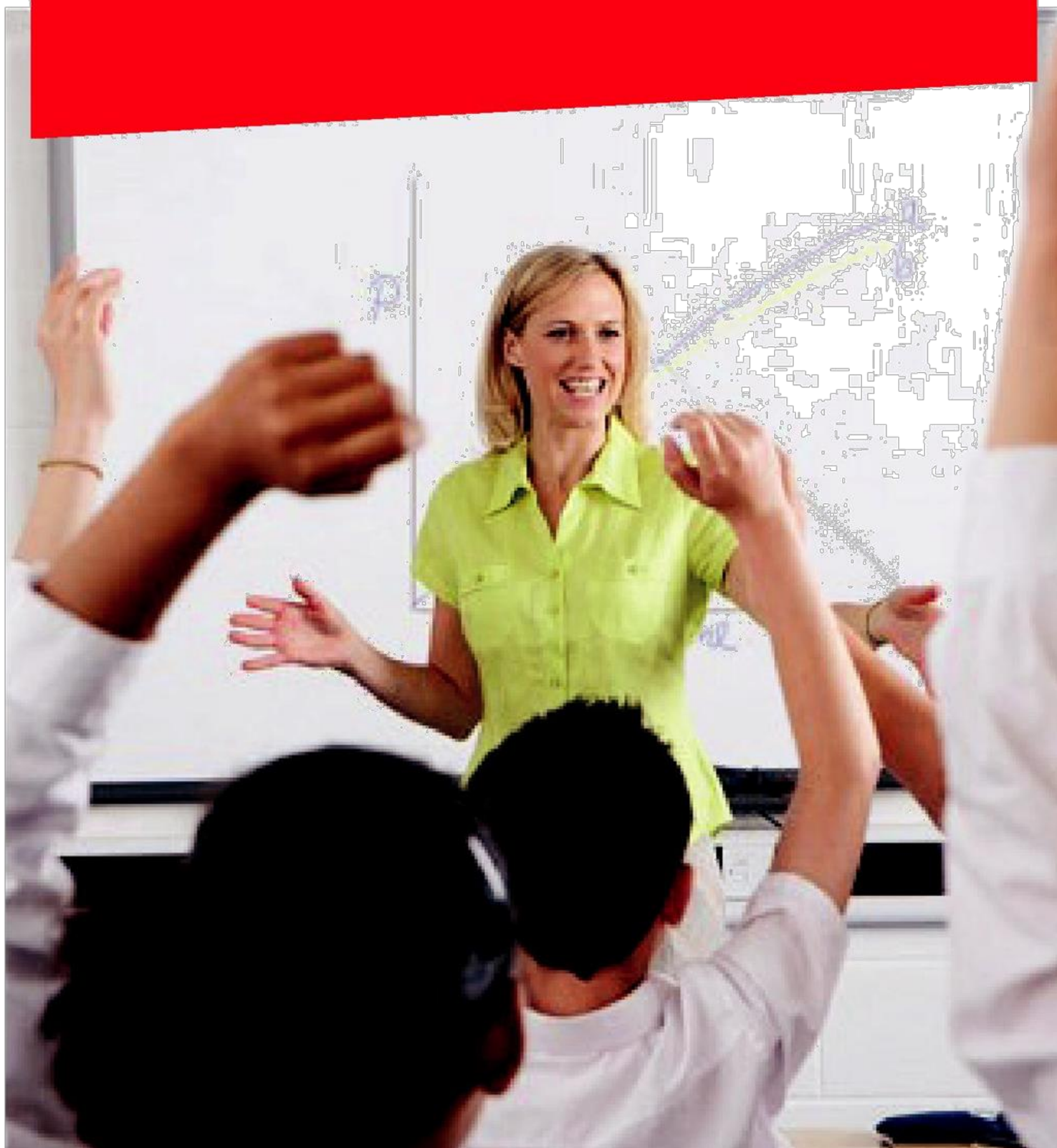


ROLE OF TEACHERS IN SUPPORT OF INDIVIDUAL HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT ACCORDING TO THE AGE GROUPS





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TIRANA, 2014

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ROLE OF TEACHERS IN SUPPORT OF INDIVIDUAL HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT ACCORDING TO THE AGE GROUPS

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Supported by:

Ema Kasapi, Save the Children

PRESENTATION AND INTRODUCTION TO THE TRAINING PROGRAMME

Objectives

- Welcoming all the participants;
- Introducing participants with the goal and objectives of the training;
- Presenting the training programme and discussing the flexibility related to the timetable and related practical details.

Duration

10 minutes

Method

Group discussion

Steps

1. Explain to participants the timetable about the sessions and breaks, and agree with them about it;
2. Read and explain the objectives of the training and make a short presentation of the programme.

Materials

Flipcharts, markers, pens, copies of the programme for each participant.





EXERCISE



SETTING RULES

Objectives

- Setting rules acceptable for all participants and the trainers themselves;
- Facilitating the training process.

Duration

15 minutes.

Method

Group discussion

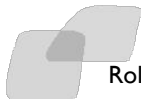
Steps

1. Explain to participants the need of setting rules;
2. Ask them to contribute in setting rules. It is important that the majority of the rules, or if possible all of them, be set by them, and be complied with by all;
3. Write all the proposed rules in the flipchart;
4. Ask participants, whether they agree on all the rules, and then stick them in an obvious place (wall, table, etc.).

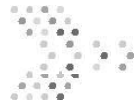
Materials

Flipcharts, markers, pens.





EXERCISE



KNOWING EACH OTHER BETTER

Objectives

- Introducing participants with each other
- Breaking the ice leading to the discussion of the main topic of the training.

Duration

20 minutes.

Method

Group discussion

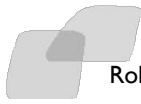
Steps

1. Ask participants to introduce themselves (their name, profession, how and how much is their work related to children).
2. Ask participants about a recent case of a challenge they have faced with a child, and their reaction to it;
3. Write their answers in the flipchart.

Materials

Flipcharts, markers.





EXERCISE



EXPECTATIONS

Objective

Identifying and discussing expectations, fears and hopes of participants, related to the training.

Duration

40 minutes

Method

Group work and group discussion

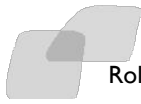
Steps

1. Explain to participants the goal of the activity;
2. Divide them into small groups. Ask them to write on a piece of paper the answers to the following questions (15 minutes);
3. Each individual writes 5 hopes and 5 fears on a piece of paper, and sticks it on the wall or in a flipchart;
4. Then, they discuss in small groups and return to the larger group.

Materials

Flipcharts, markers, tape.





SESSION

EARLY CHILDHOOD AND HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

EXERCISE



WHAT DOES A CHILD NEED?

Objectives

- Encouraging the thinking for children's needs;
- Encouraging the thinking for the establishment of relations between the needs and their fulfilment in the kindergarten premises.

Duration

40 minutes

Method

Group work, drawing

Steps

- Divide participants into groups of no more than 5 members;
- Participants draw the body of a girl or boy;
The group names the child and decides about his/her mental, physical, psychological and spiritual qualities (i.e. good health, a sense of humour, kindness). They should write these qualities on the right side of the child's body;
- On the left side of the body, they should write material, human and educational resources that are necessary to reach these qualities (i.e. whether the child is healthy, he/she needs food and shelter).
- Participants should describe what would happen in case these needs would not be fulfilled. At the same time, they can reflect about the fulfilment of needs in their kindergarten premises.

Materials

Flipcharts, markers, pens.



READING MATERIAL

EARLY CHILDHOOD AND HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

Children develop holistically. They need support in order to be healthy, to have good nutrition, protection, encouragement and learning. As a result, the development and learning objectives are multidimensional. They are achieved when children survive and are physically healthy, mentally alert, emotionally safe, competent in society and the learning process, culturally and spiritually aware, and aesthetically creative. They grow up and become responsible and productive adults. The holistic development of children in early childhood is an aspiration and basic principle guiding the interventions and programmes of early childhood.

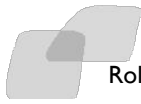
The early childhood experiences may encourage or hinder their holistic development, depending on the access to and quality of nutrition and health services, care practices of the family and community, opportunities to learn and their protection. They need support from different sectors. Such a support has an impact not only to children, but to the premises they live as well. These premises have an impact on the holistic development of children.

The holistic development in childhood includes: cognitive, social, physical, emotional, linguistic, spiritual and moral development, etc., from the prenatal stage at the age of 8 years old. The holistic development needs: health, nutrition, early stimulation, positive social and emotional interactions with the caregivers, learning opportunities, and protection against violence.

Holistic approach

The “holistic” approach means something considered in its entirety. The child development occurs simultaneously in some areas, while the holistic approach considers all these processes in its entirety, the whole development of the child respectively. This approach is based on the widely accepted principles that all the human development areas are interrelated and their development occurs simultaneously through the development areas.





We know that children differ from each other. Even though they share the same age, a certain development type might develop early in some children, while others may develop another type. We notice in the environment we live that a child may walk earlier than another child, while the latter may speak earlier. The fact that which child skills will be earlier developed, and how advanced a child may be in each of the skills, depends on the time we stay with them and how successful are the ways we try to encourage them to explore new knowledge and identify new things about their surrounding environment until they grow up¹.

The learning and development of young children are divided into 5 areas, which in the technical language are called development areas and are as follows:

- Physical and motor development
- Socio-emotional development
- Language development – early reading and writing
- Cognitive development
- Attitude towards learning

All the development areas develop in parallel, but they are more intensive at different ages and less in others. When a child is still breastfeeding, some certain areas are more active; when he/she is young other areas of development are most active; and some other areas of development are more active by the time the child reaches the age of school. Some areas of development develop early, and some others later.

By the time a child reaches the age of 1, the motor development is the most intensive type of development. The child starts to move, and walk. Later, this type of development is interrupted, and the cognitive development is the most intensive, which can be noticed after the second year.

