Embracing Diversity:
Toolkit for Creating Inclusive Learning-Friendly Environments

Introduction

"... Education systems must be inclusive, actively seeking out children who are not enrolled, and responding flexibly to the circumstances and needs of all learners..." (Dakar Framework for Action 2000)

The vision for Education for All (EFA), reaffirmed at the Dakar World Education Forum in April 2000, stated clearly that inclusive education is vital if EFA is to be achieved. The Forum set as its second EFA goal: "Ensuring that by 2015 all children have access to and complete free and compulsory education of good quality," and as its sixth EFA goal: "Improving all aspects of the quality of education."

Realizing these goals means increasing school enrolment attendance and completion rates. This requires eliminating bias within schools, national education systems and curricula. Moreover, it entails eliminating the social and cultural discrimination that limits the demand for schooling for children with diverse backgrounds and abilities.

To achieve these aims, it is critical to sensitize teachers and education administrators to the importance of inclusive education. It is equally critical to give them practical tools to analyze their situation and ensure that all children attend school and learn to their fullest capacity.

This brochure provides information and an overview of the *Toolkit for Creating Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Environments*. The Toolkit offers a holistic, practical perspective on how schools and classrooms can become more inclusive and learning-friendly. It builds on experience gained over many years, and on the strategies and tools developed by many organizations and individuals working on inclusive education and Child Friendly Schools. The Toolkit is designed to be user-friendly and a source of inspiration for teachers who find themselves working in ever more diverse classrooms.

"Schools with inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all." (UNESCO Salamanca Statement 1994)

Overview of the Toolkit

An inclusive, learning-friendly environment (ILFE) welcomes, nurtures, and educates all children regardless of their gender, physical, intellectual, social economic, emotional, linguistic, or other characteristics. They may be disabled and gifted children; street or working children; children of remote or nomadic peoples; children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities; children affected by HIV/AIDS; or children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups.

What do we mean by **Inclusive?**

Over the years, the term inclusive has come to mean including children with disabilities in regular classrooms designed for children without disabilities. In the Toolkit, inclusive means much more.

Inclusive does include children with disabilities, such as children who have difficulties in seeing or hearing, who cannot walk, or who are slower to learn. HOWEVER, inclusive also means including ALL children who are left out of or excluded from school and from learning. These children may not speak the language of the classroom; are at risk of dropping out because they are sick, hungry, or not achieving well; or belong to a different religion or caste. They also may be girls who are pregnant, children affected by HIV/AIDS, and all girls and boys who should be in school but are not, especially those who work at home, in fields, or in factories and who have paying jobs to help their families survive. Inclusive means that as teachers, we have the responsibility to seek out all available support (from school authorities, the community, families, children, educational institutions, health services, community leaders, and so on) for finding and teaching ALL children.

Moreover, in some communities, all children may be enrolled in school, but some may still be excluded from participating and learning in the classroom. For instance, they may be children:

- for whom a lesson or textbook is not written in their first language;
- who are never asked to contribute;
- who never offer to contribute;
- who can't see the blackboard or a textbook, or can't hear the teacher; or
- who are not learning well and whom no one tries to help.

These children may be sitting at the back of the classroom, and may soon leave altogether. It is primarily teachers and school administrators who are responsible for creating a learning environment where ALL children can learn, ALL children want to learn, and ALL children want to feel included in our classrooms and schools.

What is
Learning-Friendly?

Over the last ten years, many schools have worked to become "child-friendly." A "child-friendly" school is one in which children have the right to learn to their fullest potential within a safe and welcoming environment. The aim is to improve each child's participation and learning in school, rather than to concentrate only on subject matter and examinations. Being "child-friendly" is very important, but it is not enough.

Children come to school to learn, but teachers should always be learning, too. They learn new things about the world to teach the students. They learn to teach more effectively–and enjoyably–so that all students learn how to read or do mathematics. Teachers learn new things from the students as well. The Toolkit is developed to provide assistance in this direction.

A "learning-friendly" environment is "child-friendly" and "teacher-friendly." It stresses the importance of students and teachers learning together as a learning community. It places children at the centre of learning and encourages their active participation in learning. It also fulfils the needs and interests of teachers so that they want to give–and are capable of giving–children the best education possible.

