



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago  
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION  
Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Division

## FINAL REPORT

A Seamless Education System for the Ministry of Education of Trinidad and Tobago

Support the Transition of Children from Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) to Primary Education



*"WE MISS TANTY PEARL BUT GOING TO THE BIG SCHOOL WAS FUN"*

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**In general, the purpose of the consultancy was to stimulate thinking and debate on the issues related to the implementation of effective strategies that will achieve the desired goal of a smooth and seamless transition from ECCE to Primary. During the consultative process, I had the opportunity to engage internal and external stakeholders in a number of stimulating and thought provoking discussions on the topic, and other related areas.**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

## A. Introduction

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, in keeping with its national development agenda, has initiated a process to build a seamless and sustainable education system. As referenced by (Ashton and Pujadas 2004), Seamlessness refers to the openness and responsiveness of various levels of education and training. Developing a pre-school to tertiary level seamless system necessitates the development of a long term perspective on human resource development and a radically new view of knowledge throughout our society.

The ECCE Division, operating within the administrative structure of the Ministry of Education, is charged with the leadership responsibility for achieving the seamless vision from ECCE to Primary. On the one hand, the ECCE Division is guided by the core Vision of Excellence in Education, The Ministry of Education Corporate Plan (2008-2012), The Education White Paper (1993-2003), the White Paper on the National Policy on ECCE – Standards for Regulatory Early Childhood Services and National Early Childhood Care and Education Curriculum Guide. Within the context of the core vision, the Corporate Plan has identified three Strategic Priorities:

- a) Focus on Schools.
- b) Change the Ministry.
- c) Involve the Community.

On the other hand, building on the directional themes and the three Strategic Priorities of the Corporate Plan, the ECCE Division has developed a compatible Vision and Mission. The ECCE Vision is that quality education in a centre and community focused programme of early childhood development is to be achieved with improved access and equity to engage all children in the educational endeavour. In translating that Vision to Action, The Mission has incorporated these fundamental tenets:

- a) Child-centred and quality curriculum.
- b) Alliances and partnerships with the community.
- c) Continuous professional development.
- d) Involvement of parents.

From a practical perspective, this institutional strengthening initiative is significant and has far reaching consequences for the ECCE Division as it provides leadership to the integration of this economic, social and educational policy. The effective implementation of this initiative will, most likely, place added pressure on the potential Division's expanded role, as a coordinating and network centre. At the outset, it must be emphasized that the building of a team leadership culture within the ECCE Division is critical to the success of this initiative. As a result, serious consideration must be given to the implementation of the recommendations within the (Moore Report, 2010), particularly those that deal with leadership development and strategic thinking.

The complexity of the relationship between care, early learning and primary education is a critical public education challenge. Moving forward will require ongoing collaboration, sustained financial and political support to ensure that trained staff, appropriate standards and facilities are developed and monitored. In a nutshell, collaboration, effective partnerships, political will and commitment become the hallmark of its successful implementation.

The words “collaboration”, “co-operation” and “partnership” appear frequently within the Report. They give direction to the fundamental principle of co-determination. The concept of co-determination suggests that, through effective collaboration among key stakeholders, ensuing plans will be based on mutual agreement and therefore more likely to be implemented. In this operational climate, dysfunctional relationships are replaced by effective leadership, transparency and compromise. To that end, it is hypothesized that the successful implementation of plans to achieve the goal of a smooth and seamless transition from ECCE to Primary will require the resolving of perceived differences on child readiness, within the context of a philosophy of child-centred pedagogy and a continuum of learning.

In the final analysis, the successful implementation of plans to achieve a seamless transition from ECCE to Primary will depend on the extent to which there is tangible commitment and support to the ECCE Division, so that it can provide effective and strategic leadership and management to these major challenges:

- Maintaining learning and care quality, building human resource capabilities and capacities and improving the learning, technological and facilities infrastructures;
- Developing synergistic and strategic partnership relationships with the Primary sector;
- Providing collaborative leadership to the development of a shared vision.

Both the qualitative and quantitative evidence suggest that there are two options for addressing the concept of a seamless transition from ECCE to Primary: (i) continue to perpetuate the current system which, by design, is incongruent with the concept of seamlessness, or (ii) redesign the current system grounded in an early learning framework that is based on a continuum of learning competencies supported by a seamless curriculum.

Clearly, the economic, social and educational priorities are interdependent. We cannot have seamless access without reviewing the educational philosophy. We cannot have an inclusive society without “leveling the playing field” for all early learners; therefore, the status quo is not the answer. In addition, there is conclusive research evidence that suggests that the smooth and effective transition from ECCE to Primary is a fundamental requirement for the start of a successful educational experience. As Logie (1997) so aptly states, placing early childhood at the forefront of the seamless reform ensures that children will start primary school with more advantages and more equal opportunities.

## **B. Objective of Consultancy**

Within the context of the overall goal, this consultancy is designed to outline a set of realistic, achievable strategies and plans that will facilitate a smooth and seamless transition from Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) to Primary.

## **C. Overall Strategy Proposed**

In a practical sense, the proposed recommended actions encompass five general policy priorities. The highest priority is to assure that a consistent, smooth and seamless transition from ECCE to Primary become the operational norm for early learners. It is proposed that this goal will be achieved not only through the alignment of the curriculum, reducing the barriers to access with success and the restructuring of the learning infrastructures, but also quality re-vitalization, through the provision of appropriate learning resources, targeted and ongoing professional development and the rationalization of staffing patterns.

The second policy thrust is to ensure that the principles of inclusiveness and equity guide the implementation process. In operational terms, this policy direction is designed to reduce disparities and/or barriers to achieving the goal of access with success. To that end, emphasis is to be placed on reducing socio-economic inequities, while responding to the unique and varied requirements of special need early learners, in a planned and organized manner.

The third policy thrust is to build the strategic leadership capability within the ECCE Division and the Ministry of Education that will enable the orderly development of an empowering team climate, grounded in the principles of co-determination and equal partnership.

The fourth policy thrust is twofold: (i) re-inforce and strengthen the role of the ECCE Division to assume the joint policy leadership role for engaging stakeholders to achieve the curriculum and child centred learning objectives and (ii) build the capacity and capability of staff to manage the transformation process in an efficient and effective manner.

The fifth policy thrust is to advocate for a sustainable financial planning framework that will support the effective and efficient implementation of the transformation agenda.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### A. Framework and Definition

Essentially, the framework for the methodological approach was guided by: The National Early Childhood Care and Education Curriculum Guide (2005), The Ministry of Education Corporate Plan (2008-2012), and the National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Education: Standards for Regulating Early Childhood Services (2005).

Generally, the research literature views the concept of seamless transition as closely tied to the concept of readiness to school. Theoretically, it is defined as ‘ a manifestation of the developmental principles of continuity, that is, creating pedagogical, curricula and/or disciplinary approaches that transcend and continue between programs’(Baker et al 2002).

This Report, accepts an adaptation of the theoretical concept that is included in the Rationalization of the ECCE Sector, Government and Government Sectors (2010) in that document, a Seamless system is defined as one “in which all phases and components of the system are integrated to ensure the smooth transition of the learner through the system”. As one stakeholder puts it “Seamless transition from ECCE to Primary is a system in which curricula, learning environments and the pedagogical strategies employed by educators at both levels, facilitate and support children’s learning without undue stress, or disruption, so that there is a smooth movement from one level to the next (Layne 2010).

### B. Process

The process included 4 distinctive approaches:

- a) Visit to a sample of ECCE Centres and Primary Schools;
- b) Structured interviews/discussions with internal and external stakeholders;
- c) Review of relevant documents: Qualitative and Quantitative;
- d) Review of Research and “Best Practices.

### C. Data Collection and Analysis

Because of the perceived subjectivity of some of the data/information, an Institutional Organizational Assessment (IOA) framework was used to guide the analytic process. It is an adaptation of the work of Nadeau (1992), Universalia (2005) and Howe (2003). Essentially, the approach entailed the review of information/data against four standards that are related to ECCE and Primary: (a) acceptable indicators of organizational effectiveness and efficiency; (b) operational practices that are congruent with national goals and strategic priorities; (c) teaching and learning practices that are congruent with evidence based research and ‘best practices’; and (d) sensitivity to the socio-economic realities of small island states.

In discussing the issues with stakeholders two approaches were used. Firstly, they were asked to respond to these thematic questions:



- a) What is your Vision of an effective seamless transition from ECCE to Primary?
- b) In your view, what are the implementation priorities for achieving your vision?
- c) In your view what are the main challenges/constraints that may hinder the effective implementation of your priority plans?
- d) What actions, structures and processes will be required to encourage cooperative partnerships between the Ministry of Education and its partners?
- e) What policy changes may be required to emphasize the need for co-determination in the planning, developing and implementing plans for a seamless transition from ECCE to Primary?

Secondly, groups of persons were presented with a Case Study: Ranking of the Key Features of an Effective Transition from ECCE to Primary. They were asked to reach consensus on the ranking of the key challenges.

Thirdly, Visits to ECCE Centres/ Primary focused on observational interactions between teacher and children, and a review the nature, scope of the availability of the appropriate infrastructure support that will enhance the delivery of quality learning to children. The Instrument was adapted to reflect the competencies and standards as outlined in the National Early Childhood Care and Education Guide – Nurturing 3 &4 year Old Children Towards the Ideal (2005); (Margetts 1999) and Wisconsin (2010). Essentially, the Instrument was focused on five themes:

- a) Adequacy/Effectiveness of the Learning Environment;
- b) Adequacy of the Learning Infrastructures and Support Services;
- c) Adequacy of the Physical Facilities;
- d) Evidence of Parental and Community Involvement;
- e) Clarity of Policy Directions.

#### D. Sample

The actual sample included interviews with the following internal and external stakeholders, and visits to selected ECCE centres and Primary Schools.

- The Director, ECCE Division.
- The Assistant Director, ECCE Division.
- SES Staff.
- ECCE Division Coordinators: Curriculum, Quality Assurance, Family Community Support, Administrative.
- ECCE Programme Facilitators: Curriculum, Quality Assurance, Family Community Support, Administrative.
- Administrators of New Centres.
- Student Support Services ECCE Division.
- Curriculum Officers, Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre (RCLRC).
- School Supervisors.

- School of Education, University of the West Indies (UWI).
- Open Campus, UWI.
- University of Trinidad and Tobago.
- Visits to ECCE Centres: Family Development and Children's Research Centre (UWI); El Secorro South Government; Maloney Government; St. Augustine South; Monroe Government; La Puerta Government; Buccoo (Tobago), Morvant
- Visits to Primary Schools: El. Secorro South Government; Maloney Government; St. Augustine Government; Monroe Government; La Puerta Government; Buccoo Government.
- Parents.

**See Appendix B for Persons Interviewed**

**E. Limitations**

- Time pressures and availability of additional respondents;
- The usual problems of reliability and validity of verifying the subjectivity of qualitative information;
- Limited culturally sensitive models from which to draw comparisons.

Although international research results espouse the contributions that quality ECCE make to the improvement of the quality of life, (Logie 2009) suggests that while childhood transitions may be universally present, there are unique socio-economic conditions in the Caribbean that may hold different meanings across cultural communities. This point is supported by a recent review of ECCE programmes in Mali, Senegal and Gambia. The researcher reports that these programmes seem to be built on traditional community values of raising children, supplemented by best practice ideas on health, nutrition and interactive brain stimulation to better prepare children for basic education (Soudee, 2007).