The identification of child development areas, collectively or individually, is important for every individual involved in the early care and learning of young children. These achievements and scientific knowledge are very important experiences for the professional development of workers in kindergartens and in all the institutions involved in working with young children.

¹ “Fëmijëria e hershme: 5 të parat janë më të mbarat” retrieved from <http://www.prvite5.mk/zhvillimi-i-hershem-i-femijes.nsp> last accessed in September 2014





Physical and motor development

This area of early childhood development includes the development of physical and motor skills, which are manifested by the breastfeeding time or when children are young. When babies are born, they are not developed enough to have control of their body. Later they empower, are more stable, start walking, running, climbing steps, learn to ride a bicycle. These changes are so major that they cannot go unnoticed by the adults taking care of them.

When they acquire these skills, children start to express themselves through the surrounding objects/environment.

At this stage, they start moving strongly and stably. They manage to control all the parts of their body; they become aware of the space they move and start moving more in order to explore their environment. The development of the movement system and hardening of the body is an important part of the young children's development – it helps them in other things related to child development.

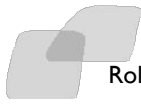
Socio-emotional development

The socio-emotional development means the relations children develop while they are young with adults and their surrounding environment. Important issues of this area are: the experience they acquire while exchanging with the environment, the way they react to familiar and unknown persons, their ease or difficulty in establishing good relations with others, how they manage to control their feelings, etc.

During that period, children learn how to identify and understand what they, or others, feel; they learn to be friendly with people and children surrounding them; how to express what they feel, and how to control their behaviour, as well as how to easily understand the surrounding environment.

The development of these experiences and skills helps children to be easily adapted to large groups, to participate in group activities and to be satisfied with the support provided by the environment. Younger children are especially sensitive to the way they are accepted by the environment and to the attitudes of people and their ideas.





Language development - early reading and writing

Language is divided into four categories: hearing, speaking, reading and writing – and its development start immediately after birth. Since they are still babies, children start to “discuss” with the people surrounding them, using different voices and sounds. There are some principles of the language and speaking development, which are applicable to all, but every child develops linguistic skills in his/her own way. Children acquire the vast linguistic experience when they reach the age before attending school. The pace of child linguistic development depends on many things, especially on how and how much do parents/adults discuss with them since they are young.

Cognitive development

The cognitive development of children and their interaction with the world depends on adults. The attitudes of adults in the child’s environment have an impact on whether the child will have the opportunity to build his/her knowledge gained by new information and how much will they learn to use this information in their everyday life with the people they live and the environment they grow up. This is an important period in which children acquire the mathematical basis, and start to think in a logical way and face with problematic situations.

This area is related to the way children learn, and not what they learn. Based on their nature, young children are curious and like to explore. The enabling of a positive learning environment encourages children to explore, solve problems, have initiatives, be curious and ask questions. Such an environment helps children to develop a positive attitude to learning, which is very important for the future success in school, as well as for the active life-long learning process.

Attitude towards learning

Each child should have the chance to acquire experience through the learning process corresponding to their sole needs, opportunities and potential. The child attitude towards learning is related to motivation, behaviour and cognitive styles that children demonstrate when they learn something new. Children should be motivated and use the acquired knowledge and skills. The early childhood sets the basis of life-long learning.





The researches carried out in some different sciences – anthropology, developmental psychology, medicine, social sciences – have found out that children's experiences in the early childhood are important factors in the development of intelligence, personality and the relations of the child with others.

If children are neglected, and we do not spend enough time with them in order to help them establish good relations with the environment and control their emotions at this period, this will be adversely reflected to the later life stages.

It does not suffice for the child to be well-nourished and healthy. Child development means simultaneous development in many areas. Each area is related to the other, and in case any of them is neglected, there is a risk that the child might not use his/her full potential; this is especially important to the children with special education needs.²

The Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasises in particular the importance of the child early development and defines children who have the right to develop his/her developmental potential to the highest level possible, while the UN countries are obliged to ensure to every child the standards about the physical, mental, spiritual and social development³.

The stressful situations in which the child is exposed to in his/her early childhood – family arguments, and aggressive behaviour of someone in his/her environment – may have negative impacts to the life of the child who might manifest later difficulties in the development of mental and learning processes, expressing and controlling their feelings, as well as problems faced with the establishment of good relations with other people in his/her environment. Such issues may slow the preparation of the child for school and may be the causes that the child achieves poorer results in high school and university⁴.

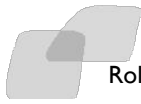
According to the statistics, children from vulnerable families face multiple consequences of poverty and attend less academic years than their peers from rich groups. The reasons for that may be poor motivation and capacities for the learning process. The early childhood is the best opportunity for an equal beginning of the learning process, as the period of intensive brain development and the setting of the basis for the mental and socio-emotional development.

2 Damovska, L., Shehu, F., Janeva, N., Palčevska, S. and Panova, L.S. (2009). "Early Development of children: Early learning and development standards for children from 0-6 years". Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, Macedonia.

3 UN (1989). Convention of the Rights of the Child, Article 6.

4 Karaj, Dh. (2005). *Psychology of Child Development*. Progress: Tirana





The devotion to the poverty reduction and increase of opportunities for all children to be successful in education achievements requires major investment in the early childhood and integration in health, social and educational interventions at local, regional and national level. The more is invested in creating the conditions for a quality development of the child in the early childhood, the less investment is required in his/her development in their later development stages.

Ensuring a healthy cognitive and socio-emotional development should be the top priority for a responsible government, responsible local communities and families with young children.

Inclusiveness and holistic development

The identification and assessment of cognitive, emotional and communication changes remains a major challenge for every teacher. Both an attitude and a way to fulfil the cultural and social changes already present in a preschool environment are needed.

Inclusive education is a fundamental right to all the children. Even though this right is widely accepted in principle, in practice it is quite often neglected. In Albania, the right to equal opportunities to education, based on the universality principle, is applied in the sense that all the children have the right to attend school and be educated. However, the selectivity principle based on the identification of needs is almost ignored. In general, the education activities should be characterised by the mentality that “one-size-fits-all” and the inclusive education concept is applied in the equal instruction for all the pupils, regardless of the learning profile of everyone, social background, personal skills and style, and without following them individually.⁵

The whole child and the holistic context⁶

The holistic development and learning includes all the development areas and supports the perspective that a child is developed as a whole being in the context of family, house, school and community.

⁵ “Schools for all” (2010). Save the Children in Albania

⁶ French, G. (2007). Children’s Early Learning and Development. National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.





Young children do not learn as units distinguished from each other; they establish relations during the process and change and develop them more over the time by gaining new experiences. The framework in which these terms are used, such as well-being, identity and belonging, communication and exploring, and thinking provides a way to set aside the development and learning in special and separated areas. The areas in this environment are holistically integrated. The traditional areas, such as cognitive, social, physical and creative may be used as terms. Therefore, the thematic framework supports the learning and development of children in a more natural and agreeable way for young children.

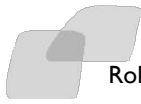
Holistic policies

There are numerous data showing that children who have positive concepts for different diversity factors (gender, ethnicity, socio-economic groups, etc.) have higher self-esteem and lower depression levels. On the other hand, prejudices and tendencies may develop earlier in life. Participation in routine activities and games enables children to receive different messages from the environment regarding their identity and changeability in relation to the others. Teachers should be aware of these dynamics and careful regarding compliance with these changes, such as gender, religion, family structure, children's needs, etc.; these form a good part of the child's experience and identity.

How can teachers help for a better adaptation of children in kindergarten? Practical advices:

- Make sure that activities are appropriate for children's development; interesting, challenging and tangible activities help children to feel comfortable in the new environment;
- Try to be familiar with every child separately and as soon as possible; Parents may give information about special likes and dislikes, and interests of children;
- Welcome suggestions from families, especially from the families of children with special needs. Parents may give specific advices they have used and which have been effective for their children, as well as about modifications to be made in the classroom;
- Be familiar with children, as well as with their families: at first, you can create small groups with children and parents in order to know each other better;
- Introduce children to the environment, programme and activities, as well as with other adults who are there and who can help them to familiarise;





- Create space for photographs of parents and family members, which can be “visited” by children during the day. In addition, include objects from different cultures in order to create a sense of mutual respect;
- Bear in mind: like adults, children need some time to adapt to the new situations.

Experience may help in facilitating transitions, but changes may still be stressful for children. Patience and understanding of children by parents and teachers help them to cope with the new situation with self-esteem: this is a skill which will help them to have successful transitions throughout their lives.

In this regard, the change should be respected in all aspects of early childhood and by all professionals. By exploring the cultural practices of ours and others, we recognise the fact that we are all human beings and provide an optimal environment for the cognitive, emotional and social development of children. Murray and O’Doherty (2001)⁷ strongly advocate for the non-prejudging approach for all the children. According to these authors, all the forms of prejudice should be challenged, and children supported in the development of empathy as well as recognition and resistance to discrimination. The purpose of this approach is the support of children and youth to encourage critical thinking and to be more active in building a more caring society for all.

⁷ Murray, C., O’Doherty, A., (2001). *Respecting Diversity in Early Childhood Care, Education and Training*. Dublin: Pavee Point.





EXERCISE



ACTORS IN THE LIFE OF THE CHILD

Objectives

- Encouraging thinking for the important people in the life of the child and their impact on the child's development;
- Encouraging thinking for the integration of these relations and the impact on children's development.

Duration

40 minutes

Method

Group discussion

Steps

- Participants list all the actors/important people in the life of a child;
- Then, they discuss about the importance of these relations in a large group;
- Participants are continuously invited to think about their impact on the development of the child and their interrelation.

Materials

Flipcharts, markers, pens.