Who can use the Toolkit?

The Toolkit was written especially for teachers working in a pre-primary, primary, or secondary level classrooms. It is also very useful for school administrators and for teacher-training institutions. The Toolkit will be especially valuable for teachers who are working in schools that are changing to become more child-centred and learning-friendly environments, possibly due to reforms introduced by the Ministry of Education, or because of activities promoted by a non-governmental organization (NGO).

One important concept that we must all accept is that *all children are different*, and all have an equal right to education, no matter what their background or ability. Many schools and national educational systems are moving towards "inclusive education" where children with diverse backgrounds and abilities are sought out and encouraged to attend ordinary schools. On the one hand, attending school increases their opportunities to learn because they are able to interact with other children. Improving their learning also promotes their participation in family and community life. On the other hand, the children with whom they interact also benefit. They learn respect and the value of each other's abilities no matter what they are, as well as patience, tolerance, and understanding. They come to realize that each person is "special," and to embrace diversity and cherish it.

For teachers, embracing such diversity among the students is not an easy task. In some cases, there are large classes, and teachers may already feel overworked. Including children with diverse backgrounds and abilities in the classes often means more work, but it need not be so. All the school needs to do is to manage the differences among children by recognizing their strengths and weaknesses; planning lessons accordingly, using teaching strategies and adapting the curriculum to fit each child's abilities and background; and, most importantly, knowing how to mobilize colleagues, parents, community members, and other professionals to help provide a good quality education for all children.

The Toolkit is designed to help teachers and school administrators do all of these things! It provides useful tools to make the schools and classrooms more welcoming and lively places of learning for ALL children and teachers, alike – places that are not only child-friendly but also teacher-friendly, parent friendly and community-friendly.

The Toolkit contains a set of proven resource materials that teachers can use to think about their own situation and start taking action, to give them ideas about what activities they can undertake. All of the Toolkit booklets present ideas teachers can try out. They also invite teachers to reflect on these ideas, discuss them with others, and, together with all the learners in the community, create a unique, dynamic and inclusive learning-friendly environment.

The Toolkit, however, is not a definitive textbook, and it will not have an answer for every problem that one might face. To help teachers and school administrators as much as possible, at the end of each booklet we have also included lists of other resources one might find valuable. Please remember, however, that creating an inclusive, learning-friendly environment is a process, a journey. There are no set paths or ready-made "quick fix" solutions to follow. It is largely a process of self-discovery. It takes time to build this new kind of environment. Since "a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step," this Toolkit will help to take the first step, and then the second, third, fourth, and so on. Teachers and their students will always be learning new things, and this journey will never be finished. Yet, it will provide an ongoing challenge, as well as enduring satisfaction to students, teachers, administrators, special need educators, parents, and the community.

How can the Toolkit be used?

The Toolkit contains ten booklets, each of which contains tools and activities that teachers and school administrators can read by themselves (self-study) to start creating an inclusive, learning-friendly environment. Some of these activities ask them to think about what teachers and their schools are doing now in terms of creating an ILFE, while others actively guide the teacher in improving his or her skills as an educator in a diverse classroom. They might want to try these individual activities first so they can become familiar with what an ILFE is, how it can be created in the classroom and in the school, and what are its benefits.

Because creating an ILFE requires teamwork, there also are tools and activities that teachers and school administrators can do with their colleagues and supervisors, with students, with the students' families, and with communities. These activities will help teachers to sustain important changes in the classroom, and assist the school administrators to improve the learning environment so that it continues to be inclusive and learning-friendly.

The Toolkit booklets can be used in two ways. For those schools that are already involved in becoming inclusive and learning-friendly, such as those working to become "Child Friendly Schools," one might want to choose one of the booklets that will help in some special way, such as working with families or communities or managing a diverse classroom. For those schools that are just starting on the path to becoming inclusive and learning-friendly, one might want to work through each booklet, starting with Booklet 1 and moving through Booklet 6, then continuing with Specialized Booklets 1 to 4. The Toolkit is designed to help each step of the way because each booklet builds on the one before it.