Logie proceeds to suggest that the issue of transitions from ECCE to Primary may be difficult to address in Trinidad and Tobago because of the strong emphasis on academic training early in children's lives and pressures due to sparse resources and family structural organizations. Put another way by (Samms Vaughn 2005), the exigencies of poverty and other transitions in children's and families' lives (mate shifting and child shifting, divorce parental migration etc) may also influence children's entrance into early childhood and formal schooling in profound ways.

**F. Vision**

A review of the documents suggests either implicitly, or explicitly that the current Vision for the system included: Excellence; Inclusiveness; Access to Quality ECCE and Primary Education; Equality of Opportunity; an Integrated Holistic System; a Coherent Organizational Framework and Financial Sustainability.

## **G. Principles**

**On the one hand, the application of the visionary framework was guided by the work of Piaget (1971); Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1971). They provide the following generalized themes of child development:**

- a) Children develop knowledge and skills in predictable sequences;**
- b) There are optimal periods for certain kinds of learning;**
- c) Learning occurs in the context of each child's unique characteristics, abilities, opportunities and socio-cultural environments;**
- d) Learning is viewed as a social experience;**
- e) Effective early learning and care recognize the integrated nature of the domains of children development.**

**On the other hand, the application of the visionary framework was also guided by the current research literature from jurisdictions that have documented effective seamless transitions from ECCE to Primary. A sample of key directional themes are:**

- a) Neuroscience and child development researchers have concluded that between the ages of 3 to 5, the brain is undergoing a critical developmental phase; therefore, learning during this phase should be nurtured by providing children with developmentally appropriate play based learning and care opportunities ( Shanker and Greenspan, 2009).**
- b) The goal of a seamless transition from ECCE to Primary is not designed to replicate teacher directed learning in Primary, but it is to create through play based and other child centred learning, experiences that reinforce the child's development and readiness for formal schooling (Pascall, 2009).**
- c) Well planned and quality integrated ECCE programmes, that combine health, nutrition, cognitive stimulation, parental support and involvement have a significant impact on the child's readiness to be successful in Grade 1. In addition, to the socio-educational benefits, economists have consistently documented the economic benefits of investments in early childhood care and education ( Temple and Reynolds (2007), Lynch (2006), Heckman, (2008), Kilburn and Karoly, (2006).**
- d) Among the key features of a seamless transition from ECCE to Primary are: (i) a systematic and integrated system ( health, nutrition, and cognitive stimulation) built on a shared vision of co-determination; (ii) organizational coherence; (iii) a streamlined developmentally appropriate curriculum and pedagogical mode, that is aligned with common national standards; (iv) learning, administrative facilities and technological infrastructures that support the delivery of quality experiences for children; and (v) an effective human resource development plan (OECD 2006).**

## **H. Contextual Framework**

- a) **Current research, combined with evidence based “best practices”, support the notion that well planned early learning interventions not only contributes to successful transition to Primary education, but also has a positive and lasting effect on child growth and development. In fact, it is not a life style choice, but in effect, a social equity issue designed to “level the playing field” for all children. Consistent with other sources, this view is supported in a Report published by the Canadian Council on Learning ( 2007). According to that Report, “Research indicates that the first five years of a child’s life have a major bearing on his or her future success in school, in the workplace and many other aspects of a healthy and fulfilling life”.**
- b) **The achievement of the stated goal of a smooth and seamless transition from ECCE Centres to Primary education should be grounded in sound educational, pedagogical and child developmental theories. Any proposed curriculum, or pedagogical model should be child centred and focus on the delivery of quality developmentally appropriate formal and informal learning experiences, within a set of coherent standards.**
- c) **The Vision of an Early Learning system should not be only limited to the delivery of quality educational programming, but should also include provisions for timely access to preventative, diagnostic, therapeutic and consultative services to parents and care givers. To that end, timely responses to specialized services for children with developmental and physical challenges should be an integral aspect of the Vision for Early Learning.**
- d) **The framework recognizes the impact that poverty alleviation has on achieving the stated goals of improved access, equality of opportunity and inclusiveness; it supports the OECD contention that positive Early Learning and child care experiences are the foundation of life long learning.**
- e) **The framework recognizes the public and private returns to education and their potential impact on social equity.**

**Theoretically, the conceptual framework mirrors the ecological system theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) to explain how everything in a child’s environment affects how he/she grows and develops. In effect, the model recognizes the impact that these five variables make to the positive development of the child: family, home, teacher/caregiver, child behaviours and child development status.**

### **3. SITUATION ANALYSIS: OVERVIEW OF DISCUSSION WITH STAKEHOLDERS**

#### **A. Recurrent Themes**

By its very nature, this section of the Report is qualitative; it represents a subjective analysis of extensive discussions with internal and external stakeholders, combined with a review of available documents. The observations and defined challenges represent a synthesis of divergent views; however, the data/information was reviewed against the IOA referred to in the section on Data Collection, the contextual framework and “evidence based best practices”. As such, every attempt was made to present a balanced view of the discussions, by incorporating the divergent opinions into an integrated framework for action and transformational leadership.

The selected directional themes represent a consensus of views by the internal and external stakeholders, the only difference is the level of importance that each group/person ascribed to each theme. At the outset, it must be emphasized that, in spite of some divergence of views, the ECCE and Primary educators are committed to working in a collaborative manner to find mutually agreed solutions to the care and learning issues, in the best interest of the children; however, at the present time, there are no approved formal structures, or focused leadership that facilitates the kind of synergistic relationships that is required.

While the participants strongly agree ,in principle, and support systematic and planned actions for an organized and jointly planned approach to the development and implementation of plans for a smooth and seamless transition from ECCE to Primary (Infant 1), a number of issues have been identified that may either facilitate, or hinder the effective implementation of realistic and achievable plans. To a great extent, they represent a variety of structural policy and attitudinal changes.

On the one hand, and within the context of readiness for change, the respondents were clear on the point that there are two basic pre –conditions that are required for the successful implementation of this initiative: (i) strategic leadership and (ii) clarity of vision. Congruent with that fundamental framework, five interdependent and interrelated themes emerged:

- a) There is a strong view that the “child” should be at the centre of the change process, and the application of the quality learning goals should facilitate “inclusiveness” and contribute in a tangible way to the “leveling of the playing field”. In practice, seamless transition from ECCE to Primary must be grounded in an educational philosophy of quality and excellence, expanded access, equality of opportunity, strategic partnerships, timely responses to children with special needs and affordability.
- b) Although this transformational agenda may be viewed as an education initiative, it must be seen in the larger socio-economic context of improving the quality of life for

all learners. To that end, equity of access and equality of opportunity constitute a critical public policy issue.

- c) In spite of the perceived climate of fiscal restraint, there must be a commitment by the Government to provide strategic and targeted investments that will enhance the capacities and capabilities of the system to implement the required changes, in a quality manner. It would appear that the key strategic priorities are: human resource development, re-vitalization of the learning infrastructures, expansion/redesign of facilities and curriculum review.
- d) It is imperative that the system builds on the strengths and successes of its current staff, rationalize existing staff inequities and ensure that that effective and efficient use is made of available resources. Essentially, it is a question of expanding existing creative initiatives, rather than a fresh start.
- e) This transformational change process requires strategic leadership with a clear sense of direction. Two operational factors are critical: (i) clarity of the accountability framework and (ii) a leadership climate that will facilitate the development of a shared vision, with the accompanying mutually agreed upon structures and processes.

On the other hand, although a range of operational themes was identified, there is widespread agreement on four key generalized themes. They were selected because they provide an overall planning framework for the design of realistic strategies that will facilitate a smooth and seamless transition from ECCE to Primary. They are:

- a) **Harmonization of the Curriculum, Pedagogy and Facilities: An Integrated Strategy for Change.**
- b) **Building the Capacity and Capability of Staff: Readiness for Change.**
- c) **A Shared Vision : The Challenge of Collaborative Co-Determination.**
- d) **A National Policy Framework: An Integrated System.**

**B. Harmonization of the Curriculum, Pedagogy and Facilities: An Integrated Strategy for Change**

There was a general consensus that children from ECCE centres often have difficulty in adjusting to the formal classroom setting of Infant 1, where the rules, routines, and learning expectations differ dramatically from their ECCE settings. As such, they are labeled as “not ready”. In reality, for the young child the concept of a seamless transition is one of re-adjustment to a new learning environment in a different physical environment. To a great extent, it is a move from a child centred guided play situation to a formal educational setting with structured learning activities (O’Brien 2004). For most learners, their excitement is diminished as they realize that they have to conform to new rules and

expectations, while having to comply with the rigors of a competitive exam based system (Margetts, 1999).

In an interesting study in Ireland ( INTO 2009), children provided the following insights of the challenges that they faced in making the transition from ECCE to Primary. The main challenges were: homework, work versus play, new rules and a structured learning environment. The crux of the problem is captured in the comments of one child: “it was a bit scary,” I was scared because all adults were talking to me and that was a bit scary”. The scary feeling was centred on the fear of new friendships, different learning expectations, more structured learning environment and new disciplinary practices.

One suggested response to this dilemma is the creation of “transitional learning centres” in the Primary school, in order to sustain and build on the holistic development of the child, while phasing in the introduction of the traditional methods of delivery. In terms of classroom organization, the strongest message emerging from the literature is twofold: the classroom organization has a primary function of promoting children involving in learning, and should be flexible and strategic to support the range of learning opportunities (Boyd 2007).

In support this strategy, (Boyd 2007) summarizes the results of the research literature which indicates that in the early years, it is particularly important that the social-emotional well being of the child should be supported across the transition to school. Initial success at school both socially and intellectually, leads to a virtual cycle of achievement; therefore, playful learning and common pedagogy should support the transition to primary school.

This paradigm shift to a dual mode of instructional deliveries is grounded on the theory that because children are born with the innate desire to learn, effective transition to school should not be judged only on academic criteria; in fact, “leveling the playing field” can compensate for disparities among children from diverse socio-economic circumstances. In this context, effective and seamless transition from ECCE to Primary should not be considered a life style choice, it is a social equity issue. In fact, the implicit goal of inclusive education is to do just that.

Against the above background, the respondents suggested that the lack of curriculum coherence between the ECCE and Primary (Infant 1) is perceived as the major problem in achieving a smooth and seamless transition. In their view, an aligned curriculum will mitigate the perceived learning deficits and transitional challenges faced by ECCE children, by providing a consistent and continuous approach to early learning through their transition to the primary phase of their development. In practice, it will require a re-conceptualization of the traditional principles of readiness and a renewed focus on child centred instructional strategies.

The dramatic effect of shifting to a child centred instructional approach is captured by this comment in the (Education Centre Report 2008). The researchers indicate that learning to engage in learner centred practices involve more than acquiring a new set of learning. It also to a great extent, involves unlearning; that is, re-conceptualizing one’s image and

others and genuinely questioning what is and ought to be, and the re-imagining the relationship between authority and education.

The objective of the aligned curriculum framework is to ensure that the learning content is congruent with the child's continuum of development. It is based on the assumption that understanding children's development begins with an understanding of the sequence of how development proceeds. The arc of possibilities for human development is wide but the progression of children's development can be anticipated (Elect 2007).

The above theoretical frameworks had the full support of the participants; however, they emphasized that these overriding principles should guide the curriculum review process:

- Joint learning standards with mechanisms for monitoring progress in meeting specified learning goals and objectives;
- Appropriate facilities, learning infrastructures and targeted ongoing professional development opportunities;
- A common core curriculum and pedagogy that is appropriate to the stages in the development of young children.

