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Introduction

The *Early Years Education Good Practice Guide* contributes to the Supreme Education Council reform initiative: Education for a New Era.

“The goal of the reform is to build a modern, world class public education/school system that provides all children with the best education possible. This new school system:

- *makes classrooms exciting places to learn;*
- *encourages all students to make the most of their talents;*
- *holds schools measurably accountable to high performance standards;*
- *involves and is responsive to parents; and*
- *nourishes Qatari values, faith and national aspirations.*

Through its school system Qatar will ensure that children grow up to become engaged citizens, innovative thinkers and productive contributors in the economic life of the Qatari nation and the world” (Supreme Education Council, 2003).

Concepts of the Reform

The concepts of the reform initiative that support the Good Practice Guide are:

- engagement – of teachers, parents and children;
- creativity, innovation;
- exploration through active learning and inquiry;
- commitment to improving educational achievement to prepare children to contribute to society;
- nourishing Qatari culture, Arabic language and religious experiences;
- inclusion, equal opportunities and
- age-appropriate specialisation.

Purpose of the Good Practice Guide

The *Guide* is intended for all those involved in teaching, administering and providing for Early Years education. It draws on research findings and professional documentation from a range of systems and regions, while attending to the culture and values of Qatar. It includes material relevant to school leaders and teachers of Pre-K (3 year olds) through Kindergarten, Grade 1 and Grade 2.

The concept of “Good Practice” is used to denote the use of appropriate teaching methods and effective decision-making which enable young children to achieve in all aspects of their learning. Good practice is evidence-based, needs based, culturally responsive and relevant to the curriculum and functional development of the child.

The purpose of the *Good Practice* Guide is to provide:

1. A framework for policy implementation at the school and Education Institute level;
2. Professional practice guidelines for implementing the *Foundation Curriculum* (Supreme Education Council, 2007) and alignment with the Curriculum Standards (Supreme Education Council, 2005), and
3. Guidance for Early Years teachers in Independent Schools as they work towards the *National Professional Standards for Teachers and Leaders* (Supreme Education Council, 2007) and professional licensure.

High quality Early Years educational experiences make a difference to the life-long learning, and social and emotional development of individuals. The *Guide* will support Early Years teachers and leaders to provide high quality programmes that:

- provide age-appropriate and well resourced Early Years educational opportunities for all children based on research and knowledge about effective practice;
- give young children a strong foundation for future and life-long learning;
- ensure children have ample opportunities to develop their social competence and creativity, and
- facilitate the transition from home to school to maintain supportive connections between the two crucial worlds of the child.

The *Guide* contains:

- a brief summary of research factors associated with beneficial Early Years Education;
- a set of values and goals related to effective Early Years practice;
- specific guidance on programme practices that promote the learning outcomes in the *Foundation Curriculum* and the *Curriculum Standards*;
- twelve areas of Early Years good practice aligned to the *National Professional Standards for Teachers and Leaders*;
- school policies that support and strengthen Early Years educational practice;
- a Glossary of professional terminology;
- bibliography, professional references and sources of data and
- appendices, including lists of recommended learning resources, useful forms, sample lessons and timetables.

Research Factors Associated with Early Years Education

Benefits of Early Years Education

There is strong evidence that high quality Early Years education (from age 3 years to primary school entry) has positive effects for children in the present and for their futures. The immediate effects include strengthening children's memory capabilities, language development, cultural identity, dispositions toward learning, and socio-emotional development. Long term effects include academic achievement, skilled jobs and lower rates of social and economic challenges (Schweinhart et al, 2005).

Neuroscience has confirmed that a child's brain is changed by experience. The parts of the brain that are used for learning are generally "wired" through processes that Jack Shonkoff and Deborah Phillips (2000) call "a continuous interaction between biology and experience". Experiences that stimulate this "wiring"

in brain regions facilitate the growth of those parts of the brain. If particular parts of the brain are not stimulated effectively through appropriate experiences, they may not develop as well or atrophy.

Adults, including early childhood educators, can enhance - or diminish - children's experiences with the ways they set up learning environments and develop relationships. Research studies have confirmed that human relationships influence the emotional and memory functioning of the brain. Longitudinal research also explains the impact of early childhood education on children's learning and development, in all areas, specifically cognitive, social-emotional, physical and linguistic (Ramsey & Campbell, 1991; Thompson, Reynolds, & Temple, 2001).

Research related to children's development of Arabic and Islamic beliefs have also been conducted with young children. Al-Meligi's study (1995) concluded that realism, formalism, utility, and social elements are features of a child's religious development and that the religious feeling is a continuous process that aims for achieving harmony with nature, human beings, and the world. An earlier study conducted by Awatif Ibrahim (1979) indicated that spiritual education develops religious feelings in Early Years and that it is not only an important preparation for future religious development but also in establishing the Islamic community.

Religious development was also studied by Harms (1944) who concluded that the religious feeling within children and teenagers progresses through the following three stages:

1. Imaginative religious concepts: this stage emerges in children 3 – 6 years old. The child imagines God in an unrealistic way.
2. Realistic stage: the child's ideas about Gods, Angels, Paradise, and Hell in this stage are derived from the real life, but in a magnified way. The child imagines God as a huge superman, and Paradise as a beautiful garden.
3. Individual stage: begins approximately in adolescence. Many people think that religious concepts are changeable, that's why it is important to give the child the correct concepts from the beginning in order not to have inappropriate images that clash with faith and belief.

High Quality Early Years Education

It is clear from research that when Early Years Education is poorly planned and does not match children's learning needs children do not make enough progress in their academic and personal development (Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study Team, 1999; Kagan & Yazejan, 2001). Educational environments must be of high quality and teaching staff must be highly qualified in order to ensure positive and lasting outcomes. Effective teachers have knowledge and understanding of themselves as teacher and learner, including their own need for extension of professional knowledge. This includes completion of high quality training courses.

Robust research about positive benefits for children indicates that the most effective Early Years teachers:

- are warm and responsive, attending to children's attachment needs and well-being;
- view cognitive and social development as equally important to help children develop self-management and independence in learning;
- ensure that the cognitive, social and physical domains reinforce each other;
- provide intentional second language learning opportunities during hands-on meaningful and practical experiences, with much less emphasis on whole class lessons and repetitive instruction;
- join in and extend children's play to develop their communication skills;
- use open-ended questions and other strategies to stimulate inquiry/ investigation;

- engage in shared thinking alongside the children to enhance their development and learning;
- accommodate each child's level of understanding and interests (rather than giving set tasks for all children);
- give regular formative and encouraging feedback to individual children;
- value children's efforts by allowing them to complete activities without excessive timetable restrictions and provide places to store unfinished work for the child to go back to;
- provide a wide array of developmentally appropriate learning experiences both indoors and outdoors that fit their capabilities;
- exhibit a wide range of relevant print in the learning environment in both Arabic and English;
- allow children to initiate personal explorations, which are then extended by adults' guidance;
- discuss the child's interests and strengths with parents, and encourage and assist parents to help them understand how they can participate in child-centered learning experiences in the home.

(Nabuco & Sylva, 1995; Reynolds, Temple, Robertson & Mann, 2001; Siraj-Blatchford , et al 2002).

In order to provide high quality educational programmes for young children, schools need to acknowledge and support the following guiding principles:

- Early Years Education is the foundation of all future learning;
- children learn best through enjoyable, meaningful and stimulating experiences where they use their senses, the mind and the body to learn. The uniqueness of effective Early Years teaching and learning is thus defined;
- effective teachers model and demonstrate a positive love of learning. They offer children shared opportunities for problem solving and focused thought in meaningful contexts;
- indicators of children's personal, social, physical and emotional well-being are strong;
- children build conceptual understandings, through first-hand experiences. They do not just memorise facts;
- children use their communication skills and abilities confidently and competently to explain their ideas;
- children are able to comprehend and converse in both Arabic and English;
- children continue throughout their school life being creative, inquisitive and original thinkers.

1. Plan Flexible Learning Experiences for Children

Rationale

The *Good Practice Guide* promotes the use of integrated curriculum and instruction and discourages the exclusive use of specific school periods for isolated content instruction. It is important to note that the *Curriculum Standards and Foundation Curriculum* do not dictate specific content periods for Early Years Programmes, however there are **recommended** percentages of time for instruction in specific content areas in Grade 1 and Grade 2.

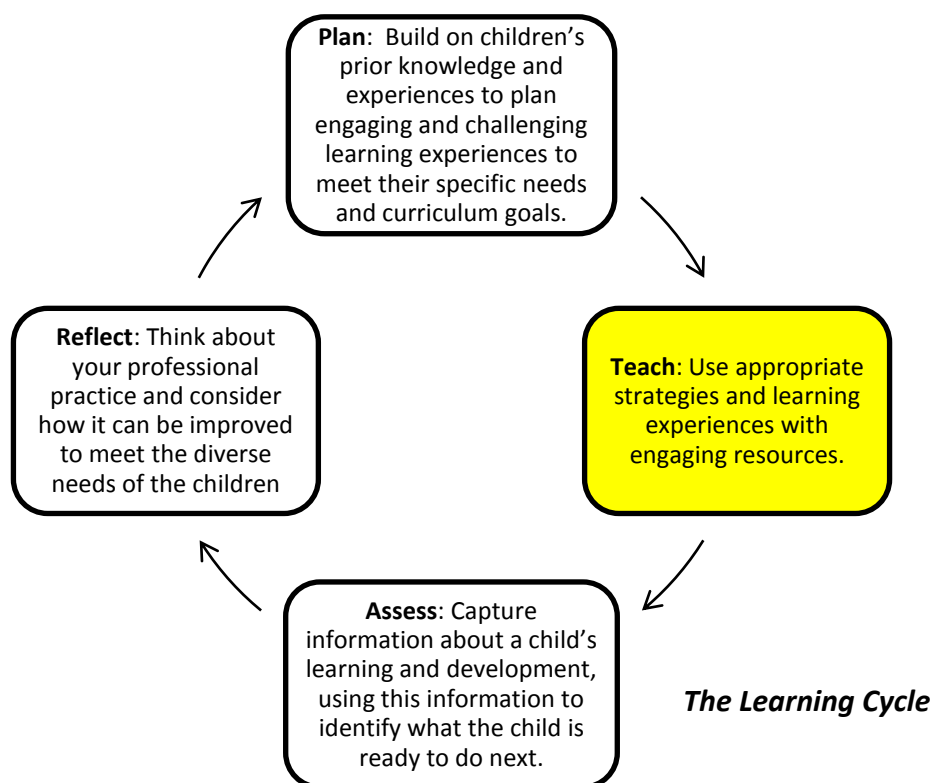
This *Guide* offers effective practices and examples for planning flexible, yet purposeful instructional schedules for Pre-K, KG, Grade 1 and Grade 2 that meet these recommended timelines through an integrated instructional approach. International research in many countries shows that young children benefit most when an integrated curriculum is provided through a mix of hands-on guided play and adult-led learning (Chung & Walsh 2000; Katz & Chard, 2000; Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whirren, 2007; Piaget, 1952). The goal for the major part of the day in effective Early Years Programmes (Pre-K through Grade 2) is adult-guided play, as well as practical and purposeful learning experiences through inquiry.

Good practices associated with flexible learning experiences

1. Planning and Teaching for children's needs and interests: Flexible and personalised learning involves planning for children's needs and interests. It is also essential that teachers:
 - use regular and on-going assessment so they are informed regarding the child's progress, achievements and new learning. Therefore, time is be allocated throughout the week to observe children as they engage in worthwhile play and learning experiences (See *Appendix A* for sample observation based assessment formats);
 - adjust planning to take full account of the information they have about children. In this way the needs of children at different developmental stages can be met through relevant and challenging activities (See the Learning Cycle diagram);
 - collaborate with team planning to share ideas and contribute towards professionalism among teachers.
 - limit the use of photocopied materials for use by all classes, as this results in all students completing the same task, thereby reducing personalisation and differentiation.
 - avoid the "every-class-does-the-same" approach as it does not allow teachers to respond to individual children or to children who have additional educational support needs (AESN), nor is it helpful in fostering innovative creative thinkers. Similar themes or units of study may be planned across classes and grade levels; however specific activities and learning opportunities are differentiated at each level to meet individual children's developmental needs and interests.

The Learning Cycle

The relationship between all aspects of classroom practice can be best illustrated by The Learning Cycle. Each area extends into the other and they are therefore inter-linked. They are of equal importance and necessary to the cycle in order to provide effective Early Years education. It is a continuous process and in good practice happens as a daily occurrence.



