Inclusive Preschool Practice Guide

A Resource to Begin Your Inclusion Journey

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Republic of Singapore

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Introduction

In 2021, the Inclusive Preschool Workgroup report put forward a vision for inclusion in which **children with developmental needs (DN) can learn, play, contribute, and participate meaningfully alongside their typically developing peers in preschools and in society.**

This guidebook is a result of that vision. It was developed to align early childhood education best practices with recommended practices for inclusive preschool education.

You may have experience working with children with developmental needs or perhaps you are preparing to welcome one into your centre or class. Regardless of whether you are an EC or EI educator, an Allied Health Professional, a Centre Leader, or any other champion for change, this guidebook aims to support you in enhancing inclusion in your class or centre.

In this book, you will be guided to:

- Cultivate high-quality learning environments and learning opportunities for *all* children
- Support participation for all children through assessing, planning, implementing, and evaluating their learning
- Recognise opportunities for collaboration with other EC Practitioners and families

How to use this book

Each chapter in this book delves into one of the 7 Recommended Practices from the Inclusive Support Programme (InSP) model. You will find a breakdown of the concepts behind the best practices, suggestions for practical strategies to adopt, and reflection questions to guide your journey.

[1] Read the full report at go.gov.sg/ipwg-full-report

We encourage you to:

- Jump to the chapters that address your immediate challenges *(you don't have to read them in order!)*
- Use the **"Let's Think"** questions to deepen your understanding and sharpen your practice
- Use the **"Let's Talk"** prompts as a guide to share and discuss strategies with your colleagues
- Refer to the **"Additional Resources"** section to make adaptations as you embark on your journey to becoming an inclusive preschool
- Revisit sections as new situations arise in your classroom

Building inclusive practices is a journey, not a destination. As you read through these pages, know that you are part of a growing community of educators committed to creating truly inclusive early learning environments.

We wish you all the best on your journey!

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Look out for the symbols below to help you journey through the guide.

- Foundational Knowledge
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Best Practice Tips
- Let's Think
- Let's Talk
- Additional Resources

Use the bottom menu to navigate through the guide!

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
AAC	Augmentative and Alternative Communication
AHP	Allied Health Professional
APIE	Assessment-Planning-Implementation-Evaluation
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
CoP	Community of Practice
DAP	Developmentally Appropriate Practice
DI	Differentiated Instruction
DN	Developmental Needs
EC	Early Childhood
EI	Early Intervention
IEP	Individualised Education Plan
OT	Occupational Therapist
PD	Professional Development

Abbreviation	Definition
PTC	Parent-Teacher Conference
SLT	Speech and Language Therapist
UD	Universal Design
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER 01

Inclusive Environments

Overview

This chapter on incorporating Universal Design (UD) principles and recommendations introduces you to the factors involved in creating an inclusive environment:

- Physical environment
- Social environment
- Temporal environment

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Universal Design for an Inclusive EC Education

Key Takeaway

In this chapter, you will learn how to design inclusive environments for all children. This includes establishing conducive spaces that encourage active child engagement and offering opportunities for exploration and meaningful learning that support children's overall development. The strategies may require educators to be more intentional when planning and setting up the environment. While this may take some effort at the beginning, with time it promotes independence amongst children and sets consistent expectations of classroom behaviour (e.g., child is encouraged to refer to a visual schedule instead of asking the educator or becoming upset at every transition change).

This chapter introduces key principles for planning and designing inclusive classrooms and draws on Universal Design (UD) to illustrate how a preschool environment can be made accessible to all children.

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Inclusive Environments

A well-designed, safe, and responsive environment is the first step towards including young children with Developmental Needs (DN) in Early Childhood (EC) settings. Every child has his or her unique personality and needs. Therefore, environmental designs should be flexible and adaptable enough to meet the diverse needs of children (e.g., interests, preferences, abilities and leaning styles).

DID YOU KNOW?

Intentional planning means that every activity, including play, has a purpose and is designed to support specific learning goals. It ensures that children are learning in environments that are engaging and stimulating.

A ***visual schedule*** uses images, icons, objects, and text to show the order of activities or events for the day. It provides children with predictability and consistency, helping them anticipate what's coming next.

Physical Environment

The physical environment encompasses both indoor and outdoor spaces used by educators and children. Educators should intentionally organise the classroom layout to ensure age-appropriate furnishings and organisation of space. The selection and display of materials and equipment, as well as lighting and sound, should be carefully considered to maximise learning opportunities and enhance the engagement of every child.

An inclusive, well-designed, EC classroom aims to provide a learning environment where every child feels valued, understood, and supported, regardless of his or her abilities. Children are more likely to gain a sense of belonging and participate fully in activities in an inclusive environment such as this. **An EC classroom setup should focus on promoting active learning through child-initiated play and self-directed learning across various settings** (e.g., large groups, small groups, and individual learning spaces). It is important to have these UD principles in mind when planning for the physical environment. UD is the philosophy of designing environments to make them accessible to everyone. There are seven key principles of UD that inform inclusive classroom designs. The following table provides examples on how to implement UD principles in a preschool classroom.

DID YOU KNOW?

Using ***Universal Design (UD)*** principles is about designing an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the fullest extent possible by everyone regardless of his or her age, size, ability, or disability.

Principle 1	Equitable Use: Accessible to all regardless of ability
Teaching Implication	Ensures that the classroom is accessible by everyone and considers all learners, including those with DN. Have equipment and furniture that accommodate a range of abilities, including those with DN.
Examples	• Modular furniture to support group and individual work • Seating options (e.g., wobble stools, beanbags and cushions, adjustable tables and chairs) • Floor furniture (e.g., soft play mats, cushions, beanbags) and reading nooks • Art centres with child-height easels, small stools, and accessible shelves with art supplies • Cubbies or storage units that are accessible for children to organise their belongings

Principle 2	Flexibility in Use: Caters to a wide range of preferences and abilities
Teaching Implication	Creates a classroom layout that can be easily adapted for different activities and learning styles. Uses movable furniture and configures activity zones to allow for small group work, large group instruction, or individual work.
Examples	Variety of activity zones: • Quiet Zone: A calming, low-stimulation space with soft lighting, cozy seating, picture books, weighted lap pads, noise-reducing headphones, and sensory tools (e.g., fidget toys or calming jars) for children who need a break or a quieter environment. • Movement Zone: A space for physical activity and gross motor development (e.g., balance beams, climbing structures, tumble mats, mini trampolines, scooter boards, tunnel crawls). • Creative Zone: For art, dramatic play, and open-ended creative exploration with supplies (e.g., crayons, paint, playdough, puppets, costumes, or building materials like wooden blocks or LEGO® bricks, musical instrument). • Sensory Zone: A space dedicated to sensory-rich activities (e.g., sensory bins with rice or water beads, textured panels, light tables, bubble tubes, fidget toys, or sensory bottles) for children who benefit from sensory stimulation.

Principle 3	Simple and Intuitive Use: Easy to understand, regardless of the child's experience or ability
Teaching Implication	Ensures the classroom is organised in such a way that any child, regardless of experience or language skills, can easily understand, move around in, and learn. Uses clear signage and a logical layout to help children find resources and move around the room easily.
Examples	Use visual supports such as picture labels on bins and shelves, colour-coded zones for different types of play (e.g., red for art, blue for reading), floor arrows to guide movement, and photo schedules to illustrate daily routines. These tools help children, especially dual language learners and those with communication or cognitive delays, recognise spaces, understand expectations, and build independence.

DID YOU KNOW?

Active learning means giving children time and space to explore learning materials by themselves, with their fellow learners, and with educators, whether in the classroom or at home.

Child-initiated play refers to activities guided by children themselves, allowing them the freedom to choose their preferred activities, how they engage with them, and when they wish to participate.

Principle 4	Perceptible Information: Communicates necessary information effectively
Teaching Implication	Uses a variety of methods to communicate information such as visual displays, auditory cues, and tactile materials. Instructions are clear and concise and in both written and visual formats. Uses hands-on demonstrations while also offering choices and opportunities for repetition and support.
Examples	Visual Cues and Simple Language: • Activity: "Let's put our shoes away." • Visual: A picture of shoes on a shelf or a designated area • Verbal: "Put your shoes on the shelf." (Use simple, clear language.) • Demonstration: Model putting your own shoes away Choice Boards and Flexible Activities: • Activity: "Free Play" • Visual: A choice board with clear, child-friendly pictures representing various activity options (e.g., block play, painting, dramatic play, reading corner, sensory table, puzzles, or outdoor play). • Verbal: "You can choose to play with blocks, paint, or pretend play." • Flexible: Allow children to choose their preferred activity and adjust the level of support given based on their needs.

DID YOU KNOW?

Self-directed learning is an approach where children get to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning goals, strategies, and outcomes. It fosters independence, creativity, and a passion for lifelong learning.

For maximum benefit, ***environmental print*** (i.e., visuals) must be meaningful and useful in the classroom. Too much print and visuals can create clutter.

Principle 5	Tolerance for Error: Minimises hazards and accidental consequences
Teaching Implication	Designs physical environments that support exploration, encourage "safe failure," and promote independence for all learners. The classroom layout includes wide, unobstructed pathways that accommodate children with mobility challenges, including those who use wheelchairs, walkers, or other adaptive equipment. The space minimises risks, fosters autonomy, and ensures all hazardous materials are securely stored.
Examples	• Arrange furniture to create spacious, clearly defined pathways that allow all children to move freely and safely. • Maintain clear sight lines so educators can supervise without intrusive redirection. • Use low, open shelves and accessible bins with pictorial and tactile labels (e.g., images and textures) to support children with visual impairments, emerging language skills, or cognitive delays. • Select rounded-edge furniture and ensure tables and seating are adjustable or varied in height (e.g., floor seating, cube chairs, child-size wheelchairs). • Define learning areas using non-slip rugs, contrasting colour tape, or tactile markers to aid children with visual, sensory, or spatial processing differences in understanding room layout. • Store all hazardous materials (e.g., cleaning supplies, adult tools) in locked or elevated cabinets, and ensure any shared spaces (e.g., sensory tables) have adult-supervised protocols. • Include self-correcting puzzles, trial-and-error toys, and open-ended materials (like magnetic tiles or stackable cups) to encourage experimentation without fear of "getting it wrong."

Principle 6	Low Physical Effort: Can be used comfortably with minimal effort or energy
Teaching Implication	Designs classroom to be comfortable and efficient to use, minimising physical strain. Uses ergonomic furniture and ensures adequate space for movement and access.
Examples	• Have flexible seating • Create a variety of activity zones • Have clear traffic paths for smooth transitions • Use storage that is accessible and clearly labelled with names, symbols, pictures, or words • Create sensory-friendly areas (e.g., calm spaces, comfortable environments conducive for the various activities that occur throughout the day, appropriate sound and light conditions)

Principle 7	Size and Space for Approach and Use: Provides adequate space for use by individuals in wheelchairs or with walkers
Teaching Implication	Provides sufficient space for children to approach, reach, manipulate, and use resources, regardless of their size or mobility. Ensures clear pathways, ample space around furniture, and accessible storage.
Examples	• Keep materials on low, open shelves so that children can easily find what they want, access them, and return them without adult support. • Ensure that each activity zone is easily accessible and allows children to move freely at their own pace.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

EC Educator

As an EC educator, you should:

- Identify existing and potential barriers in the classroom (e.g., poor lighting, noise, clutter or unsuitable furniture), and be flexible when organising space and seating arrangements to cater to children's needs
- Set up clear physical and visual boundaries for different activities
- Ensure materials and equipment are developmentally appropriate, aligned with children's interests, and offer open-ended opportunities for exploration
- Collaborate with other EI educators in planning and designing the classroom
- Be intentional and consider UD principles when designing and setting up classroom environments

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

EI Educator

As an Early Intervention (EI) educator, you should:

- Support EC educators with the planning and implementing of the above responsibilities
- Provide alternative equipment (adapted or specialised equipment and assistive technology) to support children who face challenges in accessing and participating in activities
- Be intentional and consider UD principles when designing and setting up classroom environments

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, you should:

- Begin the process by collaboratively assessing the learning environment with educators
- Ensure all classroom areas remain fully accessible by implementing permanent modifications that support safe and independent movement for all children (e.g., installing ramps, maintaining wide and unobstructed pathways suitable for wheelchairs and walkers, adding handrails where needed, and using age-appropriate, stable furniture)
- Collaborate with other EC Practitioners to design and create spaces suitable for a range of needs and activities (e.g., reading and writing, participation in STEM, dramatic play, and art activities, and resting in sensory and calming places)
- With feedback from other EC Practitioners, periodically evaluate and reflect on the effectiveness of these environmental-support measures

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Modifications and Provisions for Accessibility

Some modifications and provisions may be needed t o support children with mobility, postural control, an d sensory regulation challenges. Consult other EC and EI Practitioners for the strategies used here. Examples are:

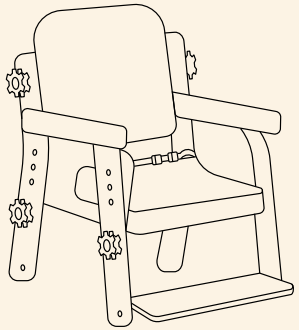
- Special or customised chairs with head rest, arm rests, or buckles that provide stability and promote participation
- Wedge and wobble cushions to be placed on chairs or the floor to improve posture and encourage 'active sitting'
- Adapted chair with elastic band attached to chair to allow children to fidget (especially the feet) and receive sensory feedback when the body needs it
- Tactile mat to be placed under a chair so the child can receive sensory feedback
- Setting up a 'Calm Corner' as a quiet space for children to tune in and learn to regulate their emotions

Providing choices:

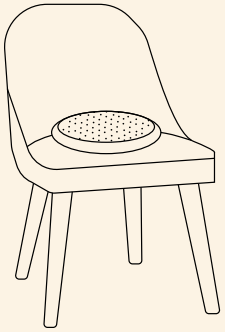
- Option to sit on the floor, chair, mat or cushion during Circle Time
- Option to sit on a special chair with buckle or a cube chair (for children who may need additional posture support)

Assistive technology such as touch screens, touch switches, and speech stimulation software may be used to increase or support the functional capabilities of children, including tools that promote early literacy, number recognition, and interactive problem-solving.

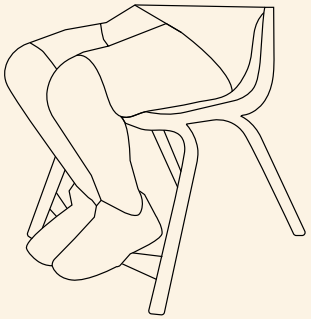
Examples of Seating Adaptations:



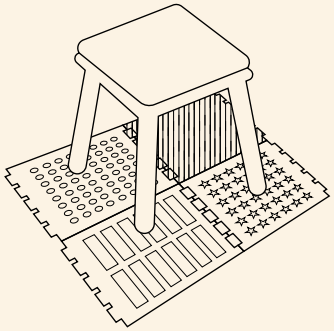
Special or Customised Chair



Wobble Cushion



Adapted chair with elastic band



Tactile mat placed under a chair

DID YOU KNOW?

Children with ***mobility challenges*** have difficulties with sitting, standing, or walking, and may be dependent on others or use mobility aids.

Children with ***postural control challenges*** have difficulties maintaining stability and balance while sitting, standing, or moving.

Children with ***sensory regulation challenges*** may struggle to process and respond appropriately to sensory information, leading to difficulties in daily activities, learning, and social interactions.

Emotional regulation is the ability to manage and express emotions appropriately. It is a crucial skill that develops through adult-child relationships and experiences, starting with co-regulation (adults helping children regulate) and progressing to self-regulation.

SUGGESTION

Educators can make use of outdoor areas for activities that require a large space if classroom space is a constraint or adjust the group size so that children can better participate in the activity to meet learning objectives.

DID YOU KNOW?

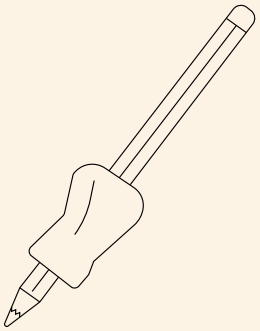
Modifications in EC education comprise changes to curriculum and activity as well as to the environment.

Assistive technology refers to electronically powered or battery-powered equipment such as specialised input-output devices and software.

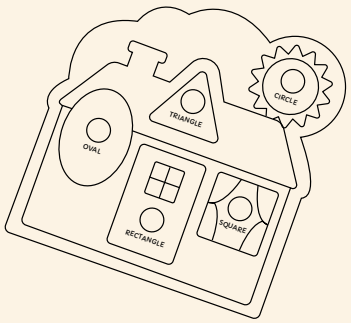
Adapted equipment refers to regular items that have been modified (at no cost or low cost) to meet the needs of children with DN (e.g., sliding a soft rubber stopper over a pencil for an easier grip, placing Velcro on a table to keep a dish or puzzle board from sliding, using foam tubing on paintbrushes or utensils for better grasp, adding visual cues or tactile markers to classroom materials, and raising table legs to accommodate adaptive seating).

Specialised equipment refers to equipment bought or made for routines or activities that are customised for children with DN (e.g., visual cue systems to support transitions, knobbed puzzles for fine motor development, left-handed scissors, specialised drinking cups to promote independence, inclined writing boards for posture support, and sensory materials to support regulation and engagement).

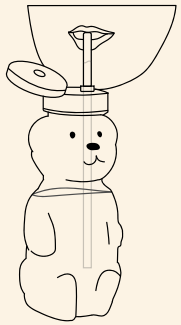
Examples of Adapted and Specialised Equipment:



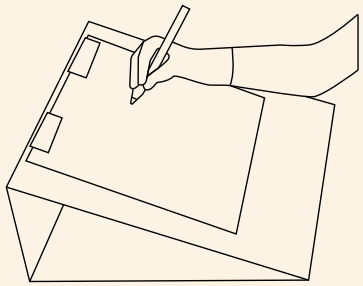
Pencil grip



Knobbed Puzzle



Honey Bear Sippy Cup



Inclined Board

LET'S THINK

Educators

As Educators, consider reflecting on the following:

- What adjustments should be made for children who are sensitive to loud sounds and bright lights?
- How can you create a calming space for children?
- What can be done if the space in your classroom is too small for large group activities?
- What went well and what challenges did you face in creating inclusive classroom environments? What is one thing you can do differently in your practice?

SUGGESTION

Preschool classrooms are high-energy places. It is necessary to have a calming area for children to take a break, rest, and recharge emotionally throughout the day. This space can be limited to one or two children to enhance a sense of cosiness and privacy while ensuring visibility for safety purposes. Ensure that all children are always visible to educators (for proper supervision) and that educators are always visible to children (for a sense of safety).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Ideas for Setting Up a Calm Down Corner

LET'S TALK

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, consider:

- Regularly asking your EC practitioners first about the strengths of their current classroom layout for all children and secondly about possible adaptations to improve existing layout
- Creating a SMART plan to make these changes, and review the impact of these changes on children's learning and development

LET'S TALK

EC Educator

As an EC educator, consider working together with your co-educator (e.g., EI educator or Mother Tongue Language [MTL] educator) to:

- Observe the classroom from a child's perspective by standing and sitting in various areas to ensure that, from every corner, a child can maintain visual connection with the educator.
- Regularly review and adjust the classroom environment to ensure it remains accessible, engaging, and supportive of learning for all children, including children with DN.

DID YOU KNOW?

SMART means:

Specific (S): For a goal to be effective, it needs to be specific.

Measurable (M): Quantify your goals so that it is easier to track progress and determine when you have achieved them.

Achievable (A): Goals should be attainable. Ask yourself: Is your objective something the team can reasonably accomplish?

Relevant (R): Think about the big picture. Why are you setting this goal?

Time-bound (T): You and your team need to be on the same page about a completion date for the goal. How long will the team take to implement the tasks they've identified and when can they start?

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Social Environment

The social environment refers to how a classroom environment influences or supports interactions. **A well-designed social environment promotes trusted relationships by enabling meaningful interactions between children and their peers as well as educators**, while also creating opportunities for educators to build strong connections with family members. This component emphasises a balance between educator-led and child-initiated activities, orientation of spaces, flexibility of group sizes, and use of materials and activities that encourage interaction.

A conducive social environment promotes the development of strong and secure social relationships. These social relationships in turn will cultivate a sense of membership, creating opportunities for imitating positive social and emotional behaviour as well as sharing and exchanging of skills and concepts for cognitive development.

IN SUMMARY:

In a **positive social environment**, children will:

Develop a strong sense of **membership**.

Feel confident to **initiate, persist, explore**, and **investigate** when learning.

This will lead to more **active engagement** and **positive developmental** outcomes.

For more information, refer to Chapter 4: Active Child Engagement.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Educators

As educators, you should:

- Ask yourself how to maintain a balance between educator-led and child-initiated activities and materials to ensure opportunities for quality interactions and encourage meaningful and creative play.
- Plan a mixture of individual and group activities in daily routines (e.g., large groups, small groups, individual learning, quiet time).
- Regularly shuffle class groups by similar skills and abilities (homogenous group) or mixed abilities (heterogeneous group). Use the objective of an activity to determine whether group should comprise children of diverse abilities or children with similar skills and development. The former promotes peer modelling and imitation while the latter can provide the optimal setting for explicit teaching of specific skills or targeted needs.
- Provide ample opportunities for child-initiated learning throughout the day (e.g., open-ended materials in accessible learning centres, free choice time, outdoor exploration, adapted art and sensory activities, and projects based on children's diverse interests and abilities).
- Plan lessons and group or pair work that balance encouraging social interactions and engaging in independent work (e.g., during circle time, transitions, learning centre periods, or station teaching periods).
- Promote enjoyable interactions amongst children through social games (e.g., board games and charades for small groups, and Duck, duck, goose for large groups).

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, you should:

- Advocate in parent-support groups for inclusion of children with diverse needs and their families in your preschool's social environment (e.g., during preschool events and outings).

DID YOU KNOW?

Having a higher proportion of time (for example, 60–70%) allocated to ***child-initiated activities*** is associated with better preschool readiness outcomes for children, as it provides an opportunity for them to develop confidence, collaboration with peers, problem-solving skills, and emotional regulation.

Characteristics of ***quality adult-child interactions*** include:

- Creating a positive and nurturing environment
- Providing support and guidance as needed
- Asking open-ended questions for children to think critically and express their ideas
- Engaging in meaningful conversations where adult and child can take turns to actively listen and respond

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

The Learning Environment

The learning environment can be designed to enhance our children's sense of safety, warmth, and trust in the activities and people they interact with. To do this, plan each day with a mix of activities, some led by educators and others initiated by children. Ensure there are opportunities for children to make independent choices and engage meaningfully with their peers.

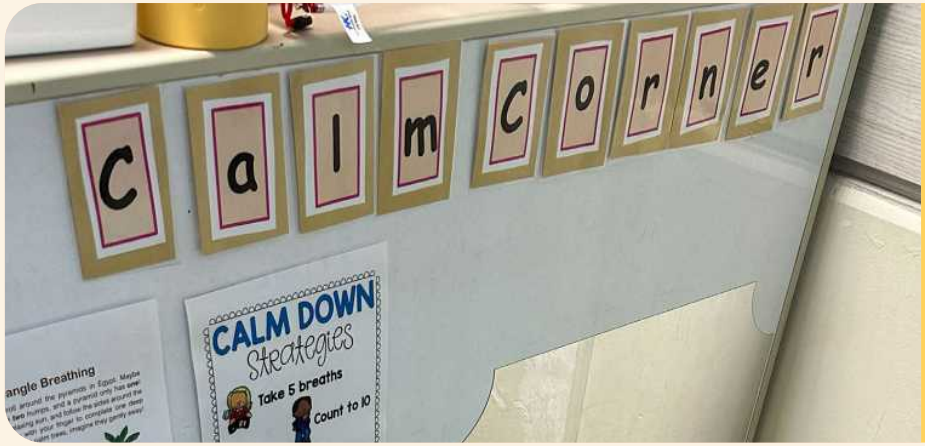
On the right are some suggested activities and corresponding group sizes.

Planned activities are expected to be flexible enough to accommodate desired group sizes.

Use the following questions to help you decide on group sizes:

- Do you have a co-educator or assistant?
- Do you have sufficient materials and space?
- How long is the duration of your activity?
- Does this group size promote quality interactions between educator and children and amongst children?

	Large Group	Small Group	Individual Time
Possible activities	Circle time, story time, music and movement, mealtime, and outdoor play	Literacy and numeracy learning, art and craft, discovery of the world, learning centre, and free play	Individual learning, quiet time
Goals	• To encourage learning of positive social skills and values that come with interacting in large groups • To allow children to experience the fun and enjoyment that come from participating in large group activities	• To provide educators with more contact time with individual children for teaching new skills, building knowledge, providing feedback, and facilitating individual learning • To provide opportunities for children to build shared experiences and friendships by working together	• To let children have some 'quiet' or individual time to consolidate their emotions and learning



SUGGESTION

A **quiet-time space** can be integrated with the reading area or calm corner and filled with gentle and soothing materials such as dim lighting, books, cushions, paper, and pens for drawing and craft work.

Think about these considerations to maximise learning opportunities:

1. **Allow children to choose verbal and non-verbal ways of learning.** For example, when teaching children about vehicles, think about:
   - What vehicle does the child want to draw?
   - What materials does the child want to use to make the vehicle craft? How does the child want to present his vehicle?
   - What questions does the child have to ask about the vehicle?
2. **Encourage children to ask questions and acknowledge and value their questions.** Search for answers together with the children. Note that educators do not always have to provide answers immediately.
3. **Encourage self-reflection as it is an effective way of deeper learning for children.** For example, invite children to comment on their work as well as the work of their peers by asking for their opinions.
4. **Teach and model positive social interactions:**
   - Set clear expectations for social interactions and social behaviour. Show and demonstrate social behaviour and communication skills to help your children develop their own social skills. Where helpful, provide social scripts to support the communication process.
   - Give opportunities to your children to practise social skills in everyday routines.
   - Let parents know about the social skills their children are learning and how parents can help their children practise these skills at home.

Here are some examples of social scripts.

Scenario: How to wait patiently in line.

Examples of Response: "I stand quietly with my feet together", "I look at the teacher", and "I wait for my turn"

Scenario: How to share toys with friends.

Examples of Response: "I can share my toys with a friend", "I can ask a friend to play with me", and "I take turns using the toys"

Scenario: How to deal with anger.

Examples of Response: "I take a deep breath", "I count to ten", and "I ask for help"

Scenario: What happens during outdoor time.

