



# **THE JAMAICA EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM**

**FOR CHILDREN  
BIRTH TO FIVE YEARS**

**A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**



**Dudley Grant Memorial Trust in  
Collaboration with the Ministry of Education**

**Rose Davies, Ph.D.  
Main contributor**



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## Preface

### **Background to Early Childhood Curriculum Development in Jamaica**

The care and education of young children in group settings emerged in Jamaica in response to the need of working parents in the post-World War II era of rapid industrialization and employment opportunities away from home. Early childhood informal “schools” were usually set up by home-based grandmothers, aunts or neighbours, on verandahs, in backyards or other available spaces and provided largely custodial care of children and limited educational content, e.g. rote learning of rhymes and Bible verses.

The first recognizable “basic school” as we know it today, was established in 1938 by Rev. Henry Ward in Islington, St. Mary. As the number of these schools increased throughout Jamaica, so did the need for organized training of the mostly untrained teachers. In 1967, Mr. Dudley Grant of the Institute of Education, University of the West Indies at Mona, initiated the Project for Early Childhood Education (PECE) with support from the Bernard van Leer Foundation. The aim of this project was to develop a curriculum manual for use with four- to five-year-olds in basic schools and to provide complementary on-going training of teachers in the use of the curriculum and its accompanying resources.

The first written Jamaica pre-school curriculum was completed in 1973 through the collaborative effort of a team of teacher trainers led by Mr. Grant himself. The “PECE Manual”, as it was called, was a very detailed instructional guide comprising 24 volumes totaling 4,988 pages. It provided a step-by-step approach for presenting content from traditional subject areas. The detailed format was considered necessary because the teachers were inexperienced and lacked in-depth knowledge of essential child development and education principles and practices. Regular fortnightly workshops by the teacher trainers were established to develop the teaching skills of the para-professional teachers, while familiarizing them with the use of the curriculum manual.

In 1979, a survey carried out by the Early Childhood Unit of the Ministry of Education, revealed that the on-going fortnightly training workshops were reaping rewards as teachers were becoming increasingly better trained and better qualified for their teaching roles. The teachers themselves called for the PECE manual to be reviewed and rewritten in a format that was much less prescriptive and allowed greater flexibility in interpreting and implementing the curriculum in their individual classrooms. Subsequently, the curriculum was redesigned and redeveloped in 1983 into two volumes: *Readiness Programme for 4 Year Olds* and *Readiness Programme for 5 Year Olds*. The new “Readiness” curriculum replaced the subject-based structure of the PECE manual with an integrated curriculum approach. This model placed more emphasis on skills development across the child’s developmental domains through an integrated programme of appropriate activities organized around themes familiar to the children. While some teachers

welcomed the more flexible format of the revised curriculum, others thought that too many of the resource ideas contained in the PECE manual had been lost to the cause of producing a smaller document. This was seen as a disadvantage for newer and less experienced teachers.

In 1990, a survey commissioned by the Early Childhood Unit in the Ministry of Education was undertaken by the University of the West Indies-based Centre for Early Childhood Education (CECE), which later became the Dudley Grant Memorial Trust, to establish the extent to which both the PECE and the “Readiness” manuals were being used in pre-primary schools throughout Jamaica. The survey also gathered ideas and recommendations for redesigning the Readiness curriculum to represent a better balance between the detail of the older PECE manual and the flexibility of the “Readiness” manual. This is one of the considerations that informed the current re-design of the curriculum.

In Jamaica, organized programmes for children from birth to three years only emerged after the development of a curriculum for four- to five-year-olds, as children in this age group were mostly cared for within the home setting. In the 1950s the Child Welfare League operated a few day care centres that provided mainly custodial and health care for infants. Over the decades of development of the Jamaican early childhood system, day care provisions have lagged behind that of basic and other pre-schools in coverage, public financing and resources, caregiver training and adequacy of learning environments. Services for the birth to three-year-old age cohort are still largely provided by private owners. Day care centres experienced their highest peak in development during the 1970s when the incumbent government instituted policies in support of organized, publicly funded day care centres to facilitate working mothers. However, only a few day care centres in the country are publicly funded.

Although this much needed attention brought about improvement in the quality of facilities and training of personnel at the time, there was no national focus on curriculum for birth to three-year-olds, and institutions operated independently of each other in this regard. The situation with regard to curriculum for birth to three-year-olds remains the same today, in spite of the growing recognition of the importance of the first three years of a child’s development, and the variety of programme models that now exist, such as centre-based programmes, home-based nurseries, and other early stimulation programmes. The re-design of the curriculum will result in the development of the first national early childhood curriculum for birth to three-year-olds, and a revised curriculum for the four and five-year-olds.

## **The documents**

The Jamaica Early Childhood Curriculum for Children Birth to Five Years is comprised of four documents.

Document 1 is the Conceptual Framework which outlines the purpose, rationale and guiding philosophical principles of the curriculum and also the developmental goals and learning outcomes desired for Jamaican children. It provides the rationale for the development of the curriculum guide for birth to three years,



and the review of the four- and five-year curricula. A synopsis of child development theories that have influenced the curriculum development process is presented in the Appendix.

Document 2 is the Scope and Sequence which comprises the developmental objectives that children would be expected to achieve by the end of each age phase. The document is divided into two parts.

Part I - For children Birth to Three Years. Part II - For children Four and Five Years. The development of skills in the four (4) developmental domains – cognitive, affective, creative and psychomotor – are reflected in the learning outcomes within this document. The learning outcomes are detailed under the headings: wellness; effective communication; valuing culture; intellectual empowerment; respect for self, others and the environment; and resilience.

Document 3 is the Curriculum Guide which early childhood practitioners will use in the planning, preparation and implementation of daily programme activities. The guide is divided into two parts.

Part 1 – Birth to Three is Key presents foundation curriculum for the birth to age three stage. It explains the developmentally appropriate concepts, skills and activities for children at this stage. Part II – Four and Five: Getting Ready for Life builds on this foundation, and includes important elements of appropriate curriculum for the four and five year olds. The component parts and structure of the curriculum are explained in each guide to facilitate easy interpretation and use by practitioners. Also included are aspects of daily curriculum implementation processes such as scheduling the day, thematic unit planning and lesson planning, organizing for instruction, and helpful strategies for practitioners and parents.

Document 4 is the Resource Book which acts as a supplement to the Curriculum Guide and provides additional developmentally appropriate activities for the various age groups.



## *Acknowledgements*

The Dudley Grant Memorial Trust, as the lead coordinating agency for the national Early Childhood Curriculum Project, wishes to acknowledge with great appreciation the contribution and hard work of all the participating individuals, groups and agencies.

The task involved the revision of the existing curriculum guide for the four- and five-year-old age groups and the development of a guide for the birth to three-year-old age cohorts. Development of the supporting documents such as the Scope and Sequence and the Conceptual Framework for the age-range birth to five years was also a vital part of the process.

Many Early Childhood professionals have contributed to the development of these documents. While it would be difficult to mention everyone by name, we must acknowledge some key individuals and groups who made significant inputs into the production of the documents.

We acknowledge the leadership, coordination and curriculum writing contributions of Dr. Rose Davies, Senior Lecturer at the Institute of Education, University of the West Indies and chief consultant to the Project.

We thank especially the following outstanding contributors:

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# 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM



## ***Purpose and Definition of Curriculum***

A curriculum acts as a dynamic force in the development of young children and must be reviewed periodically to remain relevant and effective in preparing children for life in a rapidly changing world. Current early childhood curriculum practices throughout the world are increasingly influenced by new knowledge emerging from the growing body of research on brain development and early learning, and the type of learning environments that best promote children's development and learning in ways that are age appropriate.

The primary purpose of the early childhood curriculum is to provide a 'blueprint' or 'master plan' of the *why*, *what* and *how* of care giving and teaching based on a philosophy of how children develop and learn. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) [USA] defines curriculum as "*an organized framework that delineates the content children are to learn, the processes through which children achieve the identified curricular goals, what teachers do to help children achieve these goals and the context in which teaching and learning occur*" (NAEYC, 1991, cited in Catron and Allen, 2003).

The effective curriculum provides *specific guidance* that gives clear direction to the user but allows for *flexibility* in adapting to special situations as needed. A written curriculum document generally incorporates the guiding philosophy of the programme; goals, learning objectives and desired outcomes for children's development; teaching/learning activities incorporating appropriate content knowledge; examples of supporting resources; assessment strategies; and guidelines for planning the learning environment and relating positively with children.