In addition, because the ECCE educators have identified that the transition to a testing environment is one of the major disconnects with the Primary school learning environment, the aligned curriculum initiative should also address Infant 1 pre-assessment practices. The joint review of this issue may result in the establishment of national guidelines that will alleviate the factors that contribute to the differences of opinion on this critical issue. For the most part, the Primary system is examination driven; it is incongruent with the holistic approach to child development. As a result, validation of prior learning appears to lack coherence.

There was a general concern that the process of harmonizing the curriculum may result in forcing the Primary curriculum and/or teaching strategies within the ECCE learning environment. This, in part, may be a response from parents who are eager to have their children demonstrate the literacy and mathematical skills required by the Primary school. However, this approach has the potential of having ECCE centres become pre-primary institutions; this trend has the potential of undermining the important role that ECCE centres play in enhancing the of holistic development of the child. As Shaeffer (2006), warns ECCE programs may go too far in presenting a formal academic curriculum and use inappropriate teaching methods for children below the age of six. There are many fears about ECCE becoming rigid and formal, losing its emphasis on play and children's holistic development.

On the one hand, (Wood 2004; Schweinhart and Welkart 1977) suggest that when academic work is introduced too early one has to be conscious of the undue pressure placed on ECCE children. They maintain that when begun too early literacy instructions may actually harm the self-concept of young children leading to anxiety, low self-esteem and mediocre literacy results.



On the other hand, developmental and brain researchers (Elkind 2001) are reporting the importance of Myelin (neurons in the brain) to positive child development; it is responsible for attention span, fine motor movements. It is alleged that when early learners are over challenged by unreasonable academic expectations and teaching methodology using force and emotional abuse, the chemical myelin can be damaged. This damage manifests itself in various conditions, including learning disability, bi-polar disorders and more importantly deviant behaviour.

The apparent dichotomy in the current system is characterized by one of the participants, “our written education programmes and policies (especially in early education) claim to embrace practice that is developmentally appropriate; grounded in constructivist philosophy; inclusive and child centred. However, in actual experience the converse is true. We actually foster an education system that is elitist; “ examination-focus” as opposed to learner “learner focused”; and caters to the narrow and entrenched biases of outdated thinking, rather than educational research and the needs of the child’.

The impact and influence of parents in Kenya is reflected in the conclusion of this study ( UNESCO 2005), even when appropriate pedagogical materials are available, most ECCE centers, in fact, provide “early primary education”; this pedagogical deviation is a result of the pressure by parents who see ECCE as a chance to help their children obtain good marks in primary. Although the ECCE curriculum focuses on interactive methodologies, many teachers find it easy to revert to the teaching of the alphabets and numbers.

Finally, the respondents suggested that flexible transitional opportunities should be incorporated within the curriculum framework; it will go a long way in assisting some children with the needed time to adapt to the new learning environment. At the same time, they expressed the view that seamless transition is not the fundamental problem; the major issues are associated with different learning orientations, different testing practices and resource limitations.

In a keynote address, Bennett (2004) outlines the challenges in trying to integrate holistic and academic curriculum for early learners. He identifies the following options for progress:

- (a) The co-construction of agreed curricular or pedagogical frameworks (co-constructed with professionals, parents, children, community).
- (b) Adequate program standards to allow curriculum implementation (highly trained staff; adequate investment in infrastructure (buildings, ratios, materials, resources); appropriate monitoring and support for accountability).
- (c) Improved pre-primary curricula and practice (need to both reform inadequate practice and increase government investment in early childhood; more research is needed on the effects of the current focus on early literacy, standards).

- (d) **Adaptation of frameworks to changing cultural needs (how best to integrate literacy, numeracy, technology into a child focused, open, emergent curriculum that fully involves children, parents and the community in decision-making).**

**In spite of the challenges, the research is conclusive: a planned curriculum with goals for children learning and development impacts on the quality in early learning settings (Cleveland et al., 2006; OECD 2006). Specifically,**

- a) It begins with an informed understanding of what children are capable of learning and how they learn effectively.**
- b) It has specific goals for children that support self regulation (behaviour, emotion and attention), identity, social inclusion, health and well-being, language and thinking skills and physical skills, as well as the foundation knowledge and concepts needed for literacy and numeracy.**
- c) It provides structure and direction for early childhood practitioners who support the development of capacities and skills, while respecting a child's interests and choices (Bennett 2004).**

### **C. Building the Capacity and Capability of Staff: Readiness for Change**

**Although the respondents identified the mis-alignment of the curricula as the major concern, they believed that the availability of a revitalized student centred curriculum must be balanced with planned professional development programmes that will enhance the capability and capacity of staff to deliver quality learning experiences to young children. In fact, for many persons, human resource development is the most critical issue for the successful implementation of a smooth and seamless transition from ECCE to Primary. Basically, there are two dimensions of this human resource development thrust: targeted and continuous professional development opportunities for staff; and, rationalization of the Conditions of Service, staffing patterns and qualifications between the two groups of professionals**

**Research studies and policy experts are consistent in their assertion that well prepared early learning staff are critical to the delivery of quality learning experiences for children. Educators with time for program planning, observation and documentation, opportunities for professional development and regular conversations with families are better able to support optimum child outcomes (Lero @ Irwin, 2008).**

**It must also be noted, that the issue of staff training to support the delivery of quality early learning experiences in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean, is not new. Firstly, (The OAS Hemispheric Report on School Failure In Trinidad and Tobago 2004) made two related observations on the issue:**

- i. Early years practitioners, especially in the primary school settings are lacking appropriate qualifications and competencies.**

- ii. All primary school teachers should be trained in teaching reading and early childhood education.

Secondly, in a regional context, the CARICOM Study (2006) made the observation that the task of effective early learning curriculum at the national level will take sustained effort and leadership to provide:

- i. Training of teachers and care givers to provide skills and confidence in what it takes to practice to make a difference in children's learning in the management of learning environments, scheduling and securing parental involvement.
- ii. Dedicated programmes to harmonize curricula, pedagogy and teacher training to ease the transition between the provisions for birth to three, three to five, and five to seven years.

In addition, there was overwhelming and universal support for the joint training of ECCE and Primary teachers; it is based on the compelling research evidence that qualified staff is the key determinant in the delivery of quality learning experiences for young children. The suggestion is supported by the Global Monitoring Report (2006). They report that to ease children's transition from ECCE to Primary schooling, several countries are implementing strategies for professional continuity, namely joint training for teachers at both levels to encourage connections and coherence of teaching styles.

It is interesting to note that the human resource development issues raised by the participants are confirmed by the recommendations made in a recent research (INTO, 2008). The recommendations emanating from that study are:

- a) That more formal communication procedures be established between pre-schools and primary schools;
- b) That qualified ECCE staff be appointed to all infant classes;
- c) That professional development opportunities be provided to all junior infant teachers, on a regular basis in relation to curriculum methodology in the early years;
- d) That ECCE staff be afforded opportunities to become familiar with the primary school curriculum;
- e) That information and opportunities for consultation be provided for all ECCE and Primary school parents;
- f) That formal structures be established to facilitate the transition process from ECCE to Primary.

### **C. A Shared Vision: The Challenge of Collaborative Co-Determination**

The importance of developing a shared vision of a seamless transition from ECCE to Primary is reflected in the divergent views expressed by both ECCE and Primary educators on the important issue of readiness. In general, educators from both jurisdictions had different visions of “readiness”; this dilemma contributes to a lack of shared goals for the implementation of a seamless transition from ECCE to Primary. At the same time, the evidence suggests that seamlessness can best be achieved by a shared value among educators.

This problem is clearly defined in the (Early Childhood Care and Education Study 2008). That study reported that expectations at primary school do not match the holistic education described in the National ECCE Curriculum Guide. This view is supported by the majority of ECCE educators. This perceived attitudinal barrier is significant since researchers have consistently reported that students who experience problems with transition from ECCE to Primary are a result of different expectations from adults in the two different settings ( O’Kane, 2008 and Rimm-Kaufman et al).

In general terms, primary teachers have identified factors as poor listening skills, attentiveness, and gaps in cognition as the major inhibiting factors. Generally, primary teachers would also like to see greater attention given to reading, and cognitive readiness in the ECCE centres. From their perspective, the problem of dealing with children who are not ready places additional burden on their workload and compromises their ability to meet the requirements of the syllabus. The matter is further complicated because some primary school teachers have indicated that ECCE students from private sector schools seem more ready to adapt to the academic oriented demands of the traditional Infant 1 syllabus.

In reality, there is significant pressure by parents to have their children ready for success in the Primary school; these parental expectations are driven by a competitive testing climate. Unfortunately, primary school teachers are faced with the dilemma of reconciling the holistic experiences of the ECCE children with the demands of the Infant 1 syllabus.

Again, it is interesting to note the results of an (INTO Study 2009). There was general agreement among teachers of junior infant classes that independence and self help skills, social skills, communication and language skills and concentration and listening skills were all important for children to possess when starting school. Pre-academic and problem solving skills were not considered to be as important. This observation is consistent with the research evidence (Pianta et al; 2003; Dockett and Perry 2004; Lin et al; 2003).

The issue of a smooth and seamless transition is a complex issue; it is fraught with contradictions and paradoxes. The importance of jointly addressing the issue of “readiness” in conjunction with the aligned curriculum initiative is critical because in the research literature ( Bohan-Baker et al 2002; Pianta et al, 1999) the concept of transition is tied closely to the concept of “readiness”. Based on the views of the majority of respondents, the system requires a change from its historic orientation of teacher directed

**approaches to child centred approaches , standardized expectations for both ECCE and primary teachers and a joint appreciation of the complementary roles that each play within the educational continuum.**

**In addition, some primary school teachers expressed some concern about the appropriateness of “play based learning” as a realistic preparation for transition to the primary school. This perspective is contradicted by the majority of the development literature which strongly supports the view that guided play stimulates physical, social, social, emotional and cognitive development, in early years. For example, Capon, (2006) points out that stacking blocks, and mixing sand and water, encourages logical mathematical thinking, scientific reasoning and problem solving – the learning that is a by product of play.**

**Because inter-institutional collaboration faces many systemic and attitudinal barriers, there is a need for clarity of the seamless policy, transformational leadership, strategic thinking and the development of processes and procedures that support transitional practices. The compartmentalized system must give way to synergistic relationships; in the opinion of the participants, this is out of their control. The vision of collaborative leadership or merging cultures, based on equal partnerships, have major operational implications that have to be addressed at the Ministry level. The OECD (2002) has emphasized that the strong links between the two sectors ( ECCE and Primary) can have a number of advantages in terms of developing shared goals, educational methods and creating coherence in staff training and development.**

**In proceeding along this path of collective leadership, we must be mindful of the research evidence that indicates that because of historic vested interest, attempts to establish smooth pathways for students tend to run the risk of compromising the special unique identities of each sector (Ames 2009). To that end, inter-institutional collaboration/cooperation must be focused on reconciling an appropriate balance between (institutional character) and differentiation (specialization of function).**

**The respondents saw a direct relationship between the process of arriving at a shared vision and the nature and scope of the communication processes that are in place; therefore, the issues of communication and community engagement emerged as a major complementary issue. There are two dimensions of the issue. First, the research has documented the fact the poor communication between ECCE centres and Primary schools is a barrier to successful transition of children (Margetts, 1999; Pianta&Walsh, 2005). Second, Timperley, McNaughton, Howie and Robison (2003) have reported that even when ECCE and primary teachers are committed to cooperation and collaboration, in practice, they had different expectations of each other.**

**In summary, the internal and external sample strongly supported the notion, that a shared vision combined with transformational leadership, are critical if the system is to respond to the issue of seamlessness, in an effective and practical way. In the view of the respondents, the key elements of building effective pathways for successful transition to Primary are:**

- a) **Participating, as an equal partner, in the development of a child centred common curriculum framework between ECCE and Primary.**
- b) **Participating, as an equal partner, in developing a shared vision and understanding of “primary school/child readiness” that will facilitate the implementation of a system wide seamless transition from ECCE to Primary.**
- c) **Developing clearly defined educational policy and accountability frameworks that will not only support an integrated model of early learning, but also provide collaborative structures and agreed upon implementation guidelines.**
- d) **Building the human resource capacities and capabilities, and improving the learning, technological and facilities infrastructures so that quality learning experiences can be provided to all children, who access the services.**

Currently, there are no planned mechanisms that allow, or facilitate the kind of cross-sector thinking that is needed on the issue of seamless transition from ECCE to Primary. Current successes are sporadic and based on individual initiatives. The suggested organizational ethos, based on equal partnership should create a leadership climate and working environment that is transparent. In that team oriented climate, attitudinal barriers and bureaucratic structures can be addressed in a professional manner.