READING MATERIAL

DIVERSITY, INCLUSIVENESS AND HOLISTIC APPROACH IN CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

According to the Whole Child Commission (2007)⁸, the whole child is:

- intellectually active;
- physically, verbally, socially and academically competent;
- empathic, good, caring and just;
- creative and curious;
- disciplined, self-directed and goal-oriented;
- free;
- critical thinker;
- self-confident; and
- appreciated and careful.

Education professionals expect diverse children in their classes. They appreciate the importance this diversity has in learning and what a class represents. What they may not be prepared are the different life experiences of many children they have faced or are facing, which form and set the basis of their future. Some of these different factors make them more vulnerable and undermine their skills to learn and to establish good relations with teachers and peers. Some of them are as follows⁹:

Children from families with low income

Vulnerable children and youth include those in chronic poverty and victims of domestic violence and community unrest for whom daily survival is the primary goal. They are the children whose families and

8 McCloskey, M. (2007). The whole child. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/policy-priorities/fall07/num51/full/The-Whole-Child.aspx> last accessed in September 2014

9 Kochhar – Bryant, C.A. and Heishman, A. (2010). Effective collaboration for educating the whole child. Sage publications





homes are threatened by crushing economic circumstances beyond their control. They include the children without parental care and those placed in foster families.

Exploited or refugee children from other nations

This new face of diversity is a growing population that includes a wide range of exploited or refugee children from other nations, such as returned emigrants. These are the faces of trauma, deep emotional pain, survival, and struggle - but also often of great hope. They may come with little experience with schooling, and in most cases, they have substantial social and emotional needs.

Children of divorced parents or those experiencing domestic or community violence

Children of divorced parents or those experiencing domestic or community violence represent a high percentage of children in preschool institutions. Research reveals that children of divorced parents or those experiencing domestic or community violence are more likely to have learning difficulties, and social and emotional problems.

Children with physical or mental health problems

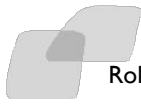
The population of children with physical or mental health problems is increasing. These problems have direct and indirect impacts on the motivation and ability of children to learn and interact with each other. Reducing problems affecting more the physical and mental health can increase the chances for better results. The five most frequent problems of this category are: vision impairment, asthma, aggression and violence, physical activity, and healthy nutrition.

Children from families with economic problems

These children come from families affected by the economic problems of the country, whose parents may lose their job or have unstable jobs. The most vulnerable children are those who:

- have families directly affected by the economic problems of the country;
- have suffered a personal loss from economic problems and/or other stressful events;





- live in communities seriously affected by economic problems;
- have parents with mental health challenges.

The sense of confusion and uncertainty experienced by many adults in these circumstances can be transmitted to children. Therefore, professionals should be alert to indications of stress in children under their care.

Children with special learning needs

Finally, we add the children who learn differently or at a pace that is different from their typical peers, whether they need more time or less time to achieve developmental levels of proficiency in academic subjects. They include the talented children who appear bored, alienated, and silent in class and dream, for instance about music or something else. There are also children who cannot organise their work and cannot concentrate on a single task, or they might be silent for a long time, without distracting their peers, as well as those who are anxious because they feel that no one understands them.

HOW TO (RE)INTEGRATE A CHILD WHO HAS NOT ATTENDED KINDERGARTEN FOR A WHILE?

(TIPS FOR TEACHERS):

Aged 3 – 4

- *"I WILL TAKE MY TEDDY BEAR WITH ME"*: A good many of children at this age feel more secure and comfortable if they have their favourite toy with them. You should let him/her take it, and at the same time show them the other toys you have in the kindergarten;
- *(RE) FAMILIARISATION*: many children, even those that have previously attended that particular kindergarten, find it difficult to readapt, due to long-term absence. You may talk with the children about their interests, needs and wishes (and you can mention something you remember from the time that he/she was attending kindergarten: you will make him/her feel appreciated)
- *REGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR*: children who miss a long time may show regressive behaviour (start talking childishly, may request more attention from the teacher, or may want to stay with her all the time, etc.), nevertheless this is a transitional behaviour;
- *TRUST IN PREVIOUS EXPERIENCES*: children recall their previous experience in the kindergarten. You may remind him/her of the things that you have done, of how fun you had, of the good friends that the child was befriending at that time, etc.





- **ROUTINE AND RITUALS:** children may develop trust and feel secure if they know how the day is going to be like, what are they going to do, etc. Parents and teachers may remind them of a typical day in the kindergarten.
- **DISPLAY OF INDEPENDENCE:** on the first days of re-attending kindergarten it is advisable that parents not rush to leave the children and depart; children feel better, when parents stay there for a while, so that separation comes smoothly. Parent and child may develop some “goodbye ritual”, such as a hug, a kiss while waving goodbye.

Aged 5 - 6

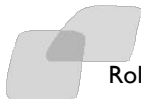
- **NEW ADAPTATIONS:** fortunately, children of this age group can understand more and this facilitates teacher to re-familiarise those children. Most of the children of this age show an interest in discussions, thus, in most cases those children will be engaged in small conversations with the others;
- **ORGANISATION OF GAMES:** You may allow the children having missed kindergarten to organise some games they really like. ‘Let’s play moon fighters or ninja’ is one of the frequently used expressions of this age. Through this, they will make game-friends, who may help them to readapt;
- **EXTRA TEACHING:** You may stay 10 minutes after the lunch break with him/her, so as to advance with the educational part. This is the time that the rest of the children are taking their nap, and he/she may pay full attention to you;
- **MAKING INDIVIDUAL ADAPTATIONS:** There might be a case of a child who does not talk much, and neither is he/she involved in the games for quite a long time.

However, you may observe that he/she keeps an eye on everything. At some point, he/she may tell you all the songs and poems, and knows how to play all the games. This is the point when the child has decided to be part of the group. Such a child needs to understand beforehand what is going to happen in his/her environment and then decide to take part. This passiveness may last some hours, days, but even months. It is highly important to give the child the necessary time, and not to put pressure on him/her to participate.

Children who come to kindergarten from dramatically unequal circumstances often leave it with similarly unequal skills and abilities ¹⁰. However, many such children have been strengthened by their experiences and get mature well beyond their age. Their success in traditional kindergarten depends on the sensitivity of the professionals:

10 Neuman, S. (2009). Changing the Odds for Children at Risk: Seven Essential Principles of Educational Programmes That Break the Cycle of Poverty. Economic Policy Institute and Teachers College; Reprint edition





educators who understand the child's unique experiences, appreciate the aspects of development that need special nurturing, and find a way to integrate the child into the social as well as the academic community of learners.

As education professionals become increasingly concerned about child achievement, they also recognize that academic development and performance are intertwined with many other aspects of development that must be nurtured.

They recognize the need to educate the whole child—attending to cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and talent development of children and youth from widely diverse backgrounds.

Dance of development: the paradox of educating children who develop at different rates ¹¹

While tension will always exist between standardized education and individualized education, all educators agree on one thing: children and youth develop at very different rates cognitively, socially-emotionally, physically, and linguistically. Until the late 1980s, most research examining life transitions and adjustments as students moved from elementary to middle school and from middle through high school. The dominant theory was that problems with coping during development were caused by rapid cognitive, physical, and social-emotional changes. The developmental process for children does not occur in a step-by-step linear fashion. Rather, it zigzags, or dances, side to side and forward and backward, but with a net movement forward. Development is a gradual process, not an event, though children are often expected to force-fit their individual dance of development into the straight lines of grade progression and one-size-fits-all developmental expectations.

If we view educational environments as well-choreographed routines and children whose “dance” of development varies widely, then only a very few might actually dance “correctly.” Most of the others will either be force-fit with some partial degree of success, or they may never fit at all. Yet the educational enterprise continues to offer standard routines unless the child has a legally required Individualized Education Programme. Keeping with the metaphor, dance experts recommend

¹¹ Kochhar – Bryant, C.A. and Heishman, A. (2010). Effective collaboration for educating the whole child. Sage publications





that if a routine is for a group, then the dance instructor should gauge each person's flexibility and ability to follow through. Additional supports are provided for those who need extra time or preparation. Thus, it is—or should be—with education.

Beyond the Metaphor: Research Confirms the Dance of Development

Humans develop at various stages and in a variety of domains—physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and moral. Each domain develops in the context of all others and cannot be separated. Each affects the others in important ways. Development in these multiple, interacting domains can be viewed as passing through specific stages. Transition to each new stage is influenced by, or contingent upon, accomplishments attained in previous stages. Just as children's language or mental capabilities develop as a result of maturation and experience, so too do children's development in other domains, such as social, emotional, and ethical, which is intertwined.

Development in the multiple domains varies somewhat for each child and is affected by both internal (biological predispositions, within-child abilities) and external (physical and social environment) influences¹².

Individual variation in development has at least two dimensions: (1) the inevitable variations around the average or typical path of development and (2) the uniqueness of each person developing in a unique social and community environment. Each child possesses an individual pattern and timing of growth, as well as individual personality, temperament, physical constitution, learning style, family, and experiential background. All children have unique strengths and for some children, special or atypical learning and developmental needs require special responses from the educational community.

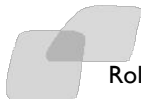
As professionals recognize, that individual variation is not only to be expected but also valued. They realize that decisions about curriculum and adults' interactions with children must be as individualized and as developmentally responsive as possible¹³.

Development and learning result from the interaction of biological maturation and the environment, which includes both the physical and social worlds in which children live. Children are results of both predetermined heredity and environmental influences. Neither perspective alone is sufficient to explain individual learning or development; development is viewed as the result of an interactive, transactional process between the growing,

¹² Brett, A., Smith, M., Price, E., & Huitt, W. (2003). Development in the affective domain. (Unpublished manuscript). Valdosta, GA: Valdosta State University.

¹³ "Developmentally appropriate practice" (2009). Retrieved from <http://www.naeyc.org/DAP> last accessed in September, 2014





changing individual and his or her experiences in the social and physical worlds¹⁴. For example, a child's physical condition at birth may predict healthy growth, but family poverty and chronic malnutrition in early years may affect long-term outcomes and trigger a variety of developmental disabilities. Similarly, a child's unique temperament creates personality characteristics that can make a child cautious about the world, or outgoing, which in turn shapes his or her experiences and social environment.

