

Guidance for the use of the *OMEP Environmental Rating Scale for Sustainable Development in Early Childhood* (ERS-SDEC)

Background

The OMEP ERS-SDEC applies the same rating procedures as the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised* (ECERS-R) (Harms, Clifford and Cryer, 1998) and - *Extension* (ECERS-E) (Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2003)¹ instruments. In many research contexts the ERS-SDEC may therefore be applied conveniently alongside these more elaborate and comprehensive quality rating scales. The ERS-SDEC may also be applied by individual or groups of practitioners to audit their education for sustainable development curriculum, and to help practitioners and preschool centre managers in setting curriculum development priorities. OMEP is committed to the further development, refinement and revision of this instrument in the future in collaboration with practitioners.

As in other environmental rating scales, the ERS-SDEC, identifies both curriculum and pedagogic provisions and it requires the rater/evaluator to make their own observations. Where it is applied by an outside researcher they will be required to ask practitioners for information about their practices, and to seek evidence that confirms these practices.

Some Design Assumptions:

- *the scale has been designed so that a rating of level 3 will be applied to the most common current preschool practice in environmental education around the world (this is our strongest area of ESD practice).*
- *a level 5 rating should identify practices that we all agree should be considered 'good' in terms of ESD in early childhood*
- *levels 6 + show how preschools can (and sometimes do) take the subject further to demonstrate 'excellence'*
- *the rating scale should also identify what we consider to be 'inadequate' preschool practice in each dimension of ESD. We recognize that inadequate practice may often be due to structural (e.g. funding/training/policy barriers). It is intended that the OMEP ERS-SDEC evidence will support those requesting resources to overcome these barriers.*

Instruments of this kind have been used as research instruments or as curriculum self-assessment or auditing tool to be applied in one classroom, across classrooms in a larger institution or even across a whole local authority. Most significantly they provide a means by which practitioners can identify areas of the ECESD curriculum that they wish to develop further, and a means by which these developments may be recorded and reported to show progress. The ECERS scales measure from 1 to 7 with 1 = inadequate, 3 = minimal, 5 = good and 7 = excellent. Following the procedures applied in developing other ECERS style instruments, level 5 is intended to show practice currently considered 'good', and the scale goes on to level 7 to identify particular 'excellence'. Given the relatively new development of the education for sustainable development in early childhood it is unlikely that many of our preschools will currently achieve more than level 3 in many areas. We hope that the publication of these results will help us in mobilising the resources that will be needed to improve things. Some of our preschools (including many in sub-Saharan Africa) may score an "Inadequate" level 1 in some areas as they don't currently have even the most basic water and hygiene facilities to adequately sustain the lives of all of the children in their care. These provisions can be seen as a necessary prerequisite to sustainable education in

¹ For details of a similar tool applied in association with the ECERS-E see <http://www.327matters.org/Docs/RR356.pdf>

preschools and they identify the highest priority for OMEP's international development efforts.

The ERS-SDEC is suitable for use in settings catering for children aged 2 ½ through to 7 years of age and should be applied in one room, or for the provisions being made for one group of children at a time.

The Current Draft ERS-SDEC

Our intention is to revise the current draft rating scale as a result of the current piloting exercise to ensure a high degree of internal consistency. The scale will then be launched in July 2013 at the OMEP World Assembly. Systematic research efforts will then be made to demonstrate construct and predictive validity and to develop further resources to support inter-rater reliability..

The Purpose of the Scale

Our intention is to develop this instrument as both a research tool, and also as a self-assessment tool for practitioners. Where the scale is used by a single practitioner within their own setting, the scale can be applied to support curriculum development through identifying priorities, setting targets and managing change without difficulties. But wherever any form of comparison is involved between settings, there will be a need to ensure inter-rater reliability. It is important that users recognise the need for external or collective validation and that their ratings may need to be collaboratively moderated. This should be achieved through:

- training to understanding the use and the role of the scale
- training to ensure common understandings of the quality criteria (definitions and cultural variations) and in.
- in many cases a 'critical friend' should also be involved to provide support and validation (this may be an local authority adviser or an academic who has applied the instrument in other contexts

How to use the Scale

In preparation for these initial ratings, be sure to read through the scales and familiarised yourself with all the items and any clarifying notes (below). If there are any that you remain unclear about please contact (**email**) and ask for further explanation, he will revise the notes below and post them online. If you don't understand something then others will certainly have the same questions and will benefit from the answers.