The significance and importance of strategic leadership is directly related to the issues raised by Colley’s review (2006). Regardless of their pedagogical approach, major obstacles to curriculum implementation met across countries are: structural failings (lack of financing, unfavourable child/staff ratios, poorly qualified and poorly remunerated staff (and inadequate pedagogical theory and practice. Against this background, three emerging issues should be debated: accountability and leadership for the desired change, re-thinking of curricula and pedagogical approaches , within the context of a child centred continuum of learning educational philosophy, and the rationalization of the Conditions of Service for ECCE and Infant 1 teachers.

#### **E. A National Policy Framework: An Integrated System**

The respondents repeatedly raised the perceived disconnect between official statements espousing the concepts of equity of access, equality of opportunity and inclusiveness and the availability of the required resources to provide timely access intervention and remedial professional services, to the unique requirements of the broad range of special needs children. The World Bank (Education Strategy 2020) puts this issue in perspective. According to that Report: “the acquisition of learning skills also does not depend only on education and training but also on other sectors such as health, nutrition, labour and employment and the private sector.”

In a Caribbean context, this Jamaican Project (UWI 2005) looked at some aspects of the transition to primary school, and, reported that:

- **Children of poorer social economic status showed poorer cognitive and academic performance which worsened with time; more behaviour problems ( Withdrawn, Aggression, Delinquency) and fewer behavioural strengths;**
- **Poverty impacts directly on children’s development and behaviour and indirectly through parenting, the learning environment and social exposure.**

**The Report concludes by stating that the implications of these findings were that efforts to improve child outcomes must be comprehensive and critically, that these efforts must begin early, as time worsens effects. This view is consistent with research findings by Charles and Williams (2006). In a Trinidad and Tobago context, they found that children of poorer social economic status showed poorer cognitive and academic performance which worsened with time; more behaviour problems (withdrawn, aggression, delinquency) and fewer behavioural strengths. They concluded that poverty impacts directly on children’s development and behaviour and indirectly through parenting, the learning environment and social exposure.**

**Currently, in the view of the respondents, the issue of early learning is considered in isolation of the other related aspects of access and inclusiveness. From their perspectives, in addition to the learning objectives, the desired implementation of a smooth and seamless transition from ECCE to Primary is driven by strong social imperatives; there is a strong belief that the early learning thrusts should be part of a comprehensive national development strategy that links economic and social development. It is a public policy issue that involves the fundamental rights of the child; therefore, it will require coordinated, policy and monitoring oversight among the Ministries of: Education, Health, People and Social Development and Community Development.**

**The proposed implementation of a seamless transition from ECCE to Primary should not only involve a fundamental re-thinking of curricula and learning philosophy, it should also assume the development of a transparent and integrated network of institutional and organizational arrangements among Education, Health, Social and Community Development. Traditionally, the research literature defines integration as a process of creating a network of services that work together. Applied to ECCE, it is related to a coordinated policy for young children through the formation of integrating networks among such sectors as social welfare, school system, family, employment and health services (OECD 1998, 2001).**

**The proposed model is a move away from a bureaucratic approach of governance to a model that is congruent with the integrated educational and socio-economic needs of young children. The multi-sectoral approach recognizes that academic success is not only an educational issue, but involves a broad range of social, economic, cultural and religious issues.**

**To a great extent, the views expressed by the participants on this theme are congruent with the critical elements that national early learning policies share as identified in the Implications of the Global Monitoring Report( 2007). They are:**

- a) **Broad stakeholder involvement, and in particular parents.**
- b) **The alignment of early learning policies with other sectoral development policies, such as poverty reduction programs.**
- c) **Detailed action plans to facilitate implementation by identifying who is responsible for what, allocating resources and setting a time frame.**
- d) **Policies should be supported by a vision statement, a legal framework and a governance model that allow a seamless transition. It should include nutrition, health and education.**

Clearly, research studies indicate that prevention and early intervention programmes for young children have the greatest impact when they are addressed in a coordinated network of integrated services. As such, the concepts of co-existence, coordination, collaboration and integration drive the operational climate.

#### **F. General Observations on Visit to ECCE Centres**

The observation visits to ECCE centres represent a snapshot that focused on three issues: (i) observation of staff interaction with children and the extent to which the activities fostered, or promoted developmental learning opportunities; (ii) the nature and scope of planned activities and the availability of appropriate resources to support the achievement of the individual, or project goals; and (iii) the organization of the physical environment in terms of space, activity centres with appropriate space for play, group learning and individual developmental activities.

The visit yielded, these general observations:

- a) **In all cases, the staff were enthusiastic, acted professionally by providing developmentally appropriate opportunities for individual and group interests;**
- b) **Children were active but purposive in guided play, exploratory activities or individual projects; great care was taken to ensure the health and safety of the children.**
- c) **There was an appropriate balance of staff guided activities and individual flexibility;**
- d) **There was a commitment by staff to the holistic development of the child and the National Curriculum Guide appeared integral to the planning of activities;**
- e) **There was some concern that the Guide was too general in its orientation; to some persons, it should have been supplemented with some “how to do suggestions”.**
- f) **Although the available learning material was varied, there is a general need for additional learning resources and expansion of facilities to accommodate the number of children. In this respect, attempts should be made to project a Caribbean image to the facilities.**



- g) To a great extent, there were an adequate number of toys, equipment and furnishing; however, there is a perceived need for additional toys and manipulative materials in sufficient numbers to allow added flexibility in the rotation of activities. Also, the technology centers should be expanded.**
- h) The equipment and furnishing were maintained in a safe and clean condition; the facilities were in a relatively good state of repair.**
- i) There was designated space for eating, resting, preparation of food and separate storage space for toys, play materials and equipment.**

**Overall, excellent work was evident in all centres; some of the project work was outstanding. The major issues are related to the adequacy of learning resources and space limitations.**

#### **4. SITUATION ANALYSIS :SUMMARY OF RELATED RESEARCH AND BEST PRACTICES**

There is a considerable literature around the issue of seamless transition from ECCE to Primary, each relevant to different circumstances; however, there is a paucity of material that speaks to the issue in small island states. This section presents an overview of a sample of research results and “best practices” that are congruent with the selected themes.

##### **A. Harmonization of the Curriculum, Pedagogy and Facilities**

- a) **Effective transitions tend to have coherence of curriculum, pedagogy and service systems, and the desirability of authentic partnerships between families and schools within the educational systems (Petriwski et al., 2005).**
- b) **A planned curriculum and common programming guide support early learning and improves transition from ECCE to Primary (Pascall 2009).**
- c) **Providing program continuity through developmentally appropriate curricula for pre-school and primary school children has also been proposed as one of the keys to successful transition (O’Kane, 2008).**
- d) **Anglo jurisdictions ( United Kingdom, Canada, United States, Australia and New Zealand) are using a combination of common curriculum, operating standards, and staffing qualifications to knit together a coherent approach and foster a synergy of cultures (Siraj-Blatchford et al., OECD 2006).**
- e) **Differences in curriculum between ECCE settings and Kindergarten account for many of the difficulties that children and their families experience when making the transition from ECCE settings to Kindergarten, or Grade 1 (Margetts).**
- f) **Differences in curriculum between ECCE settings and Kindergarten account for many of the difficulties that children and their families experience when making the transition (Volger et al, 2008).**
- g) **Children who thrive in primary school and whose pathways set for later success are those who enter Grade 1 with strong communication skills, are confident, able to make friends, are persistent and creative in completing tasks and solving problems and are excited to learn (National Research Council, Washington 2001).**
- h) **When early childhood programs collaborate with other early childhood programs, the staff benefit from harmonization of professional education and development (Colley, 2006; Corter et al, 2006).**

## **B. Building the Capacity and Capability of Staff**

- a) **Reviews of American, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand studies consistently report that educational qualifications, adult child ratios, group size influence educators' interactions with children and quality in public and private child care settings ( Mitchell et al, 2008, OECD 2006).**
- b) **To ease children's transition from ECCE to Primary schooling, several countries are implementing strategies for professional continuity, namely joint training for teachers at both levels to encourage connections and coherence in teaching styles ( Global Monitoring Report, 2006).**
- c) **The current split between 'teachers' and "child care workers will be rethought around a model of an integrated educator who employs a holistic pedagogical approach – harmonization of professional education and development ( Colley, 2006).**
- d) **Appropriate training for leadership roles is a critical element in providing high quality early childhood programs, particularly as more complex, multi professional teams come together to provide more integrate programs ( Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2007; Corter et al., 2006).**
- e) **Research studies and policy reports are consistent in recommending a university degree with a concentration in Early Childhood Education for at least some staff working in a primary setting ( Mc Cain et al, 2007).**
- f) **Appropriate training for leadership is a critical element in providing high quality early childhood programs, particularly as more complex, multi-professional teams of staff come together to provide more integrated programs ( Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2007).**
- g) **The current split between teachers and child care workers will be rethought around a model of an integrated educator who employs a holistic pedagogical approach. When early childhood programs collaborate with other early childhood programs, the staff benefit from harmonization of professional education and development ( Colley, 2006; Corter et al., 2006).**

## **C. A Shared Vision**

- a) **Children's successful transitions from pre-schools to Kindergarten and/or Grade 1 are promoted when there is a strong and equal partnership between Primary education and early childhood programs ( OECD, 2006; Reynold and Temple, 2008).**

- b) **Working towards a strong and equal partnership between early childhood and Primary offers a more positive vision (Woodhead and Moss, 2007).**
- c) **Of equal concern, the relationship between pre-school and primary may be coordinated through “schoolifying” the pre-school. Working towards a strong and equal partnership offers a more positive vision ( Woodhead and Moss 2007).**
- d) **A thematic review by the OECD (2006) in 20 jurisdictions between 1998-2006 identified 8 policy elements associated with effective early childhood programs: (i) a systematic and integrated approach to early childhood education and care policy; (ii) a strong and equal partnership with the education system; (iii) an universal approach to access with particular attention to children in need of special support; (iv) substantial public investment in services and infrastructures; (v) a participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance; (vi) appropriate training and working conditions for staff in all forms of provision; (vii) systematic attention to data collection and monitoring; and (viii) a stable framework and long term agenda for research and evaluation.**

**D. A National Policy Framework**

- a) **All discussions point to the importance of developing a national policy on early childhood. Partnerships cannot work unless the respectful roles and responsibilities of the different actors are clearly specified, along with the lines of authority. An effective policy should be backed up by legislation ( UNESCO.,2005).**
- b) **Integrated programmes that combine health, nutrition and cognitive stimulation can significantly improve a child’s immediate well-being. As such, ECCE programmes are a powerful contributor to reducing poverty ( Siraj-Blatchwood 2009).**
- c) **A rigorous long term evaluation of early learning programmes in the US showed that children who were exposed to high quality ECCE programmes had higher rates of graduation, committed fewer criminal offences and had higher earnings at age 40 than children that did not attend ( Schweinhart et al, 2005).**
- e) **Recommendations call for the integration of specialized services for children and youth with clear alignments to early childhood programs and to the education system ( Boydell, Bullock and Goering 2009).**
- f) **To ensure inclusion of all families targeted, clinical services must be incorporated into the universal platform to address individual needs of children and families (Mc Cain et al., 2007).**
- g) **Investments in early childhood programs is essential because they are the vehicles to promote children’s rights to survival, development and early education. Two hundred million children around the world under age 5 do not develop adequately**

because they live in poverty and have poor health services, nutrition and care. Increased investment in early childhood programs could dramatically help these children (Walker et al 2007).