What does it mean to educate the whole child¹⁵?

The purpose of education has been debated for centuries. Many educators and child development experts argue that the overarching goal of education is to promote the highest possible levels of cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and ethical development for each child. The whole-child movement is based on the proposition that education must move beyond preparing children to become "well-educated" citizens who are productive participants in the economic system. Education must also cultivate in young people spirituality, reverence for the natural environment, and a sense of social justice. Education must inspire children's creativity, imagination, compassion, self-knowledge, social skills, and emotional health. In this way, the term holistic education simply means cultivating the whole person and helping individuals live more consciously within their communities and natural ecosystems.

HOLISTIC EDUCATION ASSUMPTIONS AND CHALLENGES TO BE CONSIDERED

- **Healthy kids make better students and persons.**

What can be done so to ensure that all children that arrive at the kindergarten are healthy and ready to take actively part in the activities?

- **Children who are scared have trouble concentrating.** What can we do to ensure children feel safe and secure, both physically and emotionally, in their kindergarten?

- **Academic engagement is critical for success.** How can schools and communities engage children in ways that are relevant and tied to the broader community beyond kindergarten?

¹⁴ Butcher, L.M. and Plomin, R. (2008). The Nature of Nurture: A Genomewide Association Scan for Family Chaos, Behavioural Genetics 38 (4): 361–371.

¹⁵ Kochhar – Bryant, C.A. and Heishman, A. (2010). Effective collaboration for educating the whole child. Sage publications



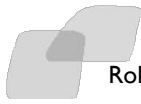


- **Children who are supported by caring adults are most likely to excel.** What elements are critical for children support, both inside and outside the classroom, to ensure high success? What does support for children mean, and how can we ensure all children have it?
- **Children must be prepared for life outside of school.** What must we do to provide a challenging, rigorous curriculum that prepares today's children for success in the further steps of their life?

More recently, educational psychologists have proposed that holistic education is aimed at helping children to achieve their best ("self-actualisation."). Education with a holistic perspective is concerned with the development of every person's intellectual, emotional, social, physical, artistic, creative, and spiritual potentials. It seeks to engage children in the teaching/learning process and encourages personal and collective responsibility on the part of professionals charged with children's development.

The quest for holistic education requires that educational experiences and environments be adapted to the developmental path of the individual, rather than the individual adapted to the environment. In today's economy - and an era of standardization of curriculum, educational environments' development, schools find little incentive for motivating all children. Having high expectations for all children is important, but real changes and individual development should not be disregarded.





WORKSHEET¹⁶

Questionnaire about diverse learners: a tool for helping teachers determine their level of understanding ¹⁶		AT ALL	A LOT		
		1	2	3	4
Examining diversity					
1.	I understand the importance and impact of the teacher on the classroom climate.				
2.	I have examined my attitudes related to diversity.				
3.	I understand how to analyse instructional materials to ensure proper reflection of children's changes.				
4.	I implement strategies that meet the learning styles and needs of the children in my classroom.				
5.	I implement effective instructional techniques that meet the needs of children who live in poverty.				
6.	I understand the type of learning style to utilise when re-teaching children in the classroom.				
7.	I understand the importance of varying activities to meet the needs of a diverse children population.				
8.	I understand the characteristics of varying activities to meet the needs of differing socioeconomic groups in my classroom.				
Recognizing bias					
9.	I understand the impact of linguistic bias on the teaching/learning process and how to avoid it.				
10.	I understand the impact of stereotyping on the teaching/learning process and how to avoid it.				
11.	I understand the impact of exclusion on the teaching/learning process and how to avoid it.				
12.	I understand the impact of unreality on the teaching/learning process and how to avoid it.				
13.	I understand the impact of selectivity on the teaching/learning process and how to avoid it.				
14.	I understand the impact of isolation on the teaching/learning process.				
Closing the Achievement Gap					
15.	I incorporate strategies that promote relationship building.				
16.	I implement strategies to build resiliency in children in my classroom.				
17.	I provide accurate information about cultural groups through straightforward discussions of race, ethnicity, and other cultural				

differences.

I6 The questionnaire was adapted based on the Training Manual by Donna Walker Tileston, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, (2005). *What Every Teacher Should Know About Diverse Learners*.





18. I understand how to implement strategies to access prior knowledge.				
19. I implement strategies to meet the needs of second-language learners.				
20. I implement strategies that will help children to be successful at school and away from kindergarten.				
21. I implement strategies that assist children in setting learning goals.				
22. I implement strategies that demonstrate my understanding of a power of the brain in learning.				

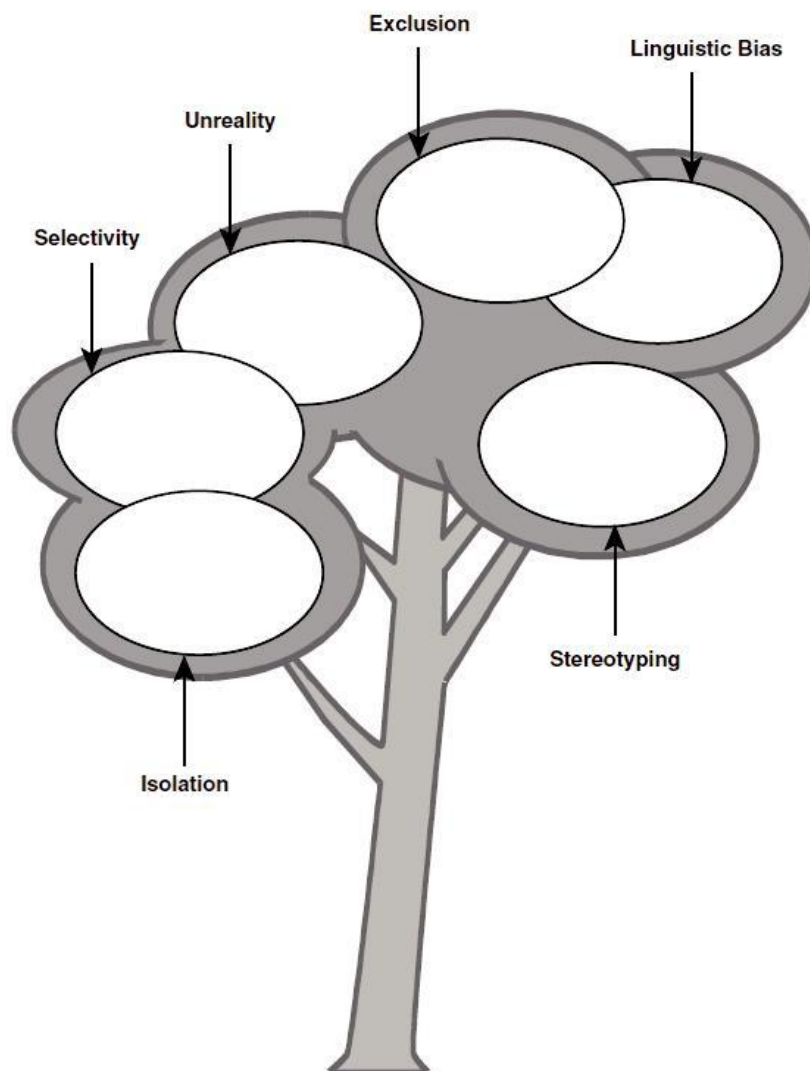


Figure 1. The bias tree. All rights reserved © 2005 by Corwin Press. Training Manual for What Every Teacher should know about diverse learners.

READING MATERIAL

INCLUSIVE AND STIMULATING ENVIRONMENT

What is inclusive education?

Inclusive education aims to address the learning needs of ALL children, and especially of those who are marginalised. Inclusive education means that all children learn together, approaching all aspects of education and active participation in development.

Role and meaning of inclusiveness

Inclusiveness broadly means taking into account all circumstances that hinder the access to quality education with its different forms, of these groups:

- Girls;
 - Children from poor/unfavourable economic conditions;
 - Children from rural/remote areas;
 - Children belonging to minorities;
 - Children returned from abroad, and children from Diaspora;
 - Children with special educational needs.
-
- Children with disabilities (physical, visual, hearing, intellectual, developmental);
 - Children with social, emotional and behavioural problems;
 - Children suffering from a disease or trauma;
 - Children with learning difficulties;
 - Gifted children and those with special abilities.

Inclusiveness is:

- an approach that advocates the human rights;
- the contrary of discrimination and can warm the climate of the preschool institution, making it welcoming for all children;



- a series of strategies for the inclusion of all children/groups;

Adults and teachers should:

- set appropriate challenges for the learning process of each child;
- respond to the different learning needs of the children;
- overcome possible barriers to the learning process of special children and special groups of children and to their assessment.

Differentiated instruction and differentiated learning is an inclusive method of all the vulnerable groups, and the principal approach to inclusion of children with special educational needs. Differentiation portrays the teaching approach, based on which it is ensured that all children learn well, despite the numerous differences among them. Differentiation is achieved through strategies, not based on the learning outcomes; therefore, we need to focus particularly on them.

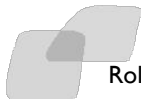
How can teachers achieve differentiation in their classrooms?

They can achieve this through 3 ways:

- *Learning outcome differentiation*, all children are given the same task, but the differentiation is done based on their answers.
- *Task differentiation*, children are given different tasks, depending on the abilities. The task may vary in respect of difficulty, structure, or instruction given to them, or through a combination of these three factors.
- *Teacher's effort differentiation*, the teacher's level of intervention shall be adapted.