2. Achieving Learning Outcomes: By using a variety of teaching strategies teachers can guide children towards achieving the learning outcomes.
- Teachers have a clear picture of each child's capabilities through well focused assessment. By knowing exactly what children can do and understand, teachers can plan future teaching and learning experiences to improve each child's development.
 - Teachers can observe at the same time as interacting with children, noting when children demonstrate that they have achieved a learning outcome, which may relate to the goals of the *Foundation Curriculum*, the *Curriculum Standards*, or to the child's holistic development (See *Appendix A* for sample observation assessment formats).
 - Planning shows how children, who are at different stages of understanding/development, are addressed and challenged.
 - Teachers ensure planned activities will take full account of all learning objectives. They ensure learning is meaningful by linking appropriate learning areas together. For example in role play children may re-enact a well known story such as 'The Three Bears.' They learn to play together as a team, develop self-help skills, to count, sort and order plates and cutlery, to acquire and communicate new words and sentences, in a meaningful and enjoyable situation, and to be creative through 'pretending'.
 - Teachers can incorporate information and concepts that address the Early Years *Foundation Curriculum* and the *Curriculum Standards* where appropriate, to support the interests, development and achievement of all children (See *Appendix B* for sample alignment between *Foundation Curriculum* goals and *Curriculum Standards*).

3. Instructional Strategies: Classes for children age 3 years through Grade 2 offer a variety of instructional strategies including:
- child-initiated and adult-guided play/learning experiences where adults join in appropriately to extend communication, cognitive, motor and social skills development and recognise ‘teachable moments’;
 - adult-initiated small group activities, where children are taught new skills and concepts across the curriculum, through focused discussion and subsequent activity;
 - whole-class activities, including dialogic reading, storytelling, inquiry and creative expression activities and
 - circle time, in large or small groups, where new ideas are promoted and discussed.

The younger the child, the greater the proportion of the day that should be available for adult-guided play/learning experiences, including extended periods of physical activities outdoors (weather permitting) or indoors (in addition to break time) (Fein, 1992, Schultz, 1992). The recommended times during the school day:

Pre-KG (age 3): 75-85% guided play, 10-15% small groups and 5-10% whole-class activities

KG1 (age 4-5 year olds): 55-70% guided play, 25-30% small groups, and 5-15% whole-class activities

KG2 (age 5-6 year olds): 40-60% guided play, 30-40% small groups, and 15-20% whole-class activities

Grade 1 and Grade 2: 20-30% guided play, 30-40% small groups, and 30-40% whole activities
(See *Appendix C* for sample plans for KG through Grade 2).

4. Adult-guided play/learning: A variety of learning experiences per class are prepared and readily available for children to select independently so they do not wait for learning resources to be distributed or teachers to present directions.
- Adults are skilled at providing play activities that challenge children so they learn to be active learners.
 - Adults support children to build new concepts, ideas and skills and help them use their mathematical understanding to problem solve.
 - Adults become actively involved in play activities, listening and joining in conversations. They guide and extend children’s exploration and thinking. They position themselves at the child’s level, both intellectually and physically.
 - Adults circulate throughout the classroom to ensure children remain on task, improve concentration skills, learn how to control their behaviour and understand the need for rules.
 - Adults talk to children about their activities to help develop communication skills particularly about the ‘here and now’.
 - Adults help children explore and represent learning experiences in creative and imaginative ways to help them make sense of the world.
 - Adults ensure activities remain available for an appropriate period of time so that all children have opportunities to access them. They plan the day so that children have opportunities to revisit and consolidate their new learning. Adults are readily available to support children’s developing thoughts so they can help take learning forward.
5. Whole-class teaching: Whole group activities are useful for children to hear and see the teacher give clear explanations, demonstrate learning activities or introduce specific vocabulary. Learning experiences that could be promoted during the whole class times include:
- connecting learning experiences to Islamic studies;

- vocabulary and language learning (English and Arabic);
- songs and rhymes;
- information related to the unit of inquiry ;
- the calendar, news, events of the day/week;
- rules and procedures (behaviour, assemblies, excursions, etc.) and
- story reading, storytelling, with adult/child participation in meaningful conversations.

It is strongly recommended that whole group times are brief, especially for younger children in Pre-K and KG. Succinct whole class times that present interesting and age-appropriate materials will be most effective and reduce the amount of behaviour challenges.

- A general rule states that for large group time allocate 4 minutes per year of age of the child to determine an approximate duration (for age 3(x4mins.)=12 mins; age 4 (x4mins.)= 16mins; age 5(x4mins,)= 20 mins.
- When teachers exceed these recommended group times, the probability of children misbehaving increases (Eddowes & Aldridge, 1990; Ratcliff, 2001).
- Some activities, especially those to encourage communication, are most effective in smaller groups of children. Smaller groups are less threatening for younger or reserved children, and enable every child to contribute.

6. Daily Schedule: All Early Years programmes provide a plan of daily routines that are differentiated for each grade level (Pre-K through Grade 2).

- Purposeful play and intentional teaching and learning experiences need to be planned throughout the day (Epstein, 2006; Flannery & Watson, 1993; Frede 1995; Hughes, 1999) and must include targeted opportunities for addressing and integrating the five key components of the *Foundation Curriculum: Communication (English and Arabic); Exploration (Math and Science); Creative Expression (Art and Music), Managing Self, Developing Identity (Personal, Social and Emotional Development) and Physical Development*. These areas also incorporate ideas related to Islamic studies. These *Foundation Curriculum* areas are aligned with the *Curriculum Standards*. (See *Appendix B*) for sample alignment.
- About 8-10 diverse learning experiences are provided daily for guided play in Early Years classrooms (one activity for every 2-3 children). Some of these may need to be provided in the corridors or hallways if classrooms are small or space is limited.
- Snack time is used to encourage social development and effective relationships within a relaxed and friendly environment.
- Indoor/outdoor activities are purposeful and well-planned and include a wide range of learning opportunities for all children and to address Physical Education learning objectives. For more information see *Physical Education Curriculum Standards* (2008).
- The daily plan delineates specific times to focus on Arabic and English communication skills development (See *Appendix C* for sample daily plans). Both languages are taught within a safe, secure and meaningful learning environment.

7. Learning Materials: Sufficient materials are available in every classroom so that children in small groups of 2, 3 or 4 can play and learn alongside each other as they participate in similar activities. Teachers should ensure:

- resources are easily accessible and used to create a challenging environment;
- free-form materials (sand, water and playdough) are available in all classrooms;

- as many as four books per child for language and literacy development are available in each classroom and
- books are changed on a regular basis to reflect children’s interests and support integrated learning experiences.
(For additional recommendations and examples, see *Appendix D*.)

8. Leadership in the Early Years: For each classroom the Early Years Programme leadership will need to guide and support teachers through implementing the following practices at each of the grade levels:

- the allocation and responsibilities of teachers and other adults working with the class (See SEC Website for more information www.english.education.gov.qa/);
- ensuring teachers have the resources and materials necessary to meet the children’s needs and interests and evaluate the impact these are having on children’s learning (See *Appendix D* for resource list);
- monitoring the way adults use language during each activity/time schedule and how well these are integrated;
- documentation of children’s learning through assessment records and portfolios;
- ensuring that there is a balance between flexibility and consistency in routines, so that if there are changes to time, space and/or staffing the practices outlined in the *Early Years Good Practice Guide* can still be implemented;
- evaluation of the Early Years programme using the *Early Years Quality Assurance Programme Evaluation Rubric* (Supreme Education Council, 2008) (see *Appendix J*).

2. Use Teaching Strategies and Resources that Engage Children

Rationale

As noted previously, the core *Curriculum Standards* and the *Early Years Foundation Curriculum* do not prescribe or mandate timetables for content specific lessons in Early Years Programmes. Both sets of standards provide significant support for the use of teaching strategies and resources that engage learners in developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive ways. Small-group instruction and “hands-on” teaching are two approaches that are effective when teachers take into consideration children’s developmental needs and interests.

Whole-group instruction/ teaching: Instruction of all children in a large group by a single teacher should be used minimally in Early Years classrooms. Research (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997) has shown that reliance on the teacher-directed instructional approach in early years classrooms may result in temporary progress or achievement, but often sets up problems for children by Grade 6 and onwards. At that time, children who have experienced mainly intensive direct instruction and too much whole class teaching in early years classes from age 4 years and above may demonstrate low achievement and poor behaviour, because critical independent skills for learning and decision-making have not been developed. Therefore children become unmotivated in later school years and have limited enthusiasm for learning.

Learning by doing (hands-on): Educational experts around the world are in agreement that instruction for young children is most effective when learning opportunities are based on interactive and play-based experiences that consider children’s learning and overall development holistically (Siraj-Blatchford, 1992; Zigler, Singer & Bishop-Josef ,2003). Adults must therefore ensure children use all their senses and have worthwhile and relevant experiences that involve: seeing, touching, hearing, smelling and feeling and sometimes, tasting (Copple & Bredekamp , 2009).

The *Early Years Education Good Practice Guide* offers three effective, interrelated teaching approaches for Pre-K through to Grade 2 that are consistent with the Education Reform initiative. These effective teaching approaches are described in this section of the *Good Practice Guide* as alternative approaches to whole-group, direct instruction. All three approaches allow children to be actively involved in constructing their own knowledge and understanding as they engage in:

- 1. Learning through inquiry and investigation**
- 2. Learning through play**
- 3. Learning through integrated units**

Learning through Inquiry and Investigation

Rationale

When children are committed to their own learning they tend to support and build on each other's ideas and initiate new inquiries. Learning through an inquiry approach develops research and problem-solving skills and becomes a lifelong skill that supports effective decision-making. This approach also values the children as active and competent learners. This teaching approach allows children to be curious and ask questions. Teachers serve as guides and use open-ended questions to help children understand concepts in familiar and unfamiliar situations. Teachers engage with children's own thinking and decision-making. They support children in working things out and asking questions for themselves. (Frede, 1995; Wood, 1998). Through inquiry, children are encouraged by teachers to:

- show interest and curiosity;
- ask questions, wonder, discover and explore;
- take a central role in their own learning;
- develop positive attitudes, independence and enthusiasm for learning;
- develop skills to investigate, theorize, create and reason and
- identify problems and discover solutions.

Benefits of learning through inquiry

The specific benefits of learning through inquiry are:

- bridges the gap between knowing and not knowing;
- builds on children's previous experience;
- takes children through their 'Zone of Proximal Development' (Vygotsky, 1978), (refer to Glossary for further information) and
- helps children gain increasingly sophisticated levels of conceptual understanding (Pappas & Tepe, 2002).

Good practices associated with teaching and learning through inquiry

1. Teachers identify what children already know and understand through high quality assessment.
2. Teachers invite children to "think out loud" providing the teacher with a window into their minds.
3. Teachers guide focused discussion by asking open-ended questions (see below for examples).
4. Teachers encourage children to think about thinking (metacognitive skill development).
5. Teachers support children to construct their own working theories and refine them as they gain new understanding.
6. Teachers arouse curiosity and maintain interest by providing children with a range of background experiences, resources and activities. For example, as children experiment with water they become curious about the power of water to move objects. The teacher presents a water wheel and the children learn to apply water pressure to rotate the wheel. They begin to formulate theories about the concept of the power of water to generate energy.
7. Teachers guide children to reach deeper levels of understanding and knowledge.
8. Teachers observe and listen to children, noting their questions, wonderings and interests.
9. Teachers present new challenges and materials.
10. Teachers engage children in extended conversations using specific vocabulary in both Arabic and English .

11. Teachers invite children to express ideas from their inquiry, through the creative arts.
12. Teachers welcome new ideas from children and adjust the direction in their planning accordingly.
13. Teachers guide children to meditate on the Creator of this universe, and His blessings on His creations, so that children develop an attitude of love and thankfulness for His gifts.
14. Teachers develop the religious attitudes related to the child's social life.
15. Teachers develop the religious motive practically, through play, such as embedding the Islamic values and morals in the school and social environments.

1. Open-ended questions might begin in the following way:
2. What makes you think that.....?
3. How do you know that.....?
4. If this were changed what might happen.....?
5. How would you make different?

Learning through Play

Rationale

Play is the natural mode of learning during childhood and a basic right of all children (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990). Beyond the humanitarian aspect, there are many beneficial reasons described in research evidence to provide frequent, extended opportunities for young children to participate in play (Moyles, 2005; Wong et al, 2008; Wood & Attfield, 1996). Research has shown that extended periods of play (approximately 45 minutes to one hour) are recommended for children to develop more complex play themes and scenarios. Play sessions less than 20 minutes do not provide children with adequate time to plan and develop more elaborate play scenarios – thus limiting imagination, creativity, language and socialisation.

Through social play, children engage in joint planning, problem solving and goal seeking. Adult-guided play helps children develop social skills that will enable them to interact positively in the community and make a valuable contribution to society as they grow up.

When children do not participate in social play, there can be negative consequences for academic success (Bergen, 2001). Teachers in Early Years classrooms need to plan and provide purposeful opportunities and encouragement for children to participate in social play. A pattern of non-social or withdrawn solitary play can foreshadow communication difficulties and negative self-esteem in later childhood and adolescence. Children who have additional education support needs (AESN) may need targeted support to facilitate their participation in social play (Burke, 2008).