- h) There was wide consensus in the research literature which suggests that intervention during the early years can compensate for vulnerability and disadvantage regardless of underlying factors such as poverty, gender, race/ethnicity, caste or religion ( Education for All Global Report 2007).

## **E. Summary**

The selected directional themes emerged on the basis of a range of objective and subjective perceptions derived from the quantitative and qualitative data/information. To a great extent, there is wide agreement on the ultimate features of an effective seamless transition from ECCE to primary. It was based on the fact that the research is consistent in suggesting that a child's readiness to enter Grade 1 is the single and strongest predictor of success in school and eventual overall contribution to society. As such, the successful transition from ECCE to Primary is contingent on the degree of pedagogical and curriculum continuity during the process.

In the view of the respondents, organized and planned responses to these challenges will involve a fundamental rethinking of organizational and curriculum processes; building a network of institutional and community services and creating a leadership and accountability framework, that is focused on collaborative planning, partnerships and interdisciplinary teams.

The issue of curriculum and facilities coherence remained a central theme during the discussions; however, there was consensus that the overall operational framework has to be guided by clarity of vision, clearly stated goals and objectives, strategic leadership and meaningful engagement of all stakeholders, particularly parents and teachers. The underlying assumptions are: change management begins with a shared vision and a climate of readiness for change.

Finally, to a great extent, the selected directional themes are interdependent and represent an integrated approach for future planning. In addition, they are congruent with the elements of good practices that are included in the DAKAR 2000 Framework for Action. That framework is intended to reinforce the protection of the rights of children; it also suggests that effective transition programs "level the playing field". In their view, the core elements of effective transitions from ECCE to Primary are:

- a) Be appropriate to the child's age and not mere downward extensions of primary education;
- b) Be comprehensive, focusing on all of the child's needs and encompass health, nutrition and hygiene as well as cognitive and psycho-social development;

- c) **Include the education of parents and other care givers in better child care, building on traditional practices;**
- d) **Include the use of early childhood indicators.**

## **5. A FRAMEWORK FOR REFORM: BUILDING A COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHALLENGES**

The aforementioned observations and challenges represent a synthesis of ideas and perceptions gathered from the sample of internal and external stakeholders. Within the reality of the existing educational framework, policy directions and socio-economic circumstances of Trinidad and Tobago, the process was designed to identify and respond to the perceived factors that will contribute to the effective implementation of plans that will facilitate a smooth and seamless transition from ECCE to Primary.

While the research literature, and the majority of respondents supported the notion that a positive transitional experience from ECCE to Primary lays the important foundation for the success of early learners, based on the discussions and available data/information five major priority themes prevailed. First, there is the strong view that the fundamental goal of this seamless transition initiative must result in the improvement in the quality of educational experiences for the young learner.

Second, in spite of the perceived climate of fiscal restraint, part of the financial planning response to the achievement of the desired goal must be the tangible commitment by the government to provide strategic and targeted investments, in order to build the capacities and capabilities of the system to respond to the challenges, in an effective manner.

Third, it is imperative that the system build on the strengths and successes of the professional staff, rationalize existing staffing inequities, develop strategic alliances and partnerships and recognize the important role that parents play in supporting learning in the early years.

Fourth, this transformation agenda will require strategic leadership to create a climate for the development of a shared vision for a seamless transition from ECCE to Primary. This should occur within the context of child centred learning and an educational philosophy of a learning continuum.

Fifth, although the seamless transition from ECCE to Primary may be viewed as a learning issue, it has to be seen in the larger social context as one strategy for “leveling the playing field” by reducing systemic barriers that contribute to school failure. In effect, it is a social equity policy issue.

The selected directional themes reflect the need to reconcile five interrelated objectives of this agenda for reform: (i) institutional interdependence (ECCE/Primary) ; (ii) strategic leadership and improved collaboration to ensure that there are effective pathways for children from ECCE to Primary; (iii) a national policy framework that is applicable to all

ECCE providers; (iv) an integrated system that reinforces the concepts of inclusiveness, access and equality of opportunity; and (v) the commitment to institutionalize and support the development of a child centred harmonized curriculum, that is grounded in an educational philosophy of a learning continuum.

To a great extent the Proposed Recommended Actions are interrelated and interdependent. Taken together, they represent an integrated approach to future planning; they provide an overall direction for achieving the goal of a seamless transition from ECCE to Primary and a context in which other specific problems may be addressed. In essence, they are reflected in 3 Goals, 3 Strategies and 16 Proposed Recommended Actions, that are developed in support of three overarching goals:

- 1) **Continuum of Learning: Harmonization of the Curriculum.**
- 2) **A National Policy Framework.**
- 3) **An Integrated and Inclusive System.**

## 6. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

### A. Goal 1: Continuum of Learning: Harmonization Of The Curriculum

- i. **STRATEGY:** Mandate the joint collaborative leadership for the development of an aligned child centred developmentally appropriate curriculum for ECCE and Primary ( Infant 1).
- ii) **Recommended Actions**
  - 1) **A NEW LEARNING FRAMEWORK:** Within the context of an educational philosophy of a child centred learning continuum, clearly state the mission, goals and objectives of a seamless transition of children from ECCE to Primary.
  - 2) **DIFFERENTIATION AND COLLABORATION:** Establish a widely representative team (curriculum professionals, ECCE, Primary, parents) to review the current National ECCE Curriculum Guide and The Infant 1 Syllabus, and prepare a revised student centred harmonized curriculum, within the context of the educational philosophy of a learning continuum. The process should also include the review of Servol's SPICES (Social, Physical, Intellectual, Creative, Emotional and Spiritual) Curriculum Guide.
  - 3) **PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT:** In order to reach a consensus on the nature and scope of primary school readiness, the curriculum development project should also develop an early years assessment tool that incorporates holistic development domains (include the prior learning and care and dimensions of the ECCE curriculum) with the expectations of readiness of Infant 1 teachers.
  - 4) **NATIONAL STANDARDS:** In an effort to be part of the national system of education, the ECCE Division in collaboration with the Accreditation Council, should establish national standards for early learning.
  - 5) **SCIENCE PROJECTS:** As part of the seamless transition initiative, and in an effort to strengthen children early interest and introduction to the World of Science, the ECCE Division should work collaboratively with NIHERST to develop project based learning activities that will combine the acquisition of scientific and technological concepts. This will facilitate the development of inquiry processes and build awareness of the principles of science and technology at an early age.
  - 6) **TRANSITIONAL LEARNING CENTRES:** In an effort to ease the transition from ECCE to Primary, consideration should be given to the re-conceptualizing of Infant 1 classroom to include learning centres similar in scope of the ECCE settings. The implementation of this initiative requires additional staffing support to the Infant 1 teacher combined with the appropriate learning resources.



### **iii. Rationale**

Throughout the discussions, the majority of respondents echoed the urgent need for institutional transparency between ECCE and Primary. Parents were particularly critical of the differing interpretations of child readiness and the perceived ad hoc principles of exam based screening of the entry level students. As a result, they are strongly in favour of having a national consistent protocol for assessing readiness, that takes into consideration the importance of the holistic development of young children.

The majority of parents expressed concern and anxiety about the content and timing of the current tests. At the same time, they fully agree that some form of entry level assessment is required to assist the teacher in the design and delivery of quality learning experiences for the young child; however, in their view the assessment should also include elements of the holistic knowledge and skills that were developed at the ECCE centres. There was general agreement that improved and continuous communication between ECCE and Primary professionals may alleviate these concerns; however, they believed that strategic leadership by principals combined with mandated policies may be required.

In addition, the most common complaints from parents is the initial unwelcoming interaction with the Primary school; for the most part, it begins with the assumption that play based holistic development programmes at ECCE centres do not adequately prepare children for the educator directed learning requirements of Infant 1. In general, they strongly believed that the Principal has a critical leadership role to play in the successful implementation of strategies that will enhance the transition from ECCE to Primary. Frankly, if the Principals do not “buy in” to the concept, the traditional approaches and attitudes will prevail, as principals set the tone for the school and have the responsibility for assigning teachers.

Both the research and the respondents suggest that the effective and smooth transition from ECCE to Primary requires planned interventions. The INTO Consultative Report on the Conference on Transition to Primary (2008) makes these recommendations:

- That formal communication procedures be established between pre-schools and primary schools;
- That professional development opportunities be provided to all teachers (ECCE/Primary) on a regular basis in relation to the curriculum and methodology in the early years;
- That pre-school teachers be afforded opportunities to become familiar with the primary school curriculum and vice-versa;
- That guidelines be available to both pre-school and primary teachers in relation to transfer information;
- That information and opportunities for consultation be provide for all parents;
- That opportunities be available to for both ECCE and primary teachers to become familiar with each other’s curriculum and assessment processes;
- That there should be additional supports to assist young learners with special needs;

- That national guidelines be available to both ECCE and Primary with respect to policy on transition.

Finally, it is believed that equal opportunity and excellence are compromised when young children are not provided with clear pathways to learning success; it sets the stage very early in life for the development of alienation from school. In the end, the aligned curriculum reinforces the learning and care goals of a developmentally appropriate learning continuum, and acknowledges that care and learning in the early years are inseparable.

It is hypothesized that the aligned curriculum will not only enhance the pedagogical continuity between ECCE and Primary, it will also provide an opportunity for the development of a climate of collaboration and cooperation ; and, hopefully the eventual recognition and appreciation of the complementary roles played by ECCE and primary teachers in the care, education and development of the young learner.

In developing scientific and technologically based knowledge and skills during the early years, children would begin to see science and technology in the broader social and economic contexts. In the long run, these project based activities should be integrated within the current or revised harmonized curriculum and be consistent with the goals of the current Primary school science syllabus. This initiative will reinforce the view that early learning standards should specify developmental expectations across all domains of the child's learning and development.

It is clear that this important goal of introducing planned scientific and technological concepts in the early learning curriculum will require strategic investments for the training of teachers and the supporting learning infrastructures.

In addition to the above observations from the respondents the research evidence is also conclusive in their report of the contribution that a common or coherent curriculum plays in the delivery of quality learning experiences for the young child.