The advantages of task differentiation correspond to the possibilities of adapting activities to the learners' abilities, so that all skill levels shall be successful. Whereas, the cons might be the fact that it requires a lot of planning. Regardless of this, teachers should know well their learners and their abilities, and should explain beforehand the reason why everyone has a different task. The use of the word **different** is of ultimate importance, and other connotative terms, such as easier/more difficult, simpler/more challenging, better/worse, more/less, and/or similar should be avoided.





Teacher's effort differentiation is best enabled through posing open-ended questions, that do NOT imply expected answers, but that promote discussion and debate. This approach enables all children to experience positive achievements and portray his/her achievement at their highest level.

Supporting all children to take actively part in their community is preconditioned by a quality early childhood. High Quality Early Childhood Inclusive Programmes have three key components: 1. are accessible to all children and their families 2. are drafted and designed according to the special needs of every child, and 3. involve an ongoing assessment of the programmes, to ensure full participation.

In the Early Childhood Care Programmes all children have the possibility to develop their linguistic, social, physical, emotional and cognitive abilities. *Inclusion in early childhood is not related to placement of the child within a certain programme, but implies the active participation in social interactions, as well as the development of children's abilities and skills.*

Key components of inclusive environment¹⁷

Access. An institution provides access to all children, when it has:

- policies that promote inclusion
- a leader that supports inclusion and
- staff that has faith in inclusion

The relationships between services and professionals should be coordinated and collaborative. Service provision sectors are: health, education, social services and care services. These groups of professionals support the evaluation, planning and design of adaptations, modifications and assessment.

Such an example might be the family doctor, who collaborates with the kindergarten's staff for a child that displays problems in social interaction and he is the one who has kept track of the child's progress.

Design and implementation. An environment is inclusive when:

- the programme that it implements is drafted to meet the needs of all children and their families (universal programme);

¹⁷ Underwood, K. (2013). *Everyone is welcome: inclusive early childhood education and care*. Queen's printer for Ontario.





- planning is individualised and reason of the participation is clear;
- goals of early interventions for children are included in the programme (differentiation and individual work).

Physical recourses that are important for inclusive practices embrace an inclusive environment that provides adapted materials, special equipment, etc. For instance, environments that are designed to provide calm and active areas are good for children with special sensory and attention needs. Moreover, inclusive environments and programmes are those that respect the natural developmental pace of each child and its family background.

In inclusive environments, every child usually has a personal file, which contains all the activities and habits in its own programme, viewed from the perspective of the child. This information may be shared with other professionals, having taken the parents' consent. The reason of record keeping is not necessary related to the so-called "normal" child, but rather to the participation of all children. In practical terms, this implies that the child shall have the possibility to be physically active, to entertain and socialise ¹⁸.

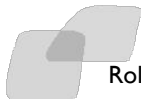
Monitoring and evaluation. Children and families are still involved when:

- professionals respond to the child's developmental changes and to the changes in the family life;
- the respective environments and programmes are flexible, responsible and use updated information, for planning and decision making processes;
- have a smooth transition from early childhood into school age.

As a consequence, Early Childhood Programmes need to monitor the changes in children, family and community's needs, as well as monitor new information that comes up. The knowledge about individual development of children acquired through informal observation and formal assessment activities, (carried out by the appropriate professional) based on the environmental assessments and other activities of a programme, are critical for inclusive education and stimulating for early childhood.

¹⁸ Rosenbaum, P. & Gorter, J.W. (2011). The 'F-words' in childhood disability: I swear this is how we should think! *Child: care, health, and development*, 38 (4), 457-463





Which are the characteristics of holistic and inclusive education?

Inclusive Education is that education which offers to each child: “the possibilities to be provided with effective educational services, with other necessary complementary age-based services and materials in classrooms, so that they are prepared to have a productive life and be an active member of the society.”

The three basic principles of early childhood, which may be used collectively for having Quality Early Childhood Programmes and Services, are: access, participation and support. All three are needed so as to ensure that the needs and priorities of all children and their families are met.

The assessment of kindergarten environment for inclusive practices (Melinda Raab & Carl Dunst, 1997)

The following list has been adapted to assess the quality of the programme and of the inclusive environment in preschool education institutions.

Programme foundation and philosophy - In high quality programmes:

- ☐ Are guided by a clearly described philosophy
- ☐ Have written goals and objectives
- ☐ Promote partnerships with parents

Management and training - In high quality programmes, the director:

- ☐ Communicates expectations to staff
- ☐ Regularly visits and monitors staff performance
- ☐ Provides ongoing support and feedback
- ☐ Arranges on-the-job training

Environmental organization - In high quality programmes:

- ☐ Have open classrooms clearly divided into learning areas
- ☐ Have appropriate, child-sized equipments and furniture
- ☐ Material selection is adequate, accessible, and developmentally appropriate

Staffing patterns - In high quality programmes:

- ☐ Staff schedules and responsibilities are clearly defined and followed
- ☐ Staff prepares activities in advance
- ☐ Staff has time to plan and exchange information

Instructional content - In high quality programmes:

- ☐ Functional skills are targeted for instruction
- ☐ Instructions take place during naturally occurring classroom routines
- ☐ Learning activities are developmentally appropriate
- ☐ Multiple activity options are scheduled and available to children throughout the day
- ☐ Children do not wait for activities to begin or end- there is a natural transition



Instructional techniques - In high quality programmes:

- ☐ Staff responds positively to child-initiated behaviours
- ☐ Staff adopts appropriate strategies to facilitate practice and learning
- ☐ Staff provides individualised attention during activities
- ☐ Behaviour management procedures are planned and used consistently

Programme evaluation - In high quality programmes:

- ☐ The programme has a written plan to monitor goals and objectives
- ☐ Evaluation is conducted regularly
- ☐ Data are used to make decisions towards improvement

Access implies providing access to a wide range of learning opportunities, activities, settings, and environments. **Participation** implies providing children with additional supportive equipments and materials in order to participate in plays and learning activities with peers and adults. **Support** implies that a supportive infrastructure must be in place, which undergirds the provision of inclusive services to children and families.

Qualities and characteristics of holistic education

Rin Miller (2008)¹⁹, one of the famous writers in the field of holistic education, defines it as follows: *Holistic education is an effort to cultivate the development of the whole human being.* Conventional schooling traditionally reflects the view of the child as a passive receiver of information and rules, or at most as a computer-like processor of information, whereas a holistic approach recognizes that to become a full person, a growing child needs to develop—in addition to intellectual skills— physical, psychological, emotional, interpersonal, moral, and spiritual skills. The child is not merely an employee in training, but an intricate and delicate being of vital forces and environmental influences.

Miller identified four qualities that characterize the holistic education:

1. *It encourages experiential learning.* There is more discussion, questioning, experimentation, and active engagement in a holistic learning environment and a noticeable absence of grading, testing, labelling, and comparing. Learning is more meaningful and relevant to students as it is related to their lives.
2. *Personal relationships are considered to be as important as academic achievements.* These learning environments strive to

cultivate a sense of community and belonging, and qualities of safety, respect, caring, and even love.

19 Kochhar – Bryant, C.A. and Heishman, A. (2010). *Effective collaboration for educating the whole child*. Sage publications





3. *There is concern for the children's inner world; that is, for the feelings, aspirations, ideas, and questions that each child brings to the learning process.* Education is no longer viewed as the transmission of information; instead it is a round-trip into the outside world.
4. *Holistic education expresses an "ecological consciousness."* It recognizes that everything in the world exists in a specific context; that is, in relationship to inclusive communities. This involves a deep respect for the nature. It is a perspective that embraces both natural and cultural diversity.

O'Hara (2006)²⁰ explained that our current educational goals and practices are insufficient to understand our world's level of complexity; they cannot deal with the uncertainty, flexibility, creativity, dialogue, understanding, and wisdom of the 21st-century children. The differences between a traditional, and an encouraging and holistic classroom in relation to the programme content, teacher's role, and parents' inclusion are presented in the following tables.

PROGRAMME CONTENT ²¹	
Traditional classroom	Inclusive and encouraging classroom
Teaching content consist of selective teaching content.	Teaching content is integrated and children collaborate with each other.
The teaching programme was compiled and developed by external experts.	The teaching content depends on children's wishes and interests.
The decision making process is of hierarchical character.	Decision making is a joint process.
The teaching content is designed in support of traditional expectations in relation to social behaviour and academic achievements.	The teaching programme is designed according to children's individual potentials and establishes positive relationships towards learning.
Culture and other individual differences are ignored and children are expected to adapt to the dominant culture.	The teaching programme respects variations and the multicultural world, aiming to prepare better the pupils for the future.
Activities are based on the book or worksheet.	Activities are based on different sources of information.

Emphasis is put on acquisition of
fundamental skills.

Emphasis is put on understanding of
important concepts.

20 Ibid

21 Walsh, K.B., Kiranxhiska, S. and Llazarevski Gjorgjieva, T. (2009). Creating 21st
century learning environment. Project on preschool education. Libri Universitar:
Skopje.





TEACHER'S ROLE AND STRATEGIES²²	
Traditional classroom	Inclusive and encouraging classroom
Teachers are the only source of information.	Teachers play a facilitating and guiding role in the learning process.
Teachers are considered to be people who have completed their learning.	Teachers consider themselves as pupils together with other children.
Teachers present information through discourses and worksheet.	Teachers create learning situations based on direct experiences, social interaction and researches.
Knowledge and assessment techniques adopted by teachers are focused on the "correct/incorrect" answer or closed-ended questions.	Teachers encourage children's critical thinking by making open-ended questions.
Skills are presented as goals which should be met.	Skills are presented as learning instrument and are related to the content.
Teachers are responsible for the behaviour in the classroom and they are authoritative.	Teachers establish rules through which personal responsibility is emphasised in cooperation with children.
Teachers usually provide children with information.	Teachers behave interactively by playing the role of a mediator.
Children work mostly individually.	Children work in pairs or small groups.
FAMILY PARTICIPATION²³	
Traditional classroom	Inclusive and encouraging classroom
Parents are considered as strangers in the classroom and they feel unwelcome.	Parents are considered as children's first teachers, as well as partners.
Communication with the family takes place when problems are encountered.	Communication with family takes place since the first day and focuses on the determination and planning of joint goals for each child.
Parents may visit school only on predetermined days.	Parents are always welcome at kindergarten.
Parents' inclusion on school assignment is reduced only to their check at home.	Parents are considered as sources of information which may be useful to homework completion.