## ***Rationale for the Curriculum***

Recent research studies on the development of the human brain highlight the fact that the early years are the most important for the "wiring" or building of brain capacity. The "wiring" of the brain is affected by the environmental circumstances in which children develop from birth and continues through the early years. Nutrition, health, physical care, relationships with parents or caregivers, and the level of mental stimulation received are some of the environmental factors that can affect the building of brain capacity. The more stimulating the environment and experiences that children are exposed to, the more likely they are to develop greater brain capacity. Research also shows that inadequate care and stimulation or stressful and traumatic experiences can undermine or impair a child's brain function, given that

under-stimulated brain cells thin out and are lost over time. Children from poor families living in deprived surroundings are those most at risk of having underdeveloped brains. However, international studies have shown that deprived children, when they have the benefit of good early childhood programmes, achieve cognitive gains on par with their better-off peers. The quality of the curriculum offered in early childhood programmes is a major factor in determining developmental outcomes for children.

This curriculum is designed to promote and support children's development in a broad range of programme types for children birth to five years in the various early childhood institutions (day care centres, basic, infant, and private preparatory schools as well as kindergarten departments). Basic schools account for the largest proportion of the over 98% coverage rate among the three- to five-year-olds enrolled in pre-primary institutions in Jamaica. It is widely known that these basic schools cater to the country's most disadvantaged children. Day care facilities cover a much smaller percentage (approximately 15%) of the eligible children in the birth to 36-month age group. The quality of care delivered in many day care centres varies with the cost charged for the service. Families with fewer economic challenges enrol their children in higher quality and more costly private day care facilities, while families with greater challenges use less expensive facilities where the quality may not be as good, given the generally strong emphasis on providing mainly custodial care. For all of the above reasons, this new curriculum embraces the concept of holistic development for all young children including those with special developmental challenges, within enriching learning environments that promote developmentally appropriate practices.

## ***Considerations Influencing the Curriculum Development and Design***

Four important considerations have guided the development and design of this curriculum. These include the need to:

1. provide early childhood practitioners with a curriculum guide that is current, based on sound principles of child development and learning, easy to understand and interpret for easy transfer of knowledge into practice;
2. emphasize holistic development and integrated curriculum approaches that allow children to express themselves creatively, using all their senses to acquire new knowledge, skills and competencies and engage in independent learning;
3. provide an enriching learning environment that can significantly reduce or eliminate the disparities that are apparent among children from different socio-economic backgrounds when they reach the Grade 1 level;
4. emphasize and reinforce pro-social cultural values and practices that are important to children, their families and the wider community.

An effective curriculum is characterized by the "rightness" of fit between several elements: children's needs and interests; parental values and expectations; teacher characteristics and abilities; and community traditions and culture. The curriculum design therefore must take into account the special characteristics of:

- a. the children who will benefit from it;
- b. the early childhood practitioners who will implement it;
- c. the learning environment (indoor and outdoor) within which it will be implemented;
- d. the parents and community who will support it;
- e. the lessons learned from international models of best practices in early childhood development.

### ***The children***

This curriculum is designed for use with children from all social strata of the Jamaican society. It seeks to reinforce and build on the developmental and behavioural strengths that Jamaican children have been shown to have. Research done on Jamaican children (Grantham-McGregor and Back, 1971) shows that motor skills development occurs earlier and is more advanced than for equivalent peer groups of children in the U.S.A. Jamaican children, from a fairly early age, demonstrate a high level of motor coordination and physical prowess in walking, running, dancing and other physical activities.

Opportunities should be provided in the daily curriculum activities to practise and refine these skills to the highest level of achievement within the ability range for respective age groups. Research has also shown that compared to children in the U.S.A., Jamaican children are generally more self-reliant (taking care of self, going on errands independently, etc.) at an earlier age and are more advanced in some cognitive tasks, such as learning mathematics and reading, than their American peers (Samms-Vaughan, 2004). The curriculum should therefore aim not only to compensate for weaknesses in children's development and learning, but also to simultaneously identify and reinforce the strengths that they naturally possess.



**Playing with balls at an early age helps in gross motor development**

### ***The early childhood practitioners***

Generally, the practitioners who will use this curriculum are better trained than their counterparts of earlier years. In the present early childhood system, practitioners range in age from 18 to 60-plus years and their

skills and abilities range from pre-trained to many years of experience as trained teachers. The practitioners' understanding and interpretation of the curriculum is critical to its effective implementation. They must understand and agree with the underlying philosophy of the curriculum and have adequate knowledge of child development and of how children learn. Therefore, this curriculum is presented in a format to facilitate understanding, interpretation and transfer into practice by the least experienced among its users. The guiding philosophy, goals and approaches to practice are clearly outlined and will serve as a guide for training practitioners to use the curriculum. A practitioner's attitude and behaviour are critical influences on the achievement of curriculum goals, as it is the quality of the adult's interaction and relationship with children that promotes the young child's emotional well-being and positive sense of self. This aspect of developmentally appropriate practice is strongly emphasized in the curriculum.

### ***The learning environment***

Conditions in Jamaican early childhood settings vary in quality, depending on the resource base of the facility. Local research studies have noted inadequacy of appropriate play equipment (indoor and outdoor) and teaching/learning materials as two major weaknesses of many Jamaican early childhood programmes (McDonald and Brown, 1993). In addition, large groups and crowded spaces do not allow much opportunity for children to move about freely and independently to pursue their individual interests. These circumstances may frustrate practitioners, the children and the achievement of the overall curriculum goals. For example, curriculum emphasis on independent and self-directed learning demands a wide array



**Preschoolers enjoy exploring the outdoor environment**

of equipment and materials from which children from as early as a few months old, can make individual choices and engage in meaningful, independent learning. A practitioner attempting to achieve this objective might be completely frustrated when faced with severe limitations of materials and cramped environmental conditions. This curriculum is designed for easy adaptation to varied early childhood learning settings, as most of the activities included require low-cost materials that can be collected easily and transformed into valuable teaching/learning aids. Emphasis is also placed on making use of the “great outdoors” that attract children so naturally, as well as adapting and making the best use of available indoor space to accommodate meaningful, developmentally appropriate activities and experiences.

The curriculum places emphasis on development of appropriate skills at the infant and toddler stages and on enhancing the preschool child’s total development and readiness for primary school. Practitioners should therefore provide warm, caring and stimulating learning environments that engage children in learning activities.

### ***The parents and community***

Parents are the child’s first and most important teachers, hence, a significant feature of effective early childhood programmes is the strong partnership that exists between early childhood practitioners and the parents. Research has shown that the stronger the level of parent involvement in a programme, the greater the benefits to the child. Positive relationships and interaction between parents and practitioners help to build trust and to make children, in particular infants, secure and supported in the group setting as both parties work together in the best interest of the child. Jamaican parents generally place a high value on early education for their children. Among poor families, adults believe it is especially important for children to achieve academically in order to have a chance of becoming more successful than they, the parents. Although Jamaican parents are becoming more sensitized to the value of play in the early years, they are still more inclined to support early childhood programmes that benefit their children’s development overall, but are also strong in advancing the academic skills. This curriculum strives to maintain an appropriate balance in the importance placed on children’s development in all the domains of learning, in keeping with its underlying philosophy of developing the whole child. Emphasis is also placed on increasing parents’ understanding of and support for the curriculum process by encouraging active involvement in their children’s learning from infancy onward.

### ***Lessons learned from international models of best practices in early childhood development***

An additional source of influence on the design and development of the curriculum derives from lessons learned from a review of early childhood development theoretical perspectives and of local and international programme models exemplifying developmentally appropriate practices. These lessons are integral to the nine fundamental principles of the curriculum and are summarized below.

- Play is central to curriculum practice, allowing children to be active learners, interacting with a wide variety of materials and engaging with projects and learning centres in the process. Varied approaches to play and different methods of learning are encouraged, with information technology as a visible part of the process.
- Learning is guided by planned, integrated curriculum with identified developmental outcomes that are age and stage appropriate and take into account the development of the “whole” child; the creative and affective skills are highlighted; the invisible and visible curriculum are equally important and culturally relevant content is emphasized.
- Adults and children share positive, caring relationships; children’s individuality and uniqueness are acknowledged; children with special developmental needs are fully included; adults serve as models for children’s learning and skills development and provide scaffolding to help children advance in their various learning activities.
- Parents and families are approached as important partners in children’s development and learning process.
- Assessment of children’s learning is appropriate and authentic and involves little or no standardized testing.