Refer to the Section 4: Situation Analysis: Summary of Related Research and Best Practices.

## **B. Goal 2: A National Policy Framework**

- i. **STRATEGY:** Revise or re-affirm the Vision and Mission of an Early Learning Framework to guide the transformational process to achieve the goal of a seamless transition from ECCE to Primary education.
- ii. **Recommended Actions**
  - 1) **LEARNING RENEWAL:** Within the context of an educational philosophy of a child centred learning continuum, assign the leadership responsibility to the ECCE

**Division** to set in motion a planned collaborative process to either re-affirm' or revise the existing policy framework on Early Learning. It should be founded on the principles of: a shared vision, access and equality of opportunity, excellence and quality in the delivery of child centred learning and inter-institutional collaboration ( ECCE/Primary). Perhaps, it may simply require a slight modification of the existing Vision.

- 2) **QUALITY ASSURANCE:** In recognition of the fact that teachers are at the core of the quality dimension for the successful achievement of the goals of a seamless transition from ECCE to Primary, the Ministry of Education should designate the leadership, and establish the formal structures and processes for addressing these critical human resource development and related issues:
  - Build on the Equivalency Rating System to rationalize the perceived staffing and qualification inequities between ECCE professional staff and Infant 1 teachers, including the Conditions of Service;
  - Review the extent to which the current staffs have the leadership and instructional capacities and capabilities to meet the desired student centred learning and continuum goals and the expectations of a quality and seamless transition from ECCE to Primary;
  - In collaboration with the Universities, explore the possibilities of: the development of a model for the joint training of ECCE and Infant 1 teachers; and the development on a prioritized basis targeted and joint continuous professional development programmes for ECCE and Infant 1 teachers;
  - Use evidenced based “best practices,” and within the limits of affordability, establish guidelines and appropriate quality standards for child staff ratios and space requirements for ECCE centres and Infant 1 Learning centres.
- 3) **SYSTEM-WIDE APPLICATION OF STANDARDS FOR REGULATING EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES:** In the interest of creating a National System for Early learners, and in cooperation with all stakeholders, set mutually agreed upon targets to ensure that all ECCE providers operate within the approved or amended regulatory standards.
- 4) **FORMALIZED COLLABORATIVE STRUCTURES:** In order to facilitate the development of national guidelines for transitional practices that are congruent with the educational policy of a learning continuum, establish joint accountability structures and processes that encourage and facilitate improved collaboration between administrators and teaching staffs of ECCE and Primary. This should include the formal establishment of Parent Advisory Committees to provide input to the planning and development of transitional practices.

- 5) **IMPROVED PUBLIC AWARENESS:** As part of a public relations and communication strategy, expand opportunities for the public to be informed about the value and importance of quality early learning, by creating for radio and TV a series of informative modules focusing on the contribution that holistic development makes to the readiness for Primary school and future learning. In doing so, national awareness will be enhanced with respect to the merits of the holistic development of the early learner.
- 6) **THE NATIONAL COUNCIL:** Re-establish the National Council on Early Child Care and Education to provide national leadership, policy advice and advocacy for the Early Learning Strategy. Consider the expansion of the committee to include the Special Advisor to the Prime Minister on Children.

### **iii. Rationale**

In spite of the many structural, attitudinal and historic barriers, the success of this convergence exercise of two phases of the learning continuum requires the forging of effective relationships among key partners (ECCC/Infant 1 teachers and Parents). It is ironic to note that the majority of the respondents saw the importance and value of institutional collaboration as a key factor in charting clearer pathways for ECCE children; moreover, to a great extent, the culture continues to perpetuate the traditional approaches. In light of this, it stands to reason that mandated structures with the appropriate accountability framework should be in place.

During the consultative process, the majority of the respondents and particularly parents signaled the need for the distribution of a clearly stated vision and objectives of a seamless transition from ECCE to Primary. In their view, the public policy statement will not only provide clear expectations for the system, but will also serve as a powerful symbol of government's tangible support and commitment. It is believed that the lack of adequate accountability and policy inconsistency lend itself to a fragmented system, in a climate of competing and conflicting priorities.

This approach to implementation is guided by two principles: (i) structural processes and policies must be in place to reinforce the shared values of co-determination and equal partnership; (ii) strategic policy leadership will create the required climate to arrive at a shared vision. These principles are based on the assumption that collaboration/cooperation will not achieve the desired results if the respective roles and responsibilities of the different partners are not clearly defined, along with lines of authority.

In essence, the National policy framework is designed to provide learning standards for the child centred learning environment; the rationalization of staffing and leadership expectations, including best practices on staff to child ratios and appropriate qualifications; the conditions for integrating health, nutrition and safety issues within the operational framework; structures for collaborative relationships with parents; systems and practices that monitor quality; and the required leadership for the effective and efficient implementation of transitional plans. In practice, the system should be governed

by legislation and regulations. The legislation should provide the required licensing and monitoring and the regulations should set the operational standards.

Fundamentally, the literature suggests that there are five elements that successful National policy frameworks share: (i) engagement of parents; (ii) alignment of early learning policies with national sectoral development policies; (iii) action plans that facilitate implementation by identifying the accountability framework for getting the job done; (iv) strategic use of available resources; and (v) a sound educational policy that places the child at the centre (UNESCO, 2007).

### **C. Goal 3: An Integrated and Inclusive System**

#### **i. STRATEGY: Harmonized Professional Services for Children with Special Needs.**

#### **ii) Recommended Actions**

- 1) ENHANCED ACCESS TO CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: Reduce barriers facing students and families of children with special needs by exploring these opportunities:**
  - Review the HUB Model as proposed in the Seamless Education System Report (2008), and evaluate whether it can be adapted to operate in each region as a focal point for the delivery of timely access of integrated professional services to early learners and families, across the range of varied needs.
  - Consider an adaptation of the existing Model of the Interdisciplinary Child Centre Project of the Ministry Of Health.
  - In order to promote national consistency in the response to the unique learning and developmental needs of early learners, and to ensure that the goal of “inclusiveness” is achieved, the Ministry of Education should strengthen the human resource capabilities at District Offices. They can then become the focal point for timely access and delivery of specialized services to early learners. Rather than re-invent the wheel, modification of one of the existing models may suffice.
- 2) POLICY COHERENCE: Establish an Inter-ministerial Committee (Education, People and Social Development and Health) to provide national coordination of policies that affect early learners; it represents the symbolic recognition of the holistic development of the young learner.**
- 3) NEW COUNCIL: Similar to the National Council On ECCE, establish a National Council For Children With Special Needs to provide leadership, advise and**

**advocacy for an integrated and responsive approach to the delivery of quality programmes and services to children with special needs.**

### **iii. Rationale**

**The majority of respondents had concern about the timely availability of professional services and support for the “special need” students. They expressed the view that the implementation of a seamless system from ECCE to Primary must include opportunities for special need students to maximize their capabilities, in a safe and healthy environment.**

**Fundamentally, inclusiveness requires that specialized instruction and services and the appropriate supportive infrastructures must be provided to meet the range of special need problems (chronic health, speech and language, behavioural/emotional, and children who are living in high risk family environments). From their perspective, specialized services were often delayed, or unavailable, resulting in added personal stress to parents. The current fragmented system accounts for many of the problems; in addition, the main barriers appear to be scarce resources and the lack of available professional resources. For the most part, there is a gap between the decision making on the nature and scope of the special need of the child and the implementation of concrete plans.**

**Charles and Williams (2007) capture the situation in their regional study. According to them, the region is severely deficient in developmental monitoring. The net result is that children with developmental delays- physical, behavioural, social, emotional, sensory, communication as well as cognitive – are not systematically identified until they are well past the age of 5. At the same time, there is conclusive evidence to suggest that timely and effective early intervention is an effective strategy for assisting disadvantaged children to break out of the intergenerational cycle of poverty.**

**Based on the review of the perceived current situation, the challenges can be classified under these themes: lack of dedicated financial and human resources; valid data/information that documents the most common special needs; timely availability of specialized services to ensure inclusiveness; informational and special supports to parents or care givers and the recognition of the important relationship between socio-economic status and the prevalence of some categories of special needs.**

**One critical issue that the system faces is a mutually agreed definition of the “special need student”. In the literature, there is a wide range of definitions of children with special needs. On the one hand, special educational needs (SEN) has a legal definition; it refers to children who have learning difficulties, or disabilities that make it harder for them to learn or access education with success. On the other hand, there are another set of definitions that emphasize the services or care that a child needs to support his or her positive development. For example as defined by the Centre of Excellence for Children With Special Needs, the term encompasses all children and adolescents who require additional public or private resources beyond those normally required to support healthy development (OECD 2003). Traditionally, these definitions refer to the range of medical, behavioural, physical, developmental and learning deficits.**

Locally, this definitional complexity is further compounded by the extent to which systematic socio-economic realities influence the healthy development and educational success of the early learner. The significance of the relationship between the special need student and socio-economic factors is outlined in the OECD Report on Overcoming School Failure (2010). From their analysis, in all OECD countries, there is a significant relationship between student performance and family socio-economic background. PISA shows that for each and every participating country, that students with lower socio-economic status have weaker literacy and numeracy skills on average than those from higher socio-economic backgrounds.

Focussing on the traditional one dimensional definition of special needs fails to recognize the social barriers that compromise the concepts of equity and equality of opportunity for the early learner. A formal response to this complexity requires a systematic framework for establishing national wide benchmarks for core competencies and the early identification of special needs. As noted in the (OECD 2010 Report) equity in education demands that students' expected learning outcomes should depend only on their effort and capacity, and not on considerations over which they have no influence (gender, ethnic, religion, or family's socio-economic level. In reality a seamless transition from ECCE to Primary is not just a question of fairness, there are also compelling socio-economic reasons.

Again, the respondents are of the view that a comprehensive integrated system of timely access to early identification and interventions for early learners reinforce the concept of inclusiveness. Moreover, it is believed that to address the education and socio-economic factors that impact on access and equality of opportunity opportunities, a coordinated network of integrated services has the potential of reducing systemic barriers that may deny some early learners the opportunity of maximizing their potential. In fact, the research evidence is conclusive in its view that integrated programmes that combine health, nutrition and cognitive stimulation can significantly improve a child's immediate well-being.

Traditionally, the research literature tends to define integration as a process of creating a network of services that work together. In doing so, effectiveness is improved and costs reduced. Applied to Early learning, it is related to a coordinated policy for young children through the formation of integrated networks among such sectors as social welfare, school system labour and health services (OECD, 1998, 2001).

To that end, inter-ministerial coordination ensures policy coherence, or seamlessness. Symbolically, an integrated approach recognizes that health, nutrition, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, physical development are all integrated in the young child's life (holistic development). It is hypothesized that: when Early learning is conceptualized at the policy levels, the more likely that national policies and administrative structures will be in place to facilitate the desired transition from ECCE to Primary.

The recommended solutions are built on two principles included in the (Seamless Education System Project Report, 2008). As an ECCE HUB in the community such

centres' responsibilities will include coordinating services, and providing technical support to the registered centres assigned to it. In addition, at the core of the government's vision for reform is the notion that all ECCE centres must be deeply rooted in, and supported by, the community.

Another side of the integrated dimension is the long term economic benefits that is accrued to investments in Early learning. James Butler Jones, the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada (2009) asserts that for every dollar spent in ensuring a healthy start in early years will reduce the long term social costs associated with health care, addictions, crime unemployment and welfare.