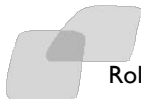
Community is viewed as a separate body from the kindergarten.	Community is a very important source of information in the teaching process.
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22 Ibid

23 Walsh, K.B., Kiranxhiska, S. and Llazarevski Gjorgjieva, T. (2009). Creating 21st century learning environment. Project on preschool education. Libri Universitar: Skopje.

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EXERCISE



INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT IN MY GROUP

Objectives:

- Encouraging thinking regarding inclusive environment in the present group of teachers;
- Comparing present activities with inclusive ones and projecting others with holistic approach.

Duration:

40 minutes

Method

Group work

Steps:

- Divide the participants into groups consisting of no more than 5 members.
- Participants discuss in groups what changes should they undertake in their classrooms to make them more holistic.
- Then, the participants will project/create activities which can be adopted to increase children's encouragement.
- Each group presents the discussed issues by providing examples on children's manners of learning at present and what can be changed.

Materials:

Flipcharts, markers, pens.



READING MATERIAL

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARENT-TEACHER COLLABORATION AND ITS IMPACT ON INCLUSION

Epstein et al. (1996)²⁴ have proposed a framework of parent involvement that includes six main types of activities which connect families, kindergartens, and communities:

Parenting: families should provide care regarding their children's health and safety, and should create a home environment that encourages learning and good behaviour at kindergarten; kindergartens should provide parents with information to help them understand and promote their children's development;

Communicating: institutions of preschool education should be responsible for providing families with information regarding child's progress; the adopted means of communication should be appropriate for parents and their cultural specificities, while the process needs to be bidirectional;

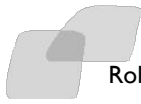
Volunteering: parents can make significant contributions to the environment and functions of a kindergarten; kindergartens and nurseries can get the most out of this process by establishing flexible schedules for the volunteering-parents in order to increase their participation, and by working to tailor the parents' talents and interests to the needs of children and teachers.

Learning at home: parents can help their children in kindergarten-related activities, or in the better understanding of lessons by the children's part through recurrence, of course with the guidance and support of teachers.

Decision-making: kindergartens can give parents meaningful roles in the institution and decision-making process. This opportunity should be open to all segments of the community, not only for those people who have more time and energy at their disposal to spend on kindergarten affairs;

24 Petrovic, M. (2009). Literature review: Family – school partnership models. Received from <http://www.see-educoop.net/aeiq/documents/v02%20The%20effects%20of%20parent%20involvement%20in%20schools.pdf> accessed in September, 2014





Collaboration with the community: kindergartens should coordinate their work and resources of the community, businesses, and other groups to strengthen its programmes, family practices, and child's learning and development. Kindergartens can help families gain more access to support services provided by other agencies, such as healthcare, cultural events, and after-school programmes.

Parent-teacher collaboration is an essential condition for children's growth and education.

- A. Parents need to feel the teachers' support. They should be informed on everything concerning their child.
- B. Teachers should fulfil parents' needs to be informed in relation to everything concerning their child.
- C. Parents should be listened carefully and attentively, as they know their child better than anyone and therefore, they comprise a valuable source of information.
- D. Parents' presence and participation in teaching activities should be spurred and encouraged.
- E. Teachers should discuss with parents on the diverse activities the child should undertake with his/her family.
- F. Parents, may go earlier to kindergarten in specific days to see how their child follows the rules, is involved in activities, and plays.
- G. Parents should not demand, reproach, and correct children more than it is necessary.
- H. Teachers should inform parents on their child's activities, progress, and the difficulties they encounter.

Parents' participation in practical activities

- Parents and teachers should share with each other each stage of their child's growth, development, education, and interventions.
- Teachers should make the parents feel that their child is in good hands, by helping them therefore create trust and maintain the calm.
- No frameworks should exist between the family and the educational institution. Both parties should establish good communication skills and mutual sympathy.
- Parents sometimes are over-protective towards their child by hampering him/her to go through experiences which are necessary for his/her skills development.





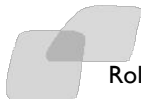
- Parents frequently describe their child subjectively.
- Parents should be provided with an environment within the kindergarten where they can discuss all their concerns, needs, problems, and wishes related to their child. They should share with each other their experiences and practices, and learn from successful ones.
- Parents should be initially involved in activities of social-educational character such as excursion, tours, picture exhibitions, going to the circus, to the cinema etc.
- Then, parents should take part in kindergarten activities as assistants by participating in teaching activities, observing what happens in the classroom, observing the ways the child involves in those activities, how he/she receives and puts in practice instructions.
- Parents may be divided into groups to provide a better service to the child and to establish a closer collaboration with the teachers.
- Family and kindergarten cannot complete their mission without establishing a full and a successful collaboration with each other.
- Parents should also be involved in decision making in the preschool institution regarding any decision or process which directly or indirectly affects their child.

Kindergarten-family collaboration contributes in the child's best development. In order for the child to feel secure, it is very important that he/she feels and witnesses that between the kindergarten and his/her family is established a harmonic relationship. This would result in better results in the child's development. Parents are the most important people in a child's life, therefore it is necessary that they participate in his/her teaching activities.

The differences between traditional and parent-teacher partnership orientation ²⁵	
Partnership orientation	Traditional orientation
Clear commitment to work together in order to promote child's performance/achievement	Emphasizing the role of kindergarten in learning promotion
Frequent communication that is bidirectional	Communication initiated only by the kindergarten; it is infrequent and problem-centred

25 Walsh, K.B., Kiranxhiska, S. and Llazarevski Gjorgjieva, T. (2009). Creating 21st century learning environment. Project on preschool education. Libri Universitar: Skopje.





Admission of cultural differences and the recognition of their importance on the creation of an inclusive, encouraging, and positive environment	“One size fits all” – cultural difference is a challenge that should be overcome
Admission and appreciation of the significance of different perspectives	Differences are considered as barriers
Roles are clear, mutual, and supportive	Separate roles distance participants
Goals for pupils are mutually determined and shared	Goals are determined by kindergarten/nursery; information is sometimes shared with parents
Plans are co-constructed, with agreed upon roles for all participants	Educational plans are devised and delivered by teachers

Defining characteristics of the family-school partnership²⁶	
Characteristics	Key indicators
Relationships among partners are collaborative, independent, and balanced	Diverse individuals work together as coequal parties, share the information on the identification of goals and problems solution, and forge trusting relationships; Roles are complementary – each actor makes a unique contribution that is mutually beneficial; All have equal opportunities in decision making.
Responsibilities for children’s education and socialisation are shared among actors	Resources, power, and responsibilities are shared; Goals are mutually determined; Outcomes achieved in the context of the partnership are uniquely superior to those achieved by any one party in isolation.
Maintenance of a positive relationship is priority	Failure to develop relationships can undermine the formation of successful partnerships; Personal needs are put aside to allow the needs and goals of the partnership take precedence;

		To be successful, partners must hold a positive regard towards the other;	
		All believe that the partnership and the anticipated outcomes are worthy of the expenditure of time and energy for its maintenance.	
Services are flexible, responsive, and proactive		Unique family–institution contexts define the form of the partnership.	

26 Walsh, K.B., Kiranxhiska, S. and Llazarevski Gjorgjieva, T. (2009). Creating 21st century learning environment. Project on preschool education. Libri Universitar: Skopje





Differences in perspectives are seen as strengths	A range of diverse experiences, skills, and perspectives are considered in the determination of problems solution; Unique knowledge, resources, talents, and expertise brought by parents and educators enhance the potential outcomes for children.
There is a commitment to cultural competence	Cultural values and traditions of the family and institution are respected; Services that are sensitive towards important cultures and traditions of institutions and families are most likely to be effective.
Emphasis is on the outcomes and goal fulfilment	Partnerships have clearly specified goals, and progress is monitored through data-based decision-making processes; Programmes are not provided because they are available; rather, they are given special attention in order to be compatible with partnership priorities.

Child-centred kindergarten

In order to create a child-centred kindergarten, we believe that it is important to share appropriate opportunities for children and parents in a systemic perspective. It includes the following issues:

- Preschool institutions should recognize the child's right to learn, and receive education and care from a holistic perspective;
- All children and parents should be provided with equal opportunities;
- Parents and staff together should be actively involved in projecting, planning, and running preschool services for the long-term benefit of their children and of the community;
- Preschool services should be community based and sensitive to local needs, attitudes, rights, including employment and training needs;
- There should be active co-ordination of services in each

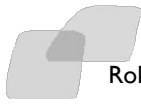
community, in a network perspective.

Preschool education is a complex system which relies on:

- The role of collaboration among children, teachers and parents, considered as inter-dependent;
- The role of children and teachers (but also parents) as co-constructor of knowledge;
- The inter-dependence of individual and social learning, considered as a mutual empowerment;
- The role of culture in understanding this interdependence²⁷.

²⁷ Fabbi, C. (2014). Guidelines for ECDC in Albania. Save the Children





EXERCISE



TYPES OF COLLABORATION

Objectives:

- Encouraging thinking on different types of collaboration;
- Becoming aware of the positive and negative sides of each type.

Duration

10 minutes

Method

Group discussion

Steps:

- Immediately following the presentation of the reading material “Parent-teacher collaboration”, the trainer asks the participants the following questions:
 - Which type of participation that was previously discussed do you consider as satisfactory and why? (in groups of 3-5 members)
 - Which type of participation would you like to have more information on? (e.g. Parenting: Computer access by children? Learning at home?). Try to be specific.