## 2 THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THIS CURRICULUM

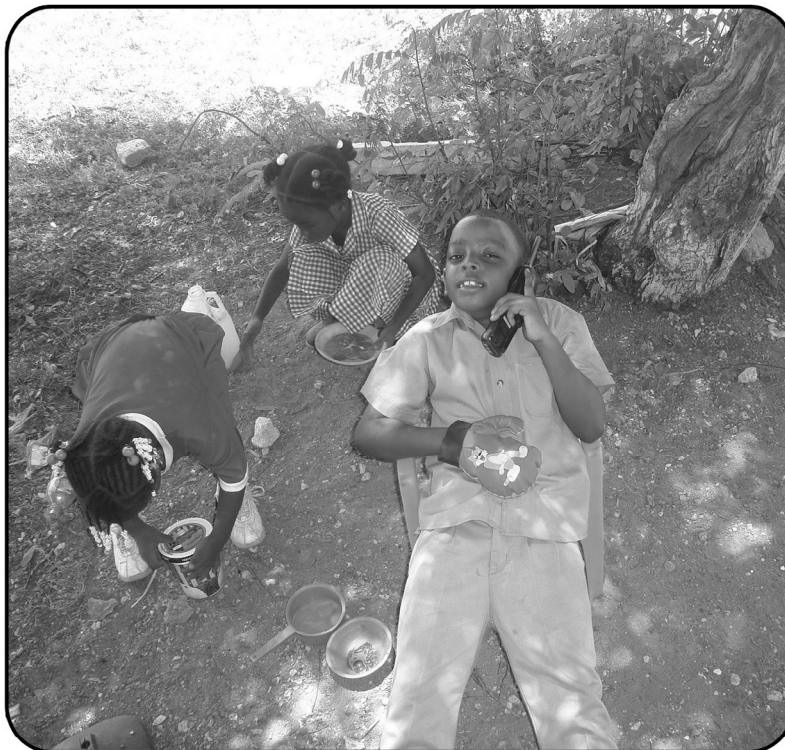


Quality in early childhood development is measured by evidence of developmentally appropriate practices in all aspects of a programme. Developmentally appropriate practices are based on sound theoretical principles of how children develop and learn. This curriculum is eclectic in approach, in that it weaves together elements of selected theories of development and internationally acknowledged best practices in early childhood programming, into a framework that is appropriate to the needs and learning contexts of Jamaican children in the birth to five age range. The guiding principles of the curriculum and the theoretical influences are outlined below.

### *Learning Through Play*

**Principle #1: Children learn best through their play and interaction with the environment.**

*(Principal guiding theorists: Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey, Montessori. See Appendix)*



**Children learn best through play**

Play is central to constructivist, developmentally appropriate curriculum practices as it is during play that children engage in “hands-on” interaction with objects and act out real life experiences. As young children of different ages manipulate things, interact with people and participate in various events, they are able to engage in critical thinking and construct their own understandings and knowledge of the world. During play, children refine their motor skills, learn how to deal with their own feelings and emotions, think critically about a range of new experiences, interact sociably with others and resolve conflicts in appropriate ways. Children also develop their imagination and creativity as they experiment, discover and dramatize what they see happening around them.



**Infants enjoy interactive play and develop a sense of security with the caregiver**

Play is the main vehicle through which children integrate knowledge in a meaningful way, learn self-expression and gain a sense of competence. Play is enjoyable activity and therefore fosters a positive disposition and love of learning in children. The activities outlined in this curriculum represent a rich resource of developmentally appropriate ideas that practitioners can use to interest and engage children in learning through play.

## ***Sequenced Learning***

**Principle #2: Children develop and learn in an orderly sequence, moving from simple to more complex knowledge and skills and they do so at their own individual pace and timing.**

*(Principal guiding theorists: Gessell, Piaget, Montessori. See Appendix)*

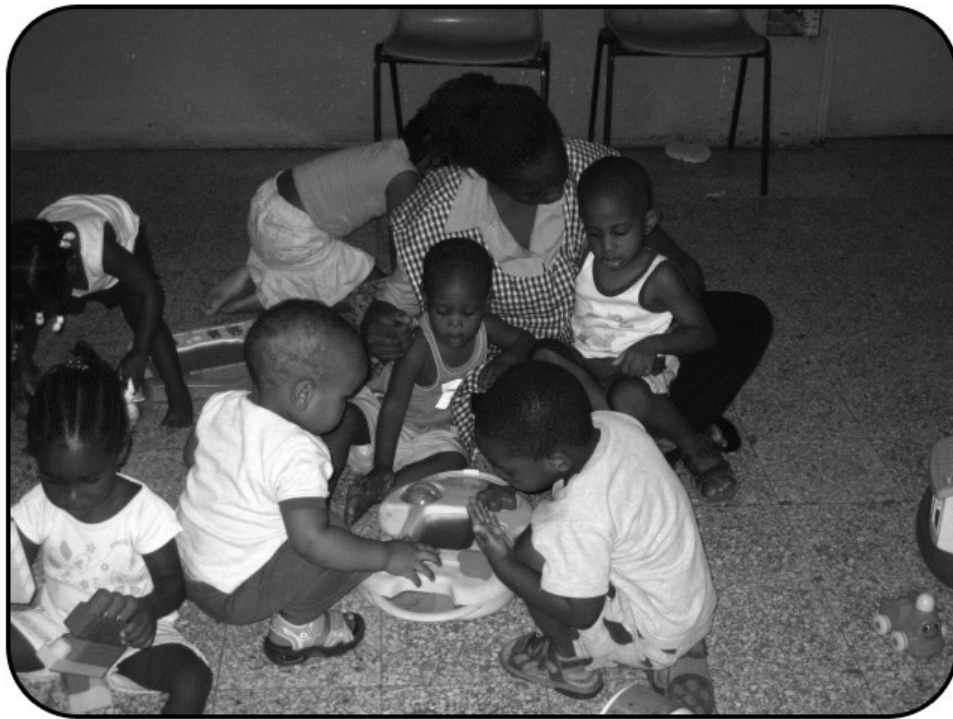
Children grow in a predictable and sequenced way. Changes take place in the different domains (physical, affective, cognitive, creative) in a similar pattern for all children throughout the world. However, different cultures might attach different meanings to these changes and respond differently to them. For example, some cultures might interpret the typical behaviour of the “terrible twos” as “bad” behaviour that must be punished and controlled early, while other cultures are more tolerant and permissive of children at that stage. The developmentally appropriate curriculum is guided by a scope and sequence framework of the skills children develop at different stages from birth to age five years, and the appropriate level and sequence of content they can learn from the traditional knowledge disciplines. Children are introduced to these skills and content as appropriate for their age and stage of development. Recognition is also given to the fact that children are individuals with their own timing and pace of development. Not all babies, toddlers and preschoolers demonstrate the same level of skills and knowledge expected for their age. Some may be more advanced than their average peer group and others less so. Therefore, activities provided should move from simple to complex and from the known to the unknown. The curriculum makes allowance both for children who are gifted and developmentally challenged.

## ***Individual Learning***

**Principle # 3: The individual child’s needs, interests, style and pace of learning must be respected and not sacrificed to group demands.**

*(Principal guiding theorists: Erikson, Dewey, Vygotsky, Gardner, DAP Framework. See Appendix)*

Although, universally, children follow the same recognizable stages with typical behavioural patterns of development, there is wide variation in the actual age at which the individual child arrives at each successive stage. Each child is a unique individual who enters the world with a different mix of genetic ability, personality, temperament, learning style (Intelligences) and pace of development. Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences theory (see Appendix) suggests that children learn in different ways and have different strengths. They learn through response to music, visual stimulation, physical activity and intellectual exercise. Furthermore, each child experiences different conditions of growing up within families and communities. Each child who enrolls in an early childhood programme, therefore, comes with differences in his or her individual strengths, needs, interests, family background, values and demands.



**Toddlers are provided the opportunity to choose their activities**

A developmentally appropriate programme supports individuality and makes plans to ensure that children are not always subject to the considerations of the large group. This is particularly important in day care settings. Therefore group size and adult-to-child ratio should be maintained at a level that allows the adult to give the individualized attention that each child requires on a daily basis.

