

NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

PRE-PRIMARY

3-5 YEARS



Mauritius Institute of Education
&
Early Childhood Care and Education Authority

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Foreword



Mauritius is today poised to drive fundamental reforms in many sectors in line with emerging national needs. We aim at fostering a cohesive and harmonious society, based on respect, care and concern for fellow citizens and giving all Mauritians an improved standard of living in a dynamic nation. Government stands committed to ensuring that all our children grow and develop to their fullest potential.

Government is also conscious that the goals of economic empowerment, sustainable development, productivity and the partnership for the common good, on which our future depends, rest upon a sound and effective education and training system. It also realizes that education during early childhood is crucial in cultivating, in all our children, the foundation of lifelong character building.

My Ministry has consequently, in its **Education and Human Resources Strategy Plan (2008 -2020)**, positioned Early Childhood Care and Education as a priority area, as enunciated by the World Education Forum (UNESCO 2000). Along this perspective, the Mauritius Institute of Education, has prepared, in collaboration with the Early Childhood Care and Education Authority (ECCEA) and other stakeholders, a **National Curriculum Framework for the pre-primary** with the aim of ensuring that **ALL** children aged 3 to 5 years get the opportunity to develop their individual intellectual, socio-emotional and psycho-motor skills to the best of their capacity in order to build their confidence and self esteem in learning. This will not only prepare them for the next level (primary school) but, more importantly, lay the foundations for learning that will support them throughout their life.

However, this will be achieved only through combined

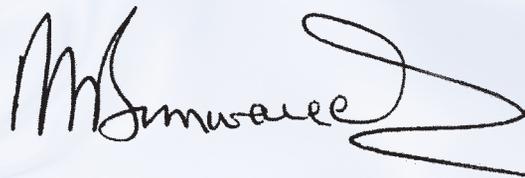
efforts of families; educators, education professional, communities and policy makers because children will learn best when adults understand the process of child development and adopt consistent actions towards them.

This **National Curriculum Framework** accordingly acknowledges the importance of involving parents, the family and the community and encourages partnership between different Ministries, organisations, practitioners, NGOs, as well as national and international agencies. It abides by the guiding principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It outlines the main areas of learning and provides the basis for the appropriate practices that are expected during this crucial stage of child development when appropriate care, affection, high quality learning experiences and stimulation are critical in developing our young children's capacity for learning and ensuring their becoming well balanced creative adults.

I therefore particularly commend the use of the National Curriculum Framework (2009) which will, no doubt, upgrade and standardise the quality of teaching in both public and private pre-primary schools. Provision is made for educators to adapt and customize the guidelines proposed.

I wish to place on record here, the exemplary partnership between the Mauritius Institute of Education and the ECCEA, and the high level of commitment and professionalism in the conception and realisation of this Framework.

May this spirit of partnership continue to guide all of us in making judicious use of this tool and in working towards the healthy, harmonious development of all our young children, the future leaders, teachers, doctors, managers and workers of this country on whom WE shall be dependent for our well being as they are now dependent on our present efforts for ensuring their future success.



Dr The Hon. Vasant K. Bunwaree

Minister of Education,

Culture and Human Resources.

Preface

The National Curriculum Framework Pre-Primary is intended to guide and support early childhood educators, the community and all stakeholders in the education of children aged 3 to 5 years. It is in line with Government vision as spelt out in the policy document “Towards a Quality Curriculum” (2006) and, more recently, in the “Education and Human Resource Strategy Plan” (2008-2020). In both documents, Pre-Primary Education is considered pivotal in building the foundations upon which all future learning ultimately depends. Its overall goal is to develop the intellectual, spiritual, socio-emotional and psycho-motor skills, knowledge and attitudes of children between the age of 3 and 5 years to their full potential and to foster within them a strong sense of self confidence and self esteem.

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) Pre-primary proposes guidelines for a universal set of standards for learning, development and care that young children should experience, irrespective of the type of pre-primary school they attend. It addresses all the developmental needs of the children and elaborates on the environment in which learning should take place.

The NCF Pre-Primary Education also provides for equality of opportunity and

anti-discriminatory practices and ensures that every child is included, and not disadvantaged because of his/her background. The Framework advocates the need to provide rich early learning experiences, and, while recognising that no two children are the same, it also appreciates the fact that their differences enrich each other’s learning experiences.

A Framework is, however, a dynamic document and needs to be continually reviewed and improved in the light of emerging needs and circumstances. It is therefore recommended that this document be piloted over a period of 2-3 years, with regular review and updating of resources and materials in the light of feedback obtained.

The NCF Pre-Primary Education is the outcome of extensive consultations between the Mauritius Institute of Education and a wide range of stakeholders and agencies, both private and public. These include, among others, the Early Childhood Care and Education Authority, Representatives from different Ministries – Social Security, Women’s Rights and Child Development and Family Welfare, Ombudsperson for Children, Supervisors of Pre-Primary Schools from Local Government, State Law Office, Mahatma Gandhi Institute and Unions of Pre-Primary School Teachers.

Without their collaboration this document would not in all probability have seen the light of the day. I acknowledge therefore with gratitude their valuable contribution. The Mauritius Institute of Education also welcomes the framework for partnership which has emerged among the schools, parents, professionals and other stakeholders. We intend to maintain and sustain this network and have recourse to it again for the implementation and the review of the NCF Pre-Primary Education.

At MIE, we consider that *“All children are our children”*.

S Thancanamootoo

Director

Mauritius Institute of Education.

ABBREVIATIONS

MOECHR	Ministry of Education, Culture & Human Resources
MWRCDFW	Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare
ECCEA	Early Childhood Care and Education Authority
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NCG	National Curriculum Goals
GLS	Generic learning Statements
OLO	Overarching Learning Outcome
LO	Learning Outcomes
BGI	Bridging the Gap Initiative
SEN	Special Education Needs
UN	United Nations
PSED	Personal, Social and Emotional Development
CLL	Communication, Language and Literacy
ECAD	Expressive, Creative and Aesthetic Development
HPD	Health and Physical Development
BEA	Body and Environmental Awareness
MLT	Mathematical and Logical Thinking

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.0 PREAMBLE

The National Curriculum Framework Pre-Primary (3-5 years) has been developed within the broader perspective of the National Curriculum Framework for the Republic of Mauritius along the lines laid down in the document issued in September 2006 by the Ministry of Education & Human Resources entitled “Towards a Quality Curriculum – Strategy for Reform”.