Benefits of play

Research shows that play:

- promotes children's overall development;
- directly promotes cognitive development and problem-solving skills;
- serves as a vital aspect of early childhood curriculum; (reinforcing the need for educators to resist policies that reduce time for play);

- its positive impact on achievement and behaviour is sustained long-term when teachers join in children's play;
- imaginative social play enables children to play with or alongside others in invented or creative situations and engage in social dialogue;
- imaginative play develops at approximately the same time as receptive and expressive language and thus promotes the use of mental representations;
- imaginative play requires the ability to transform objects and actions symbolically and demonstrates that a high level of mental ability has been attained;
- requires the portrayal of emotions appropriate to varied situations;
- involves role-taking, improvisation and acting out others' thoughts and actions;
- promotes empathy – considering the thoughts and feelings of others –which is a higher-order thinking skill that is important in helping to overcome difficulties and misunderstanding at all levels of society;
- contributes to the social and linguistic competence vital for school success and
- requires that children communicate in order to improvise, to compromise and to negotiate agreements (Chenfeld, 2006; Hyson, 2003; Montie, Xiang & Schweinhart 2006; Stegelin, 2005)

Good Practices associated with teaching and learning through play

- Teachers engage children in supervised and purposeful play, including imaginative play, for extended periods every day, not just confined to breaks (Northern, 2005).
- Teachers provide a range of resources that are updated and exchanged regularly to reflect the children's needs, interests and content of the areas of study.
- Teachers consistently plan purposeful play opportunities as a medium for learning.
- Teachers engage in conversations with the children, entering into the world of their imagination, finding out what they know, understand and can do (Rubin & Howe, 1986).
- Teachers extend children's knowledge and understanding by asking questions, providing suggestions and adding new resources. While playing with toy animals, the children may suggest painting a sign that says "Zoo." In this way, they are learning about letter sounds, about the purpose of writing and the direction and formation of letters in a child-initiated activity that has meaning for them (Roskos, Christie & Richgels, 2003).
- Teachers encourage children to ask questions during play activities. This will allow children to reveal their own particular interest in, for example, animals, cars or space.
- Teachers answer children's questions and extend their thinking and curiosity in new directions. Children know from these responses that the teacher values and respects their play. In response, children will set themselves new challenges and develop deeper levels of understanding.
- Teachers locate and provide resources (books, toys, websites, DVDs) related to children's interests.
- Teachers document and record the actions, interactions and interests of the children and use this formative assessment information to inform further planning.

Learning through Integrated Units

Rationale

Holistic learning encompasses all aspects of a child's learning including social, emotional, intellectual and physical development. This means that:

- young children learn best when their early learning experiences represent the holistic nature of their natural growth and development;
- children's learning experiences are not divided into separate disciplines or content areas as it is impossible for them to think like that;
- young children typically over-generalise because every new experience is related to previous ones and builds on previous understanding and
- when new information or experiences create cognitive dissonance (a different view from his or her current theory) the child looks for new ways to rationalise and make sense of the experience – and their strategies are likely to be a mix of intellectual, physical and socio-emotional responses (Festinger, 1962).

Traditional teaching methods attempt to break up children's learning into disciplinary boundaries. When children are taught in this way, it gradually diminishes their ability to see the world as an interconnected whole. Isolated skills and items of knowledge are disconnected and have little meaning; therefore memorised information is quickly forgotten (Kember, 1996). What is more, if the isolated learning is a word or a letter, they tend to learn labels/vocabulary without being able to talk about real things and situations.

Good practices associated with teaching and learning through integrated units

1. Teachers plan children's learning experiences around integrated themes that are relevant and match the interests of the children.
2. Teachers offer hands-on, meaningful experiences where children gain knowledge, conceptual understanding, skills and abilities that link curriculum learning areas and aspects of development. (physical, intellectual, language, emotional and social) (Hyson, 2008).
3. Teachers develop units of work that are outlined to illustrate how the topics chosen are linking to the Foundation Curriculum.
4. Teachers recognise that children's inquiries during the implementation of the units may take an unexpected direction from the written plan (see Section 8 on Planning).
5. Teachers are responsible for ensuring that the appropriate concepts are taught whilst maintaining children's interest and enthusiasm.
6. Teachers ensure that the integrated learning units encompass all subject areas such as Science, Mathematics, Exploration, Creative Arts and Literacy.
7. Teachers make effective use of ICT in a variety of ways throughout the teaching environment.
8. Teachers engage children in conversations in Arabic and English.
9. Teachers vary the time allocated for each unit based on the topic and the interest of the children. Typical units of study may range from as little as 2 weeks to several months. The content should match children's interests and age group. See Appendix C for sample planning.

3. Foster Language Development and Bilingualism

Rationale

In the Early Years, language development proceeds at a very rapid rate. The language models and guidance provided during this time will significantly affect children's long-term prospects of becoming successful communicators and achieving academic success. Through research, linguists and early childhood experts generally agree on the following about language learning in the Early Years:

- children's first language competency (for example, Arabic) has a crucial influence on cultural identity, emotional stability and conceptual development;
- from birth, children need to be immersed in rich language and cultural experiences;
- competency in two languages can enrich personal growth and understanding;
- additional languages can be learned successfully at any age;
- learning a new language is most successful when learners are immersed in contexts where the additional language is useful/has meaning;
- the strongest indicator of successful learning of an additional language is competence in the first language and
- stimulating and extending the child's existing Arabic ability is important for all learning.

(August & Shanahan 2006; Francis, Lesaux & August 2006)

Children who are competent users of their first language find it easier to learn other languages. If children intuitively understand and use the vocabulary, rules and structures of one language, they have a good foundation for acquiring a new language. Children in the early years who are learning two languages either simultaneously or sequentially are said to be 'emergent bi-linguals' (Reyes, 2006). Recent research study in the Kindergarten classrooms in Qatar indicated that many children are still in the process of establishing a foundation of vocabulary in their first language when they enter school (Kelly & Al Madaadi, 2009). Numerous research studies have illustrated that young children who have strong vocabulary skills in preschool are more successful readers and have higher achievement than their less accomplished peers as they progress through the primary grades (Barbarin, Bryant, McCandies et al., 2006; Hart & Risley, 1995; NRP 2000; Snow 2001). Young children advance their conceptual understanding and sustain their creativity best in their first language. The addition of a second language serves to broaden children's linguistic knowledge and communication resources.

Children can acquire the basic sound skills of their mother tongue (Arabic language) through the religious experience. For example: repeating, memorising, and giving simple explanations for the chapters of the Holy Qur'an, religious stories and stories of Prophets, invocations and glorifications of God, religious songs, and also talking about faith and the love of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). These activities, presented by Arabic teachers in the classrooms, need to be carefully monitored by coordinators to ensure that the use of the Arabic language is clear and accurate.

Good practices associated with teaching and learning an additional language

1. Teachers give **priority to nurturing the children's first language**, which in Qatar is typically Arabic.
2. Teachers maintain community beliefs and values and build Qatari cultural vitality, through the use of the Arabic language as the main language of instruction for children's learning in the Early Years, especially for three and four year olds.
3. Throughout the early years (Pre- K through Grade 2) teachers focus learning using the child's primary language as the development of dual-language skills are enhanced. Schools promote the linguistic and cultural experiences that children have been intimately immersed in since birth.
4. Teachers typically present new concepts in Arabic and English to support children's emerging bilingualism and dual language competence (Tabors, 1997).
5. Teachers establish and monitor children's individual language profiles. As part of the enrolment process, teachers establish the child's language profile (See Appendix E for Sample Language Development Profile).
6. In Pre-K through Grade 2 classrooms, language learning—whether Arabic or English—concentrates on the communication skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. Languages are not used as an isolated subject area, taught through lessons using primarily direct instructional methods.
7. Teachers support children's early and emergent reading skills throughout the day and across all curriculum areas.
8. Teachers role model writing and make sure that children use and develop their creative writing and handwriting skills in meaningful contexts.
9. Teachers promote communication skills through active, enjoyable and rich language learning experiences (Christie & Roskos, 2003).
10. Teachers support young children as they advance their conceptual understanding and develop their creativity when they are immersed in a language rich environment (Tabors, 1997).

11. Teachers use many language rich experiences, in English and Arabic, that include:

- reading stories, with expression and sound effect;
- storytelling with props;
- action songs;
- role-plays;
- acting out stories;
- interactive games;
- puppets;
- a variety of visual and tactile resources in Arabic and English;
- writing activities such as a continuation of songs, stories and other media experiences and
- play situations where children can connect new words to meaningful contexts

For more information about fostering bilingualism in the Early Years see the Special Policies section 'Bilingualism' in this document.

4. Create Supportive and Challenging Learning Environments

Rationale

The physical environment in educational settings effects the behaviour and development of young children. Environments for children, aged 3 years through Grade 2, need to be purpose-designed. Equipment and resources are selected with differentiated learning intentions in mind in order to facilitate an appropriate and wide range of learning needs and interests (Siraj-Blatchford, 1999). The environment in which children learn needs to be safe and secure. See the *Guidelines for Early Years Health and Safety Standards* (SEC, 2008). Activities that adults provide need to be rich and diverse. They need to excite, entice and challenge children. The relationships between adults and children need to be warm and comfortable to help children achieve. Research clearly illustrates the link between academic achievement and supportive and challenging learning environments (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004).

As active learners, children develop skills through experiences with people, objects and environments. In fact, many early childhood experts believe that the “environment is the curriculum” for young learners, whether indoors or outdoors (Gandini, 1998). Activity or play-based learning environments help children develop positive attitudes toward learning and offer ideal opportunities for adult and child interaction and social interactions (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Malaguzzi, 1996;).

Many Early Years philosophies state that children should have some control over the direction of their learning. They need to be enabled to learn through experiences of touching, moving, listening, seeing, and hearing. Children have a [relationship](#) with others and with material items in their world that they need to be allowed to explore and have many opportunities to express their themselves. (Caldwell, 2003).

It is through social interactions that children increase their knowledge and understanding, as well as develop critical independent thinking skills that support life long learning. Classrooms are social places wherein teachers and children can negotiate the curriculum and bring their own experiences to enhance learning. Guided participation in the activities of children is the primary role of the teacher; active learning and the expression of ideas through interactions with adults, peers and the environment are the primary business of children (Hill, Fu & Stremmel, 2002).

Good Practices in establishing supportive and challenging learning environments

1. Pre-K, Kindergarten, Grade 1 and 2 classrooms support all levels of play development, including exploratory, constructive, creative and dramatic play.
2. Early learning environments include a range of multi-sensory materials.
3. Some materials are adaptable (e.g. blocks or dressing up clothes) so that they can be used in a variety of ways (Alexander, Rose and Woodhead, 1992).
4. Learning activity time is used flexibly and supports inquiry and investigation projects that take place over extended periods of time—hours and days (Youngquist & Pataray-Ching, 2006).
5. Early learning environments have permanent areas of investigation as well as areas that are changed to capture children’s interest and provide new challenges, thereby motivating new learning.

6. Teachers provide writing resources to support writing development, including clip boards, note books and writing pads, in all areas.
7. Indoor space is divided into clearly defined and labelled learning areas that support and reflect children's interests and developmental levels. For example, blocks, dramatic play, art, library, sand, water, ICT, music and movement, Science and discovery, playdough, carpet area etc.
8. Materials are well-organised and stored in consistent places in the classrooms, with labels in Arabic and English accompanied by pictures and/or photographs.
9. Indoor environments will have a wide variety of environmental print on display to enhance children's literacy skills in Arabic and/or English (Roskos & Neuman, 2000).
10. The room arrangement allows ease of movement and access to resources appropriate for the physical, social, emotional and academic capabilities of children Pre-K through Grade 2.
11. Teachers consider a range of purposes when planning the layout: quiet areas for relaxing and reading, areas with new challenges or resources to stimulate investigations, social areas where children can interact with friends, a computer station where children can seek information, and an instructional area for group and whole-class times
12. Valuable learning opportunities are planned outside the classroom. Other areas within the school or KG are utilised for a range of learning experiences.
13. A larger area of space is allocated so children can run and play freely to develop their muscles and coordination skills, and develop their imaginative play, especially during the hot seasons.
14. Playground equipment is specifically designed for Early Years. The outdoor area is shaded, and easily accessible via several doors. As well as sun safety, other safety principles and practices are followed, as noted in the *Guidelines for Health and Safety Standards in Early Years Programmes in Independent Schools (2008)*.
15. Outdoor areas are designed to include natural materials such as rocks, sand, plants and earth mounds to stimulate children's creativity and imagination and scientific investigation. Children have planned time each day to play and learn in the outdoor area, not just at break time (Hartle & Johnson, 1993).
16. Children are expected to adapt and maintain the learning environment by putting items away into the correct places and tidying up. Children display their art work and projects with adult guidance.
17. Teachers monitor the noise level in the indoor area and model the use of appropriate tone and volume in various learning environments. Soft mats, curtains and large wooden notice-boards all help to soften noise. Children will copy adults and can be taught to talk with each other both quietly and respectfully.