Examples of Response: "I go outside", "I play with my friends", and 'I come back to the classroom"

DID YOU KNOW?

There are ***non-verbal*** ways you can use to teach children or for children to show you what they have learned. Examples of non-verbal ways include using visuals such as picture cards, music and movement, and hands-on activities.

DID YOU KNOW?

A ***social script*** is a guide or set of instructions that helps children know what to say or do in a social situation.

Think of social scripts as mini social stories. They focus solely on phrases to say during particular situations. Children are encouraged to practise reciting the scripts, so they know what to say when these situations arise, or keep them handy to use as needed.

SUGGESTION

- Encourage children to discuss things among themselves or help each other to solve problems or answer questions.
- You don't need to answer all questions put to you, but do display the questions in an area where all children can see them. In this way you demonstrate to children that their questions are important while encouraging waiting and patience, as well as embracing uncertainty or the idea that "It is OK that sometimes we don't know the answer".

LET'S THINK

Educators

As educators, consider reflecting on the following:

- What factors should you take into account when grouping children and planning areas or activities to support interaction and accommodate different group sizes?
- How does your current class schedule and choice of materials support both educator-led and child-initiated interactions as well as quality engagement among children?

SUGGESTION

Consider using materials that encourage social interaction to:

- foster collaboration
- develop communication skills
- develop problem-solving skills

Examples of materials are:

- educational materials or toys that children can use for common play, including pretend play and dress-up sets, puppets and stuffed toys, board games, sports games, and building sets

LET'S TALK

EC Educator

As an EC educator, consider discussing the following with your co-educator (e.g., EI educator or MTL educator):

- How can we promote a sense of belonging and membership for every child in our class? For example, plan a classroom helper chart so that every child gets to play a role and take on a responsibility as a leader or helper.
- How can we plan for small group learning opportunities, grouping children of diverse abilities, and exploring ways to facilitate child-initiated interactions through an activity plan?

LET'S TALK

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, consider discussing the following with your team:

- What elements make up a well-designed and socially inclusive learning environment in an EC classroom?
- What can educators do to have a nimbler, more responsive environment in a classroom to support the social development and needs of all children?

SUGGESTION

Make sure that every child can try different roles and play a part in the classroom. Examples of roles are:

- **Pencil Monitor:** Distributing and collecting pencils or other classroom materials
- **Line Leader:** Leading the class in a line, following directions, and ensuring safe and orderly movement
- **Calendar Helper:** Helping to mark the date or assist with calendar activities
- **Attendance Helper:** Helping to mark attendance on a class chart during Circle Time
- **Snack Helper:** Assisting with the preparation or distribution of snacks
- **Class Library Helper:** Organising books, helping others find books, or assisting with library activities
- **Class Ambassador:** Welcoming new children or assisting a newcomer with classroom tasks
- **Door Holder:** Opening and closing doors when the class is moving from indoor to outdoor areas
- **Others:** Spraying water on plants or feeding the class pet, etc.

DID YOU KNOW?

Child-initiated interactions can be implemented by educators in these ways:

- Paying close attention to children's interests, abilities, and learning styles
- Offering a variety of materials that can be used in different ways (e.g., blocks, art supplies, and natural materials such as pebbles, twigs, dried flowers and leaves)
- When children are engaging in free play, providing enough time and space for them to choose their own activities and interactions
- Facilitating opportunities for children to work together and learn from each other
- Encouraging children to think critically and explore their ideas by asking open-ended questions
- Observing and documenting children's learning and development
- Reflecting on your practice to constantly improve on your planning and teaching

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learning Centre Materials Guide

SUCCESS STORIES

I had a child in my class who refused to participate in class activities and often cried when prompted to continue. This affected her ability to join her classmates in other activities. The EI educator and I thought that the child might respond better to encouragement. We tried a strategy of grouping her with peers who consistently encouraged her. As educators, we also congratulated and celebrated her successes whenever she completed her tasks. This consistent encouragement helped to reduce frequent breakdowns, and she is now more confident to ask for help independently.

- EC Educator, My First Skool

SUCCESS STORIES

When the educators at my preschool adopted a whole-class approach to planning for children's active engagement, they became more mindful of the various ways to group children so as to reinforce strength-based learning opportunities. They were also more self-aware of the feedback provided to and about the children, fostering a supportive and positive social environment in the classrooms.

- InSP Technical Assistance (TA) Coach from the InSP pilot

SUGGESTION

- Be flexible and intentional in terms of types of activities, difficulty level, objective of activity, and children's needs.
- Facilitate and encourage both social interaction and independence, as required (e.g., use visual aids for communication and social skills that model positive social interaction and problem-solving skills).

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Temporal Environment

The temporal environment refers to how time is structured and organised in a child's daily life. This is important for young children as it provides a sense of routine, predictability, and stability. Consistent schedules for activities and routines help children feel secure, thereby reducing stress and anxiety. A well-organised temporal environment also supports the development of time-related skills such as understanding the sequence of events, anticipating future activities, and managing time. By structuring time effectively, educators can create an environment that promotes cognitive, emotional, and social development in young children.

A predictable schedule is important for young children because it provides structure, security, and a sense of control over their environment. When children know what to expect throughout the day, they feel safe and secure, which helps them anticipate upcoming activities with confidence. Consistent routines support emotional regulation by making transitions smoother and reducing feelings of frustration or overwhelm. A predictable schedule also fosters cognitive development by reinforcing memory, sequencing, and learning patterns. Over time, children build independence as they learn to navigate daily routines and develop foundational skills such as time management, self-regulation, and responsibility.

For children with DN who may have difficulties in self-regulation and understanding of social cues, having an explicit and predictable temporal environment helps them better understand behavioural and social expectations, paving the way towards active participation and independence in daily activities.

Examples of Elements in the Temporal Environment

Daily Schedules and Routines

Arrival and Departure:

Establish clear routines for children to arrive and depart, including designated drop-off and pick-up areas and procedures.

Group or Circle Time:

Allocate specific times for large group activities like story time, songs, and discussions.

Snack and Meal Times:

Schedule regular times for snacks and meals and incorporate opportunities for social interaction and learning about food.

Rest and Nap Time:

Ensure that rest and naps are held in a quiet, calm, and conducive environment.

Outdoor Time:

Schedule regular breaks for physical activity such as outdoor play and nature exploration.

Transitions:

Plan smooth and predictable transitions between activities using visual cues, music, and verbal prompts.

Activity Blocks:

Structure the day into blocks of time for different activities such as free play, teacher-directed, and small group work.

Pacing and Length of Activities

Short, Focused Activities:

Ensure activities for younger children are short and engaging to maintain attention.

Longer, More Complex Activities:

Schedule longer and more complex activities for older children, allowing for deeper exploration and learning.

Flexibility:

Be prepared to adjust the schedule and pacing of activities based on the needs and interests of children.

Transition Cues

Verbal Cues:

Use clear and consistent language to signal transitions such as "It's time to clean up" or "Let's gather for Circle Time".

Non-Verbal Cues:

Use visual cues like a timer, music, or a specific song to signal the end of an activity and the start of a new one.

Visual Schedules:

Use visual schedules or charts to help children understand the daily routine and anticipate what is coming next.

DID YOU KNOW?

Learning patterns are the consistent ways young children approach and make sense of new experiences. These patterns develop through repeated exposure to routines, problem-solving tasks, and social interactions, helping children build on what they know and adapt to new learning situations over time. As they grow, these patterns can influence their ability to adapt to different learning environments and challenges.

DID YOU KNOW?

Transition strategies help ensure a smooth shift from activity to activity and decrease the probability of disruptive or challenging behaviour occurring.

Transition strategies for the whole class

Five-Minute Glove:

- Label the five fingers of a glove with the numerals 1 to 5 in sequence.
- When five minutes are left for the current activity, educator holds up all fingers of the five-minute glove to show that current activity will end in five minutes.
- With each passing minute, put down the appropriate finger to show the corresponding amount of time left.

Echo Microphone:

- Educator or transition helper (child) uses an echo microphone to announce transition warnings to the group.

Hourglass or Visual Timers:

- Hourglass or Visual timers are used to give a visual representation of how much time is left before a transition.

Transition strategies for particular children:

- Give individual transition reminders.
- Allow a child who has difficulty transitioning to begin before other children.
- Give a child the option to bring an object from one activity to the next.
- Make things easier by decreasing the demands on a child during a transition (e.g., clean up only five train tracks instead of the entire box).
- Assign child a role (e.g., transition helper) during a transition.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Educators

As educators, you should:

- **Maintain optimal regulation**
  - Identify times of the day when children are more receptive to large-group learning versus small-group explorations and interactions. Consider children's receptiveness when implementing different models of co-teaching.
  - Include regular brain breaks and movement breaks in children's schedule. These breaks will help children to recharge and regulate their energy levels to be optimally focused and engaged throughout the day.
  - Plan a schedule that is well-balanced between high energy and sedentary activity, including educator-led and child-initiated interactions. Consider pairing children up so they can help each other with activity demands throughout the day.
- **Plan for predictability**
  - Establish a consistent routine or sequence of activities to increase sense of security and decrease uncertainty. Establish and communicate clearly the expected behaviour for different activities.
  - Provide clear indicators of beginning and end of an activity as well as what to expect during these transitions. Reduce amount of time children must wait for next activity.
  - Introduce a schedule at the start of the day and revisit it throughout the day. Ensure that the schedule is understood by all children, including children with DN.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

EI Educator

As an EI educator, you should:

- Suggest regulation exercises, embedded into activities and routines, that benefit the whole class
- Provide individualised sensory tools that cater to a particular child's needs
- Recommend a visual schedule that is appropriate for children's level of development

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, you should:

- Review class schedules to ensure there are sufficient times throughout the day for routines and regulatory breaks. There should also be a balance of high-energy and low-energy activities
- Ensure that the movement of children within the preschool is staggered, preventing chaos and congestion along pathways
- Implement regular reviews of educators' practices using checklists, observations, and feedback

DID YOU KNOW?

Regulation can be divided into three areas: Emotional, Behavioural, and Cognitive.

Emotional Regulation

- External support such as receiving and accepting comforting gestures and words from others
- Internal processes namely regulating emotional stimulation in respond to social rules

Behavioural Regulation

- Impulse control
- Delayed gratification
- Compliance to rules and expectations
- Self-monitored socially appropriate behaviour

Cognitive Regulation

Executive functioning skills like:

- Forward planning
- Paying attention
- Seeing a task through from beginning to end
- Organisation skills
- Reflection
- Following of instructions
- Problem solving

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Creating a Supportive Classroom Environment

1 **Visual schedules:** Use a daily visual schedule that clearly highlights each activity or routine planned for the day.

- Label each part of the schedule with the activity name and represent it with a photograph, drawing, or symbol.
- Place the schedule at children's eye level so they can easily see and refer to it throughout the day.

For children with DN, an individualised visual schedule may be more effective. Tailor the schedule to match their level of understanding. For example:

- While the class may use a full-day schedule with black-and-white symbols, a child with DN might use a shorter schedule showing only 2–3 upcoming activities at a time.
- Replace symbols with real photographs or even concrete objects that represent each activity, such as a toy bus for "arrival" or a cup for "snack."

2 **Transition strategies:** Use a combination of verbal and non-verbal cues to support smooth transitions between activities.

- Offer advance reminders (e.g., give 10-minute and 5-minute reminders to help children prepare for the upcoming change).
- Incorporate consistent signals such as a transition song (e.g., a clean-up song) or a musical instrument (e.g., chime or bell) to indicate it's time to move on.

For children with DN, provide individualised support alongside group instructions. This may include:

- A gentle one-on-one reminder using a visual schedule, photograph cue, or keyword prompt (e.g., showing a picture of the next activity).
- Using first–then language (e.g., "First clean up, then snack").
- Offer extra wait time or a familiar routine to reduce anxiety and increase predictability.

3 **Balancing activities and supporting regulation in class schedules:** When designing the daily class schedule, aim to balance high-energy and quiet activities. For example, after active times such as outdoor play or music and movement, include calming activities like puzzles, drawing, or quiet reading to help children settle before transitions to meals or rest time.

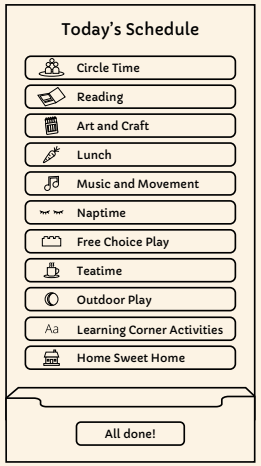
Children with DN may require:

- More frequent breaks to help sustain attention or reduce overwhelm. These can include brief opportunities to step away from a group task or engage in a self-selected quiet activity.
- Sensory regulation supports, especially when transitioning between stimulating and calm periods.

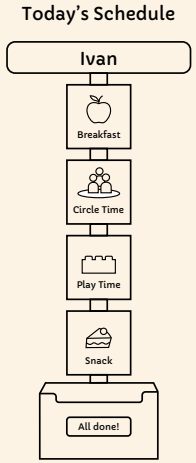
Effective strategies include:

- Visiting a calm corner with access to books, weighted cushions, or soft lighting.
- Using sensory tools such as stretchy or squishy toys, fidget items, or sensory bins.
- Offering a choice of calming strategies, empowering the child to select what helps them feel ready to re-engage.

Examples of Visual Schedules:



Class Schedule



Individual Schedule

*The type of schedule used will be based on the child's level of representation.

LET'S THINK

Educators

Consider reflecting on the following to guide the design of your temporal environment for your children:

- What types of activities and transition strategies have you incorporated into your current class schedule to support varying energy levels and smooth transitions for all children? How effective have they been and what improvements might be needed?
- What would you consider when preparing a visual schedule for your class? How might you modify it to better support a child with DN?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Tips on Visual Supports

Strategies to Support Transition between Activities

LET'S TALK

EC Educator

As an EC Educator, consider working on the following with your co-educator (either an EI or MTL educator):

- For which parts of your classroom and routine can you incorporate a visual schedule? Based on your children's level of understanding of instructions, what images, icons, or symbols should you use?
- Trial the visual schedule for a week.
- List the strengths and areas of improvement of the visual schedule being used.
- Modify the visual schedule and trial it again.

LET'S TALK

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, consider discussing the following with your team:

- What similarities and differences does the team notice in the visual schedules that team members have created separately? How will these influence your approach in creating future visual schedules?
- What are the current transition strategies used in your preschool? How can your team create and compile a pool of strategies that are consistently used by all educators in your preschool?

SUCCESS STORIES

The child I was working with had difficulties transitioning from one lesson or routine to the next. Together with the EI educator, we created a daily visual schedule for the child. I used the schedule at the start of the day to set the expectations for the child. Using the visual schedule, I observed that the child developed more social awareness and started displaying more socially appropriate behaviour with peers, and that peers also better appreciated their classmates with needs. The visual schedule has enabled children to follow through lessons and play together.

- EC Educator, My First Skool

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CHAPTER 02

Intentional Teaching and Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Overview

- Define 'Intentional Teaching' and understand how we can be intentional educators for all children
- Define 'Developmentally Appropriate Practice' and what that means when we plan and carry out our learning activities
- Introduce 'Universal Design for Learning' and how it can be incorporated into class-wide practices to create intentional and developmentally appropriate learning experiences
- Introduce 'Differentiated Instruction' and how it complements Intentional Teaching and DAP to support children with DN

Key Takeaway

Through this chapter on Intentional Teaching and DAP, you will:

- Understand how Intentional Teaching and DAP come together to provide education that is holistic and inclusive for all children
- Assess how Intentional Teaching and DAP can be applied to inclusive classrooms

DID YOU KNOW?

UDL and DI differ in these ways:

- ***UDL*** is a framework that helps all educators adapt their classrooms to meet the needs of every child. It focuses on removing barriers to learning and ensuring that all children have access to learning opportunities.
- ***DI*** involves adapting instruction based on ongoing assessment of a particular child's needs and performance. This involves adjusting content, process, product, and learning environment. DI aims to meet the needs of individual children by providing tailored instruction and support.

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Intentional Teaching and Developmentally Appropriate Practice

In an inclusive classroom, **educators can apply Intentional Teaching and Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) to create meaningful learning experiences for diverse learners**. DAP provides principles and guidelines that support Intentional Teaching in optimising children's learning and development according to each child's need. For Intentional Teaching to take place, teaching strategies such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction (DI) must be used to make learning environments more inclusive and accessible for all learners.

Your goal as an educator using DAP to guide Intentional Teaching is to:

- Create quality inclusive learning environments in the Physical, Social, and Temporal environments.
- Develop learning experiences using a child-centred and strengths-based approach such as UDL and DI.

For more information refer to Chapter 1: Inclusive Environments.

Intentional Teaching

Intentional Teaching is an educational approach in which educators purposefully act to achieve specific learning and developmental outcomes for all children. It involves thoughtful, goal-directed actions and decisions by educators to facilitate children's learning and development.

Intentional Teaching enables educators to make mindful and deliberate decisions about the teaching process and learning experience. This allows us to comprehend and address the diverse needs and interests of all children and to take a proactive approach to ensuring that all children can access learning in an optimal way.

Below are some examples of intentional teaching strategies.

Modelling and Demonstrating	Educators modelling desired behaviour or skills, (e.g., cutting paper with a pair of scissors or writing letters) to help children learn through observation
Scaffolding	Providing temporary support or guidance to help children achieve tasks they may not be able to do independently, gradually reducing support as they become more confident
Extending Vocabulary and Language Skills	Using rich language and providing opportunities for children to communicate and express themselves through storytelling, singing, or role-playing
Encouraging Problem-Solving	Presenting children with challenges and encouraging them to find solutions, either individually or collaboratively
Providing Opportunities for Creativity	Setting up activities with no expectations of the results, to encourage children to experiment and explore their creativity
Collaborating with Families	Working with families to understand children's individual needs and interests and sharing information about their learning and development

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Educators

As intentional educators, you should:

- Recognise the importance of educator-led and child-initiated experiences and incorporate both kinds of experiences in your curriculum.
- Be responsive to your children's needs, interests, and abilities by adapting your teaching strategies and materials according to your children's learning styles, pace, and developmental needs.
- Understand the needs of your children by conducting regular observations and assessments of their progress to determine the planning of future learning activities.
- Use information from formal and informal assessments to identify areas of additional support and improve your teaching practices to better meet the needs of the children in your class.
- Enlist parents to provide support to their children beyond the classroom and preschool environments by sharing children's progress and involving them in learning activities.
- Encourage parents to share information on their child's behaviour both at home and in the community, and work with other EC Practitioners to exchange strategies and resources.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, you should:

- Intentionally plan routines and curriculum schedules to allow time and opportunity for educator-led and child-initiated experiences
- Ensure that the curriculum includes opportunities for educators to adapt and modify activities to cater to the varied needs of children in an inclusive classroom
- Consistently encourage collaborative partnership with families through a variety of activities and communication modes

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Intentional Teaching

To practise Intentional Teaching, consider following these best practices:

1 High Expectations

You plan for learning experiences based on your knowledge and expectations of your children's development. All children will achieve meaningful educational goals, regardless of ability levels, but this requires you to consider multiple ways of knowing and learning, to value children's strengths and differences, and to use these in assessment and planning.

2 Planning

You are purposeful when you set learning goals. You consider whether your goals are clear, specific, and achievable. You think about how the goals relate to your curriculum, your children's development and knowledge, and their strengths, needs, and interests. You also consider principles of UDL and DI when designing activities and lessons and know how to flexibly incorporate educator-led and child-initiated experiences so that children of all abilities can engage and learn.

3 Positive Learning Environment

You create a learning environment that is safe and conducive to learning. Your children are respected and valued for the diversity they bring to the class and their learning experiences. You provide opportunities for your children to make mistakes and to learn from them. You encourage them to explore and take risks and to build resilience in a supported learning environment.

4 Engaging Activities

You seek to create learning experiences in which children can actively participate. Activities should be interactive, driven by children's interests, and encourage them to explore, ask questions, and connect their first-hand experiences beyond preschool. You facilitate children's participation and foster mastery by providing developmentally appropriate support to optimise learning and achieve learning goals.

5 Thoughtful Questioning

As you plan your learning activities, you consider that your children come with diverse experiences and thinking processes. You seek to purposefully understand their thoughts, arouse their curiosity, and prepare experiences that stimulate their thinking. You engage them and encourage their involvement by asking questions that arouse their interest and fuel their wonder. Examples of such questions are:

- What do you think will happen if we mix two different colours together?
- Why do you think the tower fell when another block was added on top?
- What are some other ways we can build a bridge with these materials?

6 Supportive and Formative Feedback

For children, receiving feedback is an important part of their learning. Feedback that encourages and provides specific suggestions for learning helps children understand their strengths and areas for improvement. This guides them towards achieving their learning goals.

LET'S THINK

Educators

As an educator, consider reflecting on how you can make use of formal and informal observations and assessments to:

- Understand the learning styles and needs of each child.
- Adapt your teaching strategies and plans to cater to these learning styles and needs.

LET'S THINK

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, consider reflecting on the following:

- How can you encourage educators to reflect on and review their teaching practices?
- How can you support educators in reflecting and collaborating on their current teaching practices on a consistent basis (e.g., weekly)?

LET'S TALK

Team

Together with your preschool or teaching team, consider discussing these Intentional Teaching best practices:

- Which are the three best practices that best reflect the strengths of your classroom or preschool? Share one example for each.
- Which are the three best practices that require intentional adjustments?
- What might be some challenges in making these adjustments?
- What can the team do to work out these challenges?

SUCCESS STORIES

I was told that I would have a child with autism in my class. Thinking about the strategies I know, I soon realised that my first challenge would be helping the other children accept him. I focused on helping them understand that making mistakes is okay and that helping one another is 'normal.' Gradually, I saw him joining groups for play and being invited to join games. He smiled more and seemed happy to be at school. He was no longer the 'special' child but just 'one of the gang'. An important part of inclusion is recognising that a child cannot learn unless they feel safe, secure, and valued.

- EC Educator, My First Skool

SUCCESS STORIES

When the Educators at my preschool had opportunities to take a step back, reflect on their teaching experiences and children's participation, and carefully evaluate each child's individual interests, strengths, and abilities, it enabled them to adapt specific and intentional strategies to support each child's learning. They asked different questions and provided individualised prompts for different children. They also acknowledged the unique interests of each child and attempted to incorporate these interests into the child's learning experiences.

- InSP Technical Assistance (TA) Coach from the InSP pilot

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Teaching Checklist for Early Childhood Educators

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is a framework that educators can use to promote young children's optimal development and learning. DAP is evidence-based and rests on nine principles and six guidelines.

Nine Principles

1. **Consider children's characteristics** and their environments and how these factors interact to influence growth and development.
2. **Consider all domains of child development** when assessing children's needs and progress, and while planning lessons and classroom activities.
3. **Allocate time for play.**
4. **Consider differences in learning and development** due to children's differing environments, cultural contexts, experiences, and individual differences.
5. **Give children opportunities to engage with, take in, and organise information** through their relationships, interactions with their environment, and their overall experiences.
6. **Create a learning environment where children feel they belong**, have a sense of purpose, and are empowered to make choices. All these motivate them to learn.
7. **Encourage children to learn by making meaningful connections** across different subject areas and domains of learning and development.
8. **Spur children to learn and develop optimally** with goals that are challenging yet achievable and to reflect on their experiences and learning.
9. **Use technology and interactive media responsibly** and intentionally to support children's learning and development.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice
Six Guidelines

1. **Create a caring community** of learners where children can feel secure and get a sense of belonging.
2. **Engage in partnerships** with families that leverage each party's strengths and circumstances.
3. **Observe, document, and assess** children's development and learning.
4. Ensure that all teaching and experiences are meant to **enhance children's development and learning.**
5. **Plan an engaging curriculum** to achieve meaningful goals and implement the plan diligently.
6. **Demonstrate professionalism** as an educator.

DAP promotes recognising children's unique abilities while advocating designing learning environments through a 'strengths-based, play-based' approach.

As an educator, you can promote optimal development and learning by reflecting on three core considerations of the DAP framework:

1. **Commonality**

   Understand how common patterns of development and learning, together with children's social and cultural experiences, influence children's learning, behaviour, and responses.

2. **Individuality**

   Acknowledge that children, families, and communities have diverse needs. By recognising individuality, educators provide support and tap into a child's individual strengths to support development and learning.

3. **Context**

   Be mindful of the personal (e.g., culture, values, and traditions), racial, and socio-economic contexts of the children you work with. Reflect also on how your professional, social, and cultural contexts, as well as those of your preschool, influence the way you adapt teaching practices and support children and families with diverse needs.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Action:

Engaging in Play-Based Learning

- **Providing Opportunities for Exploration:** Offering a variety of materials and experiences that encourage children to explore, experiment, and discover
- **Facilitating Imaginative Play:** Creating opportunities for children to engage in pretend play, role-play, and other forms of imaginative expression
- **Supporting Social and Emotional Development:** Providing opportunities for children to interact with peers, practice social skills, and express their emotions
- **Using Play as a Tool for Learning:** Integrating play into the curriculum to help children learn new concepts and skills in a fun and engaging way

Using Observation and Assessment

- **Observing Children's Development:** Regularly observing children's behaviour, interactions, and learning progress to understand their individual needs and interests
- **Using Assessment to Inform Instruction:** Using observations and assessments to guide instruction and create learning experiences that are appropriate for each child
- **Communicating with Families:** Regularly communicating with families about their child's progress and development to foster strong partnerships
- **Documenting Learning:** Documenting children's learning through various methods, such as portfolios, photographs, and videos, to showcase their growth and development

Providing Age-Appropriate Challenges

- **Pushing Children Beyond Their Comfort Zone:** Providing activities that are slightly challenging, encouraging children to stretch their abilities and learn new skills
- **Scaffolding Learning:** Providing support and guidance to help children succeed in challenging activities
- **Encouraging Persistence and Effort:** Praising children for their effort and persistence rather than focusing on outcomes alone
- **Providing Opportunities for Independent Learning:** Allowing children to take ownership of their learning and make choices about what they want to learn

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Educators

As educators, you should:

- Adopt a strengths-based approach to acknowledge the differences amongst children and their families when planning activities, groupings, and experiences. For example, when family culture prioritises the use of chopsticks, provide opportunities in the classroom to work on coordinating or strengthening fine-motor skills, as determined by the child's current abilities.
- Plan for grouping, buddy pairing, seat buddies, etc., to include children of varied abilities and experiences in daily routines and activities.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, you should:

- Foster a preschool culture that recognises and appreciates differences—social, cultural, and developmental—through a strengths-based approach when communicating with and about your team, families, and children.
- Establish policies and communication guidelines that promote partnerships with families, parent-support groups, and communities to share strategies, knowledge, and practices—all aimed at including and representing ALL children and families.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Creating Opportunities

1. When planning playtime, offer open-ended materials that support all areas of development and encourage self-regulation and problem-solving. Include items like building blocks (e.g., wooden blocks, magnetic tiles, foam bricks, cardboard boxes), pretend-play items (e.g., dress-up clothes, puppets, play food, dollhouse), recycled items, natural materials (e.g., leaves, twigs, acorn, shells, pebbles) and visuals related to classroom experiences to spark ideas and conversations. Allow ample time for exploration and promote peer interaction by inviting children to share their thoughts and ideas.
2. Vary classroom activities to cater to diverse learning styles, cultural contexts, and expressive and receptive language abilities. For example, when teaching a new word, educators can introduce the word in different languages or through a range of representations (e.g., pictures, objects, words). Tap on family involvement and support, for example:
   - Get parents to provide feedback and inputs on class activities.
   - Get parents to participate as class volunteers.
   - Get children to prepare a Show-and-Tell activity at home so they can later share their preparation experience with the class.
3. Curriculum and activity planning should build upon each other. For example, the English and Mother Tongue Language curriculum can be based on the same overarching theme. This way, all educators in your class are familiar with what each child has been introduced to and how children's experiences can be extended regardless of the educator involved.