1.1 GOALS OF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

The National Curriculum Goals (NCG) are:

1. To promote an all-round development of the individual – physical, intellectual, social and emotional – leading to a balanced, active and productive lifestyle;
2. To foster understanding and appreciation of the biological, physical and technological world to enable the learner to arrive at informed decisions about the environment and the changing needs of our society and those of the individual;
3. To develop in the learner skills and knowledge to empower him/her to participate meaningfully in an information-driven economy;
4. To develop creative thinking skills and learning competencies required for the future;
5. To promote equity and social justice by providing opportunities for every learner according to his/her needs, interests and potential;
6. To foster national unity by promoting in the individual understanding of and respect for our multicultural heritage;
7. To promote in the learner an appreciation of his/her place in an interdependent global context;
8. To promote a culture of lifelong learning for greater access to an ever-changing job market.

This document is in line with the objectives of the Ministry of Education, Culture & Human Resources Strategic Plan 2008-2020 that seeks “*to ensure that all children aged 3 to 5 years in Mauritius have the opportunity to develop their individual intellectual, socio-emotional and psycho-motor skills to the best of their capacity in order to build the confidence and self-esteem in learning that will not only prepare them for the next level (primary school) but, more importantly, lay the foundations for learning that will support them throughout their lifetime*”.

1.2 PROFILE OF THE LEARNER

The above implies that, for the learner to be able to function effectively in a rapidly changing socio-economic context, it is expected that he/she should:

1. be numerate and literate.
2. have relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes to function in society.
3. fully understand his/her role as a citizen of this country and the world.
4. develop desirable social skills for living in a multicultural society.
5. have sound communication skills.
6. use information and communication technology tools.
7. have a rational and scientific mindset.
8. develop artistic sensitivity and participate in creative activities.
9. display a willingness to engage in change.
10. show critical thinking and independence of thought.
11. be trainable.
12. develop a sense of belonging to the Mauritian nation.



1.3 GENERIC LEARNING STATEMENTS

The Generic Learning Statements (GLS) have been derived from the National Educational Goals for the Republic of Mauritius. The GLS refer to knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which students at all levels of the educational system, from pre-primary to secondary, need to acquire and achieve. They cut across all areas of learning, and provide teachers, curriculum developers and teacher educators with guidelines on which learning and teaching materials will be designed, planned and developed.

The Generic Learning Statements are as follows:

Learners should be able to:

1. acquire language skills for effective communication and meaningful interaction with self and others through listening, speaking, reading and writing. The correct acquisition of language skills is central to the whole process of thinking in every curricular activity.
2. derive meaning and understanding from numerical and spatial concepts and engage in the process of developing logical and rational thinking.
3. behave in a responsible manner with regard to everybody's right to feel valued and to live peacefully.
4. appreciate the diversity of the Mauritian culture and interact positively among themselves.
5. engage in thinking processes to develop and construct knowledge.
6. recognize desirable and worthwhile values as the foundation of good citizenship.
7. understand, appreciate and adapt to change and selectively use new technologies.
8. understand and be sensitive to local, regional and global environmental issues.
9. develop interpersonal knowledge and skills with a view to strengthening positive attitudes, understanding and sharing common values, and also respecting persons and human rights.
10. recognize a safe and sound lifestyle by developing physical fitness and proper nutritional habits.
11. participate in arts, music, dance, drama and appreciate the different aspects of aesthetic expressions and the diversity of our traditions.
12. enjoy learning by experiencing and celebrating success.

1.4 THE GOALS OF THE PRE-PRIMARY CURRICULUM

The pre-primary curriculum lays emphasis on the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that need to be acquired and developed during the pre-primary years (3-5). The objectives of the holistic development can be achieved through the six learning areas in the curriculum, embedding ICT for learning in the early years, as outlined in this framework. The 'whole child approach' is vital for the provision of learning experiences in all the areas of learning.

The six learning areas at pre-primary level are:

- I. Personal, Social & Emotional Development (**PSED**)
- II. Communication, Language and Literacy (**CLL**)
- III. Expressive, Creative and Aesthetic Development (**ECAD**)
- IV. Health and Physical Development (**HPD**)
- V. Body and Environmental Awareness (**BEA**)
- VI. Mathematical and Logical Thinking (**MLT**)

The Overarching Learning Outcomes (OLOs) Pre-Primary Education are linked to National Curriculum Goals (NCGs)

By the end of pre-primary schooling, children will be able to:

1. socialize with family, friends, peers, teachers and other adults (NCG 1, 6)
2. accept each other and live together, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, age and ability. (NCG 1, 6, 7)
3. adapt to and enjoy experiences related to change, surprise and uncertainty (NCG 2, 8)
4. develop confidence by exploring the world using their body and senses (NCG 1, 2, 8)
5. understand fairness in relation to themselves and others (NCG 1, 3, 5, 6)
6. participate in the making, following and reworking of rules in the day to day activities (NCG 1, 3, 5, 6)
7. communicate thoughts and experiences creatively, using many forms of expressions (NCG 1, 2, 4)
8. develop physical coordination and healthy habits (NCG 1, 3)

CHAPTER 2 - NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK PRE-PRIMARY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The National Curriculum Framework Pre-Primary (3-5 years) is a document which provides directions to educators, parents and other professionals who care for and educate the child of **3-5 years**. It reflects contemporary educational thinking and up-to-date pedagogical practices regarding what pupils need to learn in our specific context to derive the maximum benefit for their overall growth and development. This Curriculum Framework sets out the **rationale, the learning outcomes, the descriptors, the performance indicators and the teaching learning process** for **all learning areas** constituting the pre-primary curriculum for the Republic of Mauritius, as well as the implications for assessment.

The Pre-Primary Curriculum Framework will help educators:

- i) to design the curriculum to meet the specific needs of the child based on their experiences before entry to the primary level of schooling;
- ii) to measure the appropriateness of their teaching against the performance indicators outlined in the document; and
- iii) to take relevant remedial measures whenever this is deemed necessary.