(See *Appendix F* for examples of indoor and outdoor learning environments.)

5. Construct Learning Experiences beyond the Classroom

Rationale

Early Years education needs to connect children to experiences in real life beyond the walls of the school (Katz & Chard, 2000). Relevant excursions into the community and visitors to the school/classroom offer children opportunities to build their knowledge and skills in authentic situations. These could include a dhow ride at the harbour or a visit to the theatre for a dramatic performance. The questions that arise from these events can start new researches in the classroom.

Good practices when constructing learning experiences beyond the classroom

1. Teachers plan excursions that involve children going out into the community to see relevant places and participate in meaningful activities that link to the child's current learning and their interests (*See Appendix G* for excursion procedures and risk assessment forms and places to visit and visitors).
2. Teachers need to consider the concepts or themes they are teaching and who or what will help to develop children's inquiry and learning experiences.
3. Teachers use the expertise of community members as visitors who contribute their expertise and knowledge to a theme, unit or learning activity.
4. Teachers arrange experiences that link children to the community early in a theme in order to provoke children's questions for further inquiry and to allow them to build on this new experience. In this way teachers can use children's experiences and theories and share their own experiences and learning with the children in their lesson planning (Malaguzzi, 1996).
5. Teachers prepare the children well by planning and discussing the visitor or the excursion with them. This might include the use of pictures or other stimulus materials to help them visualize the forthcoming event.
6. Teachers model the inquiry process by collecting information from the internet, brochures, books and DVDs before the event and by helping the children to elicit their own questions to be answered. Teachers might record the children's discussions before the event in order to test their predictions afterwards and compare them with the reality that they experienced (Pappas & Tepe, 2002).
7. Teachers discuss and reflect on the visitor or the excursion afterwards with the children. They support children who want to continue with further inquiries about the topic
8. Teachers involve children in documenting the learning by using a range of strategies to write or record the event. Children can make posters, individual books with drawings or big books with photos from the event with text written in big print in Arabic and/or English to read again and again. The teacher might also help the children to use ICT to make a digital presentation that could be shown to parents and other guests.

6. Integrate ICT into Learning Experiences for Children

Rationale

Children are growing up in a world where they are surrounded by technology and their access to and use of it begins early, even before Kindergarten (DeBell & Chapman, 2006). Research has found that computer literacy and skills are increasingly necessary in a knowledge based world and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) needs to be reflected in a child's early learning environment (Rathbun, West & Hausken, 2003). Children gain skills, knowledge and conceptual understanding about and through the technology they use (Espinosa, Laffey, Whittaker & Sheng, 2006; Haugland, 2000; Klein, Nir-Gal & Darom, 2000). Examples include cameras, computers, overhead projectors, light boxes, web-based texts, audiotape recorders, and remote control toys. When computer technology is used effectively and integrated across all curriculum areas, an abundance of real life experiences from the outside world are brought into the classroom. These provide purposeful and meaningful learning experiences and assist in providing a range and balance of learning experiences across the curriculum (Bennett, Wood & Rogers, 1997). To the greatest extent possible, children should be given skills that enable them to use technology safely and independently.

Good practices for integrating ICT into teaching and learning experiences

1. Teachers use technology as a tool for children to access information, have fun with friends and solve problems in natural ways, just like adults use technology in their everyday lives. Technology is not isolated as a separate curriculum area, instead, it is integrated to support teaching and learning throughout the day, therefore children should have access to computers within the classroom.
2. Teachers provide a range of different forms of technology in early learning environments that are inviting and accessible to children. For example, the dramatic play area could have fascinating and useful technology for children's play, such as walkie-talkies, cash registers, remote controlled cars, mobile phones, computers and DVD players. These items are changed depending on the theme of the play area.
3. Teachers create opportunities for children to become familiar with the range of technology used throughout the school, e.g., by visiting the principal's office, the library/learning centre and the secretary's office to find out about computer systems, the computer server, printers, the photocopier and the fax machine. Children could send a fax or make a photo-copy for a specific purpose related to a learning inquiry.
4. When choosing educational software, teachers ask, "What can children do with this to extend their learning?" rather than "What can the software do?" The software itself should not determine the curriculum; it should facilitate children's learning. Software needs to scaffold the goals of the *Foundation Curriculum*.
5. Teachers guide children to use the computer for a real purpose. In many buildings, a computer lab is available for young children to learn foundational skills for use across all curriculum content areas. Teachers allocate time to show children how to use the mouse and keyboard. Twenty to thirty minutes is an appropriate amount of instructional time and should include experimentation and exploration.

6. Teachers ensure that children's computer use does not detract from active learning through play. All children should have equal access to computers. Some children may need to have computer time monitored and others will need to be encouraged to have a turn. Teachers engage children in groups of 2-3 children. When children are grouped around a computer, the group nature of learning enhances engagement, builds social skills and sets up natural situations for conversations and language development.
7. Overhead projectors or light boxes can be used for discovering and creating pattern and shape. Objects can be placed and repositioned for effect as children explore colour, shape, form and space. An overhead projector can provide a tool to recreate the children's pictures on a larger scale for the children to then paint (onto paper). Pictures used on the overhead can make a backdrop scene for children's imaginative play or a puppet theatre.
8. Camcorders can be used to record local dances and songs as well as all kinds of imaginative play, such as puppetry or dressing-up, and playing film back gives children an audience and appreciation for their creativity. Digital cameras can record children's imaginative constructions that would otherwise need to be disassembled. Children can use the digital cameras themselves to photograph each other or collect patterns from objects in the world around them and add the print outs to their 2D or 3D creations.
9. Teachers use interactive white boards to bring the World Wide Web into the classroom. Children can develop concepts and independence using this form of technology, as well as responsible use of technology under the teacher's guidance.

More information can be found at:

http://foundation.e2bn.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=category§ionid=4&id=7&Itemid=28

7. Assess and Report on Children's Learning

Rationale

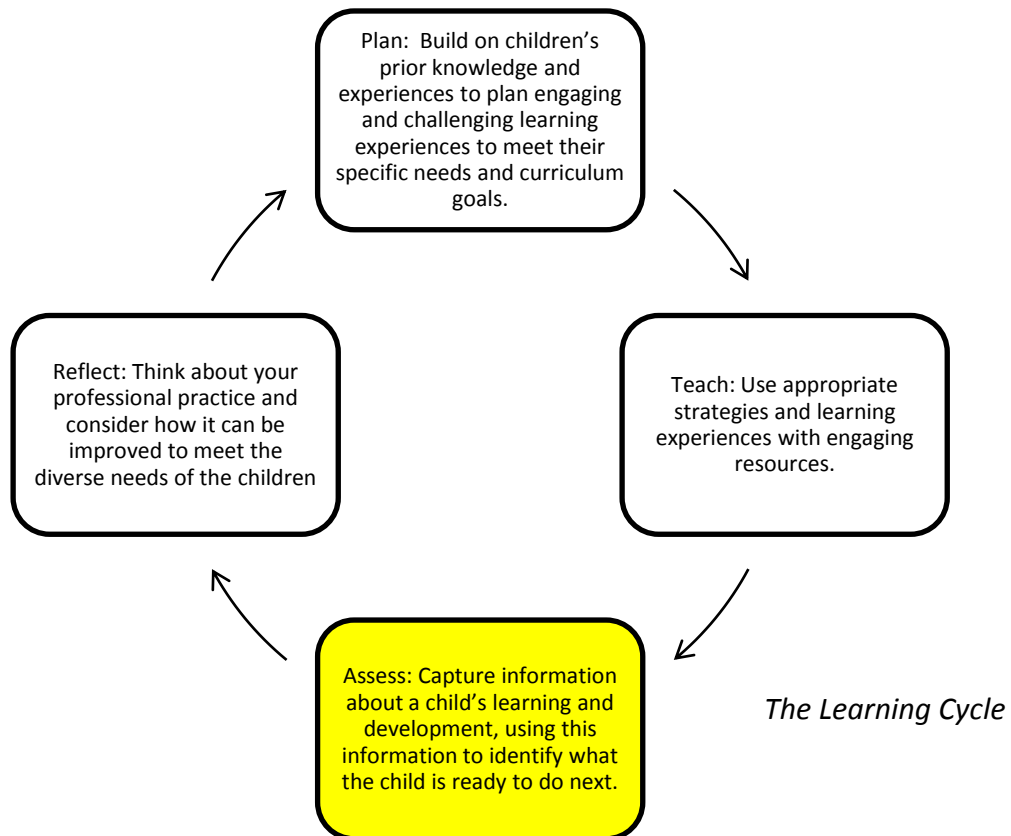
Assessment is a key professional skill for all teachers because ultimately it benefits the child and enhances learning. Assessment is the process of gathering information about the *whole* child at different stages in their learning. In the Early Years, assessment is a critical process that enables teachers to plan and organise appropriate activities to meet the needs and learning direction of individuals as well as groups of children. Effective assessment informs planning and evaluation so that curriculum and teaching can be modified and improved. In high quality Early Years classrooms, assessment occurs as part of the daily routine, as well as at critical time periods during the academic year. Assessment also provides a valuable insight into school improvement including staff development, resource needs, and curriculum development (Assessment Reform Group, 2006; Black & Williams, 2004; Clarke, 1998).

The use of standardised testing for young children is generally discouraged for the following reasons:

- diagnostic measures for testing young children are seldom reliable and valid and do not generally provide useful information for teaching and moving learning forward (Rowntree, 1998);
- testing is isolated from context and meaning and tends to assess simple facts and low level skills, ignoring the complexity and richness of the child's learning experiences;
- children's learning progresses rapidly in their early years, but young children are unpredictable and easily distracted. A test situation places unnecessary stress and anxiety on a child (Assessment Reform Group, 2002) and
- in familiar and relaxed environments, children are more likely to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and attitudes and this is far more representative of their ability.

Formal tests assume a single set of expectations for all students and come with prescribed criteria for scoring and interpretation. Informal assessment, on the other hand, requires a clear understanding of the levels of ability the students bring with them (Navarrete et al, 1990).

As a key component of **The Learning cycle**, assessment plays an essential role in ensuring effective practice in Early Years.



Good practices in assessing and reporting

1. Assessment reflects the ethos and content of the curriculum and has a clear purpose. It should be part of an effective planning, teaching and learning cycle. The analysis of assessment data is strategic and thoughtfully used for informing teaching because it is about what children can do and what they are ready to learn next (Assessment Reform Group, 2006; Black & Williams, 1998; Clarke, 1998).
2. Effective assessment procedures offer children opportunities to demonstrate progress. (Assessment Reform Group, 2002).
3. Effective practitioners identify and monitor how individuals and groups of children in their class have developed and progressed over time (Assessment Reform Group, 2002).
4. Teachers use a range of assessment strategies in both planned and spontaneous situations to identify the child's progress in knowledge and understanding, the child's learning needs, and on-going development of effective practice (Gipps, McCallum and Hargreaves, 2000).
5. Assessment promotes continuous learning and is used to enhance opportunities given to the child. Manageable systems are in place to record and store this information (Clarke & McCallum, 2001).

6. Assessment records demonstrate a wide range of individual achievement (in physical, creative arts and academics) showing a holistic picture of the child. Records capture the range of children's achievement and progress in a range of learning contexts. Teachers link assessment data to common criteria in the *Foundation Curriculum* and the *Curriculum Standards* (Harlen, 2005).
7. Teachers recognise that assessment is a school wide issue and Early Years practices align with school assessment policies (Gilmore, 1998; Hill, 2000). Refer to the School Education Plan and/or Addendum.
8. Teachers manage assessment data efficiently so that it is accessible to parents, other teachers and school staff, especially during critical transitions from grade to grade (Sanders et al, 2005).
9. Teachers involve parents in the assessment process and use the information to guide planning to meet the needs and interests of all children (Brown & Banicky 2002).
10. Teachers compile portfolios containing work samples, photographs and observations to effectively illustrate children's learning and development. Children are involved in the portfolio assessment process as they engage in conversations about their learning, celebrate achievements and set their own learning goals (Seitz & Bartholomew, 2008).
11. Teachers use non-discriminatory assessment practices and use assessment to meet the needs of all children, including those with additional educational support needs (See AESN Policy).
12. Teachers ensure that the assessment tool evaluates what it sets out to measure, taking into account the child's language competency. For example, children should be given the opportunity to demonstrate learning and development through the use of their home language and/or manipulatives, drawing or body language (Brown, 1998; Hernandez, 1994).