SUCCESS STORIES

I set up achievable goals and differentiated lesson plans for a child who had difficulty completing a particular task. Using tools and resources to cater to the child's learning style, he was able to complete the same task as his peers. After five months, he became much more participative and willing to stay engaged without much difficulty, even if the task required more time.

- EC Educator, PCF Sparkletots

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

DAP Checklist for Early Childhood Educators

LET'S THINK

Practitioners

As practitioners, consider reflecting on the following:

- What actions have you taken to be more intentional in considering the social and cultural experiences that children bring to the classroom?
- What are the strengths and difficulties of your approach when interacting with children and when making decisions for both an individual child and the entire class?
- What could you do differently to use DAP more consistently in your classroom?

LET'S TALK

Team

As a preschool team, consider using the DAP principles and guidelines to discuss the following:

- Share examples of your team's current practices for each principle and guideline.
- Now select two principles and one guideline you have identified as areas where changes can be made to include all children and their families.
- Provide examples of how they can be implemented.
- Discuss how the changes can be consistently practised for long-term sustainability.

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Universal Design for Learning

To create learning experiences that are both developmentally appropriate and intentional in purpose, we can incorporate principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and DI in our day-to-day interactions with children.

UDL is a framework based on learning sciences research to support diverse learners through multiple means of 1) engagement, 2) representation, and 3) action and expression. These three principles guide the design and development of curricula that is effective and inclusive for all learners.

Through the flexible use of both educator-led and child-initiated experiences, as guided by UDL principles and DI, children with diverse learning needs can meaningfully engage and learn throughout daily activities, including instructional time, routines, free choice, and play.

Diversity in learning is the norm. As a practitioner of UDL principles, you should adapt your curriculum to address individual differences rather than having the learner adapt to your curriculum. You can use UDL to help design instructions that cater for individual differences by providing flexibility in teaching and reducing barriers to learning.

Universal Design for Learning at a Glance

Provide Multiple Means of Engagement	Provide Multiple Means of Representation	Provide Multiple Means of Action and Expression
The 'WHY' of learning: Motivating children by offering choices, customisation, and opportunities for collaboration and individualisation Stimulating interest and engagement by providing options for: • Engaging interest • Sustaining effort and persistence • Self-regulation	**The 'WHAT' of learning: Presenting information in various formats (e.g., text, audio, video, visuals) to cater to different learning styles and preferences** Taking in information by providing options for: • Explaining concepts • Comprehension	**The 'HOW' of learning: Allowing children to demonstrate their understanding in various ways (e.g., writing, speaking, creating)** Showing what children know by providing options for: • Physical action • Expression and communication • Problem solving and decision making • Working in teams • Demonstrating adaptability • Displaying emotions

As an educator looking at applying UDL principles, consider the following:

1 **Principle of Engagement**
- How can you gain your children's attention and interest and keep them involved?
- How can you motivate your children so that they want to learn more?

2 **Principle of Representation**
- How can you teach the lesson and connect new ideas to existing knowledge in a way that your children can understand?
- How can you help your children learn new words in a meaningful way?

3 **Principle of Action and Expression**
- How can you give your children different ways to demonstrate what they have learned?
- How can you help your children practise by giving them step-by-step support and clear feedback?

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Educators

As Educators planning learning experiences, you should:

- **Principle of Engagement**
  - Adapt activities to children's interests and individual experiences.
  - Offer choices to increase relevance and help children feel more involved.
  - Set clear, specific, and achievable goals while giving timely feedback on progress to help children stay focused and motivated.
  - Help children learn ways to understand and manage their emotions through consistently using clear routines and creating a classroom environment (physical, social, and temporal environments) that helps them to focus and stay calm.

For more information refer to Chapter 1: Inclusive Environments.

- **Principle of Representation**
  - Use different modes such as pictures, hands-on activities, and music to help children understand new ideas. Make connections to new experiences by using familiar and relevant examples whileencouraging children to ask questions.
  - Use colours, manipulatives, and multimedia when teaching and explaining new concepts.
- **Principle of Expression**
  - Encourage children to express their learning and ideas in different ways and modalities such as through talking, drawing, or using actions and materials.
  - Help children to learn to plan, focus on, organise, and complete tasks by giving clear steps and direct feedback on progress.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, you should:

- Ensure roles are clear and EC and EI educators can work together as a team to apply UDL practices effectively and sensitively to all children in the classroom.
- Ensure protected time is honoured and set aside for educators to plan and prepare lessons.
- Lesson should follow DAP guidelines and be supported by UDL and DI practices.
- Provide educators with access to diverse materials, tools, and technologies that can be used to incorporate UDL in children's learning.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

UDL Principles

Principle of Engagement

1 **Provide options for engaging interest by considering:**

- Group and classroom arrangements
- Engagement of multiple senses such as smell, sight, hearing, taste, touch, vestibular, proprioception, and interoception
- Including children's hobbies and interests
- Providing variety and choice
- Connecting to prior experiences and knowledge

2 **Provide options for sustaining effort and persistence by:**

- Balancing challenge and support in learning tasks, i.e., providing children not only with learning tasks that challenge them at the right level but also with enough support to help them succeed
- Providing scaffolds and help (including peer support)
- Giving feedback

3 **Provide options for self-regulation through:**

- Creating space and giving time for children to calm down when needed
- Developing a child's understanding and control of emotions and providing strategies and routines to build emotional regulation

Principle of Representation

1 **Provide options for taking in information by:**

- Using different ways to present information
- Engaging multiple senses

2 **Provide options for explaining concepts by:**

- Using colours, manipulatives, and multimedia material
- Using different languages to reflect diverse cultures

3 **Provide options for comprehension by:**

- Drawing on children's existing knowledge and experiences and building new common experiences
- Guiding children on how to take in information (e.g., using highlighting, sizing, patterns, checklists, modelling, multimedia)

Principle of Expression

1 **Provide options for physical action by:**

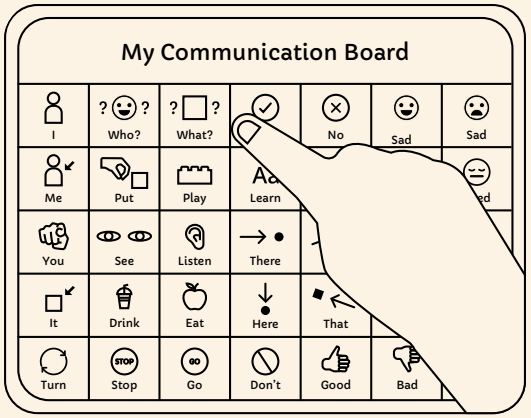
- Exploring different ways children can respond (e.g., communication boards)
- Using different tools to accommodate various physical abilities (e.g., thicker crayons, larger pieces of paper)

2 **Provide options for expression and communication by:**

- Using different ways of learning and communicating (e.g., signing, communication boards, acting versus talking)
- Considering the levels of complexity of different tasks
- Being mindful of language and cultural diversities

3 **Provide options for children to plan and organise themselves by:**

- Providing schedules and routines
- Setting clear classroom rules and expectations
- Guiding and facilitating transitions



Communication Board

DID YOU KNOW?

Vestibular refers to balance and movement; ***proprioception*** refers to sense of your body in space; and ***interoception*** refers to the feeling of knowing what is happening in your body.

LET'S THINK

Educator

As an educator, consider reflecting on the following:

- How can you ensure that a group arrangement is suitable for the activity you are planning, and that all your children (including those with diverse abilities or sensory needs) can participate fully?
- What are the classroom expectations you have clearly set for the different activities and routines?
- How can you guide and facilitate transitions between routines and activities?

LET'S TALK

Educator

With your co-educator, consider exploring the following aspects of classroom arrangement:

- How will the different group sizes and set ups support all children, including those with different abilities or sensory needs?
- Share your experience on which classroom arrangement will encourage children to join in, interact, and stay engaged.
- What challenges may prevent full participation (e.g., not having enough seating or participation space)?
- How can you change the setup to make it more accessible for all children?

DID YOU KNOW?

Sensory needs refer to the way children respond to and process information through their senses; these include sight, sound, touch, taste, smell, and movement.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Are you Using UDL Checklist

SUCCESS STORIES

At the beginning of my inclusion journey, it was a struggle as I had no prior knowledge of inclusive practices. However, once I began to understand the unique needs of different children, I learned to group them accordingly. Station teaching has greatly benefited my classroom and the children through learning in smaller groups. This generated more learning opportunities and facilitated the use of differentiated instructions for children of different needs.

- EC Educator, PCF Sparkletots

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated Instruction (DI) is a systematic educational approach in which educators modify content, teaching, and learning activities to respect the range of children's backgrounds while optimising their learning potential. It recognises children's diverse learning styles and seeks to create an engaging learning environment, using assessments to guide instructions while maintaining flexible classroom management.

DI provides an approach to instruction that is characterised by a blend of whole-class, group, and individual instruction. In DI, educators offer multiple approaches to what children learn, how children learn, and how children demonstrate what they have learned (i.e., the three principles of UDL) by focusing on at least three, and sometimes four, main curricular elements:

1. **Content (Input):** What the educator teaches and expects children to learn
2. **Process:** How the educator teaches and how children go about making sense of ideas and information
3. **Product (Output):** How children demonstrate what they have learned
4. **Learning Environment:** What classroom conditions and interactions set the tone and expectations of learning

In a classroom that adopts DI, the educator proactively plans and differentiates content, process, and product in anticipation of and in response to children's differences in readiness, interests, and learning ability.

Simple curricular modifications can promote high-quality inclusive practices and improve educational outcomes for all children. These curricular modifications can happen in routines, activities, or materials to give children greater access and increase participation in class. The table below gives examples of what an educator can do when modifying and adapting the curriculum or activities.

Material Adaptations	To promote independence by making changes to the way a child holds or uses a material.
Activity Simplification	Break a task into smaller steps or change or reduce the number of steps the child does independently.
Child Preferences	Add something a child enjoys to increase participation in an activity.
Special Equipment	Provide equipment and devices that make it easier for a child to participate.
Peer Support	Provide buddies who can model what to do during an activity and provide just the amount of support needed and no more.
Environmental Supports	Alter the physical or social environment to encourage children's participation, engagement, and learning.

Children learn better when tasks are aligned to their skills and understanding of a topic or concept (readiness); when tasks spark curiosity or passion (interest); and when tasks allow children to work in a preferred manner (learning profile). The table on the next page provides examples of what can be done when planning for low-prep and high-prep differentiation.

Examples of Low-Prep Differentiation

1 Content (What children learn):

- Choice of books or texts (by topic, genre, or reading level)
- Varied supplementary materials (videos, infographics, manipulatives)
- Multiple levels of questions (based on Bloom's Taxonomy)
- Tiered worksheets (i.e., same topic, different levels of complexity)
- Anchor tasks or early finisher options (enrichment activities but not more of the same)
- Use of varied online resources or computer programmes (e.g., adaptive learning tools)

2 Process (How children learn):

- Reading buddies or peer tutors
- Working alone or in pairs or groups
- Games for skill reinforcement
- Graphic organisers for different levels of support
- Mini-lessons or reteach stations
- Varying scaffolding strategies (e.g., sentence starters, guided questions, checklists)
- Choice of tools (e.g., manipulatives, visuals)
- Flexible pacing (i.e., extensions, check-ins, or time accommodations)

3 Product (How children demonstrate learning)

- Options for varied modes of expression (e.g., write a paragraph, create a poster, record a video, perform a skit)
- Open-ended assignments with choice (e.g., "Can you show me what you know about farm animals in your own way?")
- Choice boards or learning menus
- Rubrics with clear, developmentally appropriate expectations that allow children to demonstrate their understanding in different ways

4 Environment (Where and with whom children learn)

- Flexible seating (floor, standing desks, quiet corners)
- Noise level choices (quiet zone vs collaborative zone)
- Varied lighting or sensory tools for comfort
- Timers or visual schedules for self-management

5 Other easy differentiation ideas are:

- Exit tickets with varied prompts (e.g., "Draw what you learned," "Write one question you still have")
- Think-Pair-Share versus Write-Think-Share to meet different comfort levels
- Morning work choice activities (journal, puzzle, drawing, reading)
- Check-in questions tailored to the child's interests or needs

Examples of High-Prep Differentiation

1 **Tiered instruction and grouping based on developmental profiles, with targeted goals and supports from the IEPs**

- Dynamic grouping (e.g., rotate groups based on specific skill such as fine motor, language level, interest, rather than fixed ability levels
- Integrated therapy sessions if applicable (embed OT, PT, or ST strategies within group time or learning centres and co-teach with therapists)

2 **Learning environment and classroom design with sensory-friendly spaces (e.g., quiet zones, movement-friendly areas, and calming tools tailored to the sensory needs of the children)**

- Adaptive learning tools such as switch-adapted toys, alternative communication systems (PECS, AAC), and fine motor supports
- Modified classroom layouts to adjust traffic flow, activity zones, and materials placement to support physical accessibility and focus

3 **Curriculum and materials to include multi-sensory learning kits and thematic kits with tactile objects, visuals, songs, and storybooks tailored to a unit**

- Project-based learning to allow children to deep dive into their interests with documentation, inquiry, and collaboration
- Differentiated story retelling options include acting it out, sequencing cards, drawing, using puppets, or retelling with assistive technologyappropriate expectations that allow children to demonstrate their understanding in different ways

4 **Expression of understanding in learning portfolios (e.g., collect work samples, photographs, and voice recordings to show progress in multiple domains over time)**

- Child-led conferences that offer supported opportunities for children to "show and tell" their learning to families
- Creative expression options (e.g., expressing understanding through music, dance, sculpture, dramatic play)

5 **Planning and assessment (e.g., developmental checklists and IEP goals are aligned to EC frameworks, differentiation plans and recommended assessment tools)**

- Collaborative planning with other EC professionals and families to align supports across settings

Examples of How to Implement Differentiated Instruction in Early Childhood Classrooms:

Create Learning Stations

- Provide opportunities to learn different types of content—sections of the classrooms through which groups can rotate. Educators can facilitate this with a flexible seating plan.
- Children can rotate between stations that involve: (a) creating artwork (b) reading a story (c) solving puzzles (d) participating in educator-led explorations (e) responding to a video.
- To help children process content after they have visited all stations, the educator can hold a class discussion or ask key questions.

Use Task Cards

- Like learning stations, task cards allow educators to provide children a range of content. Answering task cards can also be a small-group activity, adding variety to class activities that normally focus on individual or large-group learning.
- First, the educator needs to identify tasks and questions that children would typically find in an activity.
- Second, the educator prints and laminates every card, each containing a single task or question.
- Finally, the educator sets up stations around the classroom and pairs children together to visit every station in turn.
- Educators can individualise instruction by monitoring the pairs and addressing knowledge gaps when needed. Educators can also prepare task cards of various levels of difficulty to provide further differentiation for children.

Incorporate Children's Interests

- Tailor lessons and activities to children's interests and experiences such as using toy animals for a counting activity or incorporating favourite storybook characters into dramatic play scenarios.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

EC Educator

As an EC educator, you should design an inviting and inclusive environment by looking at physical, temporal, and social aspects that support the learning of all children. An EC educator should:

- Know the curriculum well enough to design and deliver individualised learning experiences that meet children's different levels of readiness, interests, and learning profiles.
- Plan lessons based on UDL principles by ensuring various means of engagement, representation, and expression.
- Think about how to differentiate lessons further in terms of content, process, and product through regular assessment and monitoring of children's progress.
- Collaborate with an EI educator to develop lessons that incorporate both UDL principles and DI strategies. Focus on class-wide lesson planning and classroom instructions.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

EI Educator

As an EI educator, you should:

- Develop lessons that incorporate both UDL principles and DI strategies. Focus on children with DN who may need DI or additional help to engage in learning activities.
- Work with your EC colleagues to adapt or modify lessons and to promote engagement and participation of children with DN (e.g., breaking down novel tasks into simpler steps, focusing on mastery of skills instead of task completion).
- Conduct specific assessments and monitor progress of children with DN to ensure learning is aligned with individual goals.

For more information refer to Chapter 1: Inclusive Environments.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, you should:

- Ensure roles are clear and EC and EI educators work as a team to support all children in the classroom.
- Ensure protected time is set aside for both planning and preparation of lessons.
- Ensure access to diverse materials, tools, and technologies that can be used to differentiate classroom and activity instructions and address the diverse ways that children learn.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Intentional Teaching and DAP

1. Develop a system to regularly gather and update information about children's readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles to guide flexible planning and groupings.
2. Display the learning goals of children with DN in the classroom to support targeted learning throughout the day.
3. Create physical environments that permit flexible arrangement of furniture and classroom resources to support whole-group, small-group, and paired arrangements.
4. Adapt materials (content), teaching methods (process), and ways children show their understanding (product). Provide ways of doing tasks or set up learning centres that match the different readiness levels of children in your class.
5. Foster a supportive learning environment where children respect one another, feel safe to share ideas, ask for help, and learn from mistakes.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Are you Using DI Checklist

LET'S THINK

Educator

As an educator, consider reflecting on the following:

- What do you currently know about your children's readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles? How do you currently gather this information? What additional ways are there to better understand each child's strengths and needs?
- How often do you incorporate UDL principles and DI strategies when creating your lesson plans? How can you further differentiate content, process, and product to meet diverse learning needs in classrooms?

LET'S TALK

Educator

Together with your co-educators, consider reflecting on the following:

- Firstly, share how you gather information to understand your children's readiness, interests, and learning preferences.
- Secondly, discuss ways to help the team better understand their needs.
- Thirdly, review your lesson plan to incorporate UDL and DI approaches to support all children.
- Finally, discuss how you can further adjust lessons to better meet the needs of each child.

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CHAPTER 03

Collaborative Teaming

Overview

Collaborative teaming in an inclusive preschool ensures educators, other professionals (e.g., therapists or specialists), and families work together to plan, communicate, and align strategies. This coordination streamlines support, reduces overlap, and addresses challenges more effectively, leading to better outcomes for all children.

Key Takeaway

The African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child", emphasises that raising a child well requires the support and involvement of many people, not just the parents. This chapter will help you to identify opportunities for collaboration with other EC practitioners to better support children with DN in your classroom.

Collaboration can occur during:

- Assessing children's needs
- Planning and carrying out intervention
- Tracking children's progress
- Planning for transition

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Collaborative Teaming

Effective inclusion relies on meaningful collaboration amongst Practitioners. Each member of your team brings valuable expertise to the table. **By combining our diverse knowledge and professional experiences, we can enhance our collective capability to support children with varying DN.**

Active collaboration

- Strengthens individual and collective capabilities through peer learning and shared problem-solving approaches
- Builds morale and team cohesiveness, fostering a sense of belonging and job satisfaction

You may not have a full team of therapists or specialists, and that is okay. You do not need a 'perfect' team to start building an inclusive environment. Inclusion can start with what you have and who you have. Inclusion can be as simple as partnering another educator in your centre, reaching out to families as contributors, or learning from community resources.

DID YOU KNOW?

When you include ***parents or families in your team***, they become integral partners. Their support and contributions will provide unique insights into their children's needs, strengths, interests, and daily experiences at home and in community settings.

Here is an Example of How a Collaborative Team in an Inclusive Preschool Might Look Like:

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

The APIE Cycle

Collaboration amongst team members in an inclusive preschool begins from enrolment and ends with graduation. **The Assessment, Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation (APIE) cycle can be used to identify the key time points for collaboration.** The diagram below gives an overview of the APIE cycle.

Assessment

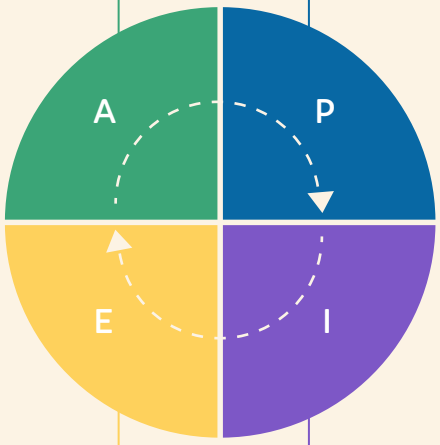
To use for "problem-solving"

- Assessment tools
- Observations
- Communication with parents / families

Evaluation

Appraise progress and efficacy of plans to amend / improve

- Progress monitoring
- Observations
- Parent-Teacher conferences (PTCs)



Planning

Designing of supports to "solve problems"

- Co-planning
- IEP development
- Lesson Plans
- DI
- UDL

Implementation

Putting planned supports into action or sequence

- Co-teaching
- Embedded learning opportunities
- Tiered support

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Effective Collaboration

1. **Regular communication:** Schedule regular team meetings or create a common platform to keep all team members updated about children's needs and progress.
2. **Clear roles and responsibilities:** Define what each team member needs to do and ensure that everyone is empowered to do his or her job well.
3. **Joint planning:** Write intervention goals and plan classroom activities together; provide regular feedback on how the collaboration is going.
4. **Tap on collaborative infrastructure:** Provide team members with timely and adequate access to resources (e.g., common communication and documentation platforms, protected administration time) to enable regular and sustained collaboration in the long run.

LET'S TALK

Practitioners

Consider discussing the following with your fellow practitioners:

- Think about any challenges or obstacles encountered when collaborating with colleagues in the preschool.
- Identify and discuss the common themes that emerge.

As a Centre Leader, consider facilitating a discussion with practitioners on the role of each practitioner. Clarify a role if members find it ambiguous. Discuss common barriers to collaborative teaming and come up with solutions to overcome them.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

APIE Factsheet

SUGGESTIONS

Reflect on whether your collaborative experience:

- had a shared understanding of inclusion and inclusive practices?
- had clear objectives and roles in collaboration?
- was open to negotiation?

Use a virtual platform such as Padlet or Slido that allows anonymous discussion, thus creating a safe space for everyone to contribute freely.

Do not be discouraged when you experience challenges in collaborative teaming. Other practitioners do as well. Some common problems are:

- Limited time and formal opportunities
- Unclear roles and objectives
- Inconsistent and unstructured meetings
- Differing views on and meaning of working effectively with other practitioners

SUCCESS STORIES

My journey in an inclusive preschool has been both challenging and refreshing. It was through sharing of ideas and the support from EC educators, parents and therapists that made these challenges manageable. For instance, something as common as helping a child master independence in toileting needed the 'hard' and 'heart' work of everyone around him. This was possible because of the consistent and collaborative efforts put in by parents and educators in using the strategies.

- EI Educator, PCF Sparkletots

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Assessment is the 'A' in the APIE Cycle

Understanding children starts with gathering information about them: their strengths, interests, and areas where they need support. This can happen in many ways:

- Observing them during daily activities in different settings (preschool, home, community)
- Engaging with families
- Reviewing of progress reports and standardised assessments

Observing children during their daily activities provides us with valuable information about how they interact, solve problems, and communicate. While these observations are useful, using standardised tools can also be beneficial to provide additional insights about a child's development in relation to a larger population. Consult your fellow practitioners if you do not have experience in using these tools.

Below are some examples of observations:

Physical Development:

- Observing a child's ability to walk, run, jump, or climb on playground equipment
- Noticing how a child uses her hands to manipulate small objects like puzzles or crayons

Social-Emotional Development:

- Observing how a child interacts with peers during play, including sharing toys, resolving conflicts, and showing empathy
- Watching a child express emotions like frustration, excitement, or sadness

Cognitive Development:

- Observing a child's attention span during different activities such as reading a book, playing with blocks, or listening to a story
- Noticing how a child uses memory skills to recall stories, songs, or past experiences
- Watching a child demonstrate knowledge of colours, shapes, numbers, or letters

Language Development:

- Observing a child's vocabulary and ability to express himself verbally
- Listening to a child's attempts to communicate with peers or adults, including making requests or asking questions
- Noticing how a child uses language to create stories or describe objects

DID YOU KNOW?

Assessment does not always refer to the use of formal or standardised tools. Assessment is simply the process of gathering information about children to understand them better! You are probably already doing this informally in your daily practice.

When observing a child, it is important to:

Be objective

- Focus on what you see and hear rather than making assumptions about the child's feelings or motivations.

Be specific

- Provide detailed descriptions of the child's actions and interactions.

Use descriptive language

- Avoid vague terms like 'good' or 'bad' and instead describe the child's behaviour in concrete terms.

Record observations regularly

- Make time to observe children during various activities and routines.

Use different observation methods

- Try using anecdotes, running records, or time sampling to capture different aspects of a child's development.

DID YOU KNOW?

Describing ***a child's behaviour in concrete terms*** involves focusing on specific actions, words, and observable behaviours without interpretation or judgment. Here are a few tips to help describe behaviour concretely:

- **Be specific:** Describe the exact actions taken (e.g., "Tina jumped on the couch" instead of "Tina was misbehaving").
- **Capture Speech and Tone:** Note what was said and how (e.g., "Kelvin yelled, I don't want to nap now!").
- **Include the Setting or Context:** Mention where the behaviour occurred as the environment can affect a child's actions (e.g., "Sam ran to the playground after hearing the announcement over the PA system").
- **Focus on Frequency and Duration:** Include how often the behaviour occurred or how long the behaviour lasted (e.g., "Adan cried for five minutes after the toy was snatched from him by Sam").
- **Describe emotional cues:** Observe emotional or physical reactions (e.g., "Meg smiled and laughed when she saw the kitten").