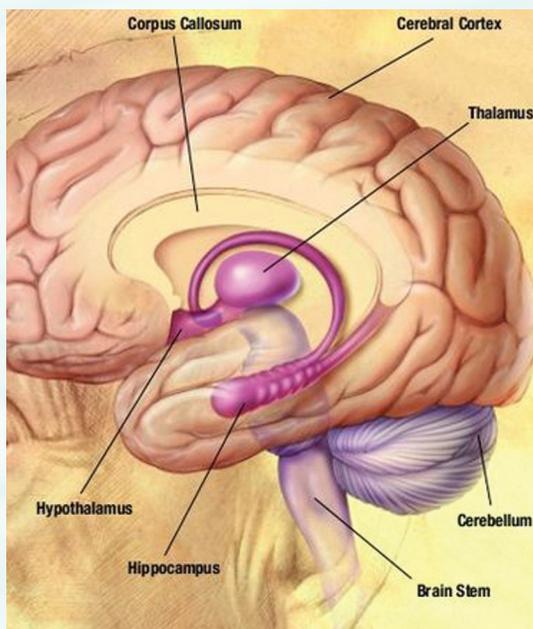
This Curriculum Framework provides all stakeholders and the community at large with a clear statement of what pupils are expected to achieve at the end of their pre-primary schooling and how they can best support the children. It also provides educators with ample space and flexibility to meet the needs and interests of pupils in relation to their immediate environment and life experiences before entry into the primary setting.

Proper understanding of this document and familiarity with the developmentally appropriate practices is a requisite for the successful implementation of this framework in the Pre-schools. As such, educators will be trained to use this document through a well-organized, accredited, continuous and systematic training programme prior to implementation in 2010.

2.2 BACKGROUND AND PHILOSOPHY

Around the age of three, the child is ready to acquire experiences beyond the home environment and discover the outer world. The experiences that children have acquired before the age of three are quite diverse in our context. Some children are cared for by caregivers in day care centers, and others by mothers, grandparents or home-based caregivers.

Up to the age of two and a half or three, the child is relatively autonomous and has a need to socialize and open up to the world. He/she starts communicating and playing with others. The pre-school is a place that caters for these needs and builds on what has been acquired by the child at home or in day care centers. In our context, for many children, both parents are working and the pre-school has an even more important role to play in caring for and educating the child. Many schools have to provide after school care services. Thus, the pre-school services aim at providing facilities and opportunities to enhance the growth and holistic development of all children as early as possible.



2.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

Brain-based research shows that the period from birth to the age of eight is a critical phase for brain development and learning; as such, pre-primary education has to provide the appropriate stimulating environment to optimize brain development which is beneficial for future learning.

The 'sensitive periods,' also known as the 'windows of opportunities,' are found during the early years. As such, children must receive the best possible care and education during these years so as to reach optimal development.

There is undeniable evidence which shows significant benefits for children who experience high quality pre-school education in Mauritius and elsewhere. Children who have participated in high quality pre-school programmes are likely to perform better in reading, mathematics and writing than other children who have not attended pre-school. Quality pre-school education, then, not only has a positive impact on children but also brings cost-effective benefits to society.

2.4 THE EARLY CHILDHOOD YEARS (0 – 8 YEARS)

The Early Childhood Years are between 0- 8. The aim of early childhood education is to develop the whole child. All the aspects of development of the child have to be addressed, namely Physical development, Cognitive and Language development, Personal, Social and Emotional development. At this level, the interrelationship between cognitive development and language is critical as children begin to express their thoughts through language and they begin to think in terms of words. Therefore, the language of the environment should be used as facilitator and support language for improving children's learning and understanding.

2.5 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN THE MAURITIAN CONTEXT

In Mauritius, children who are between 0-8 years are looked after by:

- the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare (MWRCDFW) which looks after the 0-3 year old.
- the Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources (MOECHR) which is responsible for the 3-8 year old.

The aim of early childhood care and education (0-8 years) is to focus on the holistic development of the child and to lay the foundation for lifelong learning. It is to be noted that the Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources, through its Strategic Plan (2008-2020), has proclaimed that all children aged 3 to 5 will have to attend pre-primary school, followed by 6 years of compulsory primary schooling starting at the age of five.

During the **0-3 years** the developmental progress of the child is monitored through the developmental milestones and the developmental objectives for all aspects of development. These are specified in the 0-3 guidelines document by the MWRCDFW. At this level, the role of parents and caregivers is crucial in the provision of quality interaction with the child.

For the **3-5 year** old, at pre-primary level the developmental objectives are attained through the six learning areas which are in line with international trends in Early Childhood Care and Education. However, an integrated approach is adopted where all six areas of learning are interrelated.

For the **5-8 year** old, the development and learning of the primary school child are achieved through the different learning areas as outlined in the primary school curriculum. However, to ensure a smooth transition from pre-primary to primary schooling and a gradual progression from pre-primary to Standard I, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources has instituted the Bridging the Gap Initiative (BGI) as a transitional process.

2.6 THE PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THE PRE-PRIMARY CURRICULUM

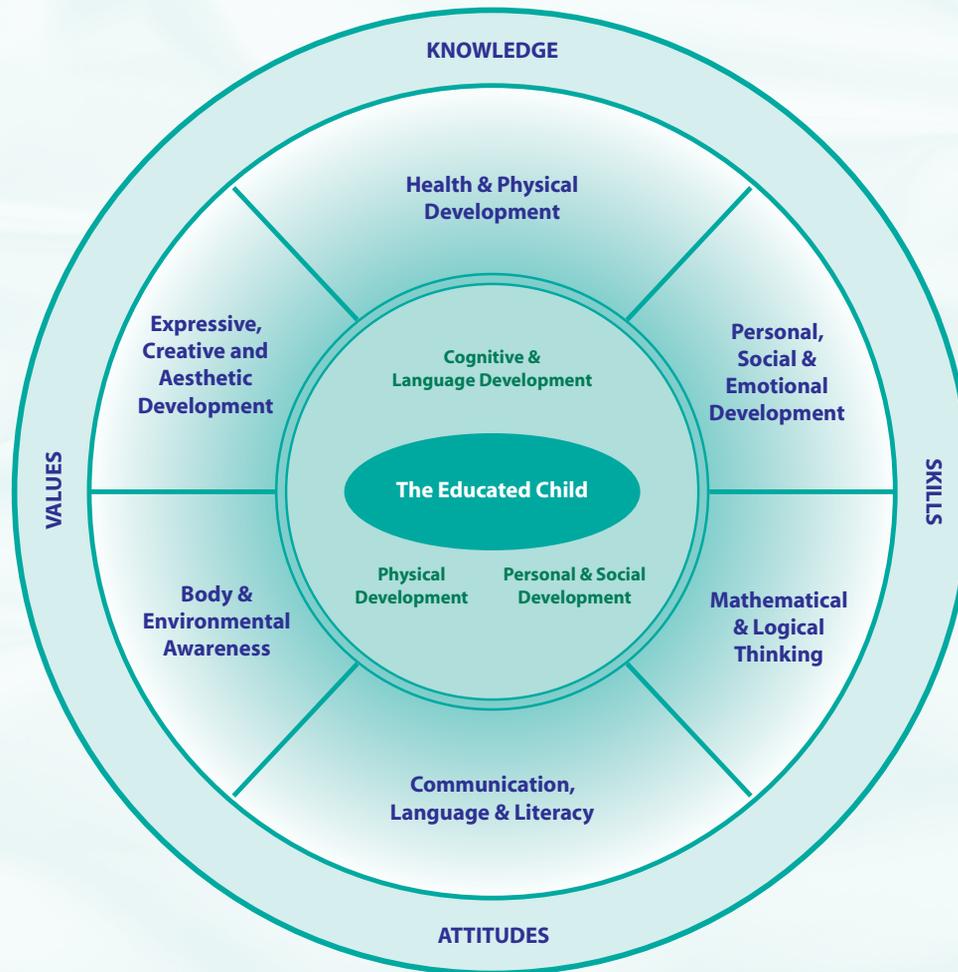
The National Curriculum Framework Pre-Primary 2009 is based on the following :