Research on the public and private returns on early learning has also consistently reported that investing in quality early learning programmes has significant long term benefits as expressed in savings in social costs. For example, the longitudinal High Scope Perry study in the US reported that children who were exposed to high quality Early learning programmes had high rates of graduation, committed fewer criminal offences and had higher earning at age 40 than children that did not attend. In tracking the cost benefits, they calculated that there was a savings of \$17 in health, justice and welfare for every 1\$ spent on early childhood ( Schweinhart et al, 2005).

Belfield and Levin (2007) analysis of a large body of research concludes that the economic and social consequences of inadequate education during early development lead to significant social and economic costs. They point out that school failure translates in lower incomes, and therefore reduced tax revenues, but also higher expenditures in public services, such as health care and public assistance.

This point is also corroborated by economic researcher and Nobel prize winner John Heckman (2004) who has demonstrated that the return on the public investment in quality early learning programmes is substantial. As Mc Cain (2007) states, this is an area where scientists and economics agree, no one can match the dividends that early learning delivers.

In the collective view of the respondents, because high quality early learning programmes and services can mediate some of the negative effects of early learners from socio-economic and disadvantaged circumstances, serious consideration should be given to this issue. Therefore, a focused and systematic plan will be required to address the range of these issues: coordinated planning; an inter-disciplinary delivery model; training and development of an effective mix of professionals and para-professionals, and in spite of the logistical problems, professional services should be made available to rural and at risk communities.

In conclusion, access to quality educational and developmental to all early learners, including special needs students, is a basic human right. The right to access with success is not exclusively a financial concern, it is intimately linked to social and economic realities. As such, meeting the range of learning and developmental needs of the special need child must be seen in the larger socio-economic context of improving the quality of life for all learners.



## **7. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

**The proposed recommendations emerged from a range of perceptions that were derived from qualitative and quantitative data/information. They provide an opportunity to think and act strategically about effective collaboration in response to the issues, challenges and opportunities. In essence, the Report is designed to facilitate collective action in the planning and implementing of strategies that will result in a smooth and seamless transition from ECCE to Primary.**

**Philosophically, the proposed recommendations are grounded in the theory that universal access to quality early learning isn't just good education policy; it makes good economic sense. At the outset, it must also be emphasized that unless teachers ( ECCE/Primary) are actively involved in policy development and feel a sense of ownership, it is unlikely that substantial changes will be successfully implemented ( OECD 2005).**

**The response to these directional themes has implications for both providers and the policy directions of the Ministry of Education; in fact, a response to the identified challenges that will institutionalize practices to achieve the goal of a seamless transition from ECCE to Primary, will most likely result in fundamental changes in the way in which early learners progress through the continuum to the primary school.**

**In reality, there is a perception that because of historic vested interests, attempts to establish smooth pathways for early learners appear to have run the risks of compromising the special and unique identities of each sector ( ECCE/Primary). Therefore, it appears that strategic policy leadership, combined with tangible commitment, are required to create a team building climate that will mutually develop a shared vision of co-determination, and in the process achieve a balanced approach to perceived competing demands.**

**The aligned curriculum is the driving force of this learning paradigm shift. There is general acceptance of the theory that effective curriculum is aligned with standards. The vision of a common curriculum that blends the principles of the National Curriculum Guide and the Infant 1 syllabus will not only create a coherent curriculum between ECCE and Primary, it will also reduce systemic barriers that tend to compromise the concept of inclusiveness. Ashton and Pujadas (2004) put the issue in context with the observation that seamlessness has an equity dimension and the challenge cannot be effectively addressed without clear guidance from the policy level.**

**In creating the curriculum, the developers should be mindful of the three critical problems with respect to the effectiveness of curricula in early childhood programmes. First, there is a lack of clarity about the distinctions between curriculum and pedagogy. Second, there is lack of comparative effective data on specific curriculum. Third, there is the difficulty of evaluating curriculum effectiveness given its interaction with other social, economic and educational factors ( Kagan et al., 2006). Moreover, the process must recognize the fact that quality and effective pedagogical and assessment strategies rely, to a great extent, on a combination of teachers' competence, experience levels and academic qualifications.**

**On a positive note, favourable conditions currently exist for the effective and efficient implementation of plans to achieve the goal of a smooth and seamless transition from ECCE to Primary. First, the directional themes are congruent with the Ministry of Education mission to enhance the education system through: (i) implementing student centred, high quality curriculum; (ii) strengthening strategic alliances; and (iii) supporting, cultivating and building the capacity of staff.**

**Second, the Ministry of Education, in keeping with its mandate to achieve the goal of Universal access to quality ECCE Services by 2012, has aligned these key activities in support of this Vision:**

- **The development of a White Paper on ECCE Standards to regulate and standardize Early Childhood services (2005);**
- **The development of a National Early Childhood Care and Education Curriculum Guide (2005);**
- **The Implementation of a new Equivalency Rating System that was applied to staff in the newly constructed ECCE centres,**

**Third, to a great extent, the identified themes and proposed responses are congruent with the Global Monitoring Report (2007) summary of successful initiatives by countries to improve access to quality programmes and services to early learners:**

- **Accord more attention to Early Learning policy;**
- **Follow a holistic approach to ECCE;**
- **Integrate Early Learning into national policy;**
- **Identify a Ministry to coordinate Early Learning programmes and services;**
- **Regulate Early Learning standards and quality;**
- **Increase funding to Early Learning initiatives;**
- **Target the most vulnerable and excluded children;**
- **Improve the monitoring of ECCE and its effect on primary school success.**
- **Implementing a student centred, high quality curriculum;**
- **Strengthening strategic alliances;**
- **Supporting, cultivating and building the capacity of staff.**

**Finally, the proposed recommended actions and directional themes are not new; they are also reflected in one local and regional Report. The OAS Hemispheric ECCE Report (2004) which reviewed the factors that contributed to school failure in Trinidad and Tobago, recommended these strategies:**

- **An integrated approach to meeting the developmental and learning needs of young children;**
- **Implementation of quality standards;**
- **A coherent training system;**
- **Standards for teacher preparation and on-going professional development;**
- **Creating stronger linkages between pre-school and primary;**

- **Placing competent trained early childhood teachers in infant classes;**
- **Development of an integrated curriculum;**
- **All primary teachers should be trained in teaching reading and early childhood development.**

**Regionally Charles and Williams (2006) made the following policy and programmatic responses to the identified issues in the CARICOM States:**

- **Legislative framework for coordinated provision of services and monitoring of standards;**
- **Equitable access to quality provisions for a large percentage of at risk children;**
- **Education and training for all providers;**
- **Appropriate curriculum development;**
- **Increased parent, community and media awareness and involvement;**
- **Increased research to inform the development of the sector.**

**As referenced above, some of the recommended actions are not new; many have been proposed before but never implemented. If the Ministry of Education plans to resolve the challenges that are outlined in the Report, a strategic leader and/or a mandated structure must be established to act as the driving force for the implementation processes.**

**This Report outlines a framework for action; it represents a road map for change. The proposed recommended actions are future oriented. They essentially deal with transformational change; the social, economic and learning changes that will influence the quality of learning experiences for the early learner; the opportunities that these changes suggest; and the strategic and operational changes that will be required to capitalize on the opportunities. There is no doubt that there are significant opportunities and challenges that confront the implementation of the recommended actions; however, successful achievement is possible with an open and transparent process, a strong commitment to the change, co-determination and strategic leadership.**

**The research evidence suggests that the impact of not addressing this issue of transition from ECCE, in a planned way, has significant negative consequences. In the short term, the most visible effects are school failure and the emerging alienation from school; in the longer term, the impacts are reflected in a cycle of deviant behaviours, crime and generational cycle of poverty.**

## **8. A PROPOSED NEXT STEP**

**There are a range of pressures and competing demands on the current educational system in Trinidad and Tobago. Although the implementation of plans to achieve a smooth and seamless transition from ECCE to Primary face many challenges, it is not however, a rationale for maintaining the status quo. The status quo simply perpetuates a system that is contrary to the goals of equity of access with success, inclusiveness and equality of opportunity.**

**The recommended actions provide a starting point for a managed transformational change process. In moving forward, it is important to build on the existing strengths of the ECCE Division, provide appropriate strategic investments and designate implementation leadership. Traditionally, implementation is the “Achilles heel” of realizing outcomes of recommendations made in Reports. As a result they stay on the shelf. The failure is due, in part, to the lack of well defined accountability framework with the associated structures and processes.**

**In my view, a significant amount of time, planning and focused effort will be required to plan and implement the recommendations in an effective and efficient manner. Given the current demands, the nature and scope of the time and effort appear to be beyond what may be reasonably expected of the ECCE Division. For this reason, I am making the following recommendation:**

**THAT the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the current seamless IADB Project, consider the appointment of a time based consultant/facilitator to guide the implementation of the proposed recommended actions.**

**In addition, please refer to Appendix D and E for Action Plans.**

## APPENDIX A

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## **APPENDIX B:**

### **LIST OF PERSONS INTERVIEWED AND INSTITUTIONS VISITED**

1. **Maurice Chin Aleong, Project Coordinator, Seamless Education System, Ministry of Education, Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.**
2. **Sharon Mangroo, Seamless Education System Project Unit, Ministry of Education, Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.**
3. **Jennifer Hussain, SES Unit.**
4. **Ann Thornhill, Director ECCE Division, Ministry of Education, Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.**
5. **Anastasia Coward-Rose, Assistant Director, ECCE Division, Ministry of Education, Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.**
6. **Jacqueline James- Wall, Student Support Services.**
7. **Gaynelle Holdip, CPDD.**
8. **Lisa Henry David, EPD.**
9. **Parents: Goryse Thomas Phillip; Asha Vishnu-Mahabir; Gail Honore; Philip mings; S. Inniss; Barbara Ince; Abigail Ramnath Ramsingh; Aneesa Bharath; Alvin Pierre/ Beverley Ann Pierre.**
10. **Sabeerah Abdul-Majied, Lecturer, ECCE, UWI.**
11. **Lesleann Whiteman, ECCE Coordinator, Early Children Training and Research Centre, UWI Open Campus.**
12. **Zita Wright, ECCE Lecturer, University of Trinidad and Tobago.**
13. **Carol Logie, Lecturer Faculty of Humanities and Education, UWI.**
14. **Dianne Phillip, Centre Supervisor, Family Development and Children's Research Centre, UWI.**
15. **Sherrine Khan, Coordinator Curriculum Officer, RCLRC.**
16. **Curriculum Officers at the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre.**
17. **Charlene Ross-Quamina, Curriculum Coordinator, ECCE Division.**

18. **Curriculum Officers, ECCE Division:** Cheryle Ralph; Alicia Gayah-Batchasingh; Maria Mervyn; Judith Joseph- Mc. Nicolls; Kamini Ramnanan; Adita Maharaj.
19. Nicole Knights, Quality Assurance Coordinator, ECCE Division.
20. **Quality Assurance Officers ECCE Division:** Adella Silochan; Shalini Garib; Sarah Suchit; Roger Romain; Ayinka Robinson; Julia Ribeiro; Nigel Reid; Shade Richardson; Ryan Potts; Koya Ryan; Akilah Lamsee.
21. James Sullivan, Administrative Coordinator, ECCE Division,
22. Clarence Leach, Family Community Support Coordinator ECCE Division.
23. **Family Community Support Officers ECCE Division:** Betty Ann Maloney; Akena Solomon; Leston Tobias; Annette Beharry; Sharon King; sherlana Langley-John; Kervel Baird.
24. Steve Williams, Student Support Services, ECCE Division.
25. Cheryle Anne Grant, Student Support Services, ECCE Division.
26. Lou Anne Francis, Principal, St. Augustine Government Primary.
27. L. Garcia, Principal, La Puerta Government Primary.
28. G. Yorke, Principal Maloney Government Primary.
29. C. Garcia, Vice-Principal Maloney Government Primary.
30. Sharon Ramnath, Infant 1 Maloney Government Primary.
31. Andrew Phillip, Infant 1, Maloney Government Primary.
32. Arlene Moore, Infant 1, Maloney Government Primary.
33. Nickisha Bruno, Infant 1 Maloney Government Primary.
34. Floyd Dick, Infant 1, Maloney Government Primary.
35. Alma Persad, Administrator, St. Augustine South Government ECCE Centre.
36. Judith Celestin, Administrator, El Socorro South Government ECCE Centre.
37. Sandra Chan Chow, Administrator, Santa Rosa Government ECCE Centre.
38. Homaida Mohammed, Administrator, San Pedro Government ECCE Centre.