Examples of observation notes from an educator:

- "Sami smiled while building a tall structure with large wooden blocks, clearly showing a passion for construction and building."
- "Mel picked a board book on farm animals from the library corner and walked to a spot on the edge of the mat. She sat by herself at the edge of the mat, demonstrating a preference for quiet reading."
- "During Circle Time, Elsie made loud random verbalisations at the educator, occasionally pausing to acknowledge the other children who took turns talking to the educator."

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Assessment is the 'A' in the APIE Cycle

When you are gathering information about a child:

1. Try to get observations from different activities.
2. Consult relevant team members about which assessment tools could work best.
3. Discuss observations with team members to ensure everyone has the same understanding.
4. Include family inputs and priorities in the assessment.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

IEP Process

LET'S THINK

Educators

As Educators, consider:

- A time when something a parent shared helped you to see a child's behaviour in a new light. How did this information change your perspective?
- A situation where you were involved in the process of gathering information on a child. What were the steps you took, who did you collaborate with, and how did the information gathered contribute to developing the IEP.

LET'S TALK

Team

Together with your team members (e.g., Educators, Other EC practitioners, Leader or Centre leader, Other professionals or specialist), consider discussing the following:

- How are you gathering information about a child and family? This would include information on the child's likes and dislikes, developmental milestones and related needs, and family concerns and expectations.
- How will this information help you set intervention goals to work with the child?
- What other tools would you consider using?

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Planning is the 'P' in the APIE Cycle

Planning is about setting your environment, lessons, and activities to maximise the opportunities for learning to take place. Planning states how your lesson objectives will be met in a clear, structured manner.

You can collaborate with other EC practitioners to:

- **Develop each child's individualised goals**—children with DN may have Individualised Education Plan (IEP) goals as part of their EI programme.
- **Incorporate each child's unique goals, interests**, and strengths into daily routines or lessons.
- **Enhance teaching practices and lesson plans** through collaborative planning by drawing on each other's expertise to refine and improve your teaching practices over time.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Educators

With assistance of visiting or in-house other EC practitioners, you should:

- Review observations or assessment results and discuss the skills in each domain that will benefit from additional support.
- Share concerns about a child's development and expected classroom behaviour and gather feedback from the family.
- Set up a meeting with the child's family to ask about the hopes they have for their child.
- Design goals by combining expertise from different disciplines while ensuring you or your team can realistically implement them in the classroom.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Educators

With other EC practitioners, you should:

- Set aside dedicated time (e.g., weekly) for planning and input-seeking sessions.
- Discuss enhancing teaching practices and lesson plans using:
  - Embedded learning opportunities
  - Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
  - Differentiated Instruction (DI)
  - Addressing IEP goals through meaningful participation in daily classroom activities and routines

Collaborative planning or co-planning is the first step towards successful collaborative teaching. It is crucial to clarify the roles of the educators and other EC practitioners involved in collaborative teaching (i.e., who does what) and ensure the instructional approach is aligned with lesson objectives.

DID YOU KNOW?

When ***developing an IEP***, intervention goals are informed by family priorities and concerns and the child's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and accompanied by corresponding objectives for the child with DN.

IEP goals and objectives should be:

- Functional and meaningful
- Clear and measurable (i.e., have a specific timeframe for completion)
- Generalisable across settings (i.e., applicable to at least one home and one preschool routine to ensure skills transfer)
- Developmentally appropriate (i.e., matches child's current abilities whilst providing appropriate challenge for growth)

IEP objectives provide a breakdown of the developmental skills needed to achieve a child's IEP goals. There can be as many objectives as necessary and appropriate for the child. Any IEP goals or objectives not achieved in one period should be rolled over to the subsequent IEP period.

Understanding the ***rationale behind IEP goals*** in a preschool is essential for supporting children with DN in a meaningful and developmentally appropriate way.

Reasons for Individualised Education Plan Goals in a Preschool	
Supports Individualised Learning and Development	• Children with DN often have unique learning needs in areas like communication, motor skills, behaviour, or social-emotional growth. IEP goals ensure that learning is personalised and focused on helping the child make meaningful progress in those specific areas.
Promotes Access to the General EC Curriculum	• IEP goals are designed to help children participate more fully in preschool activities and routines alongside their peers. They break down barriers that may be preventing a child from engaging in play, communication, or learning opportunities.
Ensures Equity and Inclusion	• Having clear goals supports inclusive practices by outlining how the child can be supported rather than being separated or excluded in natural classroom environments. • Allows educators to make intentional adaptations that promote belonging and participation.
Fosters Functional and Developmentally Appropriate Growth	• IEP goals are often functional and embedded in everyday routines like Circle Time, snack time, play time, or transitions (e.g., a goal might focus on using two-word phrases during play or following simple directions during group activities).
Encourages Consistency Amongst Team Members	• With several adults involved (educators, families, other EC practitioners), IEP goals offer a shared roadmap to support the child consistently across settings.
Monitors Progress and Guides Instruction	• IEP goals provide a way to track progress over time and adjust teaching strategies as needed.
Empowers Families	• IEPs include inputs from families and help align preschool efforts with the child's needs at home. • When families understand and participate in setting goals, the partnership is strengthened and continuity between home and preschool is promoted.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Planning is the 'P' in the APIE Cycle

To facilitate discussions with visiting or in-house EC practitioners or your collaborative team:

Before Co-Planning Meeting

1. Schedule meetings well in advance. Prepare the necessary information:
   - Agenda: A clear and concise agenda outlining the topics to be discussed.
   - Observation noted: Notes gathered from recent lessons.
   - Lesson plans and activities: Plans for the next lesson for discussion.
   - Other discussion items: For example, parent communication updates, upcoming excursions or outings, scheduling changes, or classroom logistics.

During Co-Planning Meeting

1. Review the effectiveness of planned and agreed DI strategies, embedded learning opportunities, and lesson observations.
2. Raise any behaviour of concern that may require specialised support or intervention from a visiting or in-house other EC practitioner.
3. Review progress of child's goals. Discuss any additional strategies or modifications that may be required.
4. Address parents' concerns, if any.
5. Share templates, resources, and materials.
6. Acknowledge each other's efforts and celebrate child's accomplishments and milestones.

After Co-Planning Meeting

1. Align next steps, action points, and follow-ups via team meeting notes.
2. Arrange for next co-planning meeting.
3. Prepare to modify ideas and strategies discussed (including UDL and DI).

LET'S THINK

Educators

As educators, consider reflecting on the following:

- How do you work with other EC practitioners to support children with DN in your class, and what approaches (e.g., visuals, sensory tools, assistive technology, peer buddies) can you plan to use?
- What do you need to do differently when writing your lesson plans and preparing teaching materials for inclusion in your classroom?
- How will you include therapy or support goals, where applicable, for children with DN into natural classroom routines?

LET'S THINK

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, consider reflecting on:

- How to express your appreciation for the individual efforts of team members and the collective efforts of the team to encourage continued collaboration?

Team

Here is a Practice Scenario for a class featuring a diverse group of learners, including three children with DN. In your collaborative teams or with other EC practitioners in your preschool, use the guiding questions on the next page to spark a discussion on co-planning strategies.

Class Profile: Rainbow Room

- Age Group: 4 to 5 years
- Class Size: 18 children
- Lead Educator: Ms Nancy
- Co-educator: Ms Priya
- Early Interventionist (EI): Ms Ray (visits twice a week)
- Speech Therapist (SLT): Ms Laura (visits once a month)
- Occupational Therapist (OT): Mr Dann (visits once a month)

Classroom Environment and Curriculum

- Centre uses a play-based curriculum aligned with early learning standards.
- Classroom is structured with clear visual boundaries, consistent routines, and a daily visual schedule to support all children.
- Learning Centres include:
- Dramatic Play
- Art
- Blocks
- Reading Corner
- Sensory Table
- Outdoor Play Area

Focus Child (1)—Lee:

- Age: 4 years old
- Diagnosis: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Strengths: Excellent visual memory, enjoys puzzles and numbers, responds well to routines
- Challenges: Limited verbal communication, difficulty with transitions, avoids eye contact, limited engagement with peers
- Supports required: Visual schedule, calm-down corner, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), sensory breaks

Focus Child (2)—Eve:

- Age: 4.5 years old
- Diagnosis: Global Developmental Delay (GDD)
- Strengths: Affectionate and sociable, loves music and stories
- Challenges: Struggles with motor planning, difficulty following multi-step directions, emerging play skills, cognitive delays
- Supports required: Simplified instructions, repetition, one-on-one modelling during activities, gross motor and fine motor activities integrated into classroom routines

Focus Child (3)—Jay:

- Age: 4.5 years old
- Diagnosis: Speech and Language Delays (SLD)
- Strengths: Curious and observant, enjoys building and dramatic play
- Challenges: Limited expressive vocabulary, difficulty articulating needs, gets frustrated when not understood, often quiet during Circle Time
- Supports required: Visual supports, use of sign language and gestures, language modelling by adults, small-group speech sessions

Scenario:
Planning for a Unit on Community Helpers

Goals

The teaching team is preparing for a two-week unit on Community Helpers. The goals include:

- Building vocabulary related to community roles (e.g., doctor, policeman, soldier, chef, etc.)
- Promoting imaginative play and role-playing
- Developing communication, fine motor, and social skills

Co-Planning Meeting

- Present: Ms Nancy (Lead Educator), Ms Priya (Co-educator), Ms Ray (EI), Ms Laura (SLT), Mr Dann (OT)

Discussion Points

Adapting Vocabulary:

- SLT suggests using real-life photographs and icons for each helper role.
- EI recommends using PECS cards for Lee and labelling dramatic play props with visuals.

Role-Play Area Setup:

- OT recommends including fine motor tools (e.g., tongs, tweezers, sorting boxes, or baskets).
- Lead Educator plans to rotate helper costumes and props daily to maintain interest and reduce sensory overload for Lee.

Social Interaction Goals:

- Practitioners agree to create buddy pairs for structured play so Jay can model and practise peer communication with support.
- SLT and co-educator will model sentence starters ("I am a ___.", "Can I help you?") for use during play.

Gross Motor Activities:

- OT suggests having obstacle courses themed around firefighter training or mail delivery to support Eve's motor planning needs.

Progress Monitoring:

- SLT will track Jay's use of target vocabulary.
- EI will observe Lee's engagement during Circle Time and dramatic play.
- Educators will take note of Eve's participation in group activities and ability to follow routines.

Guiding Questions:

- How did the team use each practitioner's expertise to plan meaningful participation for every child?
- What strategies were implemented to promote inclusion during group and individual activities?
- How can EC educators take the lead in creating accessible learning environments?
- What are potential barriers to effective collaboration among practitioners and how can they be addressed?
- How can we involve families to support the Community Helpers Unit's goals at home?

As a team, consider the following suggestions to make co-planning easier and more effective:

- Placing documents in a shared location so they can be conveniently accessed by all team members
- Having a quiet place for co-planning
- Setting a fixed schedule or routine for co-planning to take place

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

IEP Blank Template

IEP Sample

IEP Team Meeting Notes

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Implementation is the 'I' in the APIE Cycle

Implementation refers to how educators carry out the activities and learning experiences planned to help children develop skills and knowledge needed.The major components are:

- **Embedded learning opportunities:** Planning your lessons to include activities where children can use the targeted skill or behaviour throughout the day
- **Tiered support:** Proactive and preventive team-based support system that optimises children's learning and development
- **Collaborative team teaching (co-teaching):** When educators work together to teach, monitor children's progress, and manage preschool classes (e.g., Mother Tongue and EC educators). The two will collaborate to facilitate planned learning experiences

Collaborative teaching or co-teaching creates learning environments that are less restrictive for children with DN, prompting them to become more active and engaged learners.

The idea is to create multiple learning opportunities for all children and, at the same time, offer specific or adapted strategies for children with DN. **Within a tiered support system, the use of UDL and DI principles will ensure all children are given suitable opportunities to hone and develop their skills.**

TIER 3: FEW CHILDREN

Intensified Support

- Focus on individualised instructions and interventions
- Focus on specific foundational skills

Varying levels of support for all children

3

TIER 2: SOME CHILDREN

Supplemental Support

- Targeted support for children who are not meeting expectations
- Focus on small group instructions and interventions

Differentiated Instruction (DI)

2

TIER 1: ALL CHILDREN

Universal Support

- Evidence-based practices that support the academic, behavioural and social-emotional success of all children in the classroom
- Focus on core instructions

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

1

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Educator

As an educator, you should:

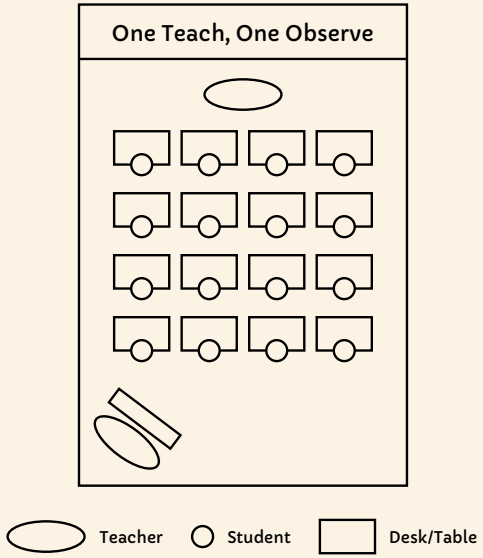
- Execute the co-teaching strategies that incorporate the multidisciplinary approaches discussed during planning sessions.
- Be flexible in adjusting roles while maintaining clear communication with teaching partners and other practitioners.
- Participate in regular progress reviews with co-educators and other practitioners to enhance teaching practices and classroom support.
- Implement recommended learning strategies (including visual aids, communication supports, and sensory modulation techniques) for inclusive learning.
- Monitor and refine intervention strategies through regular collaboration with co-educators and other practitioners, ensuring consistent implementation in daily activities.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Implementation is the 'I' in the APIE Cycle

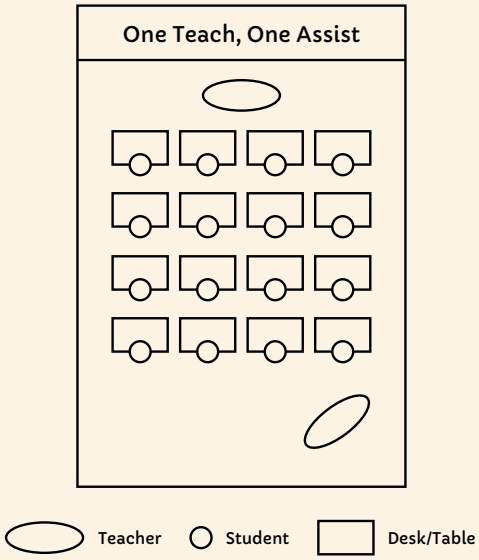
Co-teaching Models

To meaningfully engage children in the classroom, consider adopting the following co-teaching models:



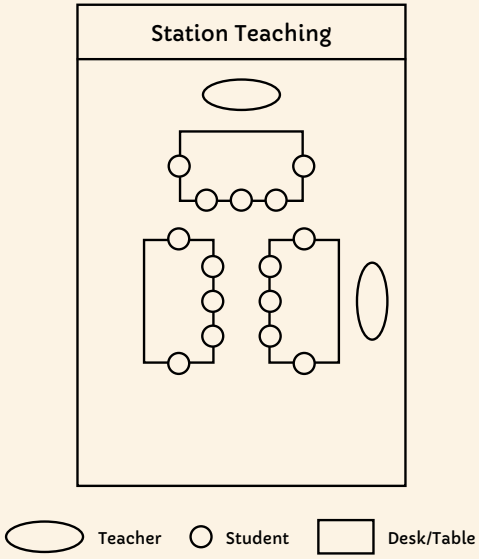
1 One Teach, One Observe

- ***What it looks like:*** One educator leads large-group instruction while the other observes and collects data about children and the class to determine what instruction takes place next (e.g., identifying children who need additional help, determining which co-teaching model should be used to address any identified needs, identifying and tracking IEP goals).
- ***Works well when:*** You need a specific observation (e.g., for IEP meeting) or to track children's responses to teaching methods.



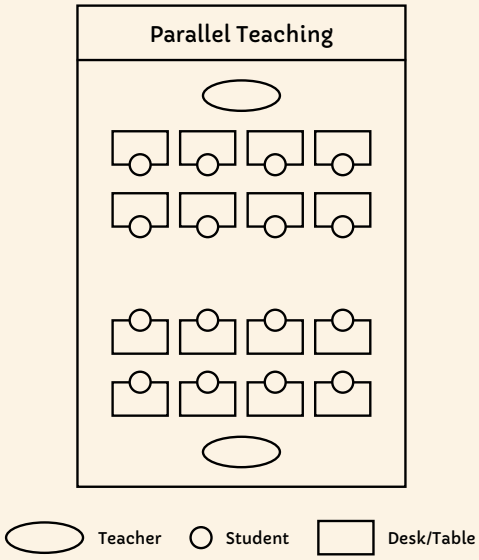
2 One Teach, One Assist or One Teach, One Support

- ***What it looks like:*** One educator leads instruction for the class while the other educator moves amongst the children and provides additional support for learning or behaviour management to a particular group of children as needed.
- ***Works well when:*** One educator is more familiar and comfortable with teaching the content and the other educator is required to support the needs of some children.



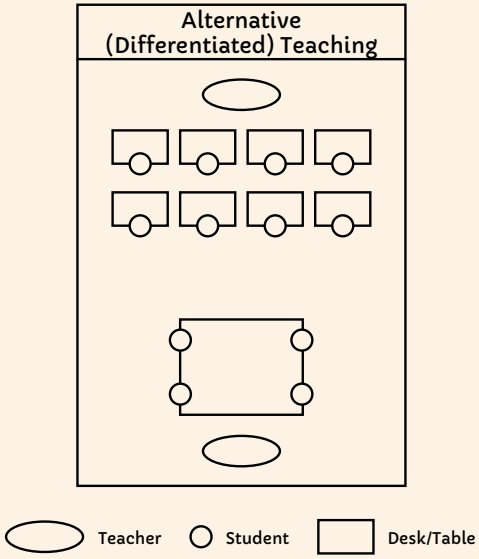
3 Station Teaching

- ***What it looks like:*** Multiple learning stations are set up in different areas of the classroom with educator-led or independent stations. For example, set up three stations, divide children into three groups, and then rotate a group from one station to another until all children have been to every station. Groups can be taught by educators at two stations and work independently at the third.
- ***Works well when:*** Co-educators bring different expertise on a topic and want children to gain from both educators.



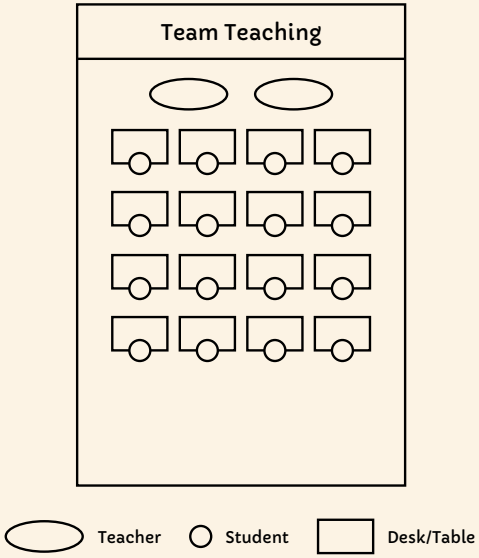
4 Parallel Teaching

- ***What it looks like:*** Children are divided into two groups and both educators teach the same information simultaneously in different areas of the classroom while providing differentiated instruction.
- ***Works well when:*** Educators have equal content expertise, and a lot of information needs to be covered in one lesson, or the content being taught is particularly challenging.



5 Alternative (Differentiated) Teaching

- ***What it looks like:*** One educator provides large-group instruction while the other educator works with a small group of children in a different area of the classroom.
- ***Works well when:*** There is a small group of children who can benefit from personal attention, simpler or more detailed explanation, repetition, or targeted practice based on their individual learning needs.



6 Team Teaching

- ***What it looks like:*** Both educators teach at the same time and both move about to check learning and understanding.
- ***Works well when:*** Educators come with different experiences, perspectives, or strategies, making it easier for all children in the class to benefit.

Key factors to consider when deciding on a co-teaching model:

- **Objectives of lesson:** Is the lesson best conducted using a particular model or can you achieve the objective by using another model? Is a big group or small group better to achieve the objective?
- **Class size, classroom space, and resources:** Some models such as parallel teaching require duplication of materials. When splitting the class into two groups, space and noise levels can be a concern.
- **Collaboration between two educators:** Some models require more time and effort in planning and implementation. For example, station teaching, team teaching, and parallel teaching require educators to discuss each role clearly during planning stage and to cooperate on logistics and time management during implementation stage.
- **Co-educator's expertise and experience:** Models that require both educators to teach expect both educators to be familiar with lesson content and delivery.

LET'S TALK

Educator

Together with your co-educator, recall the past week's lessons then consider what went well and what can be improved.

- How did you embed learning opportunities and vary support for your children to practice a skill or behaviour in different activities?
- What are the co-teaching models you have used and reflect on what worked or what can be improved?
- What are your next steps for deepening inclusive practices in your co-planning process?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Lesson Plan Template

Lesson Plan Sample

SUCCESS STORIES

The EC educators at my preschool initially relied on the 'One Teach, One Assist' model for most lessons. With support from EI educators, they began to explore a variety of co-teaching models better suited to different lesson objectives and diverse needs of children. Although it seemed demanding at the start, the educators have learned through experience the benefits of co-teaching in inclusive classrooms.

- InSP Technical Assistance (TA) Coach from the InSP pilot

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Evaluation is the 'E' in the APIE Cycle

During the evaluation phase, consider collaborating with visiting or in-house other EC practitioners to review the effectiveness of lesson modifications based on a child's individual or IEP goals. This can be done during lesson review:

- Individual or IEP Goals Progress Monitoring
- Communication with Parents (i.e., during PTCs and planning for the next educational placement)

Evaluation allows educators to reflect on and update their strategies to ensure that interventions are meeting children's needs. The process provides common ground for all stakeholders as it reaffirms the team's commitment to a set of shared goals for the child.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Educators

As educators, you should:

- Review a child's progress and goals by gathering information from various sources such as classroom observations, input from parents regarding the child's behaviour and skills at home or in the community, and evaluation by other EC practitioners on domain-specific skills and functions.
- Conduct PTCs or IEP review sessions to review goals, priorities, and strategies with parents.
- Continue to provide the necessary support for child and family when embarking on a new cycle of goal refinement.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Evaluation is the 'E' in the APIE Cycle

When meeting your team to review a child's progress, consider the following:

1 **Lesson Review:** (For educators)

- Was the child with DN participating and engaged?
- Was instruction delivery suitable for the child with DN?
- Were the materials used suitable for the child with DN?
- Did the outcome of the activity align with the IEP goals for the child with DN?

2 **IEP Goal-Progress Monitoring:** (For educators and other EC practitioners or with your collaborative team)

- Is the child with DN making any progress?
- What can be done to support the child with DN in progressing to the next level or stage?

3 **Communication with Parents:** (Educators, Other EC practitioners, Centre Leader, or with your collaborative team)

- What information do you want to provide to or seek from parents?
- How can you share strategies with parents to continue or extend certain practices at home?
- How can you get parents to increase participation and engagement in preschool activities?

For more information, refer to Chapter 5: Family Engagement.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

IEP Monitoring Checklist (Weekly)

SUCCESS STORIES

The AHPs, psychologist and educators meet weekly to discuss and monitor time-sensitive feedback to evaluate the children's progress. Our feedback is valued and documented in the child's file, and we are also invited to attend IEP reviews and parent-teacher meetings. The multiple touchpoints created many opportunities for all of us to work collaboratively and creatively together!

- Psychologist, Small Wonder Preschool

LET'S THINK

Educators

After a term of implementation, consider reflecting on the following:

- What worked well for you when monitoring progress of children in your class?
- What common practices or routines helped your team collaborate well?
- In what ways does the evaluation of a child with DN differ from the evaluation of other children in your class, and what factors contribute to these differences?

LET'S TALK

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, consider reviewing the current evaluation process with your educators:

- How often does evaluation take place?
- What sources of information are used during the evaluation phase? What tools are used?
- How do you determine if the information gathered is sufficient to provide a comprehensive view of a child's progress? What additional information might be needed?
- How is the information gathered used in goal setting and how is it being communicated to parents?

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Transition Planning: Collaborative Teaming Within and Beyond the Preschool

Transition planning is the process of making plans and preparations to support children with DN and their families as they transit from one setting to another (e.g., changing schools or programmes or advancing to the next educational placement). This is a key time point where all stakeholders involved in the child's ecosystem of support, including external stakeholders, have a part to play in paving a smooth transition for the child with DN.

All key figures in a child's ecosystem of support should provide their inputs and feedback on the child during the transition planning process. These include educators, Centre Leader, and any other EC practitioners involved in supporting the child. They are expected to work together with family members to enable smooth and well-supported transitions to the next educational setting.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Educator and Centre Leader

If a child with DN is not directly supported by other EC practitioners in your preschool, it remains important for educators to **understand the main roles and responsibilities of each practitioner that the child meets for intervention**. Here are some examples:

Psychologist

- Initiate transition planning events (e.g., a transition briefing for parents, classroom observations to support transition planning conversations)
- Lead discussions with parents (e.g., family decisions on schooling plans, parents' concerns and questions about transitions)
- Complete school placement or readiness assessments and facilitate school applications, where needed
- Provide transition support and informational resources for graduating children with DN and their families (e.g., by strengthening school readiness skills and providing information on adapting to new schooling environments)

Other EC Practitioners

- Provide feedback on a child's progress, and any domain-specific intervention needs
- Help parents better contextualise transition planning recommendations by the IEP team (e.g., continuing use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication or AAC in primary school for child with communication difficulties)
- **Work with key practitioners** from EIPIC or external agencies or programmes to:
  - Agree on the types of intervention provided and useful strategies for maintaining active engagement and progress of the child with DN in a learning environment
  - Gather feedback and perspectives on potential educational placements and any matters related to transition planning for the child
- **Support communication between parents and all practitioners**

As a Centre Leader, you should provide inputs on the child's schooling plans and family priorities and concerns, where required.

DID YOU KNOW?