The learning environment provides a range of activities appropriate to the developmental levels of individual children, so that their needs can be addressed. The child should be made to feel accepted for who he or she is and should never be compared to others or pressured to achieve beyond his or her natural ability. Some practitioners work in challenging circumstances with more children in a group than is desirable. However, in such circumstances, making each child feel that he or she is a special individual is not an impossible task. Getting to know each child well allows the practitioner to devote time relative to a child's particular need. Some children are happy with a simple acknowledging touch or smile from the adult, whereas others need further reassuring hugs and conversation. Recognizing and responding to children's individual needs is particularly important for young infants, toddlers and children with special developmental and learning needs. Also, practitioners must be mindful of the gender differences in how children learn, their interests and performance levels. They must be sensitive to the difference in the learning needs and styles of boys (who generally tend to have lower achievement rates than girls) and try to keep them focused and motivated to learn. However, girls and boys alike must be encouraged to pursue their individual interests and engage in learning activities without the limitations imposed by gender stereotyping.

## ***The Practitioners' Multiple Roles***

***Principle # 4: Children thrive and learn best in environments with warm, nurturing and caring adults who perform a variety of roles to ensure that children grow and develop healthily and feel safe, respected, loved and happy.***

*(Principal guiding theorists: Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, Erikson, DAP Guidelines. See Appendix)*

Practitioners who work in early childhood settings have a critical role to play in helping children achieve the developmental goals and outcomes as outlined in the curriculum. This is so because children receive significant messages from adults in seemingly simple ways such as: how adults position themselves to speak to children; how adults interact with children during routines or learning periods and transitions; how adults respond to children's efforts and how adults make them feel about themselves. *The more positively children are made to feel about themselves, the more likely they are to achieve their developmental goals.* Early childhood practitioners perform many different roles as discussed below.

### ***Nurturer***

The early childhood practitioner must have a love for and enjoy being with children, as his or her key role is to be a nurturer of children. Young children need to be touched, hugged, cuddled and rocked appropriately in order to feel loved, comforted or reassured. This is particularly important at the infant and toddler stages, as new research evidence points to the positive effects of touch on children's early social-emotional development (Carlson, 2006). Adult nurturers must model what "good touches" are by the genuine and positive ways in which they physically respond to young children in their care.



**It is important to have practitioners who are sensitive to the needs of children**

### ***Protector and planner***

Children thrive best in environments in which they feel protected and safe. Protecting children's best interests go hand in hand with planning. The practitioner has to be a planner who organizes and arranges the physical environment to ensure children's safety at all times. The practitioner plans the *daily schedule* so that children have adequate time to interact with a variety of play materials, learn and carry out personal and self-help tasks as they are able, benefit from rest and nourishing meals, engage in self-selected and independent play activities and participate in periods of organized play or systematic instruction as appropriate for age. The practitioner also has to be able to plan appropriate physical spaces and provide interesting and developmentally appropriate materials and props to support learning through play at the different stages of development. These are aimed at developing the critical readiness skills needed to succeed in later schooling.

### ***Facilitator and observer***

The practitioner should be a facilitator and supporter of children's learning. Although we know that children can learn much on their own, adults sometimes have to intervene, especially if children's natural curiosity and initiative have not been sufficiently stimulated. The practitioner must be a keen observer of children in order to know their individual levels of ability and what activities do or do not challenge them.

The practitioner must be able to achieve a balance between helping children too much and helping them too little as they engage in their different activities. Being able to "scaffold" children's learning means being able to detect when a child has the potential to reach the next level of understanding with a little help, and providing that help to the child. For instance, the adult can demonstrate to a child how to carry out a particular task that poses a challenge, then allow him or her to practise the skill until it is mastered, as opposed to leaving the child to struggle alone to the point of frustration and abandonment of the task. The observant practitioner identifies the "teachable" moments during children's play, by asking a question or introducing an idea that can help children to achieve higher levels of thinking and learning. The practitioner facilitates children's play and learning by also being playful. Children enjoy when their adult caregivers can share some humour, laugh and have fun with them.

### ***Guide***

As guide, the practitioner helps children learn how to manage their emotions and behave in pro-social ways by adopting a positive guidance approach. In the process of growing up and maturing, children make many mistakes and misjudgments in their conduct and many of these are interpreted as "mis" behaviour. Toddlerhood is a particularly challenging time when the child's desire for independence comes into conflict with the adults' charge to protect him/her from danger. Practitioners will need to show understanding and patience and try to divert the toddler's attention from undesirable activities or behaviours. As children

grow and become more mature, they will continue to need positive guidance from patient, caring and respectful adults, who will listen to, reason with and explain to them the course of action to be taken when they make mistakes. *Physical punishment of children is illegal in early childhood institutions according to the Early Childhood Act 2005*. The purpose of the positive guidance approach is to help children build internal controls that will help them to behave appropriately without external punishments and threats from an adult. The role of guide also extends to helping children learn to cope when they face stressful and frightening situations. In addition to regular family difficulties such as divorce or death of a parent or close relative, other stressful experiences result from the dislocation caused by natural disasters such as hurricanes, flooding and earthquakes. Violence is also a significant stress factor on young Jamaican children. The practitioner can help children to cope with their challenges by providing the necessary play props that they can use to act out their particular experiences. For example, if a child's parent or close relative has to be hospitalized for injury caused by violence, accident or a natural disaster, props that children can use to engage in "hospital" play will help them to act out their fears about the situation and be better able to cope with it.

### ***Communicator***

The practitioner's role as communicator involves speaking *with*, speaking *about* and speaking *for* (on behalf of) children. Many young children entering preschools are fluent in Jamaican Creole (patois). English is the language of education and business in Jamaica, hence one of the primary goals of education at all levels is for children to achieve some level of proficiency in using the English language. In communicating with children, this situation presents certain challenges, as in some instances the use of Jamaican Creole is frowned upon by some adults and children are constantly corrected in their speech. Children will only develop confidence in self-expression if they feel that the way they speak is respected. The practitioner can encourage children to express their feelings, opinions and needs, and must affirm their use of Creole if that is what the children are most comfortable with. However, the practitioner also has a responsibility to teach children Standard Jamaican English speech patterns and expressions that are the equivalent of those used in the home language, by consistently modeling speech patterns that they want children to learn. Practitioners should refrain from using "baby talk" with infants as they are able to understand adult forms of language long before they can speak it themselves.

Learning how to speak *with* children is also a skill that practitioners must develop. Adults should speak to children in very clear, simple statements that emphasize what they "can" do rather than what they "cannot" do. For example, "Please walk when you are inside the classroom" is a more positive statement than "Don't run in the classroom". During communication between adults and children, children will know that their feelings and views are respected when adults position themselves at the child's eye level. The adult should also maintain eye contact and focus intently on what the child is saying, or on what they are saying to the child.

Practitioners sometimes need to speak *for* children, not only to advocate for them or defend their rights, but to help them to express what they want to say when they are not able to. Sometimes when toddlers throw tantrums, they do so because of the built-up frustration of not being able to express what they want to say in words. Practitioners play a vital role when they speak for a child by saying in words what they think the child is feeling at a particular moment. Over time, this strategy helps children to learn how to express their feelings in acceptable ways.

The practitioner can help the child learn to communicate by encouraging him or her to speak about his or her work. For example, when a child does a drawing or painting, the practitioner should allow the child to describe what he or she has done. The practitioner should never judge the quality of a child's production, but should give positive feedback on the effort. When adults speak *about* children or their work it should be with honesty, since children can tell when comments are honest. If a child does not have trust in the adults who care for them, behavioural problems are likely to arise.

Practitioners can pass on valuable knowledge, values and attitudes to children through their role as communicators. They can convey attitudes of national pride by the way they talk about Jamaica's strengths such as music and sports, and engage children in discussions about national heroes and famous Jamaican musicians, sportsmen and sportswomen and other local heroes. Practitioners can also model inclusive behaviours by communicating attitudes of tolerance and kindness toward persons who are different in any way or who are from different cultural backgrounds. The role of communicator can be effectively used to help children come to value themselves, their country and their cultural heritage.

## ***Inclusion of All Children***

***Principle # 5: The curriculum ensures that the rights of all children, including those with special needs, are fully respected and appropriate adaptations made where necessary to ensure inclusion of all children in all activities. (Principal guiding theorists: Piaget, Vygotsky, Montessori, Gardner. See Appendix)***

Jamaica's legislative framework for the operation of early childhood facilities supports full integration of children with special needs into regular programmes, according to the Early Childhood Act 2005. The law requires that all new early childhood facilities be built to accommodate children with special needs. Inclusive early childhood programming recognizes that all children have the right to quality early care and educational opportunities as mentioned in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Planning for inclusive programming requires the collaborative efforts of parents, practitioners, medical and educational specialists working in the interest of the child as an individual. Inclusion means that young children, whether challenged or gifted, can participate in the same early childhood programme.