Observers should normally spend at least 2 hours in the classroom and they should also allow at least 15-30 minutes for to speak with staff, children (and ideally with parents as well) at the end of their observations. But not all the items will be constantly visible through direct observation. In many cases rating judgements may be assisted through reference to planning documents, records and displays. Observers should allow sufficient time to access these documents but ensure that their ratings reflect the observed or evidenced practice and not simply future plans. There are a few items that refer to specific adult *behaviours* which should be happening regularly – in these cases they should be observed during your visit, rather than only relying upon what the adult may say about what happens. For example, in Item Social and Cultural 5.1: Staff take advantage of the opportunities afforded in story telling and/or other group activities (e.g. with multimedia and on visits) to encourage the discussion of social and cultural sustainability and interdependence - you should *observe* staff talking to children about these issues.

The items do not have to be rated in the order in which they appear in scales and you should only score an item after you have the information you require to make a reasoned

judgement. If you are not sure about something, make detailed notes and a preliminary rating which can be moderated later.

Record the following information on the scale:

National OMEP group:

Name of Setting: (and also a pseudonym – required for the purposes of anonymity)

Date the rating was carried out:

Raters Name:

For publication purposes it would be valuable for you to obtain permission for our use of photographs of some of the settings engaged in ESD activities. Please label these clearly with the name of the setting and forward them to john@cam.ac.uk with your ratings. He will provide an online form for this purpose, he will also compile the findings and regularly report back to the group on progress.

Please also make notes on suggested changes and/or elaborations of the scale and forward these to aid in the process of revision.

Scoring:

A rating of 1 must be given if **any** indicator in section 1 is scored YES.

A rating of 2 is given when **all** indicators under 1 are scored NO and at least half of the indicators under 3 are scored YES.

A rating of 3 is given when **all** indicators under 1 scored NO and **all** indicators under 3 are scored YES.

A rating of 4 is given when **all** indicators under 3 are met and at least half of the indicators under 5 are scored YES.

A rating of 5 is given when **all** indicators under 5 are scored YES.

A rating of 6 is given when **all** indicators under 5 are met and at least half of the indicators under 7 are scored YES.

A rating of 7 is given when **all** indicators under 7 are scored YES

Item notes for clarification

Social and Cultural Sustainability

1.1 For example, boys dress up clothes, dolls or small world figures include doctors, firemen, police, while Girls, and girl dolls are dressed as nurses, brides etc. Also see Appendix One.

1.2 Where national, regional or local policies are perceived to create a barrier to effective ESD practice this rating item is intended to support campaigns by OMEP and other organizations to change these policies. Individual preschools policy statements may also identify opportunities to 'reinterpret' or 'represent' policies of this kind. See Appendix Two

3.1 To score YES to this item there should be some (2/3+) books, dolls and displays that portray women and ethnic groups in non-stereotyped powerful occupations e.g. Women doctors, Black (or indigenous) Police officers. The intention here is to identify if the setting is actively countering stereotypes. This is relevant to the ethnic majority and to boys just as much as for the self-identity of ethnic minorities and girls. See Appendix

One.

- 3.2 It is recognised that this may be challenging for some practitioners but it is especially important for children who are disadvantaged and for those others who are already developing a false sense of cultural superiority. See Appendix Three.
- 5.1 This applies equally in preschools with little or no ethnic diversity – see Appendix One.
- 5.2 The intention at this level will be to create a caring community of learners.
- 5.3 This will be demanding in many national contexts but see note 1.2 above and refer to Appendix 1-3.
- 7.3 Any schemes, plans or documentation related to work that is to be (or has been) carried out over a period of 6 weeks (or a half term where this applies) should be found to include this work.

Economic Sustainability

- 1.1 To demonstrate quality ESD provisions for **each** of these areas is considered essential regardless of any local surpluses. The indicators for this item may be:
- Printed/ visual stimulus on switch and taps (For example: Please switch off the lights before you leave, Please do not leave water running while brushing your teeth)
 - Using both sides of paper
 - Using junk paper
- 1.2 Children are already acutely aware of the power and importance of money in their lives and will be engaged in talking about it at home. This discourse should be extended in the preschool and the importance of moderation and thrift should be emphasised.
- 3.1 Children may decide to what can be bought like toys or books, etc.
- 5.3 Teacher can refer to inequality between poor and rich with appropriate activities other staff except early childhood educators can make contribution to economic sustainability process for example, we can question whether the cook decide the amounts of food bought or whether the cook have initiative to decide what can be done waste foods.
- 7.1 What are hidden costs and benefits in ECE settings? For example eating apple rather than drinking packaged apple juice or using natural toys in order to lessen our burden of consumption
- 7.4 A setting that fully supports sustainable development would not exclude families on the basis of their inability to pay the fees/tuition. Some bursary, free, or assisted places scheme should be instituted. For example, in Makoko, in Mainland, Lagos State, and in Kibera a shanty town in Nairobi Kenya, a significant number of places in private unaided schools are provided free or at reduced rates to serve the poorest of the poor.