8. Apply Knowledge of Children to Plan their Learning

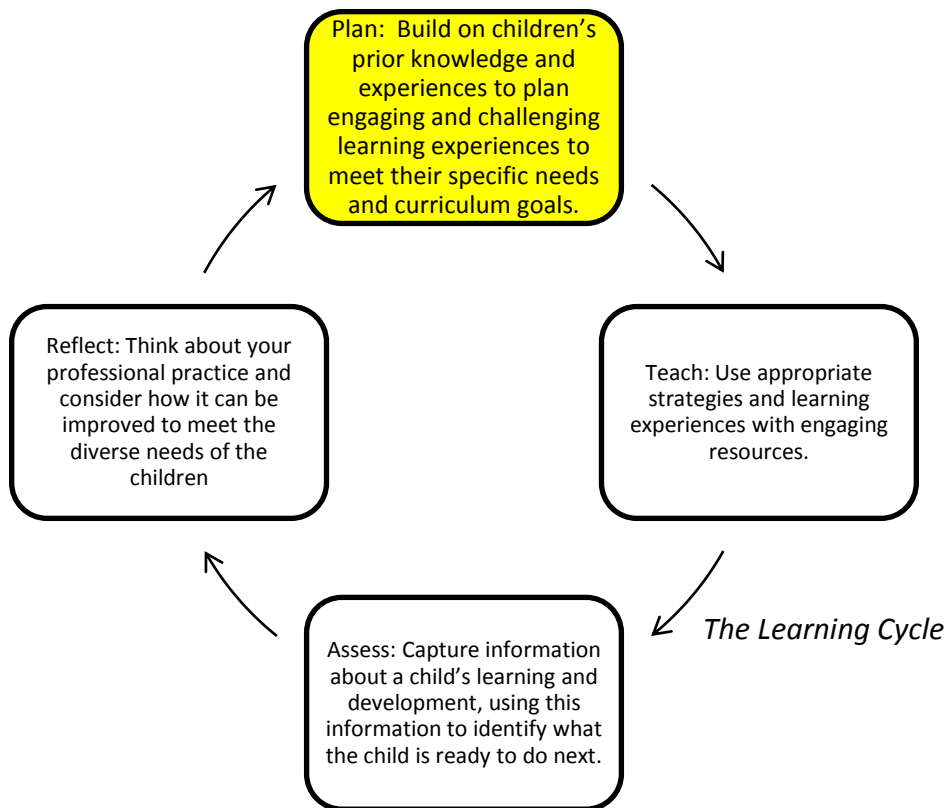
Rationale

In high quality Early Years programmes the assessment of children's learning is strategically linked to planning and implementing the *Foundation Curriculum* and the *Curriculum Standards*. Research has shown the use of ongoing assessment of children by teachers throughout the Early Years as a formative strategy for curriculum planning is essential. In most cases this is actively encouraged at the national level as a signal of good practice (Bertram & Pascal, 2002). Assessment information must be used to move learning forward. In this way children are challenged and motivated. It is of paramount importance to understand the holistic nature of individual children and use this information to plan high quality learning experiences to enhance further learning. In effective Early Years classrooms, teachers, through assessment, have knowledge of their children's abilities. They apply this knowledge to create, adapt and modify plans on a daily basis in order to address children's individual learning needs. Plans need to ensure full coverage of the *Foundation Curriculum* over time.

Children learn best when teachers:

- use their deep knowledge of child development to improve learning opportunities. They recognise that each child is on their own individual learning journey;
 - plan active play based learning opportunities that takes full account of the different learning styles of children. High quality early years programmes minimise the use of lessons where teachers provide direct instruction on isolated skills or items of knowledge as this can hinder children's learning (Nabuco & Sylva, 1996);
 - plan activities that captivate children's interests. To do this, adults take the time to find out what motivates children and what they best enjoy in school;
 - take account of children's prior knowledge and experience by identifying gaps in early learning and making sure they provide appropriate experiences to scaffold children's learning;
 - value the child's home and cultural background, so each child feels equally valued and
 - spend time engaging in conversations and getting to know each individual child so new learning is planned appropriately.
- (NAEYC, 2009)

As a key component of **The Learning Cycle**, planning plays an essential role in ensuring effective practice in Early Years.



Good practices for planning learning experiences for young children

1. When planning quality learning experiences the teacher should:
 - use children's interests as a foundation for activities based on observations, brainstorming, webbing, KWL chart etc. (See *Appendix C* for examples);
 - create a positive learning atmosphere which has a sense of purpose and fosters enjoyment (MacBeath & Mortimore, 2001);
 - provide opportunities for children to develop conceptual understanding by making sure activities are challenging;
 - ensure that activities promote creative and high order thinking skills that involve problem solving;
 - incorporate experiences designed to promote independence, perseverance and concentration;
 - include opportunities for questioning so children have chances to verbalise and consolidate new learning and
 - take account of children who learn at different rates, so that activities challenge but do not overwhelm.
 - know when and when not to intervene in children's learning experiences (Athey, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978).
 - have clearly defined learning objectives for adult-led activities that link to the *Foundation Curriculum* and the *Curriculum Standards* (See *Appendix C* for sample planning) and

- make effective use of teaching assistants to circulate and engage children in worthwhile discussion and play.
2. Teachers plan collaboratively with other teachers, teaching assistants and the coordinator, using a consistent but flexible format. The following elements are included in the flexible plan for young children, for adult-led activity:
 - allocation of time, taking into consideration young children’s concentration and attention span;
 - what children are expected to learn;
 - the specific materials, equipment, technology and books to be used;
 - where the activity will take place (indoors, outdoors and/or hall);
 - extensions or modifications to the plans based on children’s individual learning needs and learning styles and
 - assessment and reflection.
 3. Planning for, and teaching in ability groups, formed on the basis of a single test or observation is considered invalid for young children. Ability grouping can be used strategically in Early Years programmes for the development of specific cognitive skills. The use of consistent, long term groupings can have detrimental effects on children’s self-esteem, does not offer children equal opportunities and might devalue them as individuals (Nutbrown, 1996).
 4. Planning for child-initiated activity is broad and open ended so that children can be engaged in activities that interest them most. In this way they take their own learning forward and develop independent learning skills. Teachers ensure that sufficient time and a variety of materials are available for children to explore and extend concepts, ideas and interests and complete tasks to their own satisfaction (Webster-Stratton, 1999).
 5. Teachers use planning forms that include a ‘Reflection’ space in which they record how effective the plans were in impacting upon children’s learning and development. These records are also useful for programme evaluation (See *Appendix C* for sample planning formats).
 6. Teachers identify the “big ideas” that are important to children’s development. This means that teachers do not plan to present isolated facts or skills that are not connected to meaningful contexts.
 7. Teachers describe the key concepts to be presented that support the learning theme or unit. A colour is not a key concept to make a theme. Broad themes include concepts like “Friendship”, “Habitats” “Patterns” etc. (See *Appendix C* for sample planning based upon broad themes).

9. Implement the Foundation Curriculum and the Curriculum Standards

Rationale

The *Early Years Foundation Curriculum* and the *Curriculum Standards* are specifically designed to meet the learning needs of children in Pre-K (age 3 years) through Grade 2 in Independent Schools in Qatar.

The *Foundation Curriculum* promotes high quality education of young children through meaningful, purposeful and developmentally appropriate play-based experiences that result in young children learning how to learn. It favours knowledge in action (rather than transmission of facts) through integration of all subject areas. The *Curriculum Standards* set out what Qatari students should know, understand and be able to do by the end of each grade from Kindergarten to Grade 12 Advanced. The *Foundation Curriculum* and *Curriculum Standards* are aligned; effective Early Years programmes design learning experiences to enable children to achieve the goals and standards in both these documents. Both the *Foundation Curriculum* and the *Curriculum Standards* provide a basis for developing children's knowledge, skills and understanding so that they become life-long learners.

Good Practices for implementing the Foundation Curriculum and the Curriculum Standards

1. Teachers routinely assess children's prior and ongoing learning so that this information can be used to plan and implement the curriculum using developmentally appropriate teaching approaches (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).
2. Teachers personalise new learning for all children and use a range of methods such as interacting with the children, listening and extending conversations as they participate in activities and teacher-facilitated inquiry (Roskos, Christie & Richgels, 2003).
3. Teachers use theme-based units effectively to integrate the curriculum. This allows the children's learning of traditional subjects to occur primarily through projects and integrated learning experiences. Content knowledge is introduced in a meaningful way to the whole class and extended in small group activities (Marcon, 1999; Helm & Katz, 2001). The *Foundation Curriculum* and the *Curriculum Standards* are aligned, therefore integrated unit planning should contain evidence of how both are included in teaching and learning experiences (See *Appendix B* for sample alignment of Curriculum Standards and the *Foundation Curriculum*).
4. Teachers plan learning experiences that embed standards from Social Studies and Islamic Studies across other content areas, in both Arabic and English. This supports young children as they develop conceptual knowledge in meaningful ways.
5. Teachers ensure that Physical Education is provided on a daily basis to help children develop physically and enable them to feel the benefits of being healthy and active. Teachers support children so they improve skills of co-ordination, control, manipulation and movement through a range of challenging activities (Cratty, 1979).

10. Work as a Member of a Professional Team

Rationale

Teaching is a collegial profession; mutual respect is essential. This is particularly so in Early Years education where teachers often share a class and/ or space with other teachers and assistants. It is essential that adults establish and develop effective team work and collaborate within and beyond the school (Penn, 2000). Effective transitions for children are more likely where Pre-K, Kindergarten and Grade 1 and 2 teachers communicate with each other and adopt similar teaching approaches to the curriculum, teaching and assessment. As a team, the safety, well-being and education of all the children must be at the heart of all they do.

“It can also be argued that a ‘profession’ encompasses more than just professional knowledge; it also includes skills and competencies, dispositions, values and beliefs, the ‘tools’ of the profession and notions of professional expertise” (Miller and Cable, 2008 p.58).

Good practices for working as a professional team

1. Coordinators, teachers and teaching assistants share ideas, plan the learning environment, share assessment information, set goals and establish roles and responsibilities within the team. This is done continuously, revised weekly and even daily to fit with children’s interests and learning progress to maximise their learning. This is especially critical as teachers plan children’s transitions between grades.
2. Relationships characterised by open and interactive communication processes positively enhance professional teams. Adults share professional practice and support one another. Good communication and peer support is essential when there are sensitive areas to be handled, such as identification of child abuse and/or neglect.
3. Teams contribute to improving professional practice through sharing in the conduct of evaluation and self-reflection processes. This can be accomplished using the *Early Years Programme Evaluation Quality Assurances Rubric (2008)*. The team uses the outcomes to work collaboratively towards improvement and development.
4. Teachers and assistants seek ways to improve their professional knowledge. Attending training to improve knowledge and keep up to date is strongly encouraged to improve teaching and learning. Attending local and regional meetings, conferences and other events to establish links and networks with other teachers ensures that new ideas are brought into school. The information gained is shared among colleagues so everyone benefits. The collegiate approach to planning and sharing ideas also serves to address the specific learning needs of individual children.
5. As a team, adults make sure that children are supervised and kept safe at all times. Teachers and assistants prepare the classroom before children arrive. They are there to meet and greet both parents and children and welcome them to the classroom. At the end of the day they are available to say goodbye to the children and to have a quick conversation with parents if necessary.

6. The team is aware of each individual and knows where to find critical information such as medical needs or allergies etc. Replacement teachers can rely on colleagues to be sure that the needs of all children are identified and supported.
7. Teachers serve as role models and mentors for assistants and university interns so they learn how to interact with children during play and learning.
8. School Leaders, including Early Years Coordinators provide guidance, coaching and mentoring that support all teachers in meeting the *National Professional Standards for Teachers* (NPST, 2007, www.sec.gov.qa).

11. Build Partnerships with Parents

Rationale

Children's first experience of formal education is a crucial transition phase and needs to be handled with great care and sensitivity. Strong links between home and school are the best way to help children see the new learning experience as an extension of what has gone on before rather than replacing all that is secure and familiar with an unknown experience.

Parents are children's first and most enduring teachers and it is vital that they continue to be closely involved with their children's learning (Pianta, Kraft-Sayre, Rimm-Kaufman, Gercke and Higgins, 2001).

Parent involvement in school can happen on a number of levels (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001) including attending school functions and parent-teacher conferences, helping children improve their schoolwork by providing support at home as well as serving as advocates for the school in the wider community. Parents can volunteer to help out with school activities or in the classroom. They can become involved in the governance of the school (Hargreaves, 1999).

Research evidence suggests that when parents are actively involved with their children's education the child's confidence is greatly improved. With that, comes better achievement, improvements in behaviour and a stronger sense of belonging to a school community. This also is true when other family members and important primary care givers are involved in the school (Henderson & Berla, 1994). There is no question that parent involvement pays off in better educational outcomes for children.