39. Vernice Alexander, Administrator, Sangre Grande Government ECCE Centre.
40. Dixie Ann Harris, Administrator, La Puerta Government ECCE Centre.
41. Sharon Ferreira-Riley, Administrator, Valsayn Government ECCE Centre.
42. Annabelle Hodge, Administrator, St. Sylvan Anglican ECCE Centre.
43. Jeanette Johnson, Administrator, Mayaro Government ECCE Centre.
44. Petronilla George, Administrator, Petit Valley Government ECCE Centre.
45. Senita Serramlal, Administrator, Ortoire R.C ECCE Centre.
46. Karen Dalrymple, Administrator, El Socorro Government ECCE Centre.
47. Maria Mc Gregor, Administrator, Santa Flora Government ECCE Centre.
48. Bernadette Arvelay, Administrator, Salybia Government ECCE Centre.
49. Margaretta Jones, Strange Village Government ECCE Centre.
50. Elizabeth Smart, North Trace Government ECCE Centre.
51. Patricia Layne-Kirk, Lopinot Government ECCE Centre.
52. Chacieva, Mulrain, Maloney Government ECCE Centre.
53. Shenada Lai Fook, Maloney Government ECCE Centre.
54. Neisha Rambarack, Maloney Government ECCE Centre.
55. Lystra Joseph Tuite, El Socorro Government ECCE Centre.
56. Nathalie Searles, El Socorro Government ECCE Centre.
57. Lystra Joseph Tuitt, El Socorro Government ECCE Centre
58. Bernadette Sims, Monroe Government ECCE Centre.
59. Shireen Cadir-Abdul, La Puerta Government ECCE Centre.
60. Judith Pickering, Morvant ECCE Centre.
61. School Supervisors: Nicholson Sookhoo; Latiform Hosein; Robert Fortune; Rita Dillon; Osborne Plaza Wilson; Margaret Barker Caesar; Ivy Snaggs.

**62. Elinore King, Chief Educator Coordinator, Tobago.**

**63. Ronald Duke, Principal Buccoo Primary, Tobago.**

**64. Jenifer Paul, Head Teacher, Pre-School, Tobago.**

**65. Leslie H. Morris, ECCE Intervention Coordinator, Tobago.**

**66. Tricia Duncan, Teacher Pre-School, Tobago.**

**67. Evelyn James, Facilitator, ECCE, Tobago.**

**68. Vie Hamilton Milly, Teacher Pre-School, Tobago.**

**69. Verlana Garcia, OJT Classroom Assistant, Tobago.**

## **APPENDIX C**

### **INTERIM ACTION PLAN: IMMEDIATE INITIATIVES TO BE UNDERTAKEN BY THE ECCE DIVISION**

The purpose of this action plan is to highlight some activities that can be carried out by the ECCE Division within the sphere of its influence and accountability. In principle, these plans are to be aligned with the Vision and Mission, the proposed recommended actions within the Report, and be based on the identification of results driven outcomes designed to accomplish the following goal:

- Foster within the ECCE Division a culture of accountability and shared commitment to the implementation of strategies to achieve the goal of a smooth and seamless transition from ECCE to Primary.

#### **ISSUE 1**

Clarify and communicate to stakeholders the Vision of an early learning system that is grounded in a child centred educational philosophy of the continuum of learning.

#### **ACTIONS/STRATEGIES**

- Discussions among leadership staff to arrive at a consensus on mutually agreed expectations on the operational factors that will contribute to the implementation of effective strategies to achieve the goal of a seamless transition from ECCE to Primary..
- Assess the extent to which the current Vision and Mission is congruent with the desired expectations of an educational philosophy of a continuum of learning.
- Implement team building opportunities and processes that create a cultural operational shift from single accountability to shared accountability ( co-determination).
- Build a climate of ownership for an agreed upon implementation plan.

#### **INDICATORS OF PROGRESS/OUTCOMES**

- Shared commitment to common goals.
- Identification of change management champion for the Division.
- The establishment of multi-disciplinary teams for implementation of actions that fall within the Divisions' sphere of accountability.
- Alignment of resources with the implementation strategies.
- Prepare for distribution a clear statement of the early learning Vision and the planned processes for implementing the proposed recommended actions.

## **ISSUE 2**

**Enhance and strengthen partnership with key internal and external stakeholders to facilitate the effective and efficient implementation of the proposed recommended action.**

### **ACTIONS/STRATEGIES:**

- **Explore opportunities for joint collaborative meetings between ECCE, Primary educators and parents.**
- **Define the Divisional expectations for establishing a forum for collaborative planning with key stakeholders.**
- **Discuss the steps and decision-making processes that will achieve the goal of co-determination.**
- **Develop a process for obtaining input and approval for formal collaborative structures from senior leadership at the Ministry of Education.**
- **Identify the opportunities and challenges of aligning the ECCE curriculum with the Infant 1 syllabus.**
- **Review the feasibility of adapting either the HUB model, or the Interdisciplinary Child Centre Project of the Ministry of Health as the delivery mechanism for providing specialized services to special need learners.**
- **Develop a planned implementation agenda for discussions with stakeholders.**
- **Schedule ongoing informal and formal discussions with stakeholders to share research and “best practices” related to achieving the goal of a smooth transition from ECCE to Primary.**
- **Initiate discussions between ECCE curriculum officers and the curriculum officers at the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre to explore the best way forward for approaching the alignment of the ECCE Curriculum Guide with the Infant 1 syllabus.**

### **INDICATORS OF PROGRESS/OUTCOMES:**

- **Prepare and approve an ECCE Division Position Paper on the principles that should guide the collaborative processes of co-determination.**
- **Designate individual/group responsibility for establishing meetings with the key stakeholders.**
- **Prepare and distribute a document that summarizes “best practices” guidelines that enhance a smooth transition from ECCE to Primary.**
- **Establish a working group to discuss with NIHERST the co-development of Science and Technology projects for early learners.**
- **Initiate discussions with the University of the West Indies (UWI) and the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) to discuss the development of ongoing and targeted professional development opportunities for ECCE staff, Infant 1 teachers and administrators.**
- **Explore opportunities for establishing parent advisory councils for each ECCE center.**



- Create formal collaborative structures for to enable joint problem solving and improved communication with stakeholders.

### **ISSUE 3**

Create an organizational structure that will facilitate seamlessness and reinforce the effective implementation of the proposed recommendations.

#### **ACTIONS/STRATEGIES:**

- Review current administrative and leadership responsibilities.
- Identify the required administrative infrastructures and leadership skills that will be required to support the effective implementation of the proposed recommendations.
- Assess readiness for transformational change.
- Develop annual work plans with goals and objectives that link responsibilities with the agreed upon requirements for addressing the proposed recommendations.
- Define the leadership and team expectations among Divisional administrators.
- Review an update current operational and management priorities and align them with agreed upon plans for the implementation of a seamless transition from ECCE to Primary.
- Identify key performance indicators for monitoring and assessing the extent to which planned actions are being achieved.
- Identify and prioritize resource requirements for the implementation of proposed recommendations.
- Develop priority plans for the implementation of the proposed recommendations.

#### **INDICATORS OF PROGRESS/OUTCOMES:**

- Resource allocation is linked to the goal of achieving a smooth and seamless access from ECCE to Primary.
- Mutual agreement on Divisional responsibilities related to the implementation of the recommended actions.
- Confirm and communicate roles and responsibilities to stakeholders.
- Shared leadership roles and responsibilities for action items.
- Creation of cross functional teams.
- A well defined protocol for information sharing among divisional leaders.
- Resource allocation congruent with agreed upon implementation plans.
- Identify the core areas of service that will reinforce the implementation of proposed recommended actions.
- Identify the professional needs for leadership training.

## **APPENDIX D**

### **IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

#### **RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:**

The recommended actions are presented in 3 broad areas:

- **Harmonization Of The Curriculum;**
- **A National Policy Framework;**
- **An Integrated and Inclusive System.**

They represent a broad policy framework to guide the implementation of plans to achieve the goal of a smooth and seamless transition from ECCE to Primary. The following outlines Short and Medium Term Actions.

#### **A. SHORT-TERM (1 – 2YEARS)**

- i. **Publish and distribute a statement of the Vision, goals and objectives for a smooth and seamless transition from ECCE to Primary.**
- ii. **Designate the leadership for managing the process for developing a harmonized curriculum between ECCE and Primary.**
- iii. **Establish a representative curriculum team, including parents, to undertake the task of developing the harmonized curriculum.**
- iv. **Establish clear guidelines, timeframes and an accountability framework for accomplishing the task of preparing a harmonized curriculum between ECCE and Primary.**
- v. **Allocate strategic resources to support the curriculum development process.**
- vi. **Establish formal structures that will promote improved communication and collaboration between ECCE and Primary school staffs.**
- vii. **Prepare and publish “best practices” transitional practices for distribution to ECCE Centres, Primary schools and parents.**
- viii. **Establish a joint partnership agreement with NIHERST to promote and develop Science and Technology projects for early learners.**
- ix. **Analyse the organizational capacity of the current staff to deliver child centred early learning curriculum, within the context of an educational philosophy of a continuum of learning.**

- x. **Explore with the Universities the possibilities of developing and delivering joint professional development courses/workshops for ECCE, Infant 1 and Principals.**
- xi. **Reconstitute the National Council for Early Childhood.**
- xii. **Undertake an economic impact analysis of creating learning centres within Infant 1 classrooms.**
- xiii. **Review the feasibility of adopting either the HUB model or the Interdisciplinary Child Centre Project of the Ministry of Health for the delivery of specialized services for young children with special needs.**

**B. LONGER TERM ( 3-5 Years)**

- i. **Develop and implement a human resource development plan that rationalizes the Conditions of Service for ECCE and Infant 1 teachers.**
- ii. **Consult with the Universities on the feasibility of developing a joint degree program for ECCE and Infant 1 teachers.**
- iii. **Undertake a comprehensive analysis of the facilities and learning infrastructures that will be required to implement a student centred harmonized developmentally appropriate curriculum.**
- iv. **Allocate a 3 year budget plan for supporting strategic initiatives associated with the implementation of seamless transition activities between ECCE and Primary.**
- v. **Assess the impacts of applying the regulatory and licensing framework to all ECCE providers.**
- vi. **Undertake the development of a Public Awareness Programme extolling the merits of quality learning and care experiences for young children.**
- vii. **Establish an Inter-ministerial Committee to ensure policy coherence among education and related child care programmes.**