- The basic principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC as per Annex B)
- The cognitive, social, emotional, physical, aesthetic, moral and spiritual development of the child.
- The cultural diversity of the Mauritian society.
- The need to equip the child with skills to facilitate learning to read, write and count.

However, the philosophy of the following articles of the CRC has been carefully taken into consideration while preparing this framework: Articles: 5, 8, 12, 13, 14, 18, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30 and 31.

2.7 ORGANIZATION OF THIS DOCUMENT

The National Curriculum Framework is organized into six areas of learning.



1. Personal, Social & Emotional Development (PSED)

In this area of learning, children start building a sense of self through self awareness. They become aware of themselves, their feelings and develop independence and self-regulation. They learn to relate effectively to others, they also learn to respect and care for others in a multicultural context.

2. Communication, Language and Literacy (CLL)

Children learn to use language to communicate their experiences and feelings and to interact in different settings. They develop their oral (listening/speaking) and written skills (reading/writing) through involvement in a range of activities.

3. Expressive, Creative and Aesthetic Development (ECAD)

Children develop their creativity, explore and observe their environment. They use their imagination to express their opinions, feelings and ideas, using a variety of art, media, music, story telling and movement. They appreciate artistic experiences and human values.

4. Health and Physical Development (HPD)

Children learn to develop an active and healthy lifestyle by cultivating good habits, and to protect themselves by understanding basic health and safety issues. Children learn about their senses and their sensory ability to explore the environment. They also develop their gross and fine motor skills and their perceptual-motor skills.

5. Body and Environmental Awareness (BEA)

Children learn about their bodies and develop an awareness of their five senses. They also learn about plants, animals, living things and simple events occurring in the environment through observation and simple activities. This area also provides children with opportunities to learn about the importance of technology in their everyday life. They equally learn to develop the right attitudes towards the environment.

6. Mathematical and Logical Thinking (MLT)

Children learn mathematical concepts through a variety of activities in everyday life experiences. Through daily activities, children explore mathematical ideas and processes. They actively build new knowledge from previous experiences through the investigation of their physical and social environment.

2.8 LINKS BETWEEN THE OVERARCHING LEARNING OUTCOMES (OLOs) AND THE LEARNING OUTCOMES (LOs) IN THE DIFFERENT LEARNING AREAS

No	OLOs Pre-Primary Education	Personal, Social and Emotional development (PSED) (LOs)	Communication, Language and Literacy (CLL) (LOs)	Expressive, Creative and Aesthetic Development (ECAD) (LOs)
1	Socialize with family, friends, peers, teachers and other adults (NCG 1, 6)	Children interact with all children, family, teachers and other adults.	Children learn to communicate and interact with peers and adults, to express their needs and share their thoughts and feelings.	Children interact and develop healthy relationships with friends and adults through creative activities.
2	Accept each other and live together, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, age and ability (NCG 1, 6, 7)	Children develop positive attitudes towards others.	By interacting with their peers during language games and activities, children develop a bond with others.	By sharing and interacting with peers from diverse backgrounds during creative tasks, children develop tolerance, love and a sense of respect for others.
3	Adapt to and enjoy experiences of change, surprise and uncertainty (NCG 2, 8)	Children learn to respond creatively to unexpected or surprising events.	Through different language games and activities, children develop the ability to respond to new and changing situations.	During creative and interactive activities, children adapt to and enjoy improvisation and free expression.
4	Develop confidence by exploring the world using his/her body and senses (NCG 1, 2, 8)	Children show confidence while engaging in new activities, initiating ideas or speaking in a familiar group.	Children become more confident about the world in which they live through involvement in a number of language activities.	Children understand and interact confidently with their environment by using their bodies and senses in creative activities.
5	Understand fairness in relation to themselves and others (NCG 1, 3, 5, 6)	Children learn to be considerate to others.	By being exposed to a variety of creative language exercises, children are able to differentiate between right and wrong.	Children learn what is right or wrong both for themselves and for others through drama and role play activities.
6	Participate in the making, following and reworking of rules in the day-to-day activities (NCG 1, 3, 5, 6)	Children learn to follow classroom and playground rules.	Children abide by, and are encouraged to take decisions and create appropriate rules for their language games and activities.	Through creative activities children develop an awareness of rules, abide by them and develop the ability to set new ones.
7	Communicate thoughts and experiences creatively using many forms of expressions. (NCG 1, 2, 4)	Children show understanding of culture, beliefs and traditions through creative and artistic expressions.	Through creative language activities, children are encouraged to put forward and share their feelings and thoughts.	Children communicate and represent objects, ideas and experiences creatively through music, physical movement and by using a variety of art media.
8	Develop physical coordination and healthy habits. (NCG 1, 3)	Children can dress and undress independently and manage their personal hygiene.	Gross and fine motor skills are developed through language activities, and children are made aware of good health practices.	Children discover how their bodies can be used for individual / group creative expressions and develop healthy practices.