Good practices for developing partnerships with parents

1. Effective schools recognise that in the Early Years, care and education go hand-in-hand.
 - Teachers of young children provide physical and emotional care and support, appropriate for their needs and capabilities.
 - An 'Open door policy' where the door to the classroom is effectively open for parents to come into the room at any or, at least, most times, demonstrates to parents that they are valued and welcomed in the classroom and ensures any minor problems are dealt with quickly. (Fitzgerald, 2004).
 - Teachers invite parents to play an active part in managing the transition from home to Kindergarten. This will reassure children that their parents know and understand their new experience and trust the teachers to respect and care for them.
 - The school invites parents to participate in children's induction processes by welcoming parents into the classrooms for a range of activities and purposes, communicating regularly through newsletters and keeping parents fully informed about the programmes and their child's particular needs, interests and achievements (Mapp, 2003).
 - Teachers invite parents to be involved in the assessment of their child. This helps teachers have a clear picture of each child's background and experiences, so future learning can match needs more accurately.
 - Schools arrange sessions whereby teachers coach parents about the best ways to support children's learning at home. Teachers provide parents with very specific home learning experiences and activities to support their child.

Sending home whole-class worksheets provides very little evidence of children's individual progress and achievement. More innovative ways of informing parents should be used (Konzal, 2001).

2. Teachers and administrators show that they value and respect diversity of home backgrounds and avoid any form of prejudice towards parents or children from different cultural or economic backgrounds. Teachers celebrate the cultural identity of each child and his/her family (Bernhard, 1995).
3. Teachers constantly seek opportunities to build strong links between home and school and encourage parents to be partners in learning by:
 - developing an understanding of the wider school community;
 - establishing trusting and respectful relationships with parents;
 - being informed about each child's home circumstances;
 - providing opportunities for children to share objects from home and learn about family events;
 - communicating often with parents about all aspects of the programme;
 - inviting parents to participate in the programme in a variety of ways and
 - communicating learning progress based on acknowledgement of individual growth and achievement (Hargreaves, 1999).

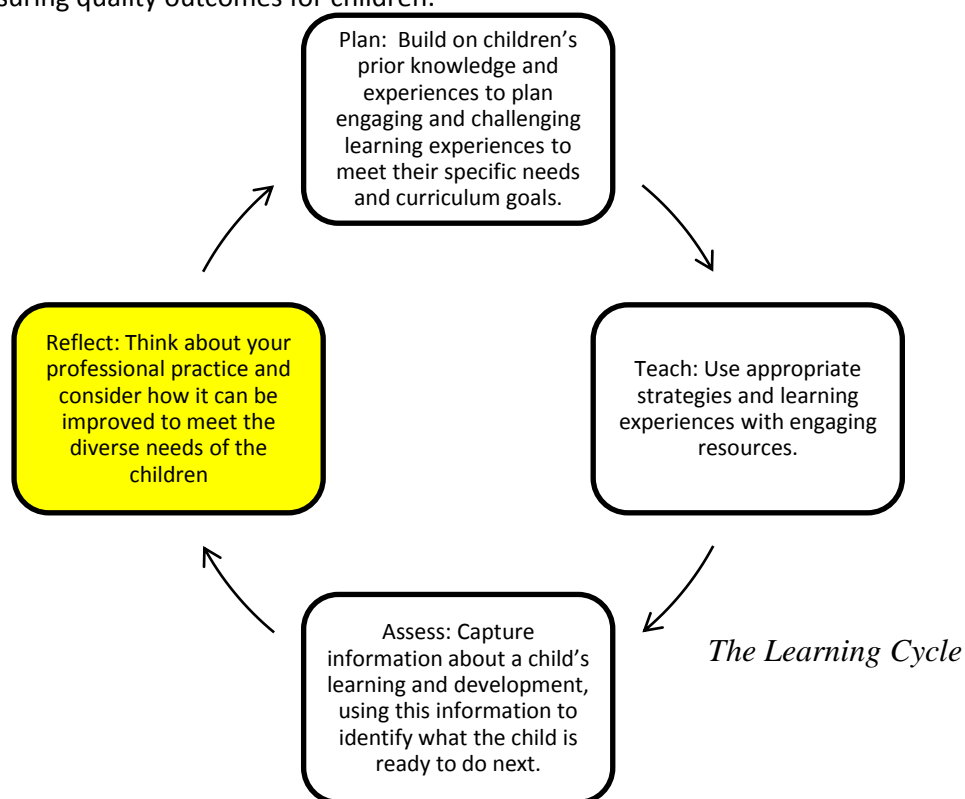
12. Reflect on, Evaluate and Improve Professional Practice

Rationale

Research shows a clear relationship between supported, reflective practice and effective teaching (Frede et al 1993). Coaching and mentoring of teachers is essential in promoting reflection. Reflection and evaluation of practice provide an evidence base for improving planning and practice. Shulman (1999) suggests that reflection occurs when practitioners look back and consider what has occurred, reconstructing and recapturing the event. The Foundation Curriculum contains 'Questions for Reflection' about the learning environment and teaching approaches as well as learning outcomes for students. The Early Years Quality Assurance Programme Evaluation Rubric (2008) is also designed to guide teachers in monitoring and developing Early years Programmes.

The ability of teachers to articulate and reflect upon practice can be linked to their professional knowledge. Well-trained teachers and assistants are more able to self-evaluate, reflect and adopt strategies for improvement. They acknowledge their own strengths and weaknesses and use these to instigate necessary change (Bowman et al, 2001).

As a key component of The Learning Cycle, reflection upon and evaluation of professional practice is essential in ensuring quality outcomes for children.



Good practices in evaluation and reflection of professional practice

1. Evaluation of the programme is a process that draws together a wealth of information to review the success of the teaching approach and what helped or hindered its effectiveness.
2. Evaluations are specific and targeted. Focused evaluations are most effective when coordinators and teachers select an evaluation topic/area that will have the greatest impact on children's learning and/or fits well with the vision statement for the school.

3. Evaluations are well organized, involve all the team and produce an honest reflection of the strengths and development needs of provision offered. The first step in evaluation is to set an objective. The second step is to draw together information. The third step is to collate, analyse and reflect on the picture in the collated information. The final step is to use those reflections to revise/improve planning and implement the curriculum in the future.
4. Teachers reflect on their work and current thinking on a daily basis and base the reflection on how well children are learning and progressing in both their academic and personal development. They understand the need to develop cycles of planning, monitoring, assessment and evaluation which move their own children's thinking forward (Wood, 1998).
5. Teachers understand that they are both teachers and learners. They attend courses and training opportunities. They review their current practices independently and in study groups. They discuss new learning/ideas and make the necessary changes that will impact on children's learning.
6. The following set of questions can be used to help teachers evaluate their professional practices on a daily basis:
 - Which activities engaged children most? How can these be extended in future planning?
 - How can the learning experiences further children's learning and development across all areas (cognitive, social-emotional, physical and language)?
 - How can the learning experiences challenge the children and extend the knowledge and skills of children?
 - What can be done to prevent possible behaviour issues?
 - When was children's physical development evident during the session?
 - Which learning experiences provided adults with opportunities to engage children in conversations? What strategies are in place to ensure teachers and assistants are speaking to each child?
 - What opportunities were given for adults to interact with small groups for extended periods?
 - How do whole class learning experiences take into account the needs of young learners?
 - Which learning experiences provided opportunities for teachers to observe and note progress in learning?

At the end of each day, effective teachers discuss these questions with the classroom assistant. When there are concerns, adults then look at daily plans and general programme provisions and make adjustments as needed.

SCHOOL POLICIES THAT STRENGTHEN EARLY YEARS GOOD PRACTICE

1. Transitions

The Policy

Children's lives are full of change and growth. From birth onwards they develop physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually. These changes in most cases, happen in the security of their own homes and families. When children enter Pre-K or Kindergarten further levels of complexity are added to these changes. This time of transition can be extremely challenging for young children and can have far reaching effects on their future growth and learning.

This policy for transition aims to ensure that:

- children develop positive dispositions and attitudes to learning within the new and perhaps strange environment that school can be (Hauser-Cram, Durand & Warfield, 2007);
- they experience continuity between their home life and their new school life or between one grade and the next and
- parents are welcomed into the school, encouraged to participate in their child's education at school and at home and are informed about the education reform and the new educational approaches in the Independent Schools in Qatar (Dockett & Perry, 2001).

In the context of this document *transition** refers to the process of children moving from home to Kindergarten or school, from Kindergarten to Grade 1 and from Grade 1 on through the further grades.

*The word *transition* can also refer to the mini-teaching opportunity that arises when a teacher plans for a group of children to move from one learning experience to something else.

Implementing the Policy

Induction in Pre-K and Kindergarten 1 and 2 classes

- Teachers who work with the young children need to have exceptional personal qualities. They should have a caring, supportive, calm and sensitive approach. (Webster-Stratton 1999).
- From the first day of Pre-K or Kindergarten teachers need to ensure that their classroom is a welcoming and inviting place with a wealth of interesting activities to engage the children. As well as welcoming the children, parents can be invited to stay and join in some of the activities on offer. In most instances once the child feels safe, secure and comfortable with the teachers they gain confidence and are happy in the new surroundings and parents can leave.
- Plan pre-entry visits to the school and to all new classes so children become familiar with new teachers and comfortable in their company.
- Invite parents to visit the kindergarten with children starting school for the first time, on at least two occasions, thus making active participation in school orientation a necessity for parents, children and teachers.
- Encourage parents to prepare their child for the important event of starting school or changing classes, by talking about it in a positive way and encouraging the child to ask questions and express fears (Donegan, Fink, Fowle, & Wischowski, 1994).
- Ask parents to teach the child specific self-care skills that will be useful in the new setting.
- Send home newsletters including e-links for parents and quality research based texts.
- Provide a school pamphlet on starting Pre-K or kindergarten to communicate to parents key points and general information about the school. The pamphlet could include photos of the

school environment and Early Years learning. It could also describe the benefits of reading books to children at home, and talking to them often about colours, shapes and numbers, among other things.

- Arrange a meeting for new parents in advance of the child's entry where information is given and general Early Years educational philosophies are explained.
- Following initial entry, teachers and parents should meet to discuss the child in detail. This will assist with early assessment and help teachers get to know children well to plan activities in an informed way.

Transition from Kindergarten to Grade classes

- Towards the middle of the second semester transitioning children can begin to do more activities with the next grade level. KG1 and KG2 children can visit their next class and Grade 1 and Grade 2 children can be invited to make visits to KG1 and KG2 classes and meet their 'old' teachers and talk about what they do now and what they liked about kindergarten. Likewise, Grade 2 children can visit Grade 3 classes and at the same time Grade 3 children can spend time with their previous teachers (Buchanan, Burts, Bidner, White & Charlesworth, 1998).
- Kindergarten coordinators, teachers and the Vice Principal Academic need to work together to align:
 - planning frameworks (lessons, projects and units);
 - curriculum learning experiences. These could include hands-on, project-based learning linked to the standards and
 - assessment processes (teacher observation, checklists, portfolios and digital media that records student learning).

This information is essential for the receiving teacher to ensure children have appropriate learning opportunities when they move into the next class.

- The *Curriculum Standards* state that "Grade K standards are a sub-set of the Grade 1 standards; this is to accommodate students who do not begin school until Grade 1, and who therefore need to cover the early work designed for Kindergarten" (*English Curriculum Standards*, p.14, 2004). Teachers need to ensure these children are not left behind, by monitoring their progress, according to Kindergarten **and** Grade 1 Curriculum Standards.
- Coordinators and teachers need to develop and implement a system for maintaining relevant individual child records, such as portfolios, and sharing them with the upcoming grade's teachers.

Transitions for children with Additional Educational Support Needs

- Children with Additional Educational Support Needs (AESN) often experience more intense transition adjustments when they come from home to Pre-K/Kindergarten. Some, very occasionally, may also make a transition from specialist services like the Shafallah Centre. A sense of belonging will be developed for such children when teachers and Center/Institute staff talk to each other to make sure there is a cross-over of the child's records, individual support plan and programmes from the Center/Institute to the school. Sharing information between home to school or centre to centre helps teachers to plan for individual needs (Katims & Pierce, 1995).
- Pre-K and Kindergarten with their play-based approach to the early years, will be suitable and effective settings for children with specific individual needs to enter the education system (Hauser-Cram, Durand & Warfield, 2007).
- For children with specific individual needs, contact between all concerned should be made well in advance to enhance the transitions for these children between home, specialist services and Kindergartens. Early Years teachers will forge positive relationships with specialist services (e.g. health services) that support such children and their parents.

- Early on, protocols for liaison between parents, teachers and specialist services should be decided. On-going discussion amongst all parties in relation to differentiating the curriculum may be necessary for those children with individual support plans.

Transitions of children transferring from one to another Early Years setting

- This section refers to children who are transferring from one Early Years setting to another for reasons such as moving country, parents exercising choice or changed family circumstance. These children are more likely to experience heightened emotions about their transition from or to a new setting. Schools will do all they can to support these children (Rosenkoetter, Hains & Fowler, 1994).
- Teachers take into account the personal and curricular needs of such children. They are sensitive to the emotional needs of a transferring child. They endeavour to send to or access from the other Early Years setting a range of information. Ideally, the information goes beyond assessment records and includes “Where Next?” information in relation to the curriculum so the new teacher can build on the similarities of approaches and curriculum.
- Where records are not available for an incoming child, any assessment of their learning should focus on what they know, can do and are ready for next. The purpose of this assessment is to build on their strengths and interests, and to maintain progressions in learning.