READING MATERIAL

PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION AND ITS IMPACT ON INCLUSION AND THE STIMULATING ENVIRONMENT

Families which are involved on their child's life in kindergarten and in any other level are provided with the opportunity to learn more on their child, especially on his/her manners of learning, and how they can support his/her development in kindergarten or outside of it. Family members on the other hand have the opportunity to share their information, which enables for a better understanding of teachers and other professionals on what strategies may be more successful for the child. This information exchange gives a more general overview of the child and a way to provide information and services which meet the needs of the whole family.

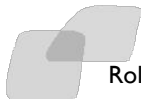
Families which are more involved in their child's life in kindergarten learn more on its way of operating and have a better understanding on the available options and opportunities in the kindergarten, community, and in relation to other activities. Families involved up to upper secondary education are usually more supportive and trust more on their parental skills and on the skills to help their children learn. In the end, families who are more involved, have a more positive view of the kindergarten, teachers, and community members. They are also more willing to discuss, to mediate, and to file a complaint in a higher institution if there are differences related to perspectives or if conflicts emerge. Parents' involvement boosts teachers' morale because both parties have the tendency to think more positively on each other when there is communication in between and a full understanding of the difficulties regarding teaching and parenting.

Valuable Methods of Communication

Berger (2000)²⁸ described two major categories of communication between teachers and families: two-way communication and one-way communication. Two-way communication occurs when there are interactions between parents and teachers that go both ways. One-way communication occurs when the school informs the family on something.

28 Berger, E. (2000). *Parents as partners in education*. NJ: Merrill Publishing Company





Two-way Communication

Interactions between kindergartens and families should be continuous and ongoing. The most valuable interactions are those that go in both directions—teachers learn from parents and parents learn from teachers (Galinsky, 1989)²⁹. These two-way interactions are reasonable because both teachers and parents should work together in the child's best interest.

When incorporating two-way communication in the kindergarten's programme, it is important to remember that not all parents can come to the kindergarten at a prescribed time for a meeting. A mother or father, for instance, may have difficulty taking time off work or may lack the transportation to make a midday visit. It is critical that parent-teacher meetings and other events have flexibility. Parents care about their children, and they usually want to participate in their child's education. They may just need the preschool institution to be a bit more accommodating. Surveying the parents can be very helpful in receiving information on the meetings and what types of meetings they would find beneficial. Turnout is always stronger when teachers listen to the parents and schedule events according to the information gathered from the survey. Among the types of two-way communication that teachers have found helpful are³⁰:

1. **Email/Facebook.** If the parents have access to a computer, email can be a very fast and easy form of communication.
2. **Phone conversations.** When a teacher calls home, parents immediately think there is bad news. It is helpful if teachers take the time to call with good news about each child, especially within the first few months of kindergarten.
3. **Leaving recorded messages.** Parents should know that they can call and leave messages for their child's teacher. They should establish when messages will be returned, for instance, if it is an emergency or not, in order to make it clearer.

29 Galinsky, E. (1989). From Our President. A Parent/Teacher Study: Interesting Results. *Young Children*, 45 (1): 2-3.

30 Klein, S. and Marian Miller, M. In Support of Family-Teacher Partnerships. Retrieved from

http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article_view.aspx?ArticleID=359 last accessed in September 2014

31 Ibid





4. **Personal visits.** Sometimes it is helpful to visit a family in their house. However, it is critical that families are told the purpose of the visit. For those parents who do not wish to have a teacher in their home, suggest alternate places for these visits, such as a playground, a café, or grandparent's home, etc.
5. **Group visits.** Visiting the family, at work/home communicates to parents that getting to know families is an important part of the agenda for the teacher, the kindergarten, and the other children. The effort of the visit is often rewarded with additional positive feelings about the kindergarten, and positive feelings from the child and his/her family.
6. **Opportunities for family members to be part of the classroom.**
Volunteers and visitors in the classroom build a sense of community. When this method is used, it is essential that teachers communicate the expectations before the visit by giving specific invitations, such as offering parents the opportunity to have lunch with their child.
7. **Social events.** Invite families and kindergarten staff in a social setting, such as a breakfast event. The provision of food and child care promotes attendance, since these make the event less taxing on the parents. Teachers should look for creative ways to make the event as positive as possible to those invited.
8. **Parent-teacher conferences.** Lawler (1991)³¹ offers suggestions to teachers for dealing with different situations, different types of families, and different models for these meetings. Traditionally, these meetings consisted of the teacher telling the parent how the child is doing in kindergarten. However, it is essential that parents' concerns are heard during these meetings.

One-way Communication

Although two-way communication is essential, one-way communications can also play an important role. Parents are excited to hear about what is going on at kindergarten, even when this communication is one-way. The joy of learning about classroom activities was clearly communicated by one kindergarten parent, who referred to her first newsletter from her child's teacher as a "gold mine." Thoughtful communication helps parents know what the kindergarten's expectations are and gives them some notion of what is happening in their children's classrooms. Thus, the classroom does not exist as a separate part of a child's life. The following are some examples of effective one-way communication provided by Berger (2000)³²:

1. **Newsletters.** Newsletters can include items such as quotes from children, children's artwork, book suggestions for families, words to

songs or finger plays, photos showing what the children are doing, recipes, and calendars, etc.

2. **Handbooks.** Parents should have a copy of the school policies clearly outlined. Having handbooks in languages appropriate for the families (or even on audiotape) helps to reduce misunderstandings, such as when a child is too sick to be at school and why.
3. **Family bulletin board.** Teachers can use bulletin boards to post pictures of what occurred at school that day. Other examples include displays with photos of all children and their families or perhaps displays that also include children and teachers.
4. **Notes.** Notes from the teacher may be formal or informal. Why not send artwork home with captions, child's words, or other information that give context to the piece?

Types of parents and how to approach³³

The supporter:

- Characteristics: satisfied and involved, prepared to help with practical matters, willing to work, an excellent helping hand, pleasant partner, active, available on demand, has sufficient time
- How to approach: appeal to sense of solidarity, existence of an alliance, partnership with shared goals

The absentee:

- Characteristics: does not consider himself/herself suited to make a contribution, may only participate when asked explicitly, moderately dissatisfied, uninvolved. Kindergarten has no priority, leaves choice of kindergarten up to chance, impossible to contact, introverted, unapproachable
- How to approach: look for contact, show interest, enter to discussion of cultural background of the children, show empathy, see where you can help, win trust

32 Berger, E. (2000). *Parents as Partners in Education*. NJ: Merrill Publishing Company

33 Texas Education Agency (2011). *Involvement: Schools, Parents and You: A Training Manual for Parent Involvement*.





The politician:

- Characteristics: desire to help make decisions, exert influence, and be involved; satisfied as long as parents can participate in meetings and discussions; critical consumer; extroverted; pays attention to quality choice of institution;
- How to approach: appeal to desire to influence institution policies, be heard, and hear oneself speak; in order to fully utilize the capacities of this parent, ask him/her to participate on the behalf of parents in the parents' board or school board

The career-maker:

- Characteristics: places responsibility for child raising, child care, and education on the institution; satisfied as long as the kindergarten/nursery school takes on all tasks; critical with regard to choice of institution; has attitude of 'institution is for the parents' and sees teachers as an extension of parents
- How to approach: enter into conversation about work, career, education; mention the functions of parents' board and what such participation could mean for career

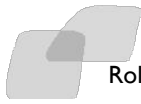
The tormentor:

- Characteristics: feel offended and misunderstood as a result of the institution's attitude to his/her own educational experiences; denounces errors on the part of the school as a critical consumer, is only satisfied when the institution cringes and takes responsibility for suboptimal functioning
- How to approach: show real interest in the motives of this parent and his or her ideas regarding child raising and education; be professional but see that the parent remains comfortable; keep your goals in mind; be well-prepared; pose good questions and keep the line of communication open

The super parent:

- Characteristics: feels responsible for child raising and education; is prepared to support the institution alongside a busy job; is willing to invest in the institution relation; thinks critically along with the institution; contributes good ideas; is prepared to utilize own networks; is satisfied when the school does its best for the performance and well-being of own child and other students
- How to approach: show a warm interest in the opinions and expectations of the parent with regard to child raising and education, gauge the need for greater involvement, be open to ideas of this parent





EXERCISE



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Objectives

- Informing on the different types of communication that are currently used;
- Encouraging the use of participatory methods.

Duration

15 minutes

Method

Individual work and group discussion

Steps

- Write on a piece of paper the following words: informing and notifying, consultation and team creation/training;
- List aside each word the communication activities you conduct, that belong to that category;
- How can you increase the activities in the two last categories?



READING MATERIAL

SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION

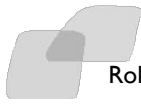
Barriers to Positive Family-Teacher Partnerships³⁴

A number of issues need to be addressed so a family-teacher partnership can be formed. Some common obstacles to a better partnership are:

- **Differences in backgrounds.** The family and teacher come from different cultures, languages, and socio-economic statuses.
- **Stress.** There is stress for both families and teachers. For example, long hours and little flexibility at work reduce the time available for teachers to work on family communication and for parents/caregivers to relate to kindergarten.
- **Differing values.** The family and teacher have a complexity of differing values.
- **Differences in viewing roles.** Differing views of the role of the preschool institution for the child between the teacher and the parent or caregiver.
- **Types of experiences.** Prior experiences with families/teachers have set up differing expectations.
- **Notions of openness.** Lack of openness to outsiders entering their territory (home or kindergarten/nursery school).
- **Differences in experiences.** A parent's experience in kindergarten/nursery school (positive or negative) sets up some expectations for their own interactions with the teacher for his/her own child.
- **Communication abilities.** Teachers or families lack the ability to identify and communicate key experiences, ideas, or issues.