No	OLOs Pre-Primary Education	Health and Physical Development (HPD) (LOs)	Body & Environmental Awareness (BEA) (LOs)	Mathematical and Logical Thinking (MLT) (LOs)
1	Socialize with family, friends, peers, teachers and other adults (NCG 1, 6)	Children learn to co-operate, share and relate with others through co-operative / opposition games and during meal time.	Children work cooperatively with peers during practical activities in the learning area.	Children develop friendship with others while playing and participating in hands-on mathematical activities.
2	Accept each other and live together, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, age and ability (NCG 1, 6, 7)	Children learn to accept and respect each other irrespective of their physical abilities.	Children work cooperatively during field trips, indoor and outdoor science activities. Children happily engage in discovery activities.	
3	Adapt to and enjoy experiences of change, surprise and uncertainty (NCG 2, 8)	Children engage in all spontaneous movement activities happily.	Children use their senses to participate fully in indoor and outdoor activities while learning about the different components of the environment, like soil, water, sun, animals and plants.	Children enjoy experimenting with number, shapes and size by exploring various objects in their environment.
4	Develop confidence by exploring the world using his/her body and senses (NCG 1, 2, 8)	Children develop gross and fine motor skills and begin to show independence in personal hygiene.	Children develop an awareness of their five senses and use them to appreciate, and discover the environment.	Children show confidence when engaged in counting, sorting and classifying objects in everyday life.
5	Understand fairness in relation to themselves and others (NCG 1, 3, 5, 6)	Children learn to abide by simple rules set during games.	Children show care, respect and love for friends, animals and plants.	Children learn about fairness in everyday life through the using, sharing, lending and borrowing of resources in all mathematical activities.
6	Participate in the making, following and reworking of rules in the day-to-day activities (NCG 1, 3, 5, 6)	Children learn to create new steps in dance and pattern of movements during structured and unstructured play. They also start to observe some table manners at meal time.	Children develop safety habits and avoid dangers such as playing with sharp objects and plants which are poisonous.	Children follow rules while playing different mathematical games.
7	Communicate thoughts and experiences creatively using many forms of expressions (NCG 1, 2, 4)	Children use language and bodily movements to express their feelings.	Children use their senses to learn about objects and living things and communicate their findings through different simple words, drawings and play.	Pupils use simple mathematical terms, drawings, patterns and gestures to express themselves.
8	Develop physical coordination and healthy habits (NCG 1, 3)	Children learn to participate regularly in physical activities. They also demonstrate an awareness of good eating habits.	Children are actively involved in handling and manipulating objects during indoor and outdoor activities. Children demonstrate an awareness of plants and animals as sources of food.	Pupils use games in mathematics to develop manipulative skills and coordination for a healthy life style. .

2.9 A COMPREHENSIVE, HOLSTIC AND INCLUSIVE APPROACH

At pre-primary level, the curriculum needs to adopt a comprehensive, whole child and inclusive approach.

The comprehensive approach aims at constructing children's learning on their previous experiences and to make schooling a joyful experience in the life of all our children.

The holistic/whole child approach aims at developing the whole child. All aspects of development are catered for in the curriculum through the six areas of learning. The National Children's Policy (March 2004) introduced "The Whole Child Approach" which is a *"new way of looking at, of thinking and acting in favor of the child, based on a right approach founded on the principles of indivisibility and universality. It promotes a culture of "Child First" where, in all decisions and actions related to the child, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration and priority is given to children"*.

The inclusive approach: The curriculum adopts an inclusive approach in the sense that all children will be taken on board, enabling each and every child to develop according to their needs and capabilities. It will ensure that there is no form of discrimination based on ethnicity, culture or religion, home background, gender, special educational needs, disability, or differential ability.

Special Educational Needs

In the Policy and Strategy document for Special Educational Needs and Inclusive Education in Mauritius, Special Education Needs refer to children with:

- disabilities: physical, sensorial, intellectual...
- specific learning needs (specialized learning needs for gifted children or children who have major learning difficulties)
- learning difficulties arising from social problems (vulnerable groups).

CHAPTER 3 - PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS & PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 THE NEEDS OF PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN

The three-to-five year old child is a fast developing young human being. Eager to grow, the child is, however, still very vulnerable and fragile. Pre-school education must, therefore, be child-centered, ensure security, and take into account young children's multiple needs which are:

• The need to feel safe and comfortable

The young child has a strong need for cleanliness, food, sleep, safety and comfort.

• The need for love

The young child needs to feel cared for and loved. This climate of emotional security depends on the class setting, the educator's attitude, the range and management of activities. Relationships with the adult educators and peers constitute the ground base of classroom life. Favourite toys, with which children relate strongly, help the child feel secure.

• The need to move and be active

The child strongly feels the need to move and act with his body. This need can be taken care of through physical and movement education, rhymes and songs involving body movements, games involving dance movements, free movement, and dance on music, rhythms, recess games, playground activities, and sports activities.

• The need to play and to experience enjoyment

Playing with sand and water is a source of great pleasure and intellectual excitement for young children.

• The need to imitate adults

Making faces and disguises are other favourite activities of the young child. They sustain him/her in his/her desire to become an adult.

• The need to socialize

While children below three are very much self-centered, pre-school children are of an age where they open up to the world and enjoy sharing activities and playing with others. Teamwork and play and, in general, activities which involve the participation of peers, help children to satisfy this need. Even playing which generates confrontations and conflicts is to be valued as it helps the child to develop conflict-solving skills and to forge his/her personality.

• The need to enjoy quietness

While the young child increasingly enjoys playing with others, he/she still frequently needs to be free to be on his/her own or alongside others, either playing quietly or daydreaming. Books or rest corners are ideal for this. Providing materials for solitary play is also useful.

• The need to grow in autonomy

The pre-school child is eager to grow and become independent. He/she strives to become less and less dependent on adults. He/she wants to take initiatives and have his personal interests or preferences taken into account. He/she thus tries to dress or to feed himself/herself alone; he/she also chooses his/her activities and the equipment he/she will need to that effect.

• The need to express and to communicate

Becoming more and more social and fascinated by the outside world, the young child strives to express his/her perception and interpretation of the world. Language allows him/her to do that and much more. He/she exchanges views with and acts upon others. He/she also uses language as a self-prompting or a monitoring tool when engaged in activities. He/she creates worlds and derives emotional and aesthetic pleasure by inventing or listening to tales and stories, playing with words and idioms. He/she loves interpreting rhymes and songs.

Expression and communication skills will first and foremost be developed, as far as possible, in the home language of the child. The latter will, however, gradually be introduced to and be made familiar with the languages commonly used during primary schooling through communicative and/or playful activities.

