

## Is your classroom inclusive and child-friendly?

### A self-assessment tool for teachers.

Most of us look at classrooms as places for seriously learning and seldom as a place where students enjoy activities and have a say in what and how one needs and wants to learn. The most important part of teaching and learning is the **learning environment**, especially the ways how teachers and students interact and how such an environment helps different children learn to their best ability.

An inclusive, child-friendly learning environment is not just a place for formal learning, but also a place where children have rights: the right to be healthy, to be loved, to be treated with respect, the right to be protected from violence and abuse (including physical or mental punishment), and the right to express his or her opinion, and to be supported in education irrespective of learning needs.

#### What are characteristics of an inclusive, child-friendly classroom?

1. An inclusive, child-friendly classroom does **not discriminate**, exclude or marginalize any child based on gender, socio-economic background, ethnicity, abilities or disabilities, etc. *This means that:*
  - a. No child is refused enrolling and attending classes for whatever reason
  - b. Boys and girls have equal learning opportunities
  - c. Children are all treated the same: with respect
  
2. An inclusive, child-friendly classroom is **effective** with children, facilitates and supports education of good quality and is child centred. *This means that:*
  - a. Teachers think about the best interest of each child when deciding on learning activities
  - b. Teachers try to adjust the standard curriculum to the learning needs of the students
  - c. Different teaching methods are used so that all children can learn, those who learn best by doing, by hearing, by seeing, by moving, etc.
  - d. Teaching-learning approaches are used that invite students to think and reason and express their opinions
  - e. All children are supported to learn and master the basic skills of reading, (and listening) writing and arithmetic
  - f. Children also learn by experiencing/discovery and by working together
  - g. Teachers encourage children to express their feelings through arts and other forms
  
3. An inclusive, child-friendly classroom is **healthy** for children. *This means that:*
  - a. What happens in the classroom also promotes children's health
  - b. Classrooms/schools are clean, safe and have adequate water and sanitation facilities
  - c. There are written policies and regular practices that promote good health

- d. Health education and life skills are integrated in the curriculum and the teaching-learning activities
4. An inclusive, child-friendly classroom is caring and **protective** of all children. *This means that:*
    - a. Children are secure and protected from harm and abuse
    - b. Children are encouraged to care for each other
    - c. No physical or mental punishment is used with children
    - d. There are clear guidelines for conduct between teachers and students and among students (and no bullying is allowed)
  5. An inclusive, child-friendly classroom involves **families and communities**. *This means that:*
    - a. Parents are invited and consulted about the learning of their children
    - b. Teachers and parents work together to help children learn better in school and at home
    - c. Teachers and parents together care about the children's health, nutrition and safety – also on the way to and from school
    - d. Parents and community members are invited for school-community project activities

What are the objectives and goals of an inclusive, child-friendly classroom?

Goal 1: Encourage children's participation in school and community

Goal 2: Enhance children's health and well-being

Goal 3: Guarantee safe and protective environments for children

Goal 4: Encourage optimal enrollment and completion

Goal 5: Ensure children's optimal academic achievement and success

Goal 6: Raise teachers' motivation and success

Goal 7: Mobilize parent and community support for education

What role can teachers and students play to reach these goals?

If all teachers and students work together and schools try to become inclusive, child-friendly schools, many of these goals can be achieved as part of whole school development. If individual teachers try to make their classrooms more inclusive and child-friendly, they may only reach parts of these goals, but these are **good first steps**. Individual teachers can make their classrooms more inclusive and child-friendly by trying to implement some of the action points mentioned below.

Goal 1: PARTICIPATION

- I have made my classroom a welcoming place for all children, also for those from very poor families, those with language difficulties, those with disabilities and those who learn slower than others.
- I involve my students in class meetings where we discuss and decide on matters that concern their well-being

- I organize together with my students learning activities involving parents and community members, while also going out into the community for project learning activities.
- I organize with my students a classroom bulletin board or student opinion box, so students can express their ideas and views about school and community issues
- I arrange different seating arrangements for my class to facilitate different ways of learning and participation
- I especially make sure that students who are shy or who have learning difficulties are also participating and learning adequately

#### Goal 2: HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

- I maintain and regularly update the health records of my students, and refer students with problems to health centres
- I use simple assessment tools to find out whether students have hearing, vision or other problems
- I teach (and role-model) proper waste disposal in my classroom and in the school
- There are separate toilets for boys and girls and they are kept clean.

#### Goal 3: SAFETY AND PROTECTION

- My classroom has proper ventilation and lighting and enough space for all students
- Classroom furniture is sufficient and sized to the age of your students
- My classroom-layout and furniture allow students to interact and do group work
- My classroom has a bulleting board or a corner that displays helpful learning materials such as posters, illustrations, low-cost and self-made teaching-learning aids, newspaper and magazine clippings and my students' own work.
- My classroom is maintained and kept clean.
- I have together with my students developed classroom rules on how to respect and help each other and on how to behave
- I have identified different learning needs and difficulties of my students and I provide additional support while also asking students to help each other
- I use positive discipline methods

#### Goal 4: ENROLLMENT AND COMPLETION

- I try to find out whether there are children not coming to school and the reasons why. I will encourage children who are not in school to come to school
- I discuss with students and parents/community members the problem of non-enrollment and how to get all children of school age into school
- I regularly check on attendance of my students and address problems concerning non-attendance.

#### Goal 5: ACADEMIC SUCCESS

- I know and implement my school's vision and mission
- I am familiar with child-centred and child-friendly teaching-learning approaches
- I ask my students what they already know about a topic before I start teaching

- I have sufficient books and teaching aids for my students' optimal learning
- I plan and prepare lessons well, while keeping in mind that children have different learning needs and learning styles
- I have interesting pictures, posters and student work on the wall of my classroom
- I encourage and implement cooperative learning and discovery/active learning ("learning by doing") with my students
- I make topics more interesting and relevant to children's lives by inviting community members or parents to the classroom or by going out of the classroom or by using locally available resources as teaching-learning aids
- I use formative assessment to make sure children are learning and I adjust my teaching methods and contents if needed.
- I observe and listen to my students and document their learning process and progress
- I often ask open ended questions to find out how my students think and reason
- I do not punish my students for giving the wrong answer or solution, but treat mistakes as new opportunities for learning

#### Goal 6: MOTIVATION OF TEACHERS

- I try to find ways to further develop professionally through reading about education, more training or in-service workshops
- I am professionally supported by the head of school, and he or she encourages us to work together as teachers to support each other
- I ask the head of school to monitor my performance and identify my areas of strengths (to be shared with other teachers) and weakness (for further professional development)

#### Goal 7: COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- I invite parents or community members to my classroom to show what is happening in the classroom or for project presentations by the students.
- I meet and discuss with parents and community members matters of concern such as safety when going to and from school; violence and abuse risks; allowing children with "special needs" into the school and supporting them; irregular attendance; etc.
- I organize literacy classes for illiterate parents
- I ask parents and communities to contribute to the learning of their children in different ways, while my students can also contribute to community needs with special projects