In addition, although the term "school" is used throughout the Toolkit, this term means any formal or non-formal learning environment where pre-school, primary, or secondary-level education takes place. In the Toolkit, therefore, the term "school" is used broadly to cover both types of educational settings. These environments can be a formal school or even a non-formal class held in the open air. Consequently, the Toolkit can also be used by administrators, professional teachers or educators who help children with diverse backgrounds and abilities to learn in non-formal settings (such as classes for street children).

What will users of the Toolkit learn?

Booklet 1
Through the Toolkit, users will learn what an "inclusive, learning-friendly environment" is, and how their school and classrooms can create such an environment.

Booklet 2
They will learn how very important families and communities are to the whole process of creating and maintaining an inclusive, learning-friendly environment, as well as how to involve parents and community members in the school, and how to involve children in the community.

Booklet 3
They will learn what barriers exclude rather than include ALL children in school, how to identify those children who are not in school, and how to deal with barriers to their inclusion in school.

Booklet 4
Users will learn how to create an inclusive classroom including why becoming inclusive and learning-friendly is so important to children's achievement, how to deal with the wide range of different children attending the class, and how to make learning meaningful for all.

Booklet 5
They will learn how to manage an inclusive classroom including planning for teaching and learning, maximizing available resources, managing group work and cooperative learning, as well as how to assess children's learning.

Booklet 6
Finally, users will learn ways to make the school healthy and protective for ALL children, and especially those with diverse backgrounds and abilities who are more prone to becoming ill, malnourished or victimized.

Specialized Booklet 1
Users will learn how to utilize methods for positive discipline in the inclusive, learning-friendly classroom, build positive student-teacher relationships and create supportive learning environments.

Specialized Booklet 2
Users will get practical tips for how to create inclusive, learning-friendly environments in large classes, how to teach effectively and how to evaluate learning in large classes.

Specialized Booklet 3
Users will learn how to overcome barriers to learning, development and participation for learners with disabilities, and how to use universal design to accommodate diverse needs. Users will also learn more about particular challenges and opportunities related to common impairments.

Specialized Booklet 4
Users will learn how to successfully teach groups across grades and manage inclusive, learning-friendly classrooms containing children with diverse backgrounds and abilities. Users will also gain practical approaches to maximizing use of available resources, planning appropriate teaching and learning strategies, developing materials, and assessing learning.

Development of the Toolkit

Teachers and practitioners from around the world helped to develop the Toolkit. They include those who were directly involved in four regional workshops organized by UNESCO Bangkok and shared their tools and ideas for getting all children in school to learn. It includes those persons who have shared their knowledge and tools through other venues such as printed publications and the Internet, and those who served as "critical readers" in reviewing early drafts of the Toolkit. Most importantly, it includes those schools and teachers from many countries who reviewed the Toolkit, and provided valuable advice and additional tools for its improvement. The tools in the Toolkit are being used in many schools in a wide range of countries. One of the most important questions a user of the Toolkit can ask when using the tools is: *"How can I adapt this specific tool for use in my classroom or school?"* The Toolkit is published in English, and represents a generic version that should be translated and adapted to national contexts.

Booklets Content

Booklet 1:
Becoming an Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Environment (ILFE)

1.1 What is an ILFE and Why is It Important?
• What Do We Mean by "Inclusive" and "Learning-Friendly"?
• What are the Important Elements of an ILFE?
• What are the Benefits of an ILFE?

1.2 Where Are We Now?
• Is Our School Already an ILFE?
• How Can Our School Become an ILFE?
• How to Create and Sustain Change

1.3 Steps to Becoming an ILFE
• How to Plan on Becoming an ILFE
• How to Monitor Our Progress

1.4 What Have We Learned?

Booklet 2:
Working with Families and Communities to Create an ILFE

2.1 Teacher-Parent-Community Relationships in an ILFE
• Who Is the "Community"?
• Why Should We Involve Communities?
• What Are Our Roles and Responsibilities?