Inclusion means that staff and parents together set goals to meet the individual child's particular developmental needs and work together in supporting the child to achieve these goals. Inclusion means making an effort to provide flexible learning environments that can be readily adapted to respond to the different kinds of developmental challenges or giftedness of young children. Outdoor and indoor play



areas must be made accessible for children with disabilities. Such areas must be designed and arranged to encourage the children to explore and interact with others.

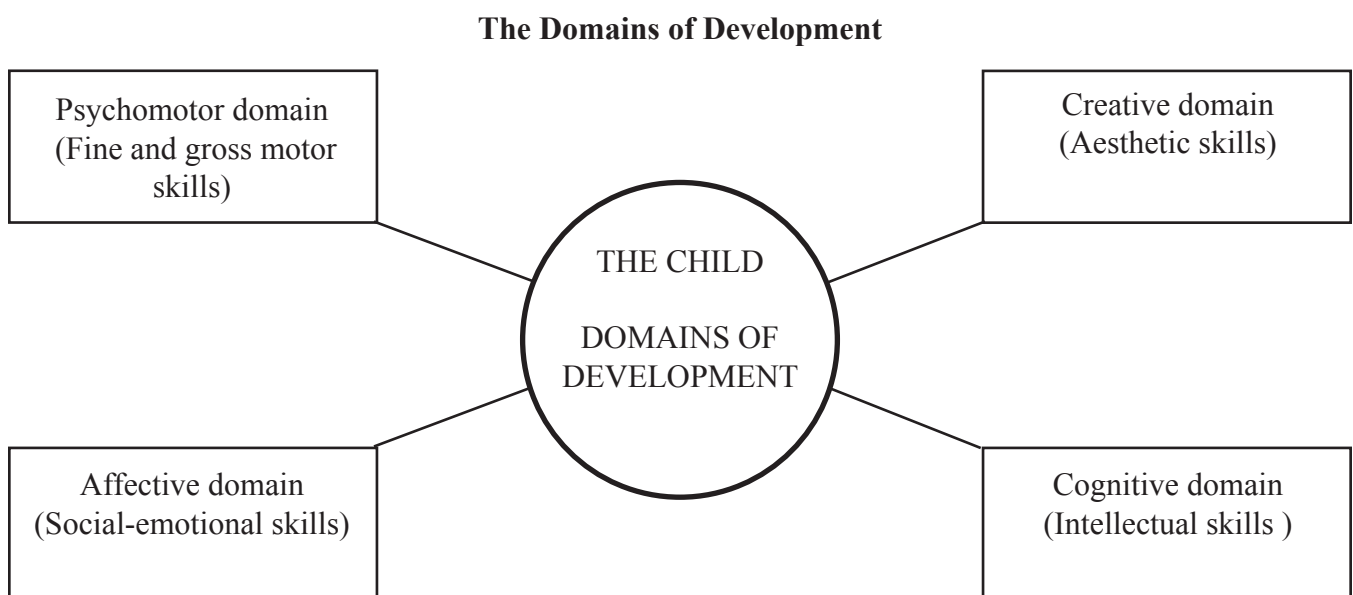
Inclusion requires that practitioners receive training to increase their knowledge and understanding of childhood giftedness, disabilities and developmental challenges. They should be able to provide a wide range of curriculum activities and opportunities that accommodate the interests and needs of *all* children within a particular group.

## ***Integrated Curriculum and the Domains of Development***

***Principle # 6: Children learn best when the curriculum integrates content from various disciplines and skills from the developmental domains in a way that is consistent with their holistic view and experience of the world. (Principal guiding theorists: Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, DAP Framework. See Appendix)***

The integrated curriculum approach is one in which the developmental goals for children address learning in all the domains of development. Equal emphasis is placed on the development of personal, social-emotional skills and spirituality (*affective domain*), aesthetic/expressive skills (*creative domain*), intellectual and language skills (*cognitive domain*), and fine and gross motor skills (*psychomotor domain*). All the domains of development are closely related and inter-connected and the way the child functions in one is likely to affect how he or she functions in the others. Children who are physically ill or undernourished are unlikely to feel very good about themselves emotionally and feelings of self-doubt are very likely to impact negatively on a child’s cognitive and creative functioning.

The figure below provides a graphic illustration of the domains of development relative to the child.



### **Skills in the *affective domain* (social-emotional skills)**

Development in the affective domain covers the range of skills children use to cope with their internal emotional drives and personal needs (intra-personal) and those they use in establishing relationships with others (interpersonal). Moral and spiritual development also fall within the affective domain.

*Intra-personal skills* include:

- personal care skills, such as dressing, toileting, and eating, which build feelings of competence and self confidence;
- persevering at tasks;
- demonstrating resilience to “bounce back” from failure;
- coping effectively with emotional frustration, i.e. learning to control antisocial impulses and finding acceptable ways of getting what is desired;
- demonstrating confidence in making independent choices and decisions;
- differentiating between right and wrong behaviour;
- taking responsibility for one’s own actions;
- showing appreciation for the natural environment and beauty of the universe.

Interpersonal skills include:

- cooperating with others at play;
- sharing and taking turns;
- sharing in classroom discussions and duties;
- extending help to others when needed;
- showing trust in, respect, sympathy and affection for others;
- respecting the property and rights of self and others;
- showing respect for other persons’ traditions and cultural heritage;
- showing respect for religious worship where required and where there is no conflict with personal or family beliefs and traditions;
- showing respect for others who may be different in any way.

### **Skills in the *creative domain* (the aesthetic skills)**

In the curriculum, fostering children's creativity is given special focus and is recognized as a special domain of development to ensure balance with the cognitive domain. This does not mean, however, that creativity is not an inherent aspect of all the other domains as well. For example, children express themselves spontaneously and effectively through speech, when they make up rhymes and verses; through dance, when they use their bodies to imitate or represent various formations of human, plant and animal life; through drama, when they portray happenings and events in their environment, as well as their own personal experiences and inner moods and feelings. Through their interaction with technology and by using computers and other multimedia children may make designs, enhance story-telling or create songs and rhymes. In addition when children solve problems in the cognitive domain, they are also demonstrating critical thinking by the creative use of their intellect.

### **Skills in the *cognitive domain* (intellectual skills)**

In this domain, children learn the skills that help them to organize and make logical sense of the world. These skills involve using all the senses: seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling and feeling, to perceive and process information and come to understand the meaning of things, events and relationships. Cognitive skills involve mental activities such as critical thinking, matching and discriminating, ordering (seriation), imitating, sorting and classifying, understanding and interpreting. Language development is usually associated with the cognitive domain as it involves much mental activity. Children gradually learn language by listening, imitating sounds, deciphering meaning, speaking and producing relevant sounds in context. Language is best learned by the young child in "language-rich" and "print-rich" environments. The youngest infant responds to words and sounds with a turn of the head even when she or he is unable to reproduce an equivalent sound. *The more interaction children have with language, the more quickly they will learn to understand and use it.* The language that is used by the child is called *expressive language*, while the language that is understood by the child is called *receptive language*. The integrated curriculum approach provides numerous opportunities for children to practise and develop their cognitive skills as they acquire and relate new information about their environment.

### **Skills in the *psychomotor domain* (fine and gross motor skills)**

Physical development is a very important aspect of young children's growth and maturation. It is most often associated with a child's good health even though we know that mental and emotional health are equally important indicators of total well-being. Development in the psychomotor domain involves learning to coordinate gross and fine motor movements and demonstrating physical capabilities appropriate to the child's stage of development. Fine motor development is of particular significance in helping children acquire the readiness skills for literacy and numeracy competence. Many of the skill areas of the creative and physical-motor domains overlap, such as dance, movement and physical exercise. Overlapping of

activities of the different domains is a characteristic feature of the integrated curriculum. Children from birth onward must have opportunities to engage their muscles while developing their gross and fine motor skills through play in well-planned spaces, both outdoors and indoors.