Collaboration matters in ***transition planning***! Transitions can be difficult for a child with DN because they involve changes to familiar routines and meeting new expectations in new settings. Therefore, it is essential to seek inputs from all key figures in the child's ecosystem of support. Families and educators can converge on strategies and goals to be shared with other EC practitioners, professionals or specialists at the next educational placement. This can help to minimise any disruptions in learning and reduce emotional stress.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

What Happens During Transition Planning?

Transition planning typically starts in Kindergarten 1 and ends when the child with DN graduates from preschool. Throughout this period, there are some key stages for potential collaboration amongst stakeholders:

Transition Planning Stages	Key Stakeholders Involved
Class observation and information-gathering	Educators and other EC practitioners (if any)
Communicating with parents on post-preschool education plans	Educators, other EC practitioners (if any), Centre Leader (where required)
Applying for a school	Educators, other EC practitioners (if any)
Transition support at preschool and at home	Educators, other EC practitioners (if any), family
Graduation	Educators, family, Centre Leader

For more information, refer to the 'Additional Resources' section on the next page.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Supporting Families Through Transition Planning

Transitioning to post-preschool education is a big milestone. As we help families prepare for this journey, here are some key pointers and questions to consider:

- Will the child continue to need specialised and targeted support in learning in the next educational setting?
- Will the child need specialised and intensive support from a SPED School?
- What support is needed for the child to successfully cope with the curriculum in the next educational setting?
- What can parents and educators do to facilitate a successful transition to the next educational setting?

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Working with Families

Here are some tips to consider when engaging parents during the transition planning period to make the experience more supportive and positive:

1 Start By Listening

- Give parents space to share their hopes and concerns for their child without judgement.
- Focus on understanding before offering suggestions.
- Pay attention to practical concerns such as caregiving arrangements and transport.

2 Guiding them through the Journey

- Connect parents with a psychologist when they have concerns on their child's abilities or schooling recommendations.
- Give parents ample time to process information and explore schooling options.
- Let them know they can reach out whenever they need help.

Remember: Parents make the final decision on their child's schooling. Your (the team's) role is to support them with information and recommendations, based on your understanding of the child and parents' perspectives and preferences.

For more information, refer to Chapter 5: Family Engagement.

LET'S TALK

Team

As members of the transition planning team, consider:

- Drawing a roadmap of transition planning for the children at your preschool
- Indicating the key persons involved and their roles, and the goals of and activities required for each step
- Identifying enabling factors and challenges from past transition planning experiences

For more information, refer to Transition Planning Workflow in Additional Resources below.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Transition Planning Workflow

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CHAPTER 04

Active Child Engagement

Overview

In this chapter, practitioners will be introduced to the four components of, and related factors that contribute to, active child engagement. The four components are:

- Environment
- Child
- Curriculum
- Educator

Key Takeaway

Engagement looks beyond presence and following of instructions. It fosters curiosity for learning, active discovery to seek answers by asking questions, and persistence throughout the process of learning.

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Active Child Engagement

Engagement refers to a child's level of participation, interest, and involvement in learning. It includes showing attention, asking questions, contributing to discussions, and actively interacting with material. This shifts the perspective of an actively engaged child from ***what*** he or she is doing to ***how*** he or she is doing it.

Facilitating children's engagement, especially for those with DN, fosters meaningful participation and minimises the occurrence of challenging behaviour due to disengagement.

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Active Child Engagement

Child participation and child engagement go hand in hand. They each have a place in an inclusive classroom. While child participation essentially refers to involvement in classroom activities, **child engagement is the emotional and intellectual connection children develop with the activities and materials around them.** Together, participation and engagement create a dynamic and interactive classroom where children are empowered to learn and grow.

Here are examples that show the difference between participation and engagement.

Participation	Engagement
Teaching Implication: Children are present, following instructions, and completing assigned tasks.	Teaching Implication: Children are actively involved, curious, and motivated, and demonstrate a deep interest in the learning activity.
Examples: • A child sitting quietly during story time, listening to an adult read • A child following directions to put toys away after playtime • A child colouring in a worksheet during a Circle Time activity	Examples: • A child actively participating in an experiment, asking questions and making observations • A child building a complex structure with blocks, showing creativity and problem-solving skills • A child role-playing different scenarios and characters during dramatic play • A child showing curiosity and asking questions about the environment during a walk outdoors

When children are actively engaged in a classroom, they tend to be self-directed, enthusiastic, and involved in exploring materials, the environment, and concepts. This applies to all children regardless of their needs.

Being able to distinguish between children who are merely participating and children who are engaged will allow you to adapt and refine your approach.

How do you know if your children are actively engaged? Here are common indicators of engagement:

Spontaneous Initiation

When a child, without prompting from an adult, confidently and independently responds to something in his or her environment. Examples:

- Choosing a toy and playing with it without prompting
- Making eye contact and gesturing to request something he or she wants
- Asking "What's that?" or "Why?" when seeing a new object
- Grabbing the hand of an adult to lead him or her to a specific location

Sustained Persistence

When a child continues to focus on or work on a task or an interaction. Examples:

- Spending time trying to solve a challenging puzzle, not getting discouraged when he or she makes mistakes
- Consistently trying to verbalise unfamiliar words while reading, not giving up when encountering difficulties
- Trying to write neatly even though it takes longer to complete the worksheet

Predictive Anticipation

When a child shows that he or she expects a certain order of events during familiar routines and activities, with or without the help of verbal or visual cues. Examples:

- When you ring the 'activity-end' bell, child looks up from his book and puts it back on the shelf
- When upon hearing a song signalling the end of nap time, children pack their pillows into their bags
- When you take a seat on your special beanbag, children gather and quieten down to read a book together, without prompting

Anticipation is essential for children to understand sequences, cause-and-effect relationships, and to strengthen memory in the learning process.

Discovery and Responsiveness

When a child shows excitement or fear during new encounters or experiences (i.e., discovering 'ah-ha' or 'uh-oh' moments). Examples:

- Child plays with water and containers to experiment with pouring and splashing
- Child investigates a toy by taking it apart to see how it works
- Child shows concern or offers a toy to another child who looks sad or hurt

'Ah-ha' or 'uh-oh' moments are when children apply skills and knowledge acquired from previous experiences to new or different situations and settings.

Curiosity and Investigation

When a child asks questions or starts exploring when faced with something new. This might begin with their five senses and progress to a more thorough investigation of possibilities. Examples:

- Child uses different ways, such as pressing, stepping on and squeezing, to hear the 'pop' sound in a sheet of bubble wrap
- Child attempts to open containers or boxes to see what is inside
- Child creates pretend play scenarios that involve exploration and discovery

Investigative behaviour motivates children to deepen and extend knowledge about concepts and everyday experiences.

CHILDREN WITH DN

Children with DN may display engagement in non-verbal ways. For example, while a typically developing child may respond to something new by shouting out "Wow! What is that?", a child with DN may show engagement through body movements such as leaning forward or copying the action or behaviour of peers or educators.

Here are some observable indicators of participation and engagement for children with DN:

Active Participation:

- A child with a visual impairment participating in a Circle Time activity by using tactile materials to understand concepts
- A child with a language delay and who uses visual aids and gestures actively participating in a storytelling activity by turning the pages of a big book and acting out movements

Sustained Attention:

- A child who usually struggles with inattention or hyperactivity showing sustained attention during a craft activity by completing the task without constant redirection
- A child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) persevering to complete his preferred activity, such as stacking with blocks, even when the blocks keep falling over

Initiating Interactions:

- A child with social communication difficulties using a script she learned from her social story to ask her peers to share toys
- A child with a learning disability waving his hand to ask an adult for help to decipher a word

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Educators

As an educator, you should:

- Record how your children respond and what they say or do when meaningfully engaged
- Take note of the types of prompts (e.g., tapping on a shoulder and pointing towards an object or person to redirect attention) that enhance your children's engagement
- Allow children to demonstrate their understanding in various ways (e.g., drawing, acting, writing)
- Motivate children by integrating their interests into your activities

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, you should:

- Allocate weekly protected time for educators to collaboratively review children's progress and changing needs and to plan for future learning activities
- Evaluate educators' implementation of IEP goals (e.g., reviewing children's level of engagement with current lesson plans)

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Planning for Active Child Engagement

When planning activities to enhance opportunities for active engagement from a child:

- Include stimuli that child finds interesting or familiar. For example, use visuals (pictures, real objects), auditory materials (songs, stories), and tactile materials (textured objects, manipulatives) to cater to different learning styles.
- Integrate technology and interactive tools such as software programmes and audio books into activities for engagement.
- Provide tasks that are appropriately challenging yet achievable to promote learning and engagement. Adjust the level of difficulty as needed to keep children motivated without causing frustration or disinterest.
- Create predictable activities and routines using songs, visual displays, and intentional environmental setup.
- Plan for time for child-initiated inquiry and exploration before going into instruction or educator-led activities.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Engagement Observation Form

Focus Areas for Active Child Engagement

LET'S THINK

Educators

As an educator, consider reflecting on the lesson plans you executed this week or month, guided by the following questions:

- What materials or topics were most engaging for your children? How did the materials used in activities planned allow children to engage in different ways?
- How did your activities relate to the children's personal experiences and interests?
- How can you include more of these materials or topics into your lessons?
- How can you build on what engages your children to 'stretch' their learning into new areas?

LET'S TALK

Team

With a partner or as part of a teaching team, discuss the following:

- Which indicator of engagement is most consistently observed in your classroom?
- Which indicator of engagement is hardest to encourage? What can you or the team do to encourage this indicator of engagement?

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

The Role of Classroom Ecology

As you become more aware of the various forms of engagement that children exhibit, you can better plan your lessons and activities to encourage active child engagement.

Engagement in the classroom is impacted by these four main components of classroom ecology.

The Environment

This includes the classroom layout, resources, and atmosphere, all of which can promote or hinder learning and engagement. **A well-organised and welcoming environment supports a positive educational experience.**

For more information refer to Chapter 1: Inclusive Environments.

The Educator

Plays a critical role in guiding, supporting, and facilitating learning. **The educator's attitudes, teaching methods, and relationships with children significantly affect classroom dynamics.**

For more information refer to Chapter 2: Intentional Teaching and Developmentally Appropriate Practice, Chapter 3: Collaborative Teaming, and Chapter 5: Family Engagement

The Child

A child's individual characteristics, such as learning styles, interests, and backgrounds, influence how he or she interacts with the environment and curriculum. Understanding these aspects will help tailor learning and promote active child engagement.

The Curriculum

The content and structure of what is taught, ensuring it is relevant, inclusive, and can be adapted to meet the needs of all learners. **A balanced curriculum fosters intellectual curiosity and skills development.**

DID YOU KNOW?

Classroom ecology views the classroom as a dynamic system where the physical environment, social interactions, and instructional practices work together to influence children's learning and development.

The term draws from ecological theories, emphasising how the elements—space, relationships, and teaching approaches—shape behaviour, engagement, and the overall learning experience.

Classroom Ecology: The Child

Children exhibit a variety of learning styles. Here are the main learning styles commonly observed in children:

Type of Learner	Learning Approach	Recommended Strategies
Visual learners	• Learn best through sight. Tend to remember things they have seen rather than heard	Use colourful charts, pictures, images, diagrams, visual aids, videos, and visual cues to reinforce lessons. For example, label classroom objects with pictures and words.
Auditory learners	• Absorb information best through listening • May be more attentive during story time and discussions. Excel when information is presented verbally	Include songs, rhymes, storytelling, and verbal instructions. Use instruments or sound cues during activities to engage auditory learners.
Kinaesthetic learners	• Learn through hands-on and movement and physical activities • May struggle to sit still for long periods • Need to engage physically with material to fully grasp concepts	Plan movement-based activities (e.g., hopping to count, clapping syllables, air writing or body tracing for letter shape and recognition). Offer tactile materials such as textured letters and sand trays. Set up hands-on learning stations.
Tactile learners	• Focus on touch and physical manipulation • Thrive when allowed to explore materials	Plan for children to work with clay, sand, or textured objects, and provide activities such as painting, cutting, and using sensory bins.
Interpersonal (Social) learners	• Learn best through interaction with others • Benefit from learning environments where they can engage with peers, share ideas, and work as part of a team	Plan group activities like collaborative projects, group discussions, or games that encourage peer interactions.
Intrapersonal (Solitary) learners	• Tend to work best independently • Prefer quiet, individual activities which allow them to focus deeply	Include opportunities for independent work and quiet reflection and activities that allow children to explore their interests individually, such as drawing or journaling.
Logical (Mathematical) learners	• Drawn to patterns, sequences, and problem-solving tasks	Plan class activities to include puzzles, games that involve numbers, and logical challenges. Provide structured activities with clear rules or steps.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Strategies for Meaningful Child Engagement

Here are some ways to promote engagement for the whole class on a day-to-day basis:

- Provide a visual schedule of the activities for the day so children know and can follow the sequence of activities.
- Provide varied activities: a balance of active and quiet times, structured and unstructured activities, and opportunities for individual and group learning.
- Put in regular brain or movement breaks for children to rest from activities that require more thinking and focusing.

When working with children with DN who have narrow interests, educators can adopt strategies to encourage broader engagement while respecting the child's preferences. Here are some tips to support these children:

Incorporate Child's Interests into Activities:

- If a child has a restricted interest or special interest (e.g., trains or dinosaurs), use that as a starting point for expanding learning. For example, incorporate the child's special interest into math activities (counting trains) or storytelling (creating a story with his or her favourite topic).
- Gradually introduce related topics that naturally extend the child's interest. For example, if a child loves dinosaurs, introduce him or her to fossils, animals, and the prehistoric period. This can help the child make connections and slowly expand his or her curiosity to broader subjects.

Suggestions for Brain and Movement Breaks

Movement & Physical Activities:

- **Movement Songs:** Sing a song with whole-body movements like "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes".
- **Dance Party:** Play a lively song and have children dance and sing along.
- **Animal Walks:** Have children mimic different animal movements such as crawling like a bear or walking like a crab.
- **Freeze Dance:** Play music and have children freeze in silly poses when the music stops.
- **Energiser 54321:** Have a structured break with a countdown of activities like 5 jumping jacks, 4 one-footed hops, 3 arm circles, 2 deep breaths, and 1 overhead clap.

Sensory & Creative Activities:

- **Deep Breathing:** Do guided deep breathing exercises to stay calm and refocus.
- **Colouring or Drawing:** Provide colouring pages or drawing prompts as a creative outlet.
- **Silent Ball:** Have children gently pass a ball around in silence, focusing on coordination and listening skills.

Games & Activities:

- **Heads Up for Children!:** Get children to guess a word or phrase by looking at the card on each other's forehead.
- **Riddles:** Present children with a simple riddle to solve as a brain teaser.
- **Charades:** Play a round of charades to encourage acting and communication.

Provide Choice and Flexibility:

- Give the child some choice in activities. For example, if a child loves trucks, offer the option of building with blocks or creating a truck-themed art project. Providing choice allows the child to feel empowered while still encouraging exploration beyond her usual special interest.
- Allow children to engage with their special interests at their own pace.

Use Visual Supports and Structured Routines:

- Some children with DN may benefit from visual schedules that clearly outline activities. This structure can help them transition smoothly from their preferred activity to new experiences.
- A visual schedule also helps prepare them for change and reduce anxiety about unfamiliar activities.
- Regularly incorporate the child's interests into classroom routines while introducing new concepts or experiences.

Use Social Stories and Visual Narratives:

- Social stories are a great tool for children who have difficulty understanding or accepting new activities.
- Social stories can explain what will happen during a new activity in a structured, predictable manner, reducing anxiety and helping the child prepare for change.
- Use simple, visual stories or sequence cards that show the steps of a new activity. This can help the child understand and anticipate the transition from the special interest to a wider topic.

Engaging children with disruptive or challenging behaviours in the classroom requires patience, consistency, and a variety of strategies to support their emotional, social, and behavioural development. Here are some tips for educators to effectively manage and engage children with disruptive or challenging behaviours:

Understand Disruptive Behaviour:

- A disruptive behaviour is often a sign of unmet needs. Educators must take the time to investigate what could be causing the disruptive or challenging behaviour and address the root cause. There are two common functions of behaviour:

1. **To Avoid:**
    - Difficult tasks (e.g., putting on shoes with laces, washing hands with soap, keeping toys)
    - Attention from others
    - Difficult activities (e.g., Circle Time, waiting in line)
    - Sensory input (e.g., loud noises, touching paint, playing with dough)
    - Social contexts (e.g., indoor gym in other classrooms, new classrooms)
2. **To Obtain:**
    - Attention from others
    - Preferred toy or object
    - Preferred activity
    - Preferred food
    - Sensory input

Teach Social-Emotional Skills:

- Model appropriate ways to express feelings, manage frustrations, and resolve conflicts. Children often learn by watching adults, so the educator's behaviour is crucial in guiding them.
- Help children develop strategies to manage their emotions (e.g., deep breathing, counting to ten, or using words to express feelings).
- Use role-playing scenarios to teach problem-solving skills and approaches to managing difficult situations.
- Use games and structured activities to teach social skills (e.g., sharing, taking turns, and asking for help).
- Praise positive social interactions when they occur.

Focus on Preventative Strategies:

- Observe patterns of behaviour and identify what might be triggering disruptive actions (e.g., transition between activities, specific tasks). Addressing these triggers can help prevent future disruptions.
- At times, a disruptive behaviour may arise from confusion or uncertainty. Give clear, concise instructions and check for understanding. Use visual supports (e.g., picture cards or gesture cues) for children who may have difficulty processing verbal instructions.
- Children, particularly those with high energy or attention difficulties, may become disruptive if they are expected to stay still for too long. Incorporate movement breaks or allow them to move to a quiet space when they need to calm down.

Praise Often and Reinforce Good Behaviour:

- Provide specific praise for good behaviour (e.g., "I like how you're sitting quietly and listening").
- Reinforce what you want to see more of rather than focusing on what is being done wrong (e.g., instead of saying, "Don't grab the toy from your friend!" Try saying, "Great job asking for a turn. That's a kind way to play!").
- Consider implementing a reward system for positive behaviour. Keep the system simple and achievable (e.g., Sticker Chart).

Establish Clear Expectations and Consistent Routines:

- Establish clear and simple expectations for classroom behaviour. Ensure that children understand what is acceptable and what is not. Use visual cues like charts or posters to reinforce these rules.
- Use a consistent daily schedule to help children feel secure and to reduce anxiety and disruptive behaviour. Use a visual schedule to outline the day's activities so children can anticipate transitions between activities or areas (e.g., moving from outdoor playground to classroom).

LET'S THINK

Educator

As an educator, consider reflecting on the following:

- How can you adjust your daily schedule to balance high-energy and low-energy activities, including breaks?
- What can be included to support children in transitioning smoothly from an unstructured, active activity to a more structured, quiet activity?
- What challenging behaviours have you observed in your classroom? (e.g., Lili frequently leaves her seat during group time, which may indicate a need for more movement or sensory input. Fiona disengaged during a task, possibly because it was too easy and didn't hold her interest. Zanni ran around during a math activity, which may suggest he didn't fully understand the concept of counting to ten or how to participate).

LET'S TALK

Educator

Together with your co-educator, pick a lesson plan that you will be teaching next week. Look through the planned activities and consider one strategy you will implement for Mark (refer to the Practice Scenario on the right) during small group or individual teaching time.

Practice Scenario

Mark is a five-year-old child who is attending a preschool. During class, he does not listen to instructions from adults. He walks around the class when the educator is teaching. Mark speaks but sometimes is unable to express himself well so it may be difficult to understand him. Mark's mother accompanies him to preschool daily and usually stays with him until Circle Time is over. Most of the time, Mark puts his hand over his ears as he says that the music is too loud. He also refuses to join in when the preschool comes together for mass dance or exercise. Recently, Mark has started biting on pencils and erasers during small group and individual teaching time. Educators are struggling to get him to cooperate.

SUCCESS STORIES

There was a child in my class who was very active and unable to sit for long periods in large and small group activities. With the help of the Early Intervention (EI) educator, we implemented strategies such as incorporating more hands-on activities, concrete learning materials and interest-based themes that helped the child settle down in class alongside his peers. As a result, my lessons became more engaging for all the children in the class. Eventually, the child was able to sit through the entire lesson!

- EC Educator, Small Wonder Preschool

Classroom Ecology: The Curriculum

Curriculum refers to the planned schedule of activities, routines, and learning experiences that shape what children engage in throughout the preschool day, from the time they arrive until the time they leave. Some important curriculum-related concepts for educators are:

Steps involved in implementing an inclusive and responsive curriculum	For more information, refer to 'Best Practice Tips' in Chapter 6: Leadership that Supports Inclusion
Conducting both formal and informal assessments, using the information gathered to improve children's learning and development, and monitoring progress	For more information on the APIE cycle, refer to Chapter 3: Collaborative Teaming
Collaborative Teaming	For more information, refer to Chapter 3: Collaborative Teaming
Family-practitioner partnerships	For more information, refer to Chapter 5: Family Engagement
Using UDL principles, DI, and individualisation when planning for teaching of curriculum content	For more information, refer to Chapter 2: Intentional Teaching and Developmentally Appropriate Practice
Modifying classroom environment	For more information, refer to Chapter 1: Inclusive Environments
Role of play in children's learning and development	• Different types of play • Difference between free play and structured play
Inclusive activities and use of assistive technology	Adapt learning materials and activities to be inclusive and accessible for children with different abilities. For example: • Use large-print books for children with poor vision. • Provide fidget tools or textured materials for children with sensory processing needs. • Offer peer-buddy systems in which children are paired with peers to provide social support and guidance. Incorporate technology tools to support learning. This might include speech-to-text apps, adaptive switches, or communication devices.

In a mixed-ability classroom that includes children with DN, educators must implement strategies that ensure all children, regardless of their abilities, can engage with the curriculum meaningfully. **The key is differentiation and flexibility, providing support while encouraging independent learning.** Besides the strategies mentioned in this chapter, here are a few more suggestions that educators can use to effectively implement the curriculum in a mixed-ability classroom.

Scaffold Learning

Provide Gradual Support: Scaffolding involves offering just the right level of support and gradually reducing it as children become more capable. For example: Model a task, such as drawing a picture, and then have the child practise independently, providing fewer and fewer prompts with time. Provide hints or cues, such as visual prompts or verbal reminders, to help children remember what comes next in an activity.

Use Peer Models: Pairing children with DN with more able peers is an example of scaffold learning. Children often learn by observing and imitating others.

Focus on Social-Emotional Learning

Teach Emotional Regulation: Many children with DN need explicit instruction on how to understand and manage their emotions. Educators can use techniques such as emotion charts, storytelling, or role-play to help children identify emotions and practise coping strategies.

Build Empathy and Understanding: Teach children to recognise and respect differences. Discuss how everyone is unique and has his or her own abilities and strengths, and provide opportunities for children to share their experiences, thereby building empathy.

Support Positive Relationships: Create activities and environments that encourage positive interactions and friendships. Celebrate diversity in the classroom and encourage children to appreciate the strengths of their peers.

Individualised and Small Group Instruction

One-on-One Support: Some children may benefit from individualised support to help them engage with the curriculum. Educators can work with children individually on specific skills or tasks to provide direct and personalised instruction to target individual goals.

Small Group Activities: Organise children into small groups based on their abilities or needs. Small groups provide opportunities for more targeted instruction, social interaction, and hands-on learning. These groups allow the educator to give more attention to each child and address specific needs in a focused setting.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Tailoring Teaching Strategies

Differentiation:

- Modify instruction to meet the individual needs of each child. For example, if a child has difficulty with fine motor skills, provide him with larger pencils or adaptive writing tools.
- If a child struggles with following directions, use visual cues, gesture-based instructions, or step-by-step modelling.

Hands-On Learning:

- Incorporate play-based, hands-on learning experiences that engage children in exploration.
- Sensory play, music, and movement are particularly beneficial for children with DN as they provide multiple pathways for learning.

Using Visual and Auditory Cues:

- For children who are non-verbal or have language delays, use visual aids like pictures, sign language, or Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices.
- For children with hearing impairments, ensure that instructions are clear and use visual supports.

LET'S TALK

Educator

Together with your co-educator, discuss the following scenario.

Practice Scenario

Teacher Leng has a sorting task for four-year-old Hana to complete independently. Hana is given a basket of large red, blue, green, and yellow buttons. She has to sort them by colour into a sorting tray. Teacher Leng sees that Hana finds it difficult to pick up a button between her thumb and forefinger. As she cannot hold on to the button, it often falls back into the basket. This leads to Hana becoming impatient and angry. After some attempts at this, Hana decides to turn the basket over completely, scattering the coloured buttons onto the table.

Next, she uses her hand to slide each button into one of several piles sorted by colour and names the colour of each button as she does so. Teacher Leng notices that Hana repeatedly mixes up colours. She terms the blue buttons 'green', the green buttons 'blue', and the yellow button 'green'. The only colour Hana identifies correctly is 'red'.

Questions for discussion:

- What are Hana's strengths?
- From Teacher Leng's observation of Hana, what are the possible learning needs or gaps that Hana is presenting?
- Given the responses to Question 2, what are the implications for Hana's educators, that is, what should they do to support Hana's learning and development?
- Who else can the educator collaborate with to support Hana in the sorting activity?

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CHAPTER 05

Family Engagement

Overview

In this chapter, you will be introduced to the goals and outcomes of Family Engagement:

- Establish the Right Conditions
- Encourage Positive Partnerships
- Equip Key Stakeholders: Set Professionals and Families Up for Success
- Enhance Learning Experiences: Specify Service Delivery and Outcomes of Family Engagement

Key Takeaway

- Family engagement in a child's learning and development results in positive social, academic, and well-being outcomes.
- Preschools and educators take responsibility to intentionally and actively engage families.
- Engagement involves providing opportunities and intentionally guiding families to be part of their child's learning and development.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Establish	Encourage	Equip	Enhance
A Culture of Collaboration	Positive Relationship	Cognition and Capabilities	Learning Experience
System and Support	Goal-Oriented Partnership	Connections	Learning Outcomes
Sustainable Best Practices	Active Participation	Confidence	Quality of Life

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Family Engagement

Family engagement is the strengths-based, continuing, and reciprocal partnership between early childhood (EC) education providers and families of children. The providers work respectfully and meaningfully with families to support the learning, development, and well-being of every child.

What's the difference between family involvement and family engagement?

