

Objectives

The major objectives of the strategies outlined for early childhood education are as follows:

- To provide appropriate training and education for all parents and caregivers of infants from birth to five years old.
- To provide appropriate education for all children between the ages of 3 to 5 years.
- To strengthen the partnership between the private sector, non-governmental organisations and the public sector in providing education at this level on a more equitable basis.
- To improve the quality of early childhood education, especially in pre-schools that cater to children from poor circumstances.

General Philosophy

Early childhood education is conceived as education to foster and nurture the cognitive, social, emotional, moral and physical development of young children. It is education to assist in their developmental levels as well as to promote their readiness to enter the formal school system. The provision of early childhood education must be particularly sensitive to socio-economic inequities since some types of early intervention and stimulation could arrest and probably reverse conditions with far reaching adverse effects. Because of this strong preventative aspect, early childhood education can be the most effective component of social compensatory programmes.

Early childhood education also provides the first point of interaction between the child, the home and the school. It is this area that mental stimulation of the child as a member of the wider community begins. Early childhood education must, therefore, begin the process of developing children in the OECS as Caribbean persons through their awareness of their identity with their community and country and the wider Caribbean.

The focus of early childhood education must be on readiness and the exploration of the physical and social environment through play and a wide variety of concrete experiences associated with language and number development. Health and nutrition are also vital elements.

While there is a strong custodial element related to the intense demand for the provision of pre-schools, new research on the development of the brain clearly indicate that exposure of young children to a rich environment is critical to their cognitive growth. In addition, exposure to

a safe, secure and caring environment is vital to the subsequent emotional health of children. Both the content and the methodology of delivery of education at this level are of critical importance.