### **Integrated learning for infants, toddlers and preschoolers**

For infants and young toddlers, integrated learning happens every moment that they manipulate and interact with age-appropriate play materials, engage in simple games with playmates and adults, and have any sensory experiences. Older toddlers and preschoolers can begin to appreciate learning through exploration of interesting themes and projects that are meaningful to them. The integrated thematic approach is widely used in early childhood curriculum practice as it makes the curriculum more meaningful for young children. “Integration is a strategy that allows learners to explore, interpret, and engage in activities surrounding a topic within their range of experience while drawing on goals from one or more subject matter disciplines” (Krogh and Morehouse, 2008). This curriculum supports the integrated thematic approach for toddlers and preschoolers as it enables children to make meaningful connections across the subject disciplines and advance their skills in the developmental domains. For example, from the theme “Transportation”, children are exposed to social studies concepts about the many ways people can travel, including by foot, bicycle, truck, car, plane, boat and using animals. The children can practise their sorting skills by putting models or pictures of vehicles in groups such as ‘trucks’ or ‘cars’. At the same time, they strengthen their language skills in speaking, listening, identifying letters, and describing and interpreting pictures relevant to the theme. They become acquainted with mathematical non-numeral concepts such as “bigger than” or “longer than”, and can practise the skill of counting and understanding numbers, e.g. 1 steering wheel, 2 windshield wipers, 4 wheels, etc. Science concepts might include speed or movement of vehicles, or push and pull. Creative activities could involve dance, music, drama, and the visual arts, by relating to the different modes of transportation.



**Meal time provides opportunity for integrated learning**

The integrated approach to learning is interesting and engaging for young children as it is in keeping with their holistic view of the world. In summary, this approach to curriculum is developmentally appropriate for use with young children as it:

- helps children make the connections and linkages across traditional subject disciplines and thus subscribes to the holistic nature of knowledge about the world;
- promotes children's active involvement in planning and implementing curriculum activities;
- makes allowance for a range of activities, skills and levels of performance as children engage in exploring various themes;
- lends itself to many opportunities for children's creative expressions, allowing for individual learning styles and multiple intelligences;
- facilitates the flow of meaningful activities across blocks of time in the daily schedule. Scheduling that supports integrated learning is organized in large blocks of time rather than in the short periods used in the subject-based curriculum approach.

Children can pursue more meaningful learning when they are able to complete a task and not be forced to endure regular transitions from one discrete lesson to another, such as leaving a science lesson unfinished to move on to a mathematics lesson.

### **Thematic curriculum content**

Although it is important to emphasize the development of critical skills in the different domains at the early childhood stage, children can and should learn valuable content and concepts about things and events that are relevant to their daily lives. In the birth to twenty-four months curriculum the emphasis is on providing non-thematic activities focused on the development of different skills. In the curriculum for the two- to five-year-olds, children are appropriately introduced to thematic integrated curriculum units. Appropriate coverage must be given to the content so that it increases children's awareness about their world, their country and culture, and enhances their sense of well-being and self-empowerment. The selection of curriculum content must take into account what children need to know to become self-sufficient, to take care of and manage themselves appropriately and confidently in different situations that they will encounter. In this curriculum, topics on Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) aim to promote positive attitudes, healthy habits and good nutrition practices as well as to increase children's awareness of threats to their health and safety. Information on eating habits, child abuse, violence prevention, HIV/AIDS, water, sanitation, hygiene and the like will be carefully and appropriately interwoven into thematic content so that children can effectively receive the messages intended. Content is also incorporated to increase children's knowledge of special features of their country and people, such as tourism, protecting their environment, and living harmoniously with others.

## ***The Learning Environment***

***Principle # 7: Effective early childhood learning environments are planned and organized to provide good balance in the children’s learning activities and to encourage children to pursue their individual interests as they interact with developmentally appropriate materials in a non-threatening environment. (Principal guiding theorists: Montessori, Dewey, Vygotsky, Piaget, DAP Framework. See Appendix)***

### **Developmentally appropriate learning environments**

Understanding the elements of practice that are represented in the term “developmentally appropriate” is a critical requirement for the practitioners who will implement this curriculum, as it is their practices in working with children that ultimately create the quality learning environments that are supportive of developmentally appropriate practices. In this curriculum, the term “learning environment” refers to all elements of the environment, both the visible and invisible elements, that influence children’s well-being and ability to learn. The visible elements include the learning materials and range of activities and routines planned for children, such as the balance between indoor and outdoor activities; quiet and energetic activities; adult-initiated and child-initiated activities; and individual, small-group, and large-group activities. The visible elements also include the arrangement of the physical environment and the approaches to assessment of children’s progress, such as teachers’ observations, portfolios, checklists and the like. The invisible elements, by definition, are those that are not as obvious to the untrained eye, but are indeed very important in terms of their effect on children. The role of the adults in setting the social-emotional climate is perhaps the most critical aspect of the invisible element of the learning environment. Also included in this category are the relationships with parents, and the strategies for managing and guiding children’s behaviour.

Developmentally appropriate curriculum practice is supported by learning environments that:

- are child-centred and child- and parent-friendly;
- foster children’s active exploration and discovery through play and interaction with a wide variety of materials;
- support holistic, integrated curriculum practices;
- allow children to learn at their own pace and in their own style (but with close supervision and monitoring by the practitioner to facilitate individual development planning as necessary);
- facilitate children’s acquisition of critical readiness skills required for success in later learning;
- include warm, loving adults to guide and nurture children;
- enable children to develop positive self-concepts and high self-esteem;
- enable children to develop intrinsic discipline and self-control;

- provide many opportunities for children to use their critical thinking skills;
- allow children to express their tremendous creativity in a variety of ways that are not gender stereotyped;
- support children's development of personal and interpersonal skills as they interact with peers and adults;
- are conducive to children making the transition from one developmental learning stage to another;
- allow children to communicate effectively in both their home language and English.

### **Learning environments for infants and toddlers**

Infants and toddlers need physical environments that are well ventilated, attractive, colourful, hygienic and safe. The floor space should be clean and adequate for lying, rolling over, crawling and walking. *Only when they are asleep should children be confined to cribs and sleeping areas.* Play materials should be age appropriate, safe and clean, since babies will naturally put these in their mouths as their way of learning about the things they encounter around them.

Toddlers are more independent and move about with high energy as they get accustomed to using their limbs and bodies more skillfully. Their natural drive towards autonomy leads to increased interest in self-determined activities. The supportive environment provides both space for toddlers to practise their gross motor skills freely as well as toys and play equipment to satisfy these needs. Materials and toys in the toddler environment should be organized on low, accessible shelves in order to encourage children to make their own decisions and choices about their play interests. Interest areas such as block area, book area, quiet corner with soft toys and cushions, and table-top activities should be established to encourage children to explore, investigate, experiment and discover on their own. In working with children at this stage, practitioners must demonstrate attitudes of love, patience, kindness, helpfulness and encouragement towards the children in their care.

### **Learning environments for preschoolers**

For the three- to five-year-old age group, the curriculum promotes the concept of interest or learning areas as a way of providing children with interesting hands-on activities and integrated learning opportunities through which they can develop initiative and learn concepts and skills in mathematics, science, social studies, the arts, literacy and technology. Interest areas are designated for activities with a special focus. The range of interest areas available for children to learn from depends on factors such as physical classroom space, availability of appropriate materials and equipment, practitioner resourcefulness and interest, among others. Some interest areas frequently provided in preschool classrooms include: home, shop, market, manipulative toys, blocks, library, science, discovery, music/sounds, art and construction, sand play, water play, computers, and special interest areas that are seasonal, e.g. celebrations, festivals and the like. Where space is limited in a learning setting, the practitioner must decide on how many

interest areas can be comfortably accommodated at the same time in order to avoid overcrowded and confusing situations.



**Learning corners need to be attractively arranged with objects/materials that are relevant to the theme and are age appropriate**

Practitioners can make creative adaptations to the environment to allow for at least three interest areas at a time to be available. These can be changed periodically. The excuse of “lack of space” is not an acceptable reason for not providing children with interest areas in the learning setting. There are many creative ways by which this objective can be achieved and practitioners should aim to apply them consistently.

**Special considerations for adapting the learning environment**

Practitioners must understand the developmental stages in children and be able to detect any disabilities they may have. Therefore, practitioners should adopt flexible classroom strategies to accommodate children with special needs and who, increasingly, are being mainstreamed into regular classrooms. All young children must be treated as children first and not in relation to any special needs they may have. Care should be taken to provide or appropriately adjust furniture and some equipment to encourage these children to participate in exploring, interacting and solving problems.

Children with special needs should not be made to feel excluded from regular activities because of their physical or other limitations. A variety of play materials should be provided or equipment adapted to meet the needs of all the children. Time should be taken to support and facilitate the children’s use of these materials. In addition, play areas should be made accessible to all children.



“An individualized, integrated early childhood programme enables all young children to learn from each other, from caring adults, and from the environment in order to grow in all areas of development.” (Catron & Allen, 2008).