Family involvement

- Occasional participation
- Preschool-initiated activities
- Highly directed by Centre Leaders and educators

Family engagement

- Consistent and regular participation
- Family-initiated activities supported by preschool
- Direction and objectives of activities are with family's input

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

A Culture of Collaboration

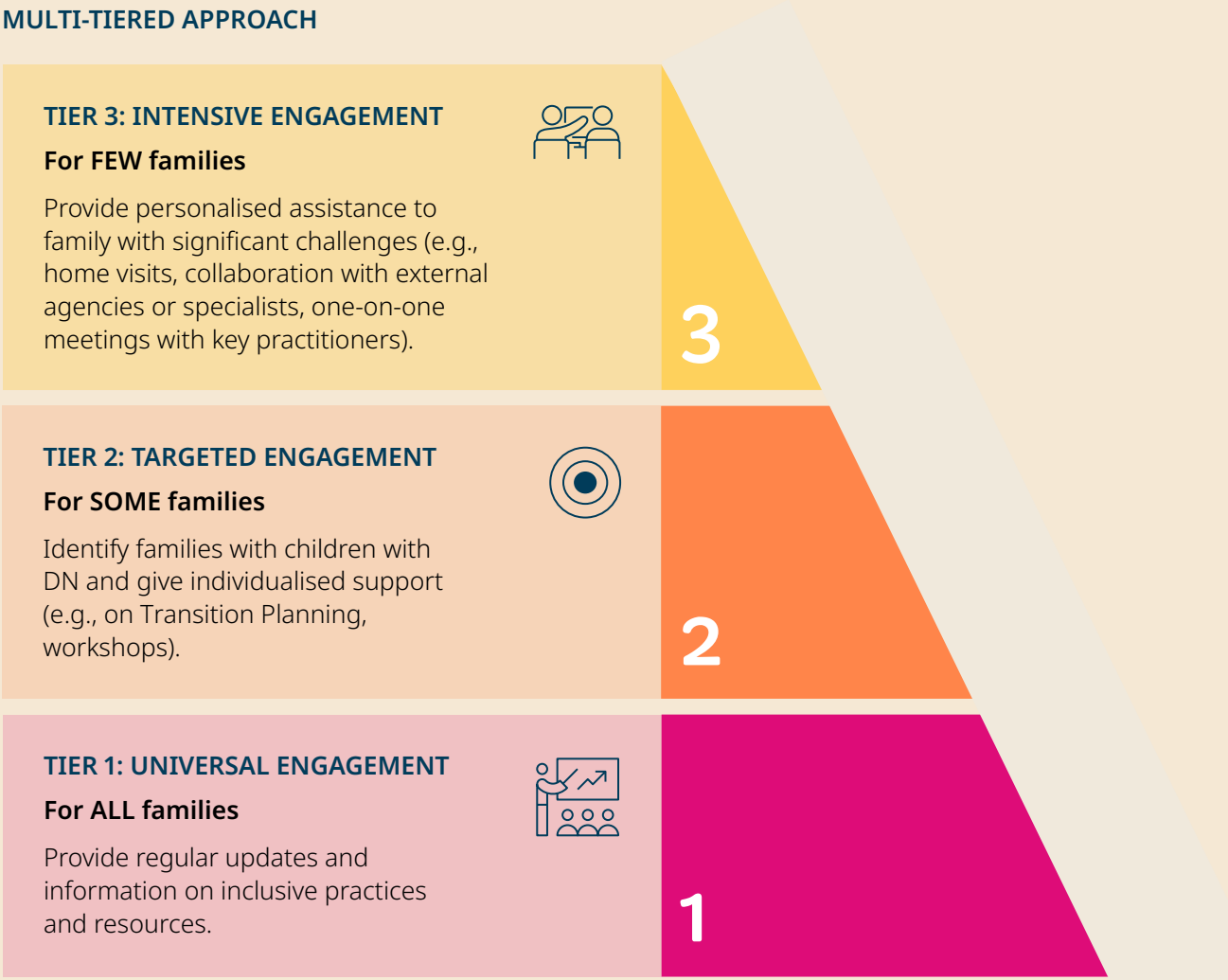
Family engagement should be:

- **Systematic**—ensure relevant systems, policies, and processes are in place
- **Integrated**—schedule activities and provide support services that help families engage meaningfully in their child's preschool experience
- **Responsive**—implement a customisable, multi-tiered support system
- **Sustainable**—maintain practices over time by incorporating family engagement into ongoing systems, policies, and routines

Systems and Support

- Varying levels of support and involvement opportunities can be offered to families, depending on their needs, circumstances, and comfort levels.

MULTI-TIERED APPROACH



ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Educators

As educators, you should support family engagement by:

- Encouraging and promoting open communication both formally (e.g., Individualised Education Plan [IEP] meetings, Parent-Teacher Conferences [PTCs], parent-led support groups) and informally (e.g., orientation, preschool communication apps)
- Being aware of the potential challenges that may impede family engagement (e.g., work schedules, financial constraints) and providing flexible alternatives, such as alternative meeting formats (e.g., virtual meetings), during parent support meetings
- Motivating and empowering families by providing appropriate resources that they value (e.g., information on educational transition planning, advocating for their child's needs outside of preschool)

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, you should facilitate family engagement by:

A	B	C	D
Establishing organisational Vision and Mission statements and other policy statements that reflect your cultural, centre-wide support for family engagement	Communicating organisational policies, processes, and practices to all practitioners and families (e.g., through posters and preschool events)	Operationalising processes and practices to provide practitioners with support for implementation	Monitoring implementation, evaluating effectiveness, and adjusting processes and practices routinely

Getting started → **Seeing it through**

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Family Engagement Activities

Examples of activities you can do to increase family engagement in your preschool programme are:

Educate families on EC development	Educate families and set expectations by explaining learning goals during preschool events or talks or new family orientation, or in written form such as a family handbook or an introductory newsletter.
Regularly invite feedback from families	Carry out surveys and seek family feedback once or twice throughout each preschool year. Some examples of questions are: • What aspects of our inclusion programme have been most meaningful or helpful for you and your child? • Where specifically can our programme be improved? • What can we do better when communicating with you? Please elaborate. Acknowledge and appreciate parents' feedback, even if you are not able to implement changes right away. Follow up with families about the steps you are taking to incorporate their feedback.
Use PTCs to set learning goals (or IEP goals) together with families	Here is a sample agenda you can use to help facilitate a more productive PTC. • Begin and end PTC with encouraging comments about the child. • Include discussions on family concerns, questions, and tips on continuing learning at home. • Create joint learning goals you can revisit throughout the year.
Conduct fun and educational learning sessions for children and their families	Focus on specific developmental skills or academic topics. Session ideas include: • Using playdough to sculpt a child's favourite toy (promotes fine motor skills). • Hosting a nature scavenger hunt (strengthens problem-solving and social skills). • Singing children's favourite songs and having parents draw what the lyrics are describing (exercises language skills, creativity, and storytelling). Tips for learning sessions: • Keep sessions short (maximum 30 minutes) to show families what their children are learning at your preschool. • Schedule sessions right after children pick-up times for families' convenience.

	• Host these events outdoors or online (e.g., video conferencing workshops, webinars). • For online sessions, send a list of required items in advance or provide children with necessary materials to bring home.
Leverage families' talents for opportunities to volunteer	Identify families' strengths and interests. Ask families how they would like to contribute. We are all more inclined to volunteer and participate when it aligns with our personal interests!
Send regular newsletters	Newsletters keep families informed about events, important reminders, policy changes, and other relevant updates. Make them more interesting and relevant by featuring photographs of children, activities, special outings, and other memorable moments. Cover engaging topics such as: • The learning objectives behind some recent classroom activities • Celebrating little successes and achievements • At-home learning tips • Educator spotlights • Family Hall of Fame: Highlight families who have contributed to the preschool • New family or child alerts and how they were welcomed to your preschool • Recipes from the classroom What NOT to do with newsletters: • Making them too long. Include important information that readers can get to quickly using text only. • Sending too infrequently. Consider doing a survey to determine how frequently your families want to get a newsletter
Help families build a community with each other	Examples include: • Providing, if appropriate, family directories at the start of the preschool year so families can get in touch with each other, share their experiences, and learn from each other. An added benefit is that children can continue to develop social and emotional skills outside the classroom. • Hosting chat groups so families can ask questions, learn about local activities, and share parenting resources.

LET'S THINK

Educators

As an educator, consider reflecting on the following:

- What opportunities can you identify within existing preschool routines to engage families?
- How can you help families extend their child's learning and development outside the preschool?
- How can you include parents in important decisions that impact their child's experiences at preschool and in the community?

LET'S TALK

Team

As a preschool team, consider the following:

- How does your preschool reflect and support the diversity of families through its policies, programmes, and partnerships?
- How can your team improve collaboration with families and community partners to provide holistic support and create a family-friendly, inclusive environment?
- What communication channels are in place for parents to share concerns or feedback and how can these be strengthened?
- Referring to the Multi-Tiered Approach, how can your team identify and address the needs of different families in a timely and consistent manner (e.g., developing a workflow)?

For more information on the Multi-Tiered Approach, refer to Page 96.

- How can aspects of the Multi-Tiered Approach change with circumstances and what distinct roles will educators (e.g., EC, EI) and leaders (e.g., Head of Inclusion or HOI, Centre Leader) play at each level?

SUCCESS STORIES

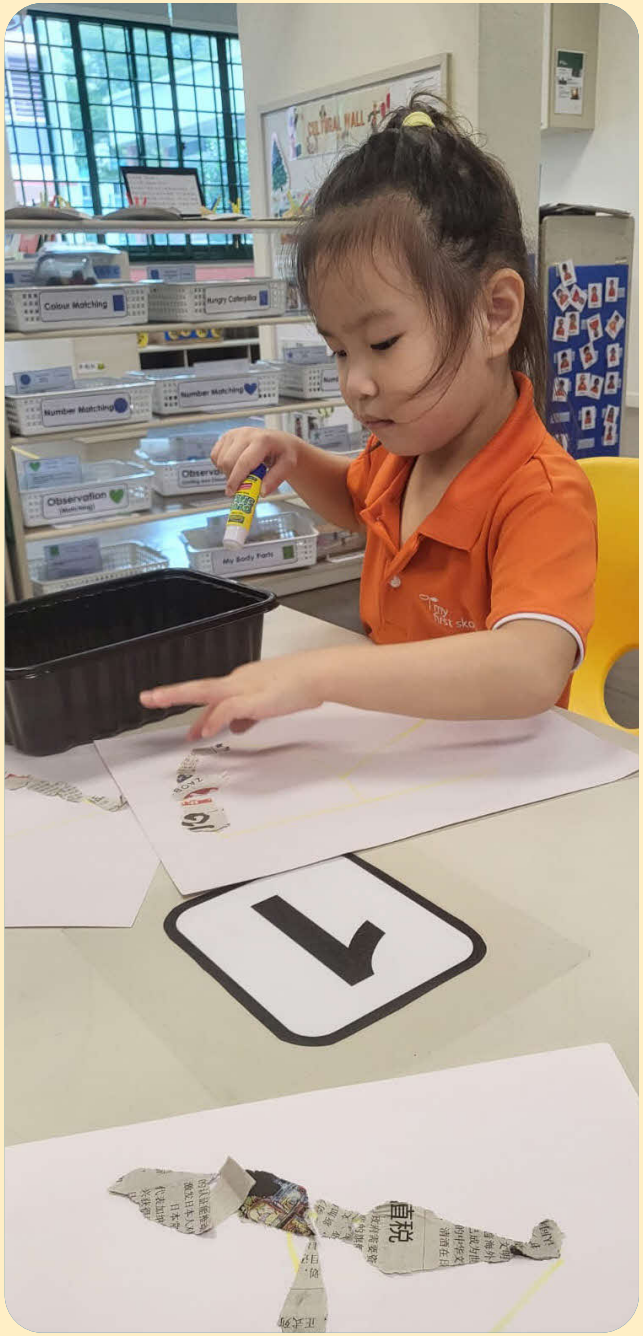
At my preschool, we adopt a whole-school approach in creating a welcoming environment where families can accompany children into the preschool and drop them off or pick them up directly from their classrooms. This approach enables families to integrate into the preschool environment through opportunities to observe their child's interactions with educators and peers, and participation in shared learning activities. Families are also encouraged to be part of an inclusive preschool culture.

- InSP Technical Assistance (TA) Coach from the InSP pilot

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Orientation to Graduation – Time Points to Engage Families

Workflow from Enrolment to PTC



FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Building Positive Partnerships with Families

How do you encourage positive partnerships?

- Supporting parents throughout their child's journey
- Goal-oriented partnership
- Active participation from families

This will ultimately help to create a nurturing environment where preschools and families can thrive together.

As practitioners in an inclusive preschool setting, you have probably often encountered parents who have just learned they have a child with DN. **Understanding the emotional journey and experiences of parents will enable you to demonstrate empathy and sensitivity and engage them more meaningfully.** Here are some best practices to engage with parents meaningfully:

Acknowledge and Validate Emotions: Recognise the range of emotions, such as shock, denial, anxiety, fear, depression, guilt, and anger, that parents may experience. Validate these feelings by expressing empathy and understanding, creating a safe space for them to express themselves.

Provide Clear and Accessible Information: Offer clear explanations and implications of the diagnosis, using simple language so parents can understand the given information. Where appropriate, provide suitable resources.

Emphasise Strengths and Positives: Focus on the child's strengths and abilities and highlight positive achievements and milestones. Encourage parents to celebrate these successes, fostering a positive and hopeful outlook for their child's future.

Goal-Oriented Partnership

Educators and families can work together to set shared goals, develop strategies, and support children's learning and development. It is vital to recognise the value of parents' knowledge and skills in intervention planning, implementation of instructional strategies, and evaluation of progress for a child.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Educators

As an educator, you should practice Respect, Reassurance, Responsiveness and Reciprocity (i.e., **the 4Rs**) to build positive relationships with families:

Respect

- Active listening
- Valuing the diverse perspectives of parents and other practitioners
- Inviting families and team to collaborate in decision-making

For more information refer to Chapter 3: Collaborative Teaming

- Providing tailored support

Reassurance

- Making time to communicate (both in-person and through communication apps)
- Showing authentic concern by acknowledging family's needs (e.g., family priorities)
- Providing regular updates
- Celebrating small wins

Responsiveness

- Addressing concerns promptly
- Tailoring support to individual needs
- Implementing suggestions from families
- Ensuring clear and timely communication

Reciprocity

- Engaging in a mutual exchange of ideas, resources, and support
- Collaborative decision-making
- Recognising and valuing each other's contributions to a child's learning and progress

DID YOU KNOW?

Active listening increases sharing of experiences and understanding of different perspectives, which in turn builds trust and relationships.

You can practice active listening by:

1. **Listening for the Whole Meaning**
   - Listen and attend to what is being said.
   - Seek to understand the context and decode the underlying meaning of what is being said to identify key focus points to address.
2. **Responding to Feelings**
   - Pay attention to both your own and the other person's verbal and non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions, body language, and posture. Ensure that your responses remain respectful, mindful, and non-judgmental.
3. **Communicating**
   - Acknowledge the speaker's views by restating their words before sharing your own response.

Fostering Meaningful Family Engagement

Here are some tips to help promote family engagement and foster positive partnerships:

Enhancing Communication

Foster open dialogue with families to better understand a child's needs, strengths, and progress.

- Schedule termly or semestral in-person tea sessions.
- Provide communication channels to share information when not meeting in person.
- Allow accessible information retrieval of medical and developmental reports and family history.

Building Trust Through Joint Efforts

Work together to achieve common goals and build trust and mutual respect between educators and families. This creates a safe and supportive learning environment for children. Hold six-monthly IEP meetings to align child's goals, priorities, and other areas of need at home and in the preschool.

Collaborating in Goal Setting to Guide Teaching

Set goals to address the needs of both child and family. Schedule weekly EC and EI educator meetings for ongoing assessment, planning, and evaluation of implementation plans.

Increasing Family Involvement

Encourage family involvement in the development and planning of a child's educational and intervention outcomes. Offer parent-support groups to share progress and topics of concerns, and involve parents in EI-led or EC-led topic sharing (e.g., using visual schedules to support daily routines, approaches to encouraging communication, mealtime strategies for picky eaters or children with sensory sensitivities).

LET'S THINK

Educator

As an educator, consider reflecting on the following questions:

- Which of the 4Rs (Respect, Reassurance, Responsiveness, Reciprocity) do you demonstrate in your interaction with families? Note some examples.
- What are three aspects of your interactions with families that you would like to improve based on what you've learned in this chapter?

LET'S TALK

Team

To have greater family participation in building an inclusive preschool, discuss how you, as a preschool team, can:

- Encourage regular attendance at preschool events and classroom volunteering occasions
- Encourage regular open communication amongst stakeholders
- Encourage a collaborative decision-making process

SUCCESS STORIES

I had a child who could not speak English and had a speech delay. To understand her better, I worked with the child's mom to figure out ways for the child to communicate her needs. I learned simple Chinese phrases and used visual charts and routine boards to help the child understand what we were doing in preschool. I also gave the child's mom a set of visual cards to use at home. Eventually, the mom told me that her child was better able to communicate, and she thanked me for the cards.

- EC Educator, Small Wonder Preschool

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Checklist for Practitioners to Prepare for Parent- Teacher Conferences

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Empowering Practitioners and Families for Success

Strengthening the capacity of educators and families in the areas of Cognition, Capabilities, Connections, and Confidence, also known as the 4Cs, is essential for achieving successful inclusion in education.

Cognition

Promote a Growth Mindset. This may involve challenging assumptions, promoting diversity, and embracing inclusive practices.

Capabilities

Equip educators and families with the skills and knowledge to support children's learning. This may include training in teaching techniques, understanding child development, and utilising learning resources.

Connections

Encourage and facilitate formal and informal connections among educators and families to share information and resources. This involves creating opportunities for collaboration, communication, and community engagement.

Confidence

Help families develop a sense of self-efficacy to contribute to their child's learning. This may involve providing feedback, celebrating successes, and offering ongoing support and encouragement.

DID YOU KNOW?

A ***Growth Mindset*** is the belief that abilities, intelligence, and skills can be developed over time through dedication, hard work, and learning from feedback and challenges. Contrast this with a fixed mindset which sees these traits as static.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Educators

As an EC educator interested in creating a collaborative environment, you should:

- Encourage families to participate in class-based activities and classroom experiences through:
  - Volunteering (e.g., assisting in managing transitions between activities, helping with setting up the classroom or activities).
  - Learning journeys (e.g., guiding and engaging small groups of children with their observations during field trips).
  - Sharing (e.g., sharing traditional stories or folktales for children to experience and learn about different traditions).
- Share and provide resources for manageable activities that families can do at home to extend learning.

As an EI educator interested in creating a collaborative environment, you should:

- Actively involve the family when reviewing and developing a child's IEP, incorporate the family's goals and priorities in the IEP, and include strategies that the family can implement at home.
- Set up regular meetings with families to discuss children's progress, review IEP goals that have been achieved, and plan future goals.
- Organise workshops or sharing sessions for families on key topics to enhance their understanding of areas that are relevant to their child's learning and development.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader interested in creating a collaborative environment, you should:

- Provide training and workshops that focus on family engagement and strategies such as how to communicate with families in a culturally sensitive way.
- Implement centre-wide activities, such as family day, parent-educator-child bonding activities, and festive celebrations, to create opportunities for families to interact and build relationships with educators and other families.
- Ensure that all communication and events are accessible to families of diverse backgrounds (e.g., providing multiple languages, flexible timings, childcare arrangements, varied meeting formats).

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Strengthening Family Engagement

The following strategies can help strengthen family engagement:

- Send personalised updates of the child, together with whole-class updates, to increase rapport and connection with each family. Provide a way for the family to respond to the update.
- Be flexible and offer several ways for families to participate or otherwise engage in class and preschool activities. For example, record workshops and share the recordings with families who cannot attend.
- Create simple surveys or feedback forms for families to share their feedback on activities carried out or to gather inputs on upcoming events or activities.
- Schedule PTCs at least twice a year to review a child's progress, celebrate achievements, and set or adjust goals.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Parent Teacher Conference Meeting Notes

LET'S THINK

Educators

As an educator, consider reflecting on how you currently engage with families:

- What are some of the different communication methods you use to engage with families?
- How do you personalise your communication to meet the needs of each family?
- What types of information have you provided to families to support their child's learning at home?
- How can you further enhance your communication with each family?

LET'S TALK

Educator

Together with your co-educators, discuss how you can actively engage families in the development and review of IEPs and learning goals:

- How can you gather family input effectively when developing or updating learning plans or goals?
- How can you incorporate a family's priorities into goals and strategies used in the classroom?
- How can you empower families to take ownership of their child's learning strategies and activities at home?

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Understanding Family Engagement

Family engagement cultivates a nurturing and empowering environment that maximises learning experiences for all children, especially for those with DN. **It fosters collaboration, understanding, and support, ultimately enriching the education journey for both child and family.**

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Enhancing Family Engagement

You can enhance family engagement by:

- Having regular check-ins with each family to discuss their child's learning progress. Encourage families to share their observations, goals, and expectations so that they feel valued and actively participate in their child's development.
- Providing various forms of communication (e.g., email, WhatsApp chat, other digital platforms) that families can use for giving feedback and reaching out for support.
- Holding regular workshops and talks on practical topics for parents. Encourage active participation through Q&A sessions, group discussions, family-child hands-on activities, and take-home resources.
- Providing information and help to connect families to relevant community resources as needed.

LET'S THINK

Centre Leader or Educator

As a Centre Leader or educator, consider reflecting on your experience engaging with families using the following questions:

- How do you ensure that your communication with families is a two-way exchange?
- What opportunities do families have to share their observations and concerns with you?
- How do you incorporate such feedback into your lessons and teaching strategies?
- What are two areas that you feel are working well about how you currently engage with families? What is one area you can improve on?

LET'S TALK

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, consider reflecting on the following:

- As a team, brainstorm ways to engage families of children with DN in activities and events that empower them.
- In what ways can families contribute to the design and implementation of these activities and events?

SUCCESS STORIES

There was a specific child who was falling behind his peers. I started updating his parents about his day and the challenges that both child and educators faced at preschool, as well as to exchange ideas on strategies to use at home and at preschool. Initially, it was hard for the parents to accept when I shared concerns about the child's behaviour. I continued to encourage and engage the parents, and the child eventually enrolled into InSP. In less than a month, the child has already made significant progress! This has given me so much motivation to strive harder in shaping the next generation.

- EC Educator, PCF Sparkletots

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CHAPTER 06

Leadership that Supports Inclusion

Overview

This chapter will give you key information to help you understand the intentions of the roles you play as a leader in an inclusive preschool. It will also provide tips on how you can operationalise these concepts to develop an inclusive preschool.

Key Takeaway

Centre leadership can enhance inclusion for all children by:

- fostering an environment of acceptance
- providing resources and support to children, families and practitioners
- regularly evaluating inclusion efforts

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Leadership that Supports Inclusion

Supporting inclusion in preschool requires intentional leadership that cultivates an environment where all children, regardless of background, abilities, or needs, feel welcome, are valued, and have opportunities to reach their full potential.

The leadership team plays a pivotal role in establishing and building a culture that promotes inclusive practices for children with DN.

DID YOU KNOW?

Children up to six years of age are said to have ***DN*** if they are observed to function at a developmental level that is below their typically developing peers, and require low, medium, or high levels of early intervention (EI) support. Children with DN require additional support and resources beyond what is generally given to typically developing children.

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Leading and Sustaining an Inclusive Culture

Establishing an inclusive culture begins with the Centre Leader. You not only define the purpose and environmental context in which a preschool operates but also select the team and set the example and standards for them. Therefore, it is essential that any Centre Leader who takes up leadership roles and responsibilities for inclusion within a preschool is committed to inclusive practice and principles.

The primary aspect of your role and responsibility as the Centre Leader is to support practitioners in navigating and implementing change. Such actions are a necessary part of creating and sustaining a preschool's culture. As the Centre Leader, you are the culture setter. You begin the culture creation process and manage the prevailing preschool culture.

As the culture setter, consider these three elements:

1. Identifying and adapting best practices suitable for your preschool.
2. Being an influential and transformational leader who translates values and beliefs into culture while leading by example.
3. Being able to identify and define the values of your preschool. This may involve communicating values through a mission statement or an inclusive philosophy statement, and motivating and guiding practitioners to come on-board.

Creating an inclusive culture in your preschool is essential for the following reasons:

1. **Fosters a Sense of Belonging:** An inclusive culture makes every child feel valued and part of the community, regardless of his or her abilities, backgrounds, or differences. Children who feel they belong are more likely to engage in learning, build positive relationships, and feel safe to express themselves.
2. **Supports Social and Emotional Development:** Inclusion helps children develop empathy, respect, and cooperation. By interacting with other children from diverse backgrounds and abilities, children learn essential social-emotional skills like understanding, patience, and collaboration. An inclusive culture promotes kindness and acceptance, values which are crucial for emotional well-being.
3. **Promotes Better Learning Outcomes:** When children feel included and supported because their learning needs are met, they are more likely to be motivated to learn and participate in classroom activities. A preschool with a good inclusion culture creates programmes and learning environments where all children can succeed.
4. **Builds a Strong Preschool Community:** When a preschool embraces inclusion as part of its culture, it strengthens relationships between practitioners, families, and the broader community. Families feel more connected to the preschool, knowing that their children are accepted and supported. This sense of partnership builds trust and collaboration, making the preschool a more supportive and cohesive space for everyone.
4. **Empowers All Professionals in the Preschool:** An inclusive culture sets the stage for practitioners to understand and stay committed to the preschool's vision for inclusion. In turn, the preschool's commitment to inclusion will guide practitioners in their daily interactions and instructional methods. It will empower practitioners to develop strategies for inclusive teaching, collaboration, and problem-solving, ensuring that everyone works toward the same goal.

As a Centre Leader, one way of fostering an inclusive culture is to have a set of principles. For example:

- Develop an open partnership with a child's family.
- Collaborate with external agencies.
- Have a robust inclusion policy and philosophy.
- Recognise and embrace the uniqueness of each child's developmental journey.
- Get children involved when making decisions about their own learning.
- Reflect on your own attitudes and values on inclusion in early childhood (EC) education.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, you should:

- **Create an Inclusive Vision for your Preschool:** The vision that you set will explicitly communicate your preschool's philosophy on inclusion to all stakeholders. This vision will support and guide all your practitioners to make suitable decisions to support learning and development of all children, including communicating with families and making curriculum choices.
- **Engage Stakeholders:** Engage the preschool and community such as educators, families, and other EC practitioners to gather information on their aspirations for an inclusive preschool organisation.
- **Craft a Renewed Vision and Philosophy:** Based on feedback received, craft the renewed vision and philosophy of the preschool or organisation. The renewed vision and philosophy should clearly state the preschool's perspective on inclusion and highlight general approaches that will be used to attain its vision and philosophy.
- **Assess Strengths and Weaknesses:** Reflect on your organisation's identity, values, and current vision and philosophy. Review areas of opportunities and identify gaps that may be encountered when working towards the renewed inclusive vision and philosophy.
- **Design an Action Plan to Support your Preschool:** Based on the gaps and areas of opportunity, design an action plan to address gaps and build capabilities in practitioners to embody the renewed vision and philosophy.