SCHOOL POLICIES THAT STRENGTHEN EARLY YEARS GOOD PRACTICE

2. Bilingualism

The Policy

Bilingualism is an asset and a child's first language will have a continual and significant role in their identity, learning and the acquisition of additional languages (Primary National Strategy, 2007).

It is widely accepted that:

- bilingualism confers intellectual advantages and the role of the first language in the child's learning is of great importance (Baker, 2001; Brisk, 1999);
- children need to develop strong foundations in the language that is dominant in the home environment, where children spend most of their time, to ensure they do not lose or fail to develop proficiency in their home language (Reyes, 2004; Wong-Fillmore, L 2000);
- once developed, home language skills are transferable to new languages and in turn strengthen children's understanding of language use (Cummins, 2000; Datta, 2000; Tabors, 2002);
- young children who are in the process of developing their first language while being exposed to and also learning one or more additional languages are described as "emergent bilinguals" (Reyes, 2006);
- emergent bilingualism serves as a foundation for knowledge and understanding of others;
- emergent biliteracy refers to children's competencies in two languages in terms of thinking, listening, speaking, reading and writing which develop in varying degrees, either sequentially or simultaneously (Reyes, 2006);
- young children use their cultural and linguistic experiences to co-construct meaning with parents, teachers, siblings, and peers in their environment (Whitmore et al., 2004).

Implementing the Policy

The Learning Environment in multi-lingual classrooms (Arabic/English/Other)

The physical learning environment:

- provides all children the opportunity to make independent choices thus allowing teachers to observe the child's interests and begin to develop the language which will support activities that are meaningful to the child.
- includes play and learning resources that positively reflect children's cultural and linguistic identity and experiences; for example books, posters, labels, role-play equipment and displays of a variety of scripts to support language awareness.
- Includes purpose-designed learning areas inside and outside the classroom. Outside play is often particularly beneficial as most children tend to be less inhibited in their language use in an outdoor environment. Practitioner observations have shown that children commonly use at least five times as many utterances outdoors as they do inside. This has clear implications for ensuring that the potential for outdoor spaces as learning environments is maximised (Primary *National Strategy*, 2007).

Teaching Strategies (in any language)

- In Pre-K, teachers use mostly Arabic to ensure that children are developing a foundation in their home language.
- In KG1 and KG2 the Arabic teacher speaks in Arabic to children and the English teacher speaks to them in English. **In the first month, translation (English, followed by Arabic) will help smooth the transition for new children. (This raises some concerns that children who have this type of sequential translation will "tune out" the English and wait for the Arabic" which could limit their growth in English). Thus continuous monitoring of children's English and Arabic language development is essential.**
- In all grades, Pre-K through Grade 2, Arabic teachers speak to each other in Arabic, and English teachers speak to each other in English
- Consistent practices regarding person, place and/or time for Arabic (or English) are the key.
- In all grades, Pre-K through Grade 2, teachers provide a variety of writing in both English and Arabic with illustrations to help with understanding.
- Teachers use extensive visual support, facial expression and body movements to accelerate understanding in the language of instruction.
- In all grades, Pre-K through Grade 2, adults often use the child's home language (Arabic) to give transitional instructions or to ensure that she has children's attention for learning.
- Teachers will "self-talk" through an activity with which they are engaged eg. "I am putting my bag on the chair." "Now you put your bag on the chair."
- Teachers will speak slowly and clearly and enunciate words correctly.
- Teachers recognise and take account of the fact that understanding of language (receptive skills) is always in advance of spoken language (expressive skills).

- Teachers support children when they appear to be in a “silent” period during early exposure to a new language. Children are provided with multiple means of communication (pointing, writing, drawing, signing, repeating, imitating and non-verbal responses).
- Teachers encourage children and use modeling or rephrasing to address linguistic mistakes rather than telling children they are wrong, as this could inhibit their attempts and damage self-esteem.
- Teachers talk with children as they interact and have rich conversations, so they learn new words and phrases in meaningful situations.
- Teachers repeat phrases and words through songs, rhymes and stories to help children learn through enjoyment. Guessing games are used to help children formulate questions.
- Teachers use open-ended questions and support children’s attempts at response by using cloze sentences, offering a word or phrase, or giving choices of two acceptable responses and allowing the child to select one.
- Teachers read to children every day and extend their understanding by engaging them in rich conversations and discussions about the content of the stories.

For more information see the good practices associated with teaching and learning an additional language in Section 3 : Foster Language Development, and Bilingualism.

SCHOOL POLICIES THAT STRENGTHEN EARLY YEARS GOOD PRACTICE

3. Additional Educational Support Needs (AESN)

The Policy

The Supreme Education Council supports the rights of children and has undertaken to provide ALL children with the best education possible. This promotes the philosophy of inclusive education, where children with Additional Educational Support Needs are in schools and have access to the same educational experiences as their peers.

The convention on the Rights of the Child states that *“Education of the child shall be directed to: the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential” (UNICEF, Article 29).*

- All children are entitled to effective and developmentally appropriate learning environments to enable them to fulfil their full potential (UNESCO, 2008). (Refer to Appendix H for Inclusion Checklist for Schools.)
- All children can learn and achieve high standards as a result of effective teaching.
- Intervening at the earliest indication of need is necessary for children’s success (Pre K-12) (Barnett, 1995; Guralnick, 1998).
- A comprehensive system of tiered support is essential for addressing the full range of children’s needs (McCook, 2006).
- Children’s skills improve when ongoing developmental, academic and behavioural performance data inform instructional decisions.
- Collaboration among educators, families and community specialists is the foundation for effective problem-solving and instructional decision-making (Hart & Risley, 1995).
- Children who have Additional Educational Support Needs (AESN) may have difficulty coping with the day-to-day demands and expectations of the curriculum and the learning environment. They often require a greater level of support than others. It is the responsibility of all adults to make sure no child is disadvantaged or excluded because of their additional support needs. Teachers’ plans and programmes reflect the needs of all individuals.
- Adults will help children overcome barriers by offering support targeted at removing or minimising those barriers. This may mean that adults spend more time with these children.
- Specific support is crucial to children who have Additional Educational Support Needs to ensure they successfully achieve their learning targets.
- All children deserve recognition, respect and equality of opportunity to help them flourish and make a positive contribution to society (Middleton, 1992).
- Non-discriminatory assessment practices should be used. Non-discriminatory assessment refers to fairness in all aspects of evaluating individuals. Schools should employ assessment policies and procedures that avoid preconceived notions or stereotypes and take into account language competence.

“ Learning to be, learning to do, learning to learn and learning to live together should be considered as critical elements in the journey of each child toward human and social development” (OECD 2006, p. 18. <http://www.oecd.org>).

Implementing the Policy

1. **STEP ONE:** Early identification is essential. Upon enrolment in the school, information from parents is obtained and documentation is collected regarding each child's birth, development and health history. School staff review this information and discuss with parents any risk factors or medical diagnosis that indicate that a child may have additional educational support needs.
2. **STEP TWO:** Observation is planned and ongoing. At the beginning of the school year, teachers observe all children in the classroom and in outdoor activities to informally assess their learning styles and needs. Throughout the school year, teachers are constantly alert to the early signs or risk factors associated with developmental or learning difficulties.
3. **STEP THREE:** When a teacher has identified a child who may need additional educational support, she observes the child over several days (or less if the concern is related to harmful behavior) and documents her observations. She then meets with the school leadership (Early Years Coordinator), who also observes the child and the teaching/learning environment. A planning meeting is held to share information and to make arrangements for communicating with the parents to gather more information on the child (*Refer to SEC Policy for Children with AESN*).
4. **STEP FOUR:** The teacher and coordinator use the information collected to write a plan for providing appropriate support strategies for that child. (Refer to Appendix I for AESN Support Documents.) These strategies are responsive to the curriculum needs of all children in the class, particularly children experiencing learning difficulties (Davis & Florian, 2004). It is at this stage that parents, teachers and support staff communicate regularly about the child's needs (Carpenter, 2004). All stakeholders are informed of the strategies to be implemented, specific documentation to be collected (Progress monitoring) and a timeline is set for a team review of the effectiveness of the plan. This is the **first layer or the Universal Tier** of the Three Tiered Model of Support (see below). Often this level of support will produce positive outcomes and no further action is necessary, other than ongoing monitoring and observations (*Refer to SEC Policy for Children with AESN*).
5. **STEP FIVE:** If the planned support does not have the desired outcomes, then the school team may contact the Education Institute Staff for additional guidance for more intensive and targeted support for the child. This is the **second layer** of Three Tiered Model of support. This tier includes collaborative teaching and professional input to scaffold the learning of children who require greater support in addition to that provided in Tier 1. The support is aligned with the classroom programme. When more complex support needs are evident, the school team and community specialists will work together to further analyse the child's needs and plan strategies for him or her. Initially, the team should include the child's teachers, the parents and school administrators. If necessary, other relevant professionals, such as the social worker, speech pathologist or psychologist may be asked to participate in team decisions. Through this process, additional evaluations and support can be recommended and implemented.
6. **STEP SIX:** Following the recommended timeline for implementation of the support plan in Tier 2, the team determines if sufficient outcomes have been achieved. If the support plans have not been successful and the child continues to demonstrate concerns to the team, then an alternate

plan can be implemented OR the next level of support may be considered. The **third layer** of the Three Tiered Model often involves specialists who can provide additional information and support to children. These are children who have not been responsive or who have not made the expected progress within the first and second layers of scaffolded teaching and support. Typically the number of children requiring Tier 3 supports would be no more than 5 percent of the school population.

Refer to *Documents for Supporting Additional Needs in Early Years Programmes for sample AESN* forms and documents.

6 STEP PROCEDURE FOR EARLY INTERVENTION

STEP 1 - ENROLMENT OBSERVATION:

All families to fill out enrolment form. If information shows the child has AESN, documentation to be received and discussed (See sample form and information necessary for enrolment).
If staff observe behaviour that is outside expected levels of development further information is obtained from parents.

STEP 2 - PLANNED OBSERVATION:

Observe and document the child in the classroom and during outdoor activities. Observe activities for 3-5 days. Write these down. Use the resources provided in the *Documents for Supporting AESN in Early Years Programmes* (Observation chart, Language Profile, etc.).

STEP 3 – PLANNING MEETING:

Set up meeting with parents, coordinators and teachers of the Child.

- If no previous information received, gather information on the child from the parent. Parents may be required to get information from a doctor regarding: vision, hearing, and overall health.
- Teachers gather observations, environmental and educational analysis, collect baseline data.
- School leaders, coordinators, including the AESN and nurse, get specialists information if available and assist with baseline data collection. Gather all information and write up initial report.

STEP 4 – WRITE A PLAN FOR EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT: (Universal Tier 1)

- Write up an *Educational Support Plan* to support the child in the classroom. (See Appendix I for sample plans)
- Implement the *Educational Support Plan* giving targeted support to the child and *documenting outcomes*.
- Set up *time frame* for review of the *Educational Support Plan* – this could be after 4-6 weeks.

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NO RESULTS, POSSIBLE REGRESSION

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POSITIVE RESULTS

STEP 5 - EXTRA ASSISTANCE REQUESTED:
(Tier 2)

- Contact SEC – AESN Team
- Review Educational Support Plan
- Revise Strategies and Positive Support Actions
- Set up new Time Frame and new Plan with review dates
- Set up further Assessment if needed –specialist

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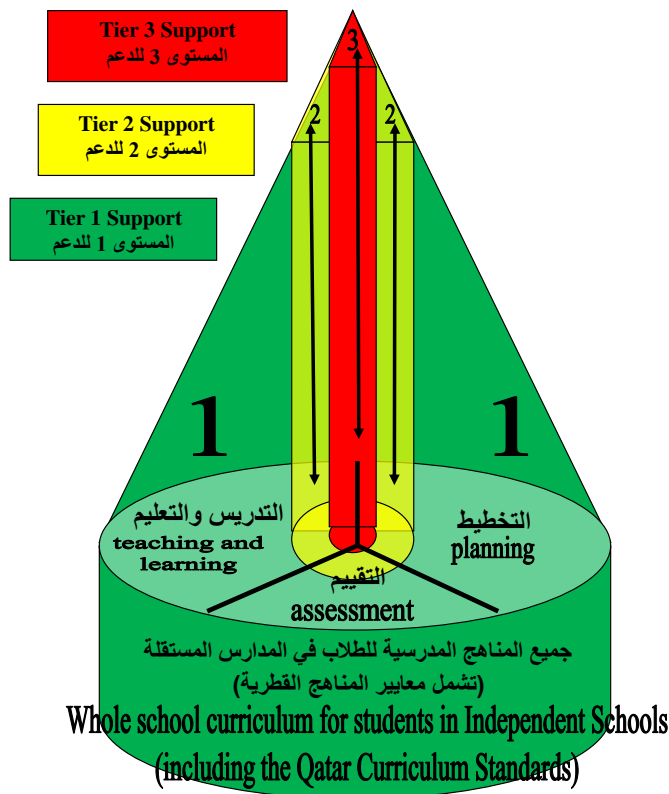
Continue support
Review, assess and monitor
change

STEP 6 - RECOMMENDATIONS: (Tier 3)
Continued school planning and Implementation and Supporting the Family *or*
Team / SEC referral: additional specialist assistance

THE RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION MODEL (RTI)

The RTI approach is often represented through reference to three tiers of support

- Tier 1: Classroom based – the first and essential layer of support that involves curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and reporting strategies that are aligned and responsive to the curriculum needs of all children in the class. However, additional accommodations may be required for children with AESN in order for them to fully participate in school life.
- Tier 2: The second layer involves collaborative teaching and professional input to scaffold children who require a greater support focus in addition to Tier 1. The support is aligned with the classroom programme.
- Tier 3: The third layer involves intensive pedagogy, often involving specialists, in addition to the first and second layers of scaffolded teaching. The support is aligned with the classroom programme, but may require additional specialised support.