• The need to discover, explore and experiment

Opening up to the world, the young child is impatient to discover his/her environment

and make out how things work. Gardening or weather observation activities, water games, manipulating familiar or new objects, observing pictures and photographs are activities that help to address this need.

- **The need to know oneself and to situate oneself in time and space**

Discovering the world is not enough. The young child also wants to come to a better awareness of his/her physical self. He/she also wants to be able to make out where he/she is and how he/she evolves in time and in space. Mathematical activities, puzzles, motor activities, tales and stories help serve that purpose.

- **The need to handle and manipulate**

Young children acquire knowledge, experiment and “harness” their environment through their senses. While at an earlier age, taste was the empowering sense *par excellence*, pre-school children experiment and learn through ‘body feel’ and ‘hands on’ activities. Playing with water, sand or earth, handling paper, hardboard, fabric, plastic or wood allows awareness of the properties of elements and materials. Manipulating shapes, volumes, colours, sizes, sets of elements introduces children to mathematical concepts. Manipulating pictures and sentences prepares reading readiness.

- **The need to create**

Young children have a powerful urge to use and develop their imaginative and creative powers. This helps them to develop a harmonious personality and enhances their intelligence. “Make as if” games, free expression, drawing and painting, inventing situations, stories and poems, creating characters or objects are all activities which converge to that effect.

3.2 HOW DO CHILDREN LEARN IN THE EARLY YEARS?

3.2.1 Introduction

Sometimes it is difficult to define what learning is and when and how it takes place. Children are constantly learning and, most of the time, without the guidance of an adult. When a baby begins to crawl, then supports himself/herself on a chair or the wall and finally walks, we say he/she has learned. When a child comes across something which is unpleasant and avoids it in future, we say he/she has learned. When he/she repeats an action or dance he/she has heard or seen others doing, we say he/she has learned. When he/she struggles with symbols and comes to read or write his/her name or a word, we say he/she has learned. Before discussing how children learn, it is important to understand why and when they learn.

3.2.2 Why do children learn?

- A child is born with a desire to find out things. His own interest and curiosity will lead him/her to discover things and gain first hand experience of the environment around him/her. He/she should, therefore, be encouraged and opportunities should be provided both at home and at school for him/her to satisfy this curiosity and learn.
- The need to achieve and succeed will drive the child to learn and try to master certain tasks and activities he/she encounters. He/She should, therefore, be exposed to challenging experiences that will make him/her want to achieve better and faster.
- A child will often want to please either the parent or the teachers and, at times, wants to be like them. If a child admires a person, he/she will wish to be like that person. Those who have the responsibility to care for children must set good examples as some children will copy them. If bad examples are set, children will learn bad things as well, but if good examples are set, children will follow and copy them.
- A desire for praise and fear of failure or punishment will make some children strive for higher and better learning. Praise for trying will encourage the child to try harder. Even in small things which do not seem important to adults such as praise for a task like feeding oneself or tying a shoe lace, will make the child stand out and he/she will want to live up to that praise and keep his/her good name.

3.2.3 When do children learn?

Children are born with the innate desire to learn. Children's experiences and learning environments during the early years greatly influence their learning abilities.

- A child will learn or benefit from activities and experiences if he/she is happy. He/she is not likely to gain much if he/she is upset, sad or afraid as he/she will be more concerned with his/her inner feelings. When a child is happy, he/she is free of emotions which might interfere with his/her participation in a particular activity. A warm, caring and happy atmosphere at home and in school is essential for successful learning.
- A child must be interested or the interest must be created in the child if he/she is to learn what is expected of him/her. Children will always find things of interest to them and they will learn as much as possible. Organized activities planned by adults should be made as interesting and as varied as possible. Where there is a challenge, there will be interest.
- A child will learn when he/she is ready. Children do not all learn everything at the same time. This means that the level of growth and development of the child will determine when he/she is ready for certain activities. Knowing this is very important for, at times, adults expect a child to know or learn certain things which he/she is not ready for. In this case, the child will either be frustrated and, therefore, unable to learn or he/she will build resistance to those activities he cannot do and develop a sense of failure. This can be a big problem to further learning. It must be remembered that, although a child may be ready for a certain activity, it might take him/her longer than another child to learn and master it.
- A child will learn when there is a need to – just like all of us.

3.2.4 How do children learn?

There are many ways in which children learn. Here are some means which should be used in the pre-school centre because they are the same ones by which children learn naturally.

• **Doing**

A child will learn more by doing something than by being told how to do it. By doing something, a child's mind becomes active. In this way his/her attention is fully engaged and he/she will gather more information than just by being told. In doing so, the child will also acquire competence in that activity.

• **Discovering and exploring**

This simply means that, left on his own, a child will explore his/her environment. He/she will touch, shake, taste, bite, open, or throw anything that comes his/her way just to find out what happens. If the experience is pleasant he/she will repeat it, if not he/she will avoid it. Through exploration and discovery, a child will find out a number of things – how things work, how they behave, what happens to them etc. This way, he/she will learn more and is likely to remember what he/she has found out. In a pre-school centre, therefore, there should be a variety of materials for children to play with and work on and opportunities should also be given so that children can find out what there is within their environment.

• **Asking questions, talking and listening**

This is another natural method of learning which should be encouraged. A child's curiosity and desire to know about the world around him/her leads him/her to ask many questions. A child will talk to himself/herself as he/she plays. His/her actions are accompanied by words and he/she talks freely as he/she works. Asking questions is a common experience which a child goes through. Even if he/she knows the answers he/she still asks. Parents and teachers should try, as much as possible, to talk with the children, listen to what they say and answer their questions.

Through this method, a child learns to express himself/herself, widen his/her knowledge and acquire vocabulary, and share what he/she knows with others. It also encourages working, promotes his/her relations with others and increases his/her understanding of the words he/she uses. It is important that a child acquires the sense of freedom to talk and be listened to. This will enhance his/her language development.

• **Imitation, Role Playing**

A child will copy an adult or an older child in a number of activities. He/she will try to act or to talk like an adult. He/she will not only copy but also play the role of an adult. A boy will pretend to drive a lorry, whereas a girl will pretend to cook or nurse a baby. To encourage this way of learning, the adults and older children should set good examples to the child. If we do not want a child to use foul language, we should not use it ourselves. The way adults behave is what the children will copy, and the impressions created can have a lasting effect on the child.

• **Trial and error and practice**

A child will also learn by trial and error. Once he/she finds out the best way of doing something successfully, then opportunities should be provided so that the child can practice several times and become expert at that activity.