DID YOU KNOW?

A ***vision*** articulates the desired outcome or impact and reflects the values, purpose, and aspirations of the entity it represents. It serves as a guiding star, providing direction and motivation for long-term goals.

A ***philosophy*** is a set of beliefs, values, and principles that guide a preschool when making decisions that pertain to the learning and development of children enrolled there.

DID YOU KNOW?

The term ***stakeholders*** in EC settings includes not only children but also families, parents, preschool board members, administrators, social service providers, and educators. Stakeholders are the ones who ensure the success of EC services.

An ***action plan*** is a detailed strategy that outlines the specific steps, tasks, or activities needed to achieve a particular goal or objective. It serves as a roadmap for turning ideas or visions into reality by breaking down larger goals into manageable actions. An action plan typically includes aspects of **what, who, when, where, and how,** providing clear direction and accountability for completing the necessary tasks.

The ***Head of Inclusion (HOI)*** advises a preschool on inclusive practices and mentors preschool educators. He or she ensures all practitioners understand their role when working with children with DN and also networks, influences, and collaborates with external stakeholders.

SUGGESTION

Preschool Philosophy

Here is an example of an inclusive preschool philosophy:

At ABC Preschool, we value each child as a unique individual with diverse abilities, strengths, and personalities. Our team of early childhood practitioners focuses on understanding each child's needs, strengths, and interests to design suitable learning experiences for optimal learning and development.

Learning experiences at ABC Preschool emphasise embracing inclusion and diversity. Our practitioners make curriculum and teaching decisions that respond and adapt to children's diverse learning needs. This enables and empowers children to have optimal learning and developmental experiences.

At ABC Preschool, we aspire to create a collaborative community where children and families feel valued, respected, and safe. We place utmost importance on including parents and family's knowledge, needs, and concerns in our care for children. Through strong partnership with parents, we aim to ensure each child receives the highest quality of care and education.

DID YOU KNOW?

The term ***practitioners*** refers to Educators, Other EC practitioners, Leader or Centre leader, Other professionals or specialist.

LET'S THINK

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, consider reflecting on the following:

- How would you define an inclusive culture? What characteristics do you think are essential for such a culture?
- What aspects of your preschool's current philosophy can be modified to better reflect an inclusive culture?
- In what ways can you effectively communicate the inclusive philosophy to stakeholders in your preschool?
- How may the adoption of an inclusive philosophy influence your preschool's current practices and procedures?

LET'S TALK

Team

The following activity can be done with different groups of individuals at either organisation level or preschool level.

Possible group combinations at organisation level are:

- Centre Leaders (e.g., Centre Principal [CP], Vice Principal, Director, Assistant Director, Head, Deputy Centre Leader [DCL], Cluster Head, Organisational Leader)
- Curriculum and Pedagogy Specialists
- Members of the Strategic Planning Committee

As an organisational-level group, consider discussing the following:

- Your personal beliefs and values about an inclusive preschool
- Your personal philosophy and how it resonates with the preschool's aim of becoming inclusive
- Any gaps that exist between the preschool's current philosophy and your aspired inclusive philosophy
- Changes you need to make to align your preschool's current philosophy to your aspired inclusive philosophy

Possible group combinations at preschool level are:

- EC educators
- EI educators
- Assistant EC educators

Together with your co-educators, consider discussing the following:

- Your beliefs and views about an inclusive preschool and how they can be reflected in your teaching practices
- The changes to be made to your current practices to ensure they are inclusive

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Designing a Philosophy for an Inclusive Preschool

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Building Capabilities

Building the capabilities of practitioners in an inclusive preschool is an important responsibility that the organisation and Centre Leaders must undertake. By creating and providing suitable and relevant professional development (PD) opportunities, leaders are ensuring that educators are equipped with the required knowledge and skills to use and sustain inclusive practices.

Ensure practitioners have opportunities to gain knowledge and skills in inclusive practices, including:

- Understanding DN
- Supporting children with social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties
- Using Differentiated Instruction (DI)
- Employing Universal Design (UD)
- Planning an inclusive and responsive curriculum
- Providing assessments for learning

For more information on UD principles, refer to Chapter 1: Inclusive Environments.

For more information on DI, refer to Chapter 2: Intentional Teaching and Developmentally Appropriate Practice.

Through suitable PD opportunities, practitioners can gain new knowledge and strengthen their current knowledge and skills in the following ways:

- **Instructional Changes within the Classroom:** When educators learn new teaching strategies, they take these strategies back to their classroom to implement them.
- **Increased Collaboration:** Providing opportunities for educators to learn from one another ensures that they are always innovating, creating, and experimenting.
- **Enhanced Teaching Skills:** Educators can strengthen their skills in managing classrooms, designing and implementing appropriate learning experiences, and designing conducive learning environments for all.
- **Increased Confidence:** Professional growth will help educators feel more competent in handling the diverse needs of children.
- **Promoting Lifelong Learning:** Practitioners are encouraged to be life-long learners who can adapt to changing trends in education.

For more information, refer to Chapter 7: Supervision, Coaching, and Professional Development.

DID YOU KNOW?

DI is used to respond to the learning needs of different children and requires an educator to manage the diversity that exists between learners in a class in an active and positive manner.

UD in EC education is a framework that requires educators to plan learning environments and activities for diverse learners from the beginning. A well-planned UD classroom will create learning environments in which all children can participate and learn meaningfully.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Planning PD for Practitioners

Here is an example of how PD can be planned for practitioners in an inclusive preschool setting:

A preschool recently enrolled more children with DN (e.g., speech and language challenges, autism spectrum disorder) as part of its goal to foster inclusion. Educators expressed concerns about supporting these children while managing the diverse needs of the other children in the class. To address this, the Centre Leader decided to organise a Professional Development workshop focusing on differentiated instruction strategies and approaches for working with children with varying abilities. The Centre Leader used the steps for planning, as listed below, for the PD workshop.

When planning for the PD experience, it is important to:

- Identify the needs of the practitioners
- Design goals and learning objectives
- Choose the most effective format (i.e., online or in-person, workshop or lecture style or focus group discussions)
- If it is an outsourced session, engage a specialist facilitator to design and conduct the session
- Provide time for practitioners to practice the learned skills in their classrooms
- Conduct a post-training dialogue to gather feedback on the session and the impact it had on practitioners' professional abilities

LET'S THINK

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, consider reflecting on the following:

- Based on your observations and conversations with your practitioners, what are some areas of professional knowledge and skills that most of them require more PD in?
- How can you help educators to effectively apply theoretical knowledge to real classroom situations?

SUCCESS STORIES

The leadership team at my preschool, including the Centre Leader, HOI, and Senior Teacher, worked together to support professional development and continuous capacity building. Newly hired EC educators were supported through structured lesson observations and coaching from the Technical Assistance Coach. Our Centre Leader, Senior Teacher and EI educators also spent time guiding them in classroom and inclusive practices. Leadership ensured that EC educators, including assistant educators, continued to grow professionally by roping in EI educators and Allied Health Professionals to organise workshops on inclusive practices and strategies.

- InSP Technical Assistance (TA) Coach from the InSP pilot

LET'S TALK

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, consider discussing the following with your practitioners:

- What specific skills and knowledge do they need to enhance their use of inclusive classroom practices?
- What other PD opportunities will be effective for their learning?

As a Centre Leader, consider exploring the following questions with relevant practitioners:

- How can the preschool manage workload and scheduling better to avoid burnout and change fatigue?
- What opportunities are there during PD to incorporate hands-on, experiential activities to enhance knowledge retention and practical application?
- In trying to bridge the theory-to-practice gap, how can the team plan for practice (hands-on) sessions after PD or training sessions?
- How will PD sessions promote collaboration across teams and departments?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

PD Self-Reflection Checklist for Practitioners

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Understanding Classroom Ecology

In leading, building, and maintaining an inclusive classroom environment, it is important to review classroom ecology and then adapt or modify it to support the diverse needs of all children. The following are aspects of a high-quality inclusive preschool:

- **Higher Engagement:** Children with diverse learning needs and abilities will feel more motivated and comfortable participating in a range of learning experiences.
- **Positive Behaviour Outcomes:** With clear rules and supportive relationships established between children and practitioners, potential disruptions will be reduced.
- **Holistic Learning Outcomes:** An effective and flexible physical and emotional environment will ensure there is optimal support to focus on learning. This will create opportunities for children to develop holistically and at their own pace.
- **Social-Emotional Growth:** Children will learn how to collaborate, communicate, and manage emotions within a structured setting.

For more information on classroom ecology, refer to Chapter 4: Active Child Engagement.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, you play a pivotal role in establishing and leading the physical learning environment. You should:

- Foster a culture of collaboration
- Ensure access to PD opportunities
- Provide the necessary resources

As a Centre Leader, you should manage or supervise:

- The safety of all children, in line with your organisation or preschool policy obligations and regulatory standards (e.g., specifications for educator-child ratios, space requirements, ventilation, lighting, sanitation)
- The design of areas within your preschool to ensure all children can easily gain access to these areas
- The availability and adequacy of equipment (e.g., handwriting tools, assistive devices), teaching materials, and resources
- How classrooms and activities are planned and set up before children arrive at the preschool
- How educators supervise children in indoor and outdoor areas (i.e., the ability to always see and hear children)
- Timing, sequence, and length of routines and activities

As a Centre Leader, you should:

- Allow educators opportunities to modify the physical classroom, learning experiences, and facilitation strategies based on UD and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to guide their curriculum and pedagogy decisions.
- Review the layout and key physical features of your inclusive preschool to determine its accessibility for all children, regardless of their needs and abilities.
- Review current preschool policies and practices to ensure they advocate for and embrace an inclusive culture and mindset.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Curriculum and Instructional Practices

When looking at classroom ecology, Centre Leaders should focus on curriculum and instructional practices. The table below shows an example of the steps involved in implementing an inclusive and responsive curriculum.

Requirements	Action Steps
1 **Identify scope and sequence**	• Decide on curriculum content and the order in which the content must be taught over a year.
2 **Develop strategy for an integrated format**	• Write a plan, ensuring a logical sequence within and across the thematic or topic units. • Plan for the integration of learning content throughout the day and across thematic or topic units.
3 **Create lesson plans using UDL principles**	• Develop a plan that covers the three UDL principles, namely, multiple means of representation, multiple means of engagement, and multiple means of action and expression.
4 **Review lesson plans to include differentiation and individualisation**	• Produce lesson plans that provide curricular modifications to address children's identified needs. • Formulate a plan to implement embedded learning opportunities throughout the day to provide direct instruction for children's individualised needs and learning goals.
5 **Link progress monitoring to scope and sequence**	• Establish work processes for gathering progress monitoring data to assess whether individual learning goals have been achieved.
6 **Review implementation for future lesson plans**	Set aside time for the team to: • Review the implementation of lesson plans and make modifications to future lesson plans. • Review progress monitoring data regularly and adjust lesson plans based on evidence gathered.

LET'S THINK

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, consider reflecting on the following:

- How can you help practitioners to modify their lessons and facilitation strategies to support children with DN?
- What additional support can you give to practitioners to assist them in this process or to reduce the possibility of experiencing stress or facing huge workloads?

LET'S TALK

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, consider discussing the following with your practitioners:

- What are the key skills or information you need to make modifications based on UD and UDL principles?
- How can you collaborate with other practitioners within the preschool or organisation to facilitate this process?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Quick Factsheet on Universal Design Principles

SUCCESS STORIES

Leadership at my preschool supported inclusion by enabling regular co-planning and co-teaching sessions among practitioners. This was made possible through ensuring that both EI and EC educators had access to the electronic weekly planner. Coordination improved amongst practitioners, thus making it easier to plan, discuss, modify lessons and carry out co-planning and co-teaching effectively.

- InSP Technical Assistance (TA) Coach from the InSP pilot

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Specialised Support

As a Centre Leader, **ensure that children with DN have access to specialised support wherever possible.** If your preschool does not provide specialised support, consider obtaining them from external service providers.

If your preschool has other EC practitioners, you can get their help to identify potential developmental delays and other issues a child may have. They can collaborate with educators to ensure that the quality of intervention given to a child with DN is more effective, leading to better long-term learning and developmental outcomes.

As a Centre Leader, you should wherever possible provide opportunities for other EC practitioners to observe and interact with children with DN as they allow for:

1 Development of Individualised Education Plan (IEP)

An IEP is a plan tailor-made to support the learning and development of a child with DN. As the first step in IEP is to identify a child's needs and strengths, other EC practitioners supporting the child should be allowed to observe and assess the child to attain this information. Obtaining key information from other EC practitioners will allow for an IEP with appropriate development goals to be designed and implemented.

2 Focus on the Holistic Development of the Child

With the information that other EC practitioners gather about the child with DN, suitable learning goals that focus on holistic development can be designed. With their specialist knowledge and skills, other EC practitioners can focus on growth across various skill areas like fine motor and gross motor, adaptive, social-emotional, social and communication, cognitive, and emotional regulation. Ensuring that all domains of development are adequately covered prevents potential gaps in providing support for children with DN.

3 Child-Centric Adaptations of Learning Experiences and Materials

When other EC practitioners observe children with DN during daily preschool activities and routines, they obtain the information necessary to support educators, suggest adaptations for learning experiences, and provide materials to support the learning of the child with DN.

4 Measurable Progress of Children with DN

Other EC practitioners can provide additional support for your preschool as they have specialised knowledge and skills to monitor and chart the progress of children with DN based on milestones and standardised benchmarks.

For more information, refer to Chapter 3: Collaborative Teaming.

DID YOU KNOW?

An ***IEP*** is a document that outlines a child's learning and developmental growth path. The IEP process is collaborative and culminates in a written plan (the IEP) that includes the child's current level of functioning; particular areas where specialised services are required and annual goals set; short-term objectives; and how evaluation should be implemented. This process requires inputs from educators, other EC practitioners (e.g., a visiting or in-house psychologist or AHPs), and parents who will work with the IEP Team to meet the needs of a child who requires a range of support. The IEP Team develops IEP goals based on the child's current needs and skills and writes a plan for the current academic year.

Holistic refers to the whole child, i.e., considering multiple interconnected aspects(e.g., emotional, physical, cognitive, and social well-being) rather than focusing on just one area. Having a holistic focus on a child's development will ensure there is comprehensive and sustainable growth.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, you play a critical role in allowing children with DN to obtain specialised support from other EC practitioners. You should:

- **Establish Clear Procedures**
  - Develop guidelines, workflows, routines, and procedures for your preschool on how other EC practitioners can engage with children with DN and how they can collaborate with educators.
  - Ensure that procedures are well-communicated to practitioners and families.
  - Communicate to all stakeholders that the purpose of collaboration is to support the development and learning of children with DN.
  - State procedures for parental consent, data privacy, and collaboration in guidelines and workflows.
- **Schedule Regular, Consistent, Specialised Support for Children with DN**
  - Schedule intervention hours for children with DN to ensure support is regular and consistent.
  - Include specialised support from EI educators as part of the intervention hours.
  - Offer optional pull-out intervention support to children with DN. It is recommended that other EC practitioners or EI educators determine the need for pull-out sessions.
  - Examples of such support are:

Changes in scheduling:

- Extra time for completing activities, classroom tasks, or worksheets
- Breaks throughout the day

Changes in setting:

- Intentional grouping of children
- Quiet spaces

Changes in materials:

- Fewer items to complete on a page
- Notes and visual cues provided
- Recorded audiobooks available

Changes in instruction:

- One-on-one teaching and revision available
- Changes in the difficulty of reading materials or books

Changes in how a child shows knowledge:

- Performing a hands-on demonstration
- Voicing an answer instead of writing it down
- Typing an answer on a computer keyboard instead of writing it down

DID YOU KNOW?

Stakeholders that should be given access to your preschool's workflows are Educators, Other EC practitioners, Leader or Centre leader, Other professionals or specialist.

The ***purpose of workflows*** is to focus on the structure of work within the preschool and improve the way teams collaborate to complete the work. Workflows also document processes and steps for better understanding, quality control, and practitioner training. High-quality workflows reflect the recommended service delivery standards required for incorporating key aspects of inclusion in early education. To cater to each preschool's operational requirements, the preschool should review and adapt its workflows regularly to suit its service delivery model.

Child-centric adaptations of learning experiences and materials refer to modifications made to learning content, teaching methods, and classroom environments that cater specifically to the unique needs, interests, and abilities of children. This approach ensures that learning is meaningful, engaging, and accessible to every child, fostering both personal growth and learning development.

- **Provide Opportunities for Other EC Practitioners to Join Planning Meetings with Educators and Families**

  Ensure there are opportunities for families to collaborate with other EC practitioners and educators. The occasions during which these collaborations can occur include:

  - Assessments for Learning
  - IEP Goal Development
  - Progress Monitoring

  Share with parents the purpose and importance of these collaborative opportunities when the child is enrolled and oriented.

- **Allow Other EC Practitioners to Plan and Facilitate Appropriate Training Sessions for Educators and Families**

  Based on the training needs of educators, identify a topic that that other EC practitioners can provide training for. Training topics can include:

  - Enhancing social communication skills in children with DN
  - Observing and assessing children for IEP development and progress monitoring
  - Purposeful Play
  - Teaching empathy and social skills to children
  - Training educators on mindfulness
  - Teaching handwriting to children
  - Managing behaviour in EC classrooms
  - Effective classroom management
  - Effective use of visual supports in preschool classrooms
  - Transition planning for children with DN
  - Positive Behavioural Intervention and Supports
  - Collaboration with parents and other EC practitioners

  When planning for family-engagement activities, equip families with information that would strengthen their ability to support their child's needs and learning at home. Training topics can include:

  - Strengthening the child's ability to communicate more effectively in social contexts
  - Supporting emotional regulation and behaviour management at home and in community spaces (e.g., places of worship, shopping malls, food courts, playgrounds, parks)
  - Parent-child tasks and activities to encourage active child engagement at home
  - Positive Parenting Approach
  - Purposeful Play at home
  - Rules on screen time and use of technology at home
  - Handwriting tips for parents
  - Mindfulness for parents
  - Transition planning for the child's next educational placement

DID YOU KNOW?

Specialised support for children with DN in preschools means giving extra help and tools to those who have physical, learning, or developmental challenges so they can learn, play, and grow just like other children.

This support can include:

- Educators trained to help with different needs
- Speech or physical therapy
- Special learning materials or toys
- Extra time or attention in activities

There is a difference between in-class support and pull-out sessions. ***In-class support*** is an instructional arrangement, designed and implemented by EC and EI educators, that provides intervention in the preschool classroom.

Pull-out sessions, provided by an EI educator or other EC practitioners may include intensive, specialised, IEP-directed instructions for children with DN for some parts of the day or week. They are conducted mostly in a one-on-one setting outside the preschool classroom.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Collaborative Mindset

A Centre Leader should invest time in developing an inclusive and collaborative mindset amongst families, educators, and other EC practitioners. This will enable the Centre Leader to effectively fulfil his or her role of creating and sustaining an inclusive preschool. Some examples of what can be done are:

1 Establishing a Conducive, Collaborative Culture

- Promote a team-based approach where families, educators, and other EC practitioners involved in the well-being of the child can collaborate regularly to support a child's holistic development.
- Encourage an inclusive mindset where each stakeholder is welcome to be an active participant of a child's learning journey.
- Define the purpose, roles, and responsibilities of each stakeholder clearly.

2 Ensuring Open Channels of Communication

- Establish clear communication channels between families, educators, and other EC practitioners to document all communication exchanged about the child with DN (e.g., assessment reports, the IEP, meeting notes).
- Share communication procedures with families during enrolment and orientation. Include the procedure in both the Staff and Parents Handbooks and ensure they are readily available for all to access.
- Maintain confidentiality when recording or discussing observations and assessments. Avoid sharing sensitive information in front of others not part of the child's IEP team.

3 Providing a Safe Physical and Social Environment for Collaboration and Exchange of Information

- Provide a conducive physical environment that allows for positive exchanges between families, educators, and other EC practitioners (e.g., a meeting space or meeting room).
- Provide options (e.g., online meetings, translation services) for stakeholders to attend and contribute to these meetings.
- Ensure a safe social environment that promotes open exchange of information. Strive for this by assuring the confidentiality of information shared during meetings and creating a bias-free environment.

A Centre Leader should help educators build good working relationships with parents and encourage parents to participate actively in their child's learning and development. To achieve this, a Centre Leader is encouraged to:

- Be knowledgeable about a child with DN.
- Understand well the curriculum and appraisal methods used in the preschool.
- Be able to maintain open, ongoing communication with parents and practitioners who are working directly with the child with DN.

LET'S THINK

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, consider reflecting on the following:

- What are the differences between in-class support and pull-out sessions? When should each type of intervention be used?
- What are your preschool's existing procedures when it comes to how other EC practitioners can work with children with DN and educators?
- How can any gaps in these procedures be bridged to strengthen the access that other EC practitioners have to children with DN?

LET'S TALK

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, consider facilitating a discussion with other EC practitioners using the following questions:

- What are some of the current challenges you face when working with children with DN and when working with educators?
- What are some gaps you currently see that can be bridged to strengthen access to children with DN?
- How do team members (educators and other EC practitioners) access information about the child under their charge? How would you improve the existing process?
- How are collaborative efforts to support children with DN shared between EC and EI educators? What can be done to adjust the working dynamics between the EC and EI educators?
- As other EC practitioners (e.g., a visiting or in-house AHP or psychologist), how do you decide whether a child with DN requires pull-out sessions? What are the in-class support and pull-out session guidelines you need to follow?

The section below provides information for further discussion with your team.

In-Class Support

- High collaboration between EC and EI educators
- Differentiated classroom practices are maintained and consistent throughout daily learning experiences and routines even in the absence of an EI educator or other EC practitioners
- EI educator and other EC practitioners ensure that children with DN have all the accommodation and modifications they need
- EC educators are familiar with and continue to use the recommended classroom practices independently
- EI educators can work with any child in the preschool classroom
- EC and EI educators plan for and provide several and varied learning opportunities across different lessons, class activities, routines, materials, people, and environments
- EC and EI educators plan for and provide embedded learning opportunities with a child's IEP goals in mind

Pull-Out Sessions

- Provided on a needs basis only
- Based on recommendation by EI educator or other EC practitioners
- Services are delivered by an EI educator or other EC practitioners
- These are a short-term, not long-term, arrangement (e.g., 4 to 8 pull-out sessions over a short period of time, for 30 to 45 minutes per session)
- Setting is separate from the regular classroom
- Aims to target specific IEP goals
- Accommodation and modifications must be in place
- Bridges gaps in child's learning by using specific strategies and pedagogy

As a Centre Leader, consider discussing the following with your practitioners:

- In what ways do you feel equipped to support children with DN?
- What additional support or resources can help you adapt and modify lessons for children with DN more confidently?
- How would you like to collaborate with other EC practitioners (e.g., a visiting or in-house speech therapist or occupational therapist)? What is your experience working with them?

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CHAPTER 07

Supervision, Coaching, and Professional Development

Overview

In this chapter, we cover three main ways of continuing professional learning and development for practitioners:

- Professional Development (PD)
- Coaching
- Supervision

Key Takeaway

Ongoing PD is essential for practitioners. It helps you stay current with best practices, build confidence in your work, and ensure your practices are on the right track. These learning opportunities create valuable opportunities to connect with your colleagues, share experiences and challenges, and provide mutual support. Whether through supervision, coaching or PD, there are many ways to enhance your skills.

When choosing a capability building path, take into account:

- The competencies you would like to strengthen
- Your preferred learning style
- The intensity of the training programme

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Supervision, Coaching, and Professional Development

The roles and functions of early childhood (EC) services are evolving.

As we welcome more children with DN in our classrooms, the roles of practitioners have expanded to meet these changing needs. **Continuing Professional Development (PD) is critical to strengthen our practice and build confidence in implementing inclusive practices.**

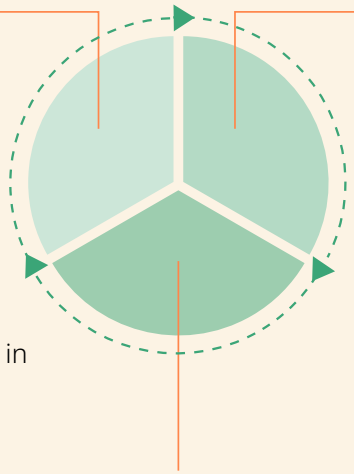
Professional Learning & Development Cycle for Practitioners

PD, coaching, and supervision work together to support practitioners and improve outcomes for children. When all three are in place, they create a powerful cycle of on-going improvement to help practitioners grow, ultimately enriching the experiences of the children they teach.

Professional Development

PD refers to the ongoing learning and training practitioners engage in to improve their knowledge, skills and practices. It includes: workshops and confrerences, online courses or certifications, in-service training, peer learning communities.

Goal: To build a strong foundation in quality early childhood practices.



Coaching

Coaching is more hands-on and individualised. A coach works closely with a practitioner, usually in their classroom setting, to: observe teaching practices, give constructive feedback, set professional goals, model strategies, reflect and problem-solve together.

Goal: To help practitioners apply what they have learned in training to real-world classroom situations.

Supervision

Supervision involves administrative support and accountability. Supervisors are responsible for: monitoring practitioner's performance, providing evaluation and feedback, ensuring compliance with regulations and standards, supporting practitioner's well-being and development.

Goal: To maintain quality standards, ensure children's safety and growth and support practitioner's development.

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Professional Development

Professional development (PD) is an ongoing process of facilitated teaching and learning experiences. It involves assessing educators' abilities, preparing and developing their readiness for their job, and supporting continuing skill development. It commonly takes the form of courses or qualification programmes, training, workshops, and a Community of Practice (CoP) involving a network or platform for sharing useful resources and information.