Glossary

Active learner – someone who is actively engaged in the learning process, rather than passively absorbing information. An example would be a child who cuts a pizza into six pieces and then works out how to share the pieces equally between three playmates. A passive way of experiencing this activity would be where the child watches as the teacher does the same thing in front of the whole class.

Adult guided – when an adult supervises or acts in a supportive, advisory capacity in response to the needs or requests of the children.

Adult-led activities – an activity that is influenced and directed by an adult where the activity is the idea of the adult only.

Age appropriate specialisation – adapting something to be suitable for a certain age.

Annotate - add explanatory notes to or supply with critical comments.

Assessment - the process of evaluating knowledge, skills and attitudes. It is usually done in measurable terms. Assessment is one of the four parts of The Learning Cycle which also includes planning, teaching and reflection.

Atrophy- any weakening or wasting away through lack of use.

Authentic assessment- Authentic assessment presents students with real-world challenges that require them to apply their relevant skills and knowledge.

Background experiences – knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired from interaction with the world.

Child initiated –an activity or project that is chosen or directed by the child rather than the teacher.

Children document their learning – when teachers assist children record the knowledge and skills they have acquired. This might take the form of a photograph, child's writing or a dictation paired with a picture.

Circle time –when children and adults gather together to share their personal feelings and ideas about anything that is significant to them. The circle form promotes the development of social skills through eye contact, focused listening and turn taking. Story time, on the other hand, is best conducted in a small or whole group situation where the reader and book are the focus of attention.

Cloze sentences – a sentence which has words missing and the reader is expected to fill in the blanks.

Cognitive – the process of thought.

Cognitive dissonance- the feeling of confusion that comes about from lack of agreement between what a person currently believes to be true and new information that is received.

Collaboratively – working together for a joint or common purpose.

Collegial – equal responsibility and respect when teachers work with other teachers and members of the administration team.

Conceptual development – the growth of ideas, theories, beliefs or understandings.

Construct own knowledge/understanding – to build up one's own knowledge and understanding of something through two- way interactions with people, objects and representations (or images) of things, within social and cultural contexts. Teachers and children can co-construct their understanding knowledge by planning learning programmes together.

Construct working theories – children and adults build up sets of ideas to explain their experiences and observations of the world. These are not supported by research or data and are open to continual revision.

Constructive play – play associated with the use of materials such as blocks, Lego, box collage etc where children build.

Creativity – the ability to produce original things or ideas using imagination and skill.

Critical foundational skills- the abilities that are of the greatest importance to support future development.

Cultural identity – the influence of the habits, traditions and beliefs of a country, or group of people on an individual.

Developmentally appropriate – something that is suitable for a specific stage of growth. See also the position statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practice at <http://www.naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/PSDA98.pdf>.

Dialogic reading – that form of shared reading when all participants are actively involved through question, answer and discussion. There is no passive listener.

Differentiation – the process of designing different learning experiences and assessment on the basis of ability, interest, learning style, etc so that all children have the opportunity to demonstrate their learning and development.

Digital media - equipment such as a computers, cameras, sound recording equipment or interactive whiteboards.

Digital presentation - information and ideas presented using digital media.

Direct instructional methods – teaching that goes straight from the teacher to the student without the intervention of learning materials such as blocks, puzzles or games or the input of other students for example, through discussion or group work.

Disposition – enduring habits of mind and action, and tendencies to respond to situations in characteristic ways. A willingness to explore, communicate, act independently and collaboratively and to persevere are examples of dispositions that are important to life long learning.

Dramatic play – play in which children imitate the actions of others such as family members, nurses, police officers or super-heroes. This type of play lets children explore the life roles of these people or characters.

Emergent biliteracy – the ongoing, dynamic development in the early years of concepts and expertise for thinking, listening, speaking, reading and writing in two languages.

Emergent reading - the reading and writing behaviours of young children that precede, and develop into, conventional literacy. There is a broad understanding now that learning to read and write should happen at the same time and should support each other.

Empathy – the ability to understand and enter into the feelings of another person.

Environmental print – the print that we see in the world around us. Some examples are road signs, advertising billboards, logos for brands or names of places like Delicious Meal Restaurant or Alahli Hospital. Signs, labels, rosters, lists etc that are displayed in the classroom or school are also environmental print.

Evidence based – proof or justification for professional action. It is gained through high quality, peer-reviewed research.

Exploratory play – through this type of play children seek new information about their environment. They need to touch and handle objects, ask questions, observe other children learning, have time to find out how things work as well as feel free to investigate.

Extended conversations – Sustained conversation between children and between teachers and children that builds understanding of concepts and ideas. These have been shown to improve vocabulary, thinking skills, social skills and self worth.

Extended play – play that is conducted over a long enough period of time to enable children to fully explore their ideas.

Fine motor skills – skills that involve the muscles of the hands and fingers and allow controlled use of tools such as pencils, knives and forks. Strength in the arms and shoulders are also necessary for fine motor control.

Formative assessment - The process of gathering information about a child's learning and development which is then used immediately to adapt teaching and learning to meet the needs of the child.

Governance – relates to decisions that define expectations, grant power or verify performance.

Gross motor skills – skills that involve the large muscles of the body that enable such functions as walking, kicking, sitting upright, lifting, throwing a ball etc.

Guided play – when an adult supervises or acts in an advisory capacity in response to the needs or requests of the children.

Higher order thinking skills – skills that use the final three levels of thinking in Bloom’s Taxonomy of intellectual activity: analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

Holistic development and learning - considering all factors relating to the child’s growth. These include physical, cognitive, environmental, social and emotional factors.

Humanitarian – committed to improving the lives of other people.

Hypothesis- a tentative explanation for something that is used as a basis for further investigation.

Immersed – to be totally surrounded by, deeply involved in.

Improvise - to invent, be creative, think laterally.

Independent thinking skills – teachers use open-ended questions that encourage children to evaluate various options when problem-solving. “How ?” not “What ?” questions.

Inquiry – to explore, to look into, to study, to probe, to examine.

Inquiry-based learning - An approach to learning that involves children actively whether working alone or with others. It fosters deep engagement, good thinking and participation in sustained conversations (see extended conversation). Inquiry-based learning involves children questioning, developing theories and hypothesis, discussing, recalling, interpreting, and with support, analysing and deciding on future action. The teacher interacts to motivate, prompt, question, initiate conversations and summarise ideas generated through discussions.

Integrated curriculum - all traditional subject areas are combined so that children’s learning occurs primarily through themes, projects and learning centres and reflects the children’s interests and suggestions. See http://www.archeworks.org/projects/tcsp/ic_guide_p2.html

Intervention – in the educational context, to take steps so as to alter and improve the learning path of a child in some way.

Intuitively – having knowledge of something without evident rational thought.

Investigation – a way of learning through focused, active exploration of ideas, materials and processes involving observation, questioning, hypothesising, testing ideas and evaluating outcomes of the exploration.

Language – Expressive language is learning to speak and to use language. Receptive language is learning to listen to and understand language.

Learning areas – spaces in the classroom designed for children to engage with different materials and activities in order to progress their development and learning.

Linguistic competence – to be capable of speaking, reading and writing in language.

Metacognitive skills – ability to think about thinking. Planning, goal setting, evaluating progress are all part of our metacognitive skills.

Multi-sensory - in which children use all or a number of the senses of taste, touch, smell, sight and hearing to engage with an activity or materials.

Needs based – in the educational context, when a plan of action is based on the perceived learning attributes and/ or needs of a child .

Nurturing – helping to grow or develop.

Observation - An assessment technique used for gathering information about children’s learning. The technique involves watching and listening to, and interacting with, children deliberately and purposefully to gather information about and interpret children’s learning across a range of contexts. Observations can be recorded and gathered in many ways, including anecdotal records, running records, using checklists or focus sheets (e.g. rubrics), and taking photographs and audio/video recordings of children’s learning.

Open ended questions – those questions which lead to further discussion and conversation. They require more than one word answers.

Outcome – learning achievement, end result of a time of learning.

Over-generalise - when children use rules which they have worked out for themselves but then apply to every similar case. An example is: when a child works out that, in English, the past tense is shown by adding ‘ed’ to the end of some words such as jumped he then adds this ending to any word to show the past tense as in ‘I callded you.’

Partnerships - Partnerships include the formal and informal relationships and processes that people or groups participate in to support children's learning and development in the early years. Effective partnerships are characterised by people having common goals and expectations, communicating openly and treating each other with respect.

Physical learning environment – that part of the learning environment that encourages gross motor and fine motor activity.

Play - a context for learning through which children organise and make sense of their social worlds, as they engage actively with people and things. Play often involves pleasure and imagination. It is usually begun by the child or worked out between children rather than being imposed by an adult. Play is sometimes described as social, purposeful, extended, interactive, constructive, dramatic or exploratory play.

Positive learning atmosphere - the relaxed tone or “feel” in a classroom that comes about when children are accepted by teachers and other children as learners and know that it is safe to make mistakes while in the process of learning.

Prediction – a guess or forecast about something in the future. For example, child might make a prediction that the water-wheel will spin when water is poured onto it.

Primary care giver – the main or most important carer of a child.

Project approach: an approach that involves children working collaboratively with the teacher and/or peers to investigate a topic of deep (personal) interest. Together they choose, plan, design, inquire about, communicate and record their learning throughout the project. Projects are one way to help children build a positive sense of themselves as learners

Real-life situations - in an educational context, everyday experiences that are typical of activities children may engage in as part of their families and communities, and that also provide opportunities for learning. Examples include cooking, gardening, reading or taking part in community events.

Reliable/valid (assessment) – assessment that accurately and consistently over time estimates children's learning using dependable assessment tools.

Routinely assess – where teachers monitor their students' learning regularly and as part of The Learning Cycle.

Scaffolding - the process of supporting a child's learning to solve a problem or perform a task that could not be done by that child alone. The aim is to support the child as much as necessary while they build their understanding and ability to use the new learning; then gradually reduce the support until the child can use the new learning independently. See <http://eduscapes.com/tap/topics69.htm> for more information.

Self assessment – where students are encouraged to think about how they are learning and to make plans for how to move forward another step.

Self-reflection – when a teacher thinks about her professional progress and then makes plans for further growth and development on a daily basis and over the long term.

Summative assessment – is assessment that is undertaken at the end of a unit of work or at the end of a theme or project.

Supportive connections - interpersonal relationships that are positive, build confidence and encourage development.

Supportive environment – can be the total physical, social and emotional environment characterised by trust, challenge and encouragement.

System- a procedure or process for obtaining an objective.

Teachable moment- those times in a classroom when an unpredictable thing happens that the teacher can immediately take advantage of to open up an inquiry. An example is when a child brings a piece of pumice stone that was found at the beach and the teacher uses it to lead in to an inquiry into volcanoes and floating and sinking.

Teacher directed instruction – instruction in which the teacher is the active, focal point of the lesson and the children are passive consumers of information. They are often less engaged.

Teacher-facilitated inquiry – where the teacher’s role is that of support person for the students who are learning by inquiring about a topic of interest.

Transform objects and actions symbolically – to change objects and/ or actions into signs, marks, logos, images, movements sounds or representations.

Transitions – those times during the day when one activity is coming to an end and another activity is about to occur. Transition times can be complicated if children don’t know what to do. Effective teachers plan short ‘transition’ games, songs or learning activities that will ensure that this change happens in a calm and positive way. (This word is also used to describe the move from one grade level to another or from home to Kindergarten)

Wonderings – vague but interesting questions that we might ask, perhaps not in search of an answer but just for the pleasure of playing with ideas.

Zone of proximal development- The distance between the actual development level of the child and the level of development that can be reached if working with a more capable child or with a supportive adult.

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