• **Learning from other children**

A child will not only learn from adults but also from his/her brothers, sisters and playmates. This should be encouraged because children are closer to each other in the way they look at things. They should be encouraged to be a resource to each other – learn from each other, seek and give help to each other, and share many of their experiences.

From the above, it is clear that parents and educators must, while treating all children in the same way, also make room for the differences in an individual and try to treat them accordingly. The best way is to get to know each child as much as possible by observing him/her and talking to his/her parents.

Pedagogical approaches at pre-primary level

- **Play-Based Approach**
- **Child Centered Approach**
- **Integrated Approach**
- **Project-Based Approach**
- **Multicultural Approach**
- **Partnership with Parents and the Community at Large**

All these approaches would be supported by the use of multimedia and ICT tools to make children's learning experiences enjoyable.

3.3.1 PLAY-BASED APPROACH

Play is vital to children's healthy development and learning. Play touches all aspects of life and helps in the emotional, cognitive, physical and social dimensions of the child's life. Play is the "work" of children and it is used as an educational tool in a direct way through the use of games, puzzles and simple problem solving tasks.

*"Parents should play much more with their children,
because people who can't play can't be good at their work either"*

child of eleven

The importance of play in the education of young children is universally acknowledged and valued. Play is the natural way in which children learn. It is a great motivating force. Play is thus the most effective learning instrument for them. Play is important as a means of contributing to a happy and creative childhood, and it paves the way towards positive collective attitudes.

VALUE OF PLAY

INTELLECTUAL

Play helps children to concentrate, to reason and to organize their thinking.
In so doing, they learn to solve problems.

SOCIAL

Children learn to give and take, to take turns, to share and co-operate. During social play they reveal their personality, strengths and limitations.

EMOTIONAL

Play helps children to develop a positive self-image. It provides a way for them to express their emotions.

Play should be a pleasurable experience, which helps to relieve tension and prevent boredom.

PHYSICAL

Play helps to get rid of excess energy. It enables children to relieve tension and express themselves through movement. It helps them to exercise their muscles and develop a strong and healthy body. Play can also help divert aggressive instincts.

LANGUAGE

Through play, the children learn to share their ideas and communicate with others.

EXPLORING

Children learn by exploring and discovering new things. Early in life, children learn through their senses – by touching, tasting, seeing, feeling, smelling and hearing. Later they learn by taking things apart and looking at the component parts.

LEARNING SKILLS

Play enables children to practice skills and learn to master them.

BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION

Stacking blocks leads to the development of many skills as well as spatial, perceptual and mathematical concepts.

PLAY AND CULTURE

Any consideration of play must also include the importance of culture while discussing play opportunities for children. Gonzala Mena (1993) writes that culture helps to determine whether play is seen as something that children do under no adult involvement or whether adult involvement is valued. The cultural context in Mauritius is very varied and pre-school educators need to investigate the cultural expectations of parents in relation to play. This is important for some parents see little value in play and do not want their children to be involved in messy play. In these situations, educators need to discuss with parents the value of direct, often messy play! It is through such concrete experiences that children develop important concepts.

TYPES OF PLAY

“Play is children’s way of perceiving the world they have been called upon to change.”
Maxim Gorki

SOLITARY PLAY (PLAY ALONE)

Very young children play on their own. They do not relate to other children when playing. It takes time and a certain amount of maturity to learn to share toys and to understand that there may be rules which must be followed while playing.

PARALELL PLAY

In paralell play, two or more children play together, but without any social interaction. They are usually doing the same thing, but watch those who play on their own.

SOCIAL PLAY

During social play, children interact with one another in a game. In playing together, children learn such social skills as cooperation, taking turns, waiting for turns, following rules, winning and losing.

3.3.2 CHILD CENTERED APPROACH

An approach based on in-depth understanding of child development and learning is referred to as developmentally appropriate practice. In this approach, the educator starts from the developmental ability of the child and then takes decisions about what should be taught. The educator designs his/her curriculum based on the developmental level of the child. Developmentally appropriate practice has two dimensions:

1. Age appropriateness, that is, what is appropriate for the age of the child based on developmental averages for that age.
2. Individual appropriateness is what is appropriate for each child based on his/her unique personality and experiences.

In a developmentally appropriate approach, learning is an active process. Children learn by experiencing their indoor and outdoor environments as well as by interacting with other children and adults.

In this approach, all aspects of child development are considered when planning activities, i.e, a holistic approach is adopted where personal, social, physical, emotional and cognitive developments are catered for.

Brede Kamp & Copple, (1996), identified 12 key principles of child development that help educators make decisions about developmentally appropriate practice:

- 1) All areas of development (physical, social, emotional and cognitive) are closely related and influence one another.
- 2) Child development is a relatively orderly process, with new skills and abilities building on those previously learned.
- 3) Development proceeds at different rates for individual children and varies for different aspects of development within the child.
- 4) Early experiences can either positively or negatively influence the child's later development. Key periods lead to optimal growth in many aspects of the child's development.
- 5) Development is predictable and proceeds toward increasing complexity.
- 6) Development occurs in, and is influenced by, social and cultural contexts.

- 7) Children are active learners who construct their own knowledge of the world around them.
- 8) Both heredity and environment influence child development.
- 9) Play is essential for healthy social, emotional, physical and cognitive development.
- 10) Development is enhanced when children can practice newly acquired skills, and when they are challenged just beyond their current ability level.
- 11) Children have different learning modes and also vary in the ways in which they represent what they know.
- 12) Children who feel safe, secure, and valued will develop and learn at their highest level.

3.3.3 THE INTEGRATED APPROACH

At pre-primary level, an **integrated approach** is adopted as it reflects real-world educational experiences and matches what children and adults do outside the classroom. The integrated curriculum consists of organizing the teaching and learning process through chosen themes and related to the six areas of learning. Integrated learning makes the curriculum more relevant as it allows an in-depth study of a chosen theme, project or story. The educator chooses the appropriate theme related to the needs and interest of the children. One theme can be studied for 3-4 weeks. The steps in the thematic planning as identified by Dodge, Colker and Heroman (2002) are as follows:

- Learn about the topic selected.
- Find and organize materials related to the theme.
- Reflect on what you want the children to learn.
- Identify open-ended questions to encourage inquiry.
- Plan activities and lessons related to them.
- Invite parent participation.
- Determine a closing event or activity.
- Evaluate the theme and what children have learnt.