³⁴ Parents Helping Parents: Building Bright Future for Children with Special Needs (2007). Parent/Professional Collaboration retrieved from <http://www.php.com/professionals/sto-ry6> last accessed in September 2014





- **Communication discomfort.** Families or teachers are uncomfortable about communication abilities, or do not have enough fluency in the language.
- **Need to feel valued.** Parents and teachers perceive that their perspective is not valued or taken into account.
- **Differences in viewing child's needs.** The preschool institution views the child (his/her learning and development) differently than the family does. The institution's philosophy differs from the family's view of appropriate child rearing. For example: The family equates teaching with telling, and the teacher equates learning with doing. Or, behaviour issues are handled one way at home and another at the institution (spanking at home, explaining at kindergarten). When the preschool institution clearly explains its own philosophy, families get a better sense of the match between home/institution expectations.

Cooperation can be adjusted in compliance with:

- Specific family conditions and demographic factors;
- Child developmental needs;
- Preschool institution structure;
- Community resources.

Why are parents good collaborators?

We often think that only experts can solve teachers' problems. We understand that sometimes this is necessary, but when it comes to "representation" or "action", parents are the first and the best representatives of their children. Parents are experts because they have:

- Direct information on the child's needs;
- Devotion and motivation to take actions;
- Reliability.

Which are some of the successful strategies for parents' involvement? Inviting parents or family members in the kindergarten or parent-teacher meeting is not enough. Parents and family members can be supported in a proactive manner so that their involvement is successful. The following are ideas on how to achieve a successful involvement:

- Written policies promoting parents' involvement;
- Administrative support (funds) from the budget, for materials, space, equipment, and time, so that the staff can organize activities for the parents;





- Continuous training which is available for staff and families;
- Joint planning, setting goals, developing policies and assessment among parents, kindergarten teachers and director;
- Regular communication between the family and the kindergarten (parents and families are happy when they come to the kindergarten, share ideas, and talk about their concerns);
- Networking in order to share information and resources;
- Including regular assessment activities in key stages, as well as in a project or activity cycle finalisation.

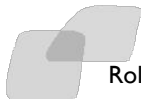
The standards of parent involvement have been compiled in other countries, during the last few years. They are based on a 30-year research, and they aim at encouraging parents' participation, raising awareness on the effective programmes, and providing guidelines for preschool education. What are these standards?

- Communication between parents and kindergarten staff is regular, two-way, and meaningful;
- Parenting skills are promoted and supported;
- Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning;
- Parents are welcome in the kindergarten, and their support and assistance, are sought;
- Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families;
- Community resources are used to strengthen the kindergarten, families, and learning.

What are some practical ways to increase family and parent involvement?

- Providing teachers with information and support on the ways how to communicate better, and involve families; giving teachers the time to have conversations with the families on the phone or face to face;
- Developing a network with phone numbers or creating a calling chain so volunteer families can call each other. Families respond better to direct contact;
- Developing a short survey to ask families on the type of activities they want to participate, as well as about what lacks from the child and the family as part of the community;
- Developing different ways for families to actively participate, based on the previously shared information;





- Inviting families to visit and create a welcoming environment for the parents, which makes them feel comfortable;
- Establishing family centres within the kindergarten (an environment where families can stay, find education and parental material, and communicate with other families or the staff);
- Providing the kindergarten premises for planned social events with the family to celebrate together. If there are no premises for the families in the kindergarten, then they will feel uncomfortable;
- Providing a suggestion box for the families that do not want to discuss something personally, but they want to present a concern or compliment;
- Establishing kindergarten boards that highly represented by parents to develop policies and practices;
- Creating opportunities for the involvement of children with special needs in all the kindergarten activities. Parents attend social events and activities only when their children participate;
- Providing the kindergarten premises for afternoon activities where parents and the kindergarten staff can interact and communicate.

The identified positive practices are as follows:

- Focusing on the positive aspects of the child's performance, when providing information to the parents, so that what is emphasised is the child's potential to overcome difficulties; however, this emphasis should not be overstated, so that the child's real achievements are not misunderstood;
- Requiring parents' perspective can help teachers to understand what type of information is useful for them so they can be able to help the child to reach their future education and development goals;
- Honesty while discussing is crucial, even though some things should be said "in a diplomatic manner";
- *"It is not just what you say, but how you say it"*– treating parents well when giving them bad news, is important for establishing a trustful and open parent-teacher relationship;
- Having a strategic orientation, not focusing on what happens here and now, but in establishing a successful partnership.





Embracing differences among families

When the teacher and parents share the same culture, there is a greater chance of understanding the different situations and interactions between parents and children. Thus the reactions of the child in the classroom contain less of the potential threat of misunderstanding or misinterpretation. Many of the basic goals of parenting are common across all cultures and classes, with differences only in the means of attaining these goals. Many teachers are females, usually of middle class, while many of the children may or may not belong to this category. Thus they should find common ground on which to base relationships. This section will give three suggestions for teachers: 1) Realize what diversity is and the fact that it is an issue worthy of attention; 2) Ask the parents for help; and 3) Develop appropriate curriculum.

Realize diversity is an issue worthy of attention

Classroom populations are becoming more diverse. There has been a steady increase by major ethnic and social groups over the last years. Culture is learned very early, and early childhood theoreticians and practitioners can't afford to ignore this fact. Thus, the importance of the recommendations to teachers regarding dealing with inequities is significant. Researchers believe that children should start learning about different cultures as early as possible, and that their teachers remember that all the children who come to school are promising.

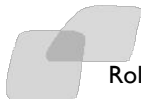
Ask parents for help

Caruso and Fawcett (1986)³⁵ stress the efforts of parents as valuable resources. Parents can share their own cultural heritage with children or with staff in a variety of ways, and can also be involved in helping to solve problems stemming from differences. Multicultural education helps children, parents, and teachers learn.

Teachers that have families in their classroom that differ in culture, and who speak a second language, need to view these differences as beneficial in that they help teach children about diversity. Kindergartens today mirror the world, a world with many cultures, ethnicities, and languages; in this world children will live in as adults, should give us hope for erasing inequities.

35 National Centre for Family-Centred Care (1990). What is Family-Centred Care? (brochure). Bethesda, MD: Association for the Care of Children's Health.





Develop appropriate curriculum

Pictures and posters displayed on the walls do not teach children about cultural and ethnic differences because in most cases they have traditional models, which do not represent the real diversity in a society. Teachers should ask themselves this question “What does it do to me and the children the fact that these pictures display only similar people?” For example, in the writing area, it is common for teachers to post pictures of houses or houses drawn by the teachers, or children, for inspiration. Most often the houses are the traditional type, with a square body, triangular roof, a few windows. How does this picture of a house include children that are homeless, live in apartments, or live in shelters? Drawing houses is a fine activity, but the activity could be extended to being more inclusive of differences. Some authors suggest how teachers may obtain background information about children’s homes and build a social studies unit that helps children understand that there is no one right place to live.

Capacity building to increase parents’ involvement

- Helping parents understand the state and respective institutions’ standards;
- Providing materials and trainings to help parents work with children, for example, regarding the use of technology;
- Training others on the values of parents’ involvement, communication, and working with them as equal partners;
- Coordinating and integrating the programmes of parents’ involvement with other programmes;
- Ensuring that the information related to school and the programmes, meetings and other activities with parents are compiled in an understandable and practical language for the parents;
- Providing support for the activities of parents’ involvement.





EXERCISE



ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Objectives

- Awareness on the perceptions regarding the respective roles;
- Awareness on the perceptions regarding the respective responsibilities.

Duration

15 minutes

Method

Individual work and group discussion

Steps

- Divide into groups of 3-5 (or 2 and more groups);
- Write the things that parents wish teachers would do and the other group writes the things that teachers wish parents would do;
- Present respective expectations.



READING MATERIAL

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES³⁶

9 things teachers wish parents would do

1. **Be involved in their children's education.**
Parent involvement helps children learn, improves preschool institutions, and makes teachers' work easier.
2. **Provide resources at home for reading and learning.**
Parents should have children's books and magazines available in their houses and read with them during the day.
3. **Set a good example.** Parents should show to their children that they believe reading is both enjoyable and useful.
4. **Encourage students to do their best in school.**
Parents should encourage children to achieve the goals they have set.
5. **Academics should be a primary concern,** followed by their children's preparation for the world of work and involvement in athletics and activities.
6. **Support school rules and goals.** Parents should take care not to undermine school rules, discipline, or goals.
7. **Use pressure positively.** Parents should encourage children to conduct new activities, but not pressure them by too many activities.

³⁶ Texas Education Agency (2006). Parent Involvement in Every School: a training manual.





8. **Call teachers as early as possible if you think there's a problem**, while there is still time to solve it.
9. **Accept your responsibility as parents** and not expect the school and teachers to take over their obligations as parents. For example, teaching basic discipline is rather a parental than school responsibility.

10 things parents wish teachers would do

1. **Build child's self-esteem**, by using rewards, and avoiding negative public criticism.
2. **Get to know each child's needs**, interests and special talents, as well as the way each child learns best.
3. **Communicate often and openly with parents**, contacting them early about academic or behavioural problems, being candid rather than defensive when discussing these problems.
4. **Regularly assign homework that helps children learn**, and advise parents how they can work with their children on their homework.
5. **Set high academic standards**, expecting all students to learn and helping them to do so.
6. **Care about children**, since children learn best when taught by warm, friendly, caring and enthusiastic teachers.
7. **Treat all children fairly** and do not play favourites.
8. **Enforce a positive discipline code** based on clear and fair rules that are established and fully explained at the beginning of the school year - reinforce positive behaviour as well as punish negative behaviour.
9. **Be aware of students' different learning styles** and vary teaching methods to help each child achieve success.





10. **Encourage parent participation** by reaching out to involve parents in their children's education. Show parents how they can help their children at home. Understand that parents want to work with teachers to help their children be successful.

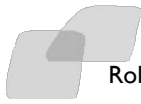




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Role of teachers in support of individual holistic development according to the age groups



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