## ***Assessment in Early Childhood***

***Principle # 8: Assessment of children should be carried out for the primary purpose of providing adults with the information they need to plan more appropriately for children’s ongoing development and should involve strategies that support rather than threaten children’s feelings of self-esteem. (Principal guiding theorists: Montessori, DAP Framework, Vygotsky, Piaget. See Appendix)***

Assessment of curriculum effectiveness is an integral aspect of early childhood programmes. Developmental goals and learning outcomes are set for children and these must be monitored to see how well they are being achieved. Continuous assessment helps the practitioners to know the children’s level of development at the beginning of a programme year, and informs them on a continuous basis of the children’s progress and achievements. Assessment also increases awareness of each child’s specific needs, strengths and learning difficulties, and this knowledge helps adults to plan effectively.

It is important for the early childhood practitioner to understand the important difference in meaning of the terms *assessment* and *testing*. *Assessment* is an essential feature of curriculum and instruction and involves a process of observing, recording, and documenting the work children do and how they do it, as a basis for making educational decisions for the individual child. There are many forms or methods of assessment that a practitioner may choose depending on the children’s age range, stages of development and levels of performance. *Testing* is only one form of assessment and usually involves a systematic way of sampling a child’s behaviour and knowledge and awarding a score to these. Best practices in the assessment of young children support approaches that are continuous, based on children’s performance in familiar environments, and that engage them in activities with which they are comfortable. At this developmental stage, *testing* should not be used as a form of assessment.

In order to encourage practitioners to be consistent in their assessment of children, assessment processes should be uncomplicated and easily implemented in any group setting. The following are some methods of assessing children.

- One simple method of assessment is by using a checklist developed from the curriculum objectives.
- The practitioners’ observation of the children is also extremely important; this constitutes a form of *continuous assessment*. Very busy practitioners can make a determined effort to observe at least two or three children per day and record what they have observed. Adults can make mental and/or

written anecdotal notes of the behaviours and skills a child demonstrates on a daily basis, as this provides insight into exactly how the child is coping and developing. The strategy of observation might include specific activities planned by the practitioner for children to engage in, for assessment purposes. Observation and recording information are the most appropriate means of following the development of young infants.

- Portfolios are another valuable assessment method, as they contain children's work that reflects their developmental progress over time. A portfolio should be created for each child to record what he or she has produced.

Assessment processes should not lead children to experience feelings of failure as that will reduce their sense of self-worth, but should clearly identify a child's strengths, i.e. what he or she *can* do. Assessment procedures should help a child develop the ability to self-evaluate and recognize personal strengths and weaknesses. The assessment procedures recommended for use in this curriculum (checklist, observation and recording, portfolios) are simple ones that even the most hard-pressed practitioner can carry out. This approach will ensure that each child's progress is assessed and the information recorded. This type of planning is important to ensure that the important task of continuous assessment is carried out.

Practitioners are expected to analyze and use the results of assessment to decide whether to introduce new learning activities or to allow more time for children to develop and acquire the skills and knowledge previously introduced.

Assessment provides a basis for communicating with parents and for planning strategies for the home and the early childhood facility, so that they can work together in the children's interest. The information communicated to the parents should serve to strengthen parents' relationship with their children, and help them to develop realistic expectations of their children's abilities. Parents can be informed of how they too can support and assess their children's learning and development, as well as encourage their children to evaluate their own emerging skills.

Assessment instruments should be used so that at the end of each year each child has a cumulative record of his/her developmental progress from the time of entry. This information should accompany the child on entry to the next level of schooling, as it provides the receiving practitioner with an overall picture of the child, i.e. cognitive ability, social skills, personality tendencies and adjustment abilities.

## ***Involving Parents and Community***

***Principle # 9: Children benefit most from early childhood programmes in which practitioners value and build supportive relationships with parents, families and the community. (Principal influencing theorists: Piaget, Vygotsky, DAP Framework. See Appendix)***

The strength of an early childhood programme often lies in the quality of the relationship between practitioners and parents. Close collaboration between home and the early childhood facility benefits children in many ways. When information about a child is shared between parent and practitioner, both



**Parental support is vital for effective curriculum delivery**

can collaborate more effectively in working with the child to improve areas of weakness. Facilities benefit from having interested parents who are willing to offer support in various ways, e.g. volunteer for field trips, share special skills as curriculum resource persons, help to make toys and other learning aids from ‘junk’, among other activities. Maintaining good parent-school relations is not to be taken for granted. Practitioners must respect parents and families of the children in their charge, and work at maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with them. Parents generally desire the best care and education for their children, therefore assumptions should not be made about parents’ ability to participate meaningfully because of their socio-economic circumstances. Local research (Davies, 2004) has shown that a high level of parent support and involvement is possible among parents of low socio-economic status, especially where the practitioners make an effort to work with the parents at building mutually supportive and trusting relationships.

The community, too, should be engaged in the important task of raising children, if we draw on the age-old maxim that “it takes a village to raise a child”. Parents are, by extension, part of the community surrounding a particular early childhood facility. However, the community extends beyond the parents of the early childhood facility; many members of the community (such as business people, skilled persons and other volunteers) should be encouraged to actively support and assist the early childhood facility, whether on an on-going basis or for specific events. Getting the entire community to support local early childhood facilities is perhaps the best guarantee that children’s health, development and well-being will be fully protected.

### **3. DEVELOPMENTAL GOALS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN BIRTH TO FIVE YEARS**



#### **Learning Outcomes for Young Children**

The goals and learning outcomes are drawn from extensive review of local, regional and internal curricula as well as the *Learning Outcomes for Early Childhood Development in the Caribbean: Curriculum Resource Guide* (Child Focus II Project, 2005). The six learning outcomes are:

- 1. Wellness** – a child who is healthy, strong and well adjusted;
- 2. Effective communication** – a child who understands and makes his or her needs known;
- 3. Valuing culture** – a child who values his/her own culture and that of others;
- 4. Intellectual empowerment** – a child who is a critical thinker and independent learner;
- 5. Respect for self, others and the environment** – a child who respects self, others and the environment;
- 6. Resilience** – a child who has coping skills.

Each learning outcome is supported by a set of developmental goals or learning tasks to be achieved by the child. The aim of the curriculum is to provide learning activities that will enable each child to attain these outcomes. Equitable opportunities for learning should be provided irrespective of the child's gender, disability, ethnicity or background.

#### **Wellness**

Wellness can be achieved by helping the child to develop:

- physical strength, agility and mastery in using large and small muscles;
- emotional well-being from having a strong sense of belonging, of personal identity and positive view of self as having competence and personal worth;
- interest in and ability to maintain personal health and protection of self and others;
- ability to assume responsibility for own actions and behaviour;
- ability to accept own abilities, limitations, preferences and potentials.

#### **Effective communication**

Effective communication can be achieved by helping the child to develop generally, the ability to listen, to understand and to use language to communicate with others and to express thinking and problem

solving skills; and more specifically to develop:

- verbal and non-verbal communication skills;
- skills in listening and understanding language as well as expressing thoughts and ideas effectively;
- skills in using language creatively;
- literacy skills.

### **Valuing culture**

Valuing culture can be achieved by helping children to develop:

- awareness of their own cultural traditions and those of others;
- respect and appreciation for their local and national cultural forms;
- pride in national and regional identity;
- appreciation for international cultural forms.

### **Intellectual empowerment**

Intellectual empowerment can be achieved by helping the child to:

- develop curiosity and an ability to explore, discover and make use of the results to increase knowledge and understanding of the world;
- develop the ability to observe, inquire, notice similarities and differences and organize things into logical relationships with each other;
- engage in play and other activities that encourage self-initiated learning and problem-solving;
- develop the critical readiness skills necessary to successfully advance to the formal level of education;
- develop the ability to advance and enrich own learning and competencies through the use of technology;
- develop sensitivity to and appreciation for beauty as well as the ability to express inner feelings and creative impulses through the aesthetic arts, e.g. dance, music, speech, art and craft.

### **Respect for self, others and the environment**

Respect for self, others and the environment can be achieved by helping the child to develop an awareness of spiritual and moral values that promote attitudes such as caring, tolerance, dignity, respect for self and others, self-discipline and a consciousness of right and wrong; and more specifically to:

- demonstrate strong inter-personal skills for effective interaction with peers and adults;
- express empathy to others;
- show love, acceptance of and respect towards self;
- show love, acceptance of and respect toward others;
- establish and build relationships with family and others;
- understand and appreciate the views and feelings of others;

- recognize and respect own feelings, limitations and strengths;
- know what represents acceptable and unacceptable behaviours;
- appreciate, care for and protect the environment.