- The planning through the integrated approach starts with a process called webbing. The web is then translated into the planning of activities for all the areas of learning.
- The activities are planned for the whole class, small groups and adapted for children with special needs.
- There are many ways to integrate the learning experiences of children. These include using themes/ topics, stories or projects.

3.3.4 THE PROJECT APPROACH

The **project approach** is closely linked to the Reggio Emilia program where approaches are based on an in-depth investigation of topics of interest to children and educators. There are four key steps involved in implementing a project work.

Selecting a topic: Children choose a topic under the guidance of educators. The topics are limited to children's first-hand experiences as well as to topics that can be investigated in the school setting.

Beginning the project: Children are encouraged to share understanding of the topic through drawing, writing or dramatic play.

Doing the project: Children and educators engage in gathering new information on the topic. Taking field-trips, observing, manipulating objects, and talking to people are some ways that children can use to collect information.

Ending the project: The information gathered is summarized through art work, photographs, displays.

3.3.5 THE MULTICULTURAL APPROACH

The pluri-cultural tissue of the Mauritian society calls for a cultural approach in our curriculum. It is based on respect and mutual understanding of the cultures of others to promote unity.

It is generally acknowledged that a child's education begins in the home and that the task of the school is to build on what children have already learnt. Educators recognize that new experiences and information must be linked to existing knowledge and understanding if learning is to take place. For all these reasons, it is simply good practice to reflect the home experience of children in the activity room. It stands clear that a developmental and a multicultural pre-school programme can happily co-exist, provided the educator considers more fully how this should be achieved and why.

Young children attending pre-school for the first time essentially need to feel secure and settled in the activity room. They will not indulge in play activities unless they feel secure. In various activities the children imitate adults. When children play in the home corner, they can celebrate a wedding, a religious ceremony, and get involved in a group conversation.

They also speak about what they see on television, in and outside the home. Mutual respect is thus fostered by what is celebrated in the children's environment.

It is, therefore, important for all children to develop an awareness of their own beliefs, cultures, traditions and festivals, and those of their friends.

3.3.6 PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE

THE ROLE OF PARENTS

Children's first educators are the parents who play an important role in their children's lives. 'Home sweet home' is the place where children feel more secure and loved, and it is at home that they learn many things necessary in life, for example,

- Trust and love
- Objects around them
- How people get along with others

Parents have a fundamental role to play in the child's education; they need to support their children continuously and encourage them in whatever they do. The support should not only be economic but also be affective.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATORS

Pre-school educators also have an important part to play as they should be able to work closely with parents and provide the best possible ways for children's development. It is essential that they share with parents the pre-school programme.

Another important dimension of pre-school educators' role is socialization. Pre-school educators have to promote and develop a trusting relationship with parents so that they know how their children are cared for. They must show respect to parents, greet and welcome them when they bring their children in the morning and fetch them back in the afternoon. Parents must have the possibility at times to enter the class and talk to them. It is not a good practice to leave the child at the door; the pre-school educator should encourage the parents to exchange ideas. In any learning situation, the child can perhaps have some difficulties and the relationship with parents may help to find ways of helping the child.

THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE

Schools can no longer operate independently. Successful schools need strong school-community relationships. To enable schools to respond to the exigencies of a fast changing societal set up, right from the pre-primary level, schools should open up for partnership with the community. If schools have the responsibility to equip the children with such desirable qualities that make them functional in society, then the onus is on the community to support the pre-primary schools in the development and implementation of school programmes.

3.4 ASSESSMENT AS AN INTEGRATED PROCESS

Assessment forms part of the teaching and learning process. Through assessment the educator monitors the achievement of an individual child in each area of learning. This serves as a tool to construct a comprehensive picture of the short-term and long-term needs of the child and to plan future work accordingly.

However, young children do not understand assessment in the same way as older children do. Assessment tools must be used carefully as the use of wrong assessment tools may cause harm to the child. There are numerous methods to gather and report information; however, the methods selected at this level must be sensitive to cultural, racial, class, gender, linguistic and ability differences among children and families.

3.4.1 Educators

At pre-school level, assessment is integrated in the learning process. It continuously encourages, motivates and engages the learners who perceive it as an opportunity and a challenge. Assessment records the progress the child is making as a pre-school learner. Parents, educators, administrators and community members at large, all want to know and should be informed about the skills the children are learning through their own effort and about the contributions of the educators.

Assessment of young children is an ongoing process that documents evidence of early learning in order to make informed instructional decisions. This evidence may include observations, anecdotal records of children's conversations and behaviors in individual, small and large group situations, samples of artwork, drawings and photographs, and recordings or other records of children engaged in activities and play.

- **Observation**

Observations of children have proven effective in both assessment and curriculum development. It is an important tool in determining children's needs and interests for curriculum planning and assessment purposes. This is a skill that must be developed and perfected by the educator over time.

Assessment of children through observation enables educators to look at the development of the whole child. Observation is the best technique in assessing children's physical skills development, use of language during play and social interaction. When children engage in hands-on learning, observation is again one of the best choices for assessing this progress.

(i) Anecdotal records

Anecdotal records are brief written notes taken while observing the child. These notes include when the observation was carried out (day and time), who was observed, what the children were doing and what was said. The anecdotal records enable spontaneous recording of situational outcomes relating to the personalized qualities of the child.

(ii) Checklist

The checklist is another observational technique that gives information on a child. Performance indicators are used to develop a checklist to evaluate children. A checklist includes a few indicators related to only one area of learning or one aspect of development.

• Portfolio

The portfolio is an important assessment tool used by educators to compile and organize information on the individual child.

The portfolio comprises:

- The profile of the child.
- A sample of the child's work.
- Photographs of the child's activities in the classroom and outside the classroom.
- A learning log written by educators which consists of plans and accomplishments of the child.
- Interviews of children about what they have learnt.
- Anecdotal records - Brief, clear written records of classroom activities.
- Narrative reports - A report card which summarizes the child's progress over a period of time (weekly, monthly, term wise or yearly).

This portfolio is a document that can be used during transitions from home to school, from one classroom to the next or from pre-primary to primary school.

3.4.2 Parents

Parents should be partners in the accurate and sensitive assessment of the child. Educators must discuss child observation with parents and encourage them to participate in the assessment of the child's qualities, behaviour and potential.

3.4.3 Children

The children must be given the opportunities for self-assessment, such that they take pride in their achievement. Educators must observe and document things the children say and do, and establish their likes and dislikes, all of which will serve to construct learning activities to satisfy the children's curiosity.