2.2 Information and Advocacy for ILFE in Families and Communities
• Contacting Families and Communities
• Keeping Regular Communication
• Motivating Support for an ILFE

2.3 The Community and the Curriculum
• The Community in the Classroom
• The Classroom and the Community

2.4 What Have We Learned?

Booklet 6:
Creating a Healthy and Protective ILFE

6.1 Creating Healthy and Protective Policies for ALL Children
• Advocating for School Health Policies
• Building Consensus
• Assessing and Monitoring Our School Health Policy Situation
• Dealing with Violence: Turning Policies into Action

6.2 Giving Children Skills for Life!
• Skills-Based Health Education
• What Skills are Needed?
• How Can These Skills Be Taught?
• Skills-Based Health Education to Prevent HIV/AIDS

6.3 Providing School Nutrition and Health Services and Facilities
• Assessing Our Current Situation
• School Food and Nutrition Programmes: Helping Children Who Do Not Eat Well
• Ideas for Creating a Clean School Environment

6.4 What Have We Learned?

Specialized Booklet 1:
Positive Discipline in the Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Classroom
A Guide for Teachers and Teacher Educators

1.1 Overview
• Our Challenge
• What is an "Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Classroom"?
• Why is this Document Needed?
• What Will You Learn?

1.2 Understanding Punishment versus Discipline
• Children Past and Present
• The Meaning of Punishment
• The Meaning of Discipline
• Positive Discipline in the Classroom
• Avoiding the Discipline Dilemma

1.3 Building Positive Teacher-Student Relationships
• The Basis of a Teacher-Student Relationship
• Why Children Behave as They Do
• Why Children Misbehave
• Learning about Your Students
• Understanding the Context of Your Students' Lives
• Learning about Your Students' Families
• Parent-Teacher Communication
• Encouragement Strategies

1.4 Creating a Positive and Supportive Learning Environment
• Classroom Management in an ILFC
• Making the Learning Environment Comfortable
• Developing Classroom Routines
• Developing Classroom Rules with Students and Parents
• Standards for Behaviour and Good Management
• Providing Positive Reinforcement

1.5 Dealing with Challenging Students
• Improving the Effectiveness of Positive Discipline Techniques
• Positive Discipline Tips
• Positive Classroom Teaching Tips
• Using Appropriate Consequences, Positive and Negative
• Use Caution in Using a "Timeout"
• Conflict Resolution
• Age-Specific Teaching and Positive Discipline
• Assisting Children with Special Needs

1.6 Suggested Readings

Specialized Booklet 2:
Practical Tips for Teaching Large Classes
A Teacher's Guide

2.1 Overview
• What is a "Large Class"?
• Challenging Opportunities
• Booklet Contents

2.2 Creating a Well-Managed Learning Environment in Large Classes
• The Classroom Environment
• Organizing the Physical Environment
• Building the Psycho-Social Environment

2.3 Teaching Effectively in Large Classes
• How, Not Just What, to Teach
• Planning Lessons
• Starting the Teaching Process
• Using a Variety of Teaching Methods

2.4 Evaluating Learning and Teaching in Large Classes
• The Role of Feedback
• Giving Assignments
• Giving Exams
• Grading Assignments and Exams
• Reflecting on Your Teaching

2.5 Top 20 Tips for Teaching Large Classes

2.6 Where You Can Learn More
• Publications
• Internet Resources

Specialized Booklet 3:
Teaching Children with Disabilities in Inclusive Settings

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Defining "Disabilities"

3.3 Barriers to Learning, Development and Participation and How to Overcome Them
• What are Barriers to Learning, Development and Participation?
• Environmental (and Attitudinal) Barriers
• Individual Barriers
• Identifying Barriers to Learning, Development and Participation
• Practical Tips for Removing Barriers to Learning, Development and Participation

3.4 Accessible School Environments – Universal Design Principles
• The 7 Principles of Universal Design

3.5 Hearing Impairment
• Importance of Early and Appropriate Intervention
• Modes and Means of Communication
• Sign Language and Fingerspelling (Manual Communication)

3.6 Visual Impairment

3.7 Physical Impairment – Motor and Mobility Impairments
• Cerebral Palsy

3.8 Developmental / Intellectual Impairment
• Down's Syndrome

3.9 Specific Learning Difficulties
• Dyscalculia
• Dysgraphia
• Dyslexia
• Dyspraxia

3.10 Other Impairments and Disabilities
• ADHD – Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
• Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
• Epilepsy
• Tourette's Syndrome

Specialized Booklet 4:
Practical Tips for Teaching Multigrade Classes