### **Resilience**

Resilience can be achieved by helping children to develop strong intra-personal skills that increase coping abilities, feelings of competency and autonomy; and more specifically to develop the ability to:

- make independent choices and decisions and stand by them;
- show perseverance in trying situations, e.g. being able to complete an unpleasant or challenging task;
- use a range of appropriate social skills when coping with challenging situations;
- understand and accept disappointments and failures and try again.

#### 4. **THE ROLE OF THE CURRICULUM IN SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL GOALS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES**



In developing a curriculum, *identifying* goals and learning outcomes for children is a relatively simple task, as research in the field has established clear developmental milestones for children. The real challenge lies in *providing* the consistent levels of developmentally appropriate supports that will make achievement of the desired goals and outcomes likely for the individual child. Early childhood institutions and families must collaborate in supporting the child's development. The child's family contributes crucial early learning opportunities that can increase self-esteem, self confidence, identity and a sense of belonging. The early childhood programme supports the home in this regard, but has an even more vital role to play in preparing the child for higher levels of education and for coping in the wider world. This early childhood curriculum provides a holistic approach towards helping children achieve developmental goals. Both visible and invisible elements work together to enable the child to acquire a wide range of skills, develop positive dispositions to life and learning and develop a positive concept of self.



**Positive early learning experiences produce happy children**

However, the curriculum must be implemented as discussed in this document for the goals to be achieved. This requires that practitioners:

- have a sound understanding of how children develop and learn;
- understand the guiding philosophies of the curriculum;
- receive specific training in implementing this curriculum;
- become confident in how to conduct the daily activities for children;
- know how they should act toward children in different situations;
- develop skills in how to communicate with children;
- acquire effective techniques in guiding children toward self-control and pro-social behaviours.

Achieving developmental goals through curriculum processes demands much from the early childhood practitioner, as the major task of making the curriculum work in the interest of children lies with him or her. Curriculum effectiveness is contingent on a high level of practitioner devotion and commitment to the growth, development and well-being of each child in his or her care.





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### **Theoretical Influences on Early Childhood Curriculum**

Curriculum development processes usually involve identifying an underlying philosophy or belief about what, why and how teachers do what they do. A brief review of some of the theories/philosophies of child development and learning provides a basis for understanding the underlying principles that have shaped the variety of contemporary curriculum models we know today. Some of these significant theories are explained below.

#### **Maturationist theory (*Arnold Gessell, 1844–1924*)**

Arnold Gessell developed an extensive set of tests and measurements to assess and describe children in ten major areas of development: motor, personal hygiene, emotional expression, fears and dreams, self and sex, interpersonal relations, play and pastimes, school life, ethical sense, and philosophical outlook. His view was that children's inner abilities, rates of development, and behaviour in the ten identified areas were genetically determined. This meant that each child developed, matured and learned according to his or her own internal maturational schedule. Children were masters of their own educational process and could thrive on their own within a supportive environment.

#### **Psychosocial theory (*Sigmund Freud, 1856–1939* /*Erik Erikson, 1902–1994*)**

Erik Erikson's psycho-social theory provides an explanation of social and emotional development from birth through old age. This theory derives from Freud's earlier psychoanalytic theory of human development. Both theories are primarily concerned with social-emotional and personality development. Freud believed that children's behaviour resulted from the focus of their sexual energy at different developmental stages. Erikson believed that personality was strongly determined by social context and environmental influences. According to Erikson, human beings go through eight stages of development from birth through old age, and at each stage they have the potential to learn certain patterns of behaviour, influenced by their social experiences. Erikson refers to these behaviour patterns as identity crises or tasks that each person must resolve to satisfactorily move on to the next stage. The three important tasks in the first six years of life are the development of *trust versus mistrust* (birth to 1 year); *autonomy versus shame and doubt* (ages 2 to 3) and *initiative versus guilt* (ages 3 to 6). If the child is able to successfully resolve each task during the specified stage, the outcome is the ability to perceive the world and the self correctly, the development of a healthy personality, and becoming socialized effectively into one's culture.

### **Behaviourist theory (*B.F. Skinner, 1904–1990, Albert Bandura, 1925–*)**

In Skinner's stimulus-response theory, learning is a process of conditioning the individual to display expected behaviour and knowledge by using consequences, and reinforcement. Both the process and pace of children's development are determined by environmental forces. Developmental progress is achieved through the application of stimuli from the external environment, hence children's behaviour and abilities are shaped and influenced by others. Learning occurs in small steps moving from simple to more complex actions. Skills are acquired piece by piece cumulatively. All children are capable of increasing their skills and abilities when exposed to external stimuli in the appropriate setting. No allowance is made for individual differences in style and pace of learning. Bandura's theory represents a slight modification of Skinner's, whereby children's own thoughts on their actions are recognized as well as learning through social interaction. Thus Bandura's theory allows for individual differences in style and pace of learning which is also modeled in this curriculum.

### **Cognitive-Developmental/Constructivist theory (*Jean Piaget, 1896–1980, Lev Vygotsky, 1896–1934*)**

Constructivist theory is by far the most influential of all on contemporary early childhood curriculum development and practices. From the constructivist viewpoint, children are active constructors of knowledge and the growth of intelligence results from the child's interaction with the environment and his/her efforts to make sense of the world around him/her. The importance of play is a significant feature of the constructivist approach. Children construct their view of the world within the limitations of their level of mental functioning at different stages, and continue to alter these understandings as their mental structures mature further. Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky were the chief proponents of constructivist theory although they differed slightly in some respects. From Piaget's perspective, young children's ability to acquire new and more challenging information depends on their biological and mental maturation or state of readiness to absorb new and different information. Therefore, certain concepts can only be learned in a meaningful way when a child's mental structures are ready to absorb (assimilate) and accommodate the new information.

Vygotsky believed that children learn in active, self-directed ways, but whereas Piaget viewed children's learning as largely dependent on the rate of development of internal mental structures, Vygotsky's (whose theory is often referred to as "sociocultural,") believed that children could be helped through social interaction with others to achieve higher levels of intellectual functioning. He created the term "zone of proximal development" (ZPD) to describe the point at which new learning can take place for a child. Simply put, there are two levels of a child's learning behaviour: (1) what the child can do independently (independent performance), and (2) what the child can achieve with help (assisted performance). The ZPD is the point at which the connection between the two levels occurs. Assisted performance includes the help of an adult or peer who provides direct or indirect support to help the child advance to a higher level of knowledge. Vygotsky used the term "scaffolding" to describe the assistance provided by the adult or peer to support the child's learning. From Vygotsky's perspective, the role of the practitioner is critical as he or she can provide the appropriate environment, the materials, instructional strategies and learning

opportunities to “scaffold” or help the child acquire new competencies and continue to move on to higher levels of functioning.

### **Multiple Intelligences theory (*Howard Gardner, 1943–* )**

Gardner’s theory differs from many others which present intelligence as solely related to the cognitive domain. Gardner believes that there are at least seven intelligences or ways in which children learn about the world: language, logical-mathematical, spatial representation, musical thought, bodily-kinesthetic (use of the body to solve problems or create things), interpersonal (understanding others) and intrapersonal (understanding self). Children will demonstrate different strengths in the different areas and their special abilities should be valued as their way of self-expression and learning. In Gardner’s view, therefore, the curriculum must offer children opportunities to foster development in all areas of intelligences, and assessment of children’s development must embrace more than the areas typically associated with achievement. This theory is in harmony with the concept of the integrated curriculum.

### **Progressive Education (*John Dewey, 1859–1952* )**

John Dewey’s philosophy of progressive education has been one of the most significant influences on public education in America. Dewey believed that the education processes should bring about the formation of dispositions, ideas or habits which should lead to the all round growth and self-fulfillment of every member of society. Educational experiences should lead to the realization of a “satisfactory” self and happiness. From Dewey’s perspective, every educational experience should be a joyful and participative one, as he felt that education cannot take place by direct transfer of an item (idea, belief, attitude) from teacher to pupil. The teacher can educate the pupil only by transforming the learning environment in some way. Classrooms should be organized on democratic principles involving working in groups, cooperative effort and shared responsibilities and goals. In this environment, the activities offered to children should be based on their interests, needs, goals and abilities. Children should take responsibility for their own learning and teachers should involve them in instructional planning. The concept of learning centres is a central feature of Dewey’s philosophy of learning.

This curriculum embodies some of Dewey’s philosophy, through advocating using learning centers and giving the child some responsibility for his/her learning.