Continuing PD is important because it enables you to:

- **Stay relevant and updated:** Practitioners are equipped with the most current knowledge and practices.
- **Connect with the community:** Through learning platforms, practitioners develop a culture of collaboration with other EC and EI educators in the field. At the same time, they get opportunities to share their ideas and challenges and demonstrate support for each other.
- **Maintain ongoing learning, fostering a sense of empowerment:** Through acquiring new skills, attaining relevant professional certifications, and connecting with professional networks, practitioners can enhance their careers and increase job satisfaction.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader, you should:

- Identify the learning needs of every educator and build capacity for your preschool
- Explore and evaluate PD options to meet, singly or collectively, the learning needs of your educators
- Follow up and review learning outcomes after every PD event (e.g., through feedback forms)

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Key Considerations for PD

Practitioners can consider which PD event to attend or conduct using the following guidelines:

1. Given a practitioners role and competency, what are the specific critical professional dispositions or skills that are lacking?
2. What is the evidence-based design, content, and targeted training competencies of the PD option being considered?
3. How does the PD option fit with your centre's schedule and budget?

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Making PD Work

PD can be time-consuming or costly, making it challenging for Centre Leaders to send their practitioners to courses that may benefit them. To overcome barriers such as limited time and resources, consider the following options:

1. **Rostering:** Involve other practitioners or engage relief educators to cover the practitioners who are attending PD sessions.
2. **Alternative Formats:** Consider alternative PD formats (e.g., virtual, recorded, or asynchronous classrooms). Schedule in-person follow-up sessions to supplement virtual courses.
3. **Peer Learning:** Get different practitioners to attend different PD courses. This enriches your centre in two ways: You get a broad range of skills within the centre and untrained practitioners can tap on the knowledge and skills of trained practitioners.

LET'S THINK

Practitioners

As practitioners, consider reflecting on the following:

- Identify your strengths and the areas you would like to work on for inclusive practices.
- Think about past PD events you have attended. Identify the elements of these PD events you found most useful or educational (e.g., face-to-face versus webinar).

SUGGESTION

Set specific goals for your PD and reflect on your progress. Ask yourself how your actions and decisions align with your goals and what steps you can take to get closer to achieving these goals.

LET'S TALK

Team

Consider discussing the following as a team:

- What are the team's strengths and weaknesses related to inclusive practices?
- Which inclusive practice skills are lacking?
- What are suitable and available PD events that can address the team's skill gaps?

SUCCESS STORIES

At our preschool, we organised a series of professional development sessions on essential inclusive practices for our Chinese Early Childhood (EC) Educators. These sessions aimed to empower Chinese EC Educators as key contributors to inclusive education. The educators participated enthusiastically, frequently requesting additional training opportunities. This initiative not only provided a platform for them to learn from one another but also fostered a culture of lifelong learning and strengthened the foundation for inclusive practices.

- InSP Technical Assistance (TA) Coach from the InSP pilot

SUCCESS STORIES

持续的培训是很重要的, 让老师学到新的知识, 同时也能反思自己遇到的困难。

(Translation: Ongoing training is very important. It allows educators to learn new knowledge and reflect on the difficulties they encounter.)

- MT CL Educator

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Coaching

Coaching is having an experienced guide as part of an educator's professional journey. The coach brings specialised knowledge to help educators build specific professional skills and reach their goal while giving them space to reflect and grow.

Coaching can help practitioners acquire specialised skills and adapt to programme-level changes such as how to include children with DN into preschools. Coaching on inclusive strategies can cover a range of topics, including educator-child interactions, teaching practices, the classroom environment, family engagement, and how to support children with diverse needs. However, the key roles and focus areas of a coach and coachee can vary depending on the preschool or programme.

DID YOU KNOW?

What's the difference between supervision and coaching?

Objective: Supervision ensures ***centre-wide quality control*** by guiding educators to align with their preschool's goals. Coaching allows *individual educators to improve their teaching strategies* through trial, analysis, and feedback.

Specificity: Supervision takes a ***holistic, long-term view*** of one's professional growth and well-being. Coaching is mostly task-oriented and time-bound, focusing on ***strengthening specific skills or strategies.***

A Coach's (Senior Teacher) focus may include:

Teaching Strategies and Instructional Practices

- Observing how you engage children in learning
- Helping you develop or refine lesson planning and learning activities
- Supporting intentional teaching (e.g., connecting play to learning outcomes)
- Offering tips on how to ask open-ended questions and promote thinking

Classroom Environment and Management

- Creating a positive, nurturing environment
- Organising material to support independent learning
- Supporting smooth transitions between activities and routines
- Helping to manage challenging behaviours using positive guidance

Child Development and Observations

- Strengthening your ability to observe and assess children's development
- Guiding how to document progress (e.g., anecdotal notes or portfolios)
- Helping you tailor activities based on children's needs and interests

Relationship and Communication

- Building stronger relationships with children and families
- Encouraging team collaborations with co-educators
- Supporting effective parent communication (e.g., at drop-off or during IEP meetings or PTCs)

Professional Goals and Growth

- Helping you identify and work toward professional goals
- Offering constructive feedback after class observations
- Recommending resources, workshops or strategies
- Supporting reflections (e.g., "What's working well? What's your next step?")

A Coachee's focus may include:

Being Open and Reflective

- To welcome feedback and see coaching as a tool for growth, not criticism
- To reflect on your teaching: What's working? What's tricky?
- To ask questions
- To try saying: "I've been struggling with transitions. Can you observe and give me some tips?" "I'm not sure if I'm engaging all learners during Circle Time. What do you notice? "

Setting Clear, Realistic Goals

- To work with your coach to create specific, actionable goals
- To focus on one or two goals at a time so you do not feel overwhelmed
- To track your progress with your coach

Trying New Strategies

- To be willing to experiment with what your coach suggests
- To bring back feedback on what did or did not work so you and your coach can tweak together
- Growth mindset alert: "That approach didn't work the way I hoped, but I'll try it again with a small change"

Building Trust and Communication

- To be honest about your challenges and strengths
- To share the kind of support that works best for you (e.g., modelling, written feedback, co-teaching)
- To respect the partnership

Examples of Personal Coaching Goals

Managing Challenging Behaviours	**Goal:** I will implement at least two positive behaviour guidance strategies (e.g., redirection, visual cues or choices) during daily routines to help children manage strong emotions and make safe choices.
Circle Time or Engagement During Group Activities	**Goal:** I will plan and lead one Circle Time per week that includes songs, movement and open-ended questions to keep children actively engaged and participating.
Transitions Between Activities	**Goal:** I will use consistent visual and verbal cues during transitions (e.g., clean-up songs, timers, visual schedules) and reflect weekly on how they support smoother transitions.
Building Stronger Relationships with Children	**Goal:** I will connect individually with at least three different children each day through one-on-one conversations, play or support, to build trusting and responsive relationships.
Planning and leading Learning Activities	**Goal:** I will plan and lead at least one small group or centre-based activity per week that is developmentally appropriate and supports language, math or fine motor skills.
Observation and Documentation	**Goal:** I will complete two focused observations per week using anecdotal notes or checklists, and I will use the information to reflect on children's developmental progress or plan next steps.

LET'S THINK

Coachee

Consider reflecting on the following:

- What new skills have you learned through coaching before? How did the coaching process help you to gain confidence and improve?
- What specific skills (e.g., managing challenging behaviour during transitions between activities) would you like to work on through coaching?

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Coach and Coachee

In a preschool, coaches are often experienced educators such as Senior Educators or Mentor Educators, while coachees are typically beginner or developing educators. A coachee's interactions with a coach should be viewed as a valuable opportunity for collaborative growth. By actively engaging in reflection, goal-setting, and open communication, you can strengthen your teaching practice and apply the practical steps outlined in this chapter.

As a coach, you should:

- Help your coachees discover ways to make their classroom and practices more inclusive through reflective questioning about their experiences and decisions.
- Share your knowledge and experience in EC education and EI strategies.
- Be available as a trusted source of support when coachees need guidance.

As a coachee, you should:

- Remain open to new ideas, feedback, and learning opportunities as well as commit to professional and personal growth.
- Come prepared to coaching sessions with specific situations from your classroom.
- Practise and experiment actively between coaching sessions.
- Document your progress through notes and photographs so your coach can provide detailed feedback on your teaching practices.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Coach

Before a coaching session:

1. Get to know the coachee's background (including strengths, areas for growth, and personal goals).
2. Prepare relevant materials and resources (e.g., classroom visual aids, observation tools, reading materials) suitable for the coachee's learning needs.
3. Find out what PD events (e.g., workshops, talks, CoPs) your coachee has attended to help him or her apply the knowledge gained to current practices.

During a coaching session:

1. Provide hands-on support and demonstrate effective strategies.
2. Give specific feedback on coachee's progress as he or she tries new strategies.
3. Celebrate progress through words and actions to affirm the coachee's efforts.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Coachee

Consider these additional tips when engaging a coach:

1. Plan for a coaching format or delivery medium that suits you (e..g., individual, in pairs, or small group coaching, online or in-person coaching).
2. Agree on the length of engagement with your coach or preschool (e.g., short-term for 3 to 6 months, medium-term for 6 to 12 months, or long-term for more than a year.
3. Specify upfront the duration and frequency of coaching sessions.

LET'S THINK

Coachee and Coach

As a coachee, consider the following:

- What actions have you taken to plan and prioritise your practice goals and to apply the skills learned in your classroom?
- How can you ensure consistent and intentional transfer of the skills learned to your classrooms, and what gaps or challenges do you face?

As a coach, consider the following:

- How are your coachees progressing towards the goals they have set?
- How do you ensure your facilitation and feedback effectively support educators' skill development and foster a positive culture of practice?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Rating Scale for Coaching Practices

GROW Reflection for Early Childhood Educators

SUGGESTION

Ask yourself open-ended questions to help direct your reflection:

What went well today?

What challenges did I face and how did I address them?

How did I connect with children today?

What is one thing I could do differently to improve my teaching?

SUCCESS STORIES

Our centre organised group coaching sessions focusing on selected inclusive practices. Educators analysed videos highlighting exemplary practices by their colleagues, reflected on their own experiences, and engaged in thoughtful discussions. This approach fostered a supportive culture within the preschool, promoted collaboration, and inspired educators to take meaningful steps towards enhancing inclusive practices.

- InSP Technical Assistance (TA) Coach from the InSP pilot

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Supervision

Supervision is a hierarchical relationship between a supervisor (e.g., Centre Leader or senior educator) and a supervisee (e.g., EC educator) in which the supervisor provides directions and feedback to the supervisee. This is to ensure the supervisee's learning is aligned with the preschool's overall objectives and services. However, the key roles and focus areas of a supervisor and supervisee can vary depending on the specific preschool or programme.

A Supervisor May Focus on the Following or More:

Supervisor (Centre Leader)	**Policy and Practices of the Preschool as Stipulated by HQ**	The focus may be on: • Design and implementation of curriculum and lesson plans • Ensuring that the curriculum is adhered to • Monitoring quality teaching practices • Monitoring availability of teaching resources • Evaluating the teaching competencies of educators • Seeing that classrooms are well managed, and children are engaged in learning • Ensuring that the children's learning is accurately documented and assessed • Ongoing PD for educators • Ensuring that educator-child interactions are positive • Effective use of class time • Manpower and enrolment
	High-Quality Programmes for all Levels	
	Quality Standards (e.g., SPARK)	
	Day-to-day Operations	

A Supervisee's Focus May Include:	
Implementing the Curriculum	• To follow lesson plans and activities as guided by the supervisor or curriculum framework • To adapt teaching to meet the developmental needs of each child
Child Supervision and Safety	• To ensure constant supervision of children to maintain safety • To report any concerns or incidents promptly to the supervisor
Professional Communication	• To maintain open, respectful communication with supervisors, colleagues, and families • To ask questions and seek clarification when unsure of policies or practices • To share observations and insights about children's behaviour and development
Receptiveness to Feedback	• To accept and apply constructive feedback from the supervisor • To demonstrate a willingness to grow professionally and improve on classroom practices
Adherence to Policies and Procedures	• To follow all rules, routines, health, and safety procedures as stipulated by the preschool • To comply with ethical and legal standards in childcare
Collaboration and Teamwork	• To work cooperatively with other practitioners • To contribute to a positive, respectful, and inclusive preschool setting
Reflective Practice	• To reflect on teaching practices and interactions with children • To be open to learning and ongoing PD
Documentation and Record Keeping	• To help maintain accurate records (attendance, incident reports, developmental observations) • To share relevant documentation with the supervisor as needed

Supervision ensures that practitioners are guided, supported, and encouraged to carry out their roles confidently and competently. Good supervision goes beyond imparting knowledge and skills; it inspires and motivates practitioners in their profession while building strong workplace relationships.

LET'S THINK

Supervisee

As a supervisee, consider reflecting on the following:

(Note: There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers to these questions. They are intended to help you reflect on your supervisory experience.)

- In the past six months, what opportunities have you had to speak with a senior about your goals, strengths, and areas for growth?
- Regardless of whether you have an assigned supervisor, what are some areas you would appreciate mentorship or guidance in?
- Who can you think of in your centre or organisation who has provided you with valuable guidance that helped you improve your teaching practices?

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Supervisor and Supervisee

In a preschool, supervisors are usually Centre Leaders or senior educators, while supervisees are typically beginner or developing educators. Interactions with a supervisor typically revolve around daily operational or administrative matters. Building a strong, supportive supervisor-supervisee relationship takes time and intentional effort. Start fostering this connection by taking small, practical steps as outlined in this chapter.

As a ***beginning*** supervisor, you should:

- Set up regular chats with your supervisee to check in. These can be monthly or quarterly, depending on the needs of the supervisee.
- Identify your supervisee's needs based on his knowledge and skills related to practices on inclusion and the standard continuing PD roadmap for educators.

As an ***experienced*** supervisor, you should:

- Stay curious about your supervisees' evolving needs by being mindful that supervisees' challenges and goals will shift as they gain confidence and mastery of skills. Ask open-ended questions regularly such as "What are you working on professionally right now?", "What kind of support would be most helpful for you at this stage?".
- Adapt your supervision style over time (e.g., moving from directive to collaborative approaches, shifting from modelling to mentoring, offering more space for autonomy while staying available as a sounding board).
- Recognise and leverage on your supervisees' strengths. Experienced supervisees often want to contribute beyond their own classrooms. Examples include offering leadership or mentoring opportunities, involvement in programme planning or PD, and space to pilot new ideas.
- Continue to give thoughtful, high-quality feedback and keep conversations focused, balanced, and reflective.

As a supervisee who is ***new to supervision***, you should:

- Evaluate your readiness to support the diverse needs of children in classrooms.
- Develop a set of goals together with your supervisor.
- Create a one-year road map for your PD with your supervisor.

As a supervisee ***looking to get more out of your supervision***, you should:

- Reflect on what components of supervision have been most beneficial to your practice and share these with your supervisor.
- Discuss with your supervisor your training needs and the challenges encountered at work.
- Regularly share your work progress and reflections with your supervisor.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Supervisor and Supervisee

	Introductory Steps	Take the next step to these best practices
Supervisor	Tell your supervisee about inclusion and why the preschool is moving in this direction.	Model inclusive practices in your own interactions with children and practitioners. This helps your supervisees envision how these practices work in real situations.
Supervisor	Call for a meeting with your supervisee when you observe him or her struggling or when you hear concerning feedback about him or her from other members of your team.	Create regular, protected time for reflection and discussion. These proactive conversations should go beyond problem-solving to explore the 'why' behind inclusive approaches and celebrate small successes.
Supervisee	Be open to feedback given by your supervisor because your supervisor is there to guide you to grow professionally.	Take the initiative. Show that you are eager to help, whether it is prepping materials, calming a child, or supporting other practitioners.
Supervisee	Prepare questions to ask your supervisor, seek feedback, and reflect on how to use the feedback for your professional growth.	Observe and learn. Watch how experienced practitioners handle transitions, behaviour challenges, and classroom routines. Bring new learning (e.g., from a workshop you have attended, journal articles, and new ideas and developments in EC) to the supervision session so your supervisor can reflect with you.

LET'S THINK

Supervisee

As a supervisee, consider reflecting on:

- Three strengths of your current working relationship with co-educators and one area of improvement
- A SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goal for your next supervision meeting or milestone

For more information on SMART goal, refer to Page 17.

- Three to five goals that you hope to achieve through supervision based on the Best Practice Tips above

LET'S THINK

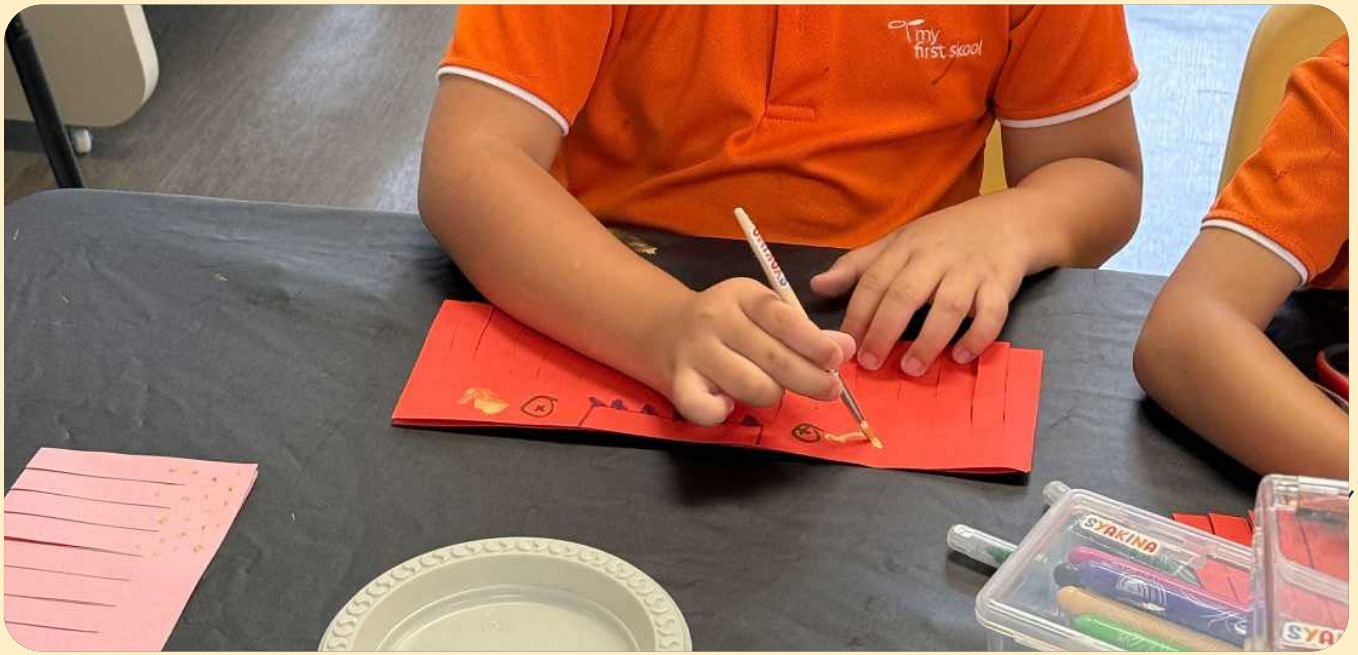
Centre Leader

As a Centre Leader engaged in a supervisory role, consider reflecting on:

- How you currently sustain inclusive practices in your preschool. Focus on the information highlighted in Best Practice Tips
- The specific skills that would benefit your team the most
- The practical steps (e.g., PD opportunities) you can take in the areas of growth identified

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Supervision Checklist for General EC Professional Practices



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Glossary

ACCESS

Making available a wide range of learning opportunities, activities, settings, and environments

ACTIVE LEARNING

Teaching approach to encourage children to be active participants in the learning process rather than just listening and memorising information

ADAPTED EQUIPMENT

Regular items that have been modified (be it at 'no-cost' or 'low-cost') to meet the needs of children with developmental needs

ALLIED HEALTH PROFESSIONALS (AHPS)

Denote people whose work is related to the interests and well-being of the child. Examples are Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapist, Speech and Language Pathologist, Speech Therapist

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Equipment that is electronic or battery driven, e.g., specialised input-output device and software

CHILD-INITIATED PLAY

Play where children choose their toys and resources and decide how to play with them

DIFFERENTIATION

Tailoring instructions to meet individual needs by differentiating content, process, products, or the learning environment together with ongoing assessment and flexible grouping

DISABILITY

Term covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; a participation restriction is a limitation experienced by an individual when participating in some life situations

DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS (DN)

Term used for children from birth to six years old who a) display a level of developmental functioning that is below that of typically developing peers of the same age and b) require low, medium, or high levels of Early Intervention support entailing different or additional resources beyond what is conventionally available for typically developing peers

DIVERSE LEARNERS

Children of all abilities from racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse backgrounds

EDUCATORS

Refers to Early Childhood (EC) and Early Intervention (EI) educators

FAMILIES

Any family forms that are based on the definition of a legal marriage in Singapore. Families include dual-parent families, single-parent families, foster and blended families, extended families, and estranged families

FAMILY AS PARTNERS

Implies no sense of superiority on the part of educators but a recognition that the family and the educator have complementary roles to play

FAMILY DIVERSITY

Differences in family backgrounds, values, and practices

HEAD OF INCLUSION

Person who advises centre on inclusive practices and mentors EI educators in the preschool. Ensures all practitioners understand their role when dealing with children with developmental needs. Networks, influences, and collaborates with stakeholders

HOLISTIC

Refers to the all-round development—physical, intellectual, social, emotional, moral, and creative development—of the child without undue emphasis or pressure to concentrate on any specific area

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Refers to a) including children with developmental needs (i.e., disabilities, developmental delays, and special abilities) alongside typically developing peers in regular, mainstream classes, and b) planning and implementing programmes that focus on the needs, abilities, and interests of these children

INTERVENTION

The help a child receives, usually from regular caregivers (e.g., parents and educators) to address an area of need

INCLUSIVE PRESCHOOL WORKGROUP (IPWG)

Set up in April 2019 to study and develop recommendations to better support children with developmental needs, particularly those who require medium to high levels of early intervention support, in preschools. The IPWG is in part a response to the third Enabling Masterplan, which amongst several recommendations had called for efforts to enhance the integration and inclusion of children with developmental needs within the context of Singapore's education system. Members of the Workgroup are drawn from across the people, public, and private sectors, providing a diverse range of perspectives and ideas

LEADER, CENTRE LEADER

In the context of the IPPG, the term refers to Centre Principal (CP), Vice Principal, Director, Assistant Director, Head, Deputy Centre Leader (DCL), Cluster Head, and Organisational Leader. Maintains oversight of the preschool centre, leads practitioner teams in fostering inclusive culture, and facilitates centre-wide workflows and platforms for inclusive practices

LEARNING PATTERN

The consistent ways in which individuals approach, process, and retain new information or skills over time, this being a combination of children's learning strategies, beliefs, and motivations

OTHER EARLY CHILDHOOD (EC) PRACTITIONERS

In the context of the IPPG, the term refers to visiting or in-house Allied Health Practitioners (AHP) (e.g., Occupational Therapist [OT], Physiotherapist [PT], Speech and Language Therapist [SLT]), Psychologist, Head of Inclusion (HOI), and Inclusion Coordinator (ICO)

OTHER PROFESSIONALS, SPECIALISTS, SUPPORT PRACTITIONERS

In the context of the IPPG, the term refers to anyone whose work is related to the interests and wellbeing of the child (e.g., pediatrician, psychologist, social worker, counsellor)

PARTICIPATION

Refers to the additional individualised accommodation and support some children may need to participate fully in play and learning activities with peers and adults

PARENT

Anyone who is legally responsible for the care and well-being of a child (e.g., a natural or adoptive parent, guardian, grandparent, stepparent, surrogate parent, or foster parent)

PRACTITIONERS

In the context of the IPPG, the term refers to Educators, Other EC practitioners, Leader or Centre Leader, Other Professionals or Specialist

RESPECT

To take a personal interest in each child and pay due regard to a child's feelings

ROUTINES

Naturally occurring activities that take place with some degree of regularity at home, in the classroom, and in the community

SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

The ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate one's own learning. Helps children to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills and build their confidence and self-esteem

SHARING INFORMATION

Implies trust and non-disclosure of confidential information. Sharing of information between parties allows each party to have a more complete picture of the child's development so that timely and informed decisions can be made

SMART GOAL SETTING

Well-established tool that can be used to plan and achieve work targets. SMART goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Children's positive communication and interactions (i.e., getting along) with others

SUPPORT

Professional information and assistance provided as necessary without taking over the role of parent or educator

SUPPORTS

Refer to the services, resources, and strategies provided to help young children (typically from birth to age five) who have developmental needs, and their families. These supports are designed to promote optimal development, enhance learning, and improve long-term outcomes

TIERED MODEL

Model of intervention intensity required for a child. Used to help practitioners organise assessments and interventions. Depending on the individual needs and priorities of children and families, implementing inclusion involves a range of approaches—embedded, routine-based teaching, or more explicit interventions—to organise learning and participation for all children

UNIVERSAL DESIGN (UD)

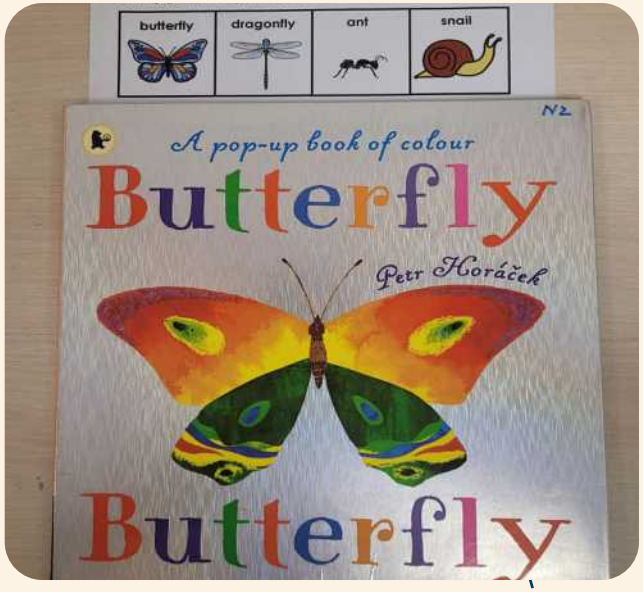
Concept used to support access for children in many different types of settings or environments through the removal of physical and structural barriers

UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING (UDL)

Reflects practices that provide multiple and varied formats for instruction and learning. UDL principles and practices help to ensure that every child has access to learning environments, typical home or educational routines and activities, and the general education curriculum. In inclusive preschools, technology can enable children with a range of functional abilities to participate in activities and experiences

ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT (ZPD)

Concept developed by psychologist Lev Vygotsky to describe the gap between what a child can do independently and what the child can achieve with guidance or support from a more knowledgeable person such as an educator, parent, or peer



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