Environmental Sustainability

- 1.1 References may include books, pictures, photos etc.
- 1.3 Natural beauty may include forests, lake, outdoors of the setting, etc.

- 1.4 The WHO advises that a 10kg child should consume a total of 1 litre of water from drinks each day and a 5kg infant, 0.75 litres per day under average conditions, but this should be increased depending on the conditions, up to 4.5 litres, for example if the child is very active in high temperatures.
- 1.5 Because of either lack of water or lack of hand-washing habits².
- 3.1 materials may include toys, puzzles, ICT materials, materials for socio-dramatic play, etc.
- 3.2 At this stage what is intended is that children are encouraged to note any local problems of people not caring enough about the environment e.g. leaving litter, not conserving trees etc.
- 5.1 plants and animals can be found both indoor & outdoor/ children are encouraged to bring natural materials(for example: a pet from home, gathering leaves in autumn)
- 5.2 environmental issues are that of concern to the setting, to the local community, and/or to the international community.
- 5.3 Examples of this are included in the curriculum most weeks.
- 7.1 may include solar powered energy system or other energy conservation system.
- 7.3 the curriculum here means both written and action.

References

- Harms, T., R. Clifford (1980). *Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Sylva, K., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B. (2003). *Assessing Quality in the Early Years. Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Extension (ECERS-E): Four Curricular Subscales*. Stoke on Trent, UK: Trentham Books.

Appendix One

Prejudice is an unjustified (usually negative) attitude towards an individual based solely on the individual's membership of a social group. Gender prejudice has been woven into the fabric of most societies over centuries. Research evidence from around the world shows that prejudice directed at people from 'other' cultural, ethnic or tribal groups is not restricted to multi-ethnic or diverse preschool settings. This is especially important to recognise when teachers argue that there is 'no problem here' and/or have opposed any form of 'multicultural education' in the past. The fact is that prejudiced ideas remain common in all of our societies, and structural inequalities, and frequently a background of harassment provide a powerful hidden curriculum for children. Clear and strong policies for dealing with prejudiced behaviour are necessary in settings with cultural and ethnic diversity. But curriculum

² Note: Every day, 6,000 children die of water-related diseases. This is a sustainability issue and OMEP is campaigning with many other organisations to include a Human Right to clean water in the Sustainable development Goals that are being drafted to replace the Millennium Development Goals in 2015. More than four billion cases of diarrhoea cause 2.2 million deaths each year - mostly of children under the age of five. This is preventable and early childhood hygiene education has a major role to play in dealing with the problem. In the rich nations where such provisions may often be taken for granted the inclusion of these 'hygiene' features in the scale are intended to draw greater attention to the issues and to stimulate international collaboration in dealing with the problems.

strategies, which allow all children to discuss, understand and deal with oppressive behaviour, are relevant in all preschool settings. Prejudice will only be reduced, and social justice, and the widespread recognition of equality and international interdependency, will only occur when educators offer a carefully planned and coordinated approach throughout every preschool curriculum.

Note: ***Complacency is Passive Complicity***

- ❖ Recognize that because we live in a world where many biases exist, we must counteract them – or else we will support them through our silence.
- ❖ At home or at school, give children messages that deliberately contrast stereotypes by providing books, dolls, toys, wall decorations, television programmes, and records that show: (a) men and women in non-traditional roles; (b) people of different colour in leadership positions; (c) people with disabilities doing activities familiar to children; and (d) various types of families and family activities.
- ❖ Show no bias in the friends, doctors, teachers, and other service providers that you choose, or in the stores where you shop. Remember what you do is as important as what you say.
- ❖ Make it a firm rule that a person's appearance is never an acceptable reason for teasing or rejecting them. Immediately step in if you hear or see your child behave in such a way.
- ❖ Talk positively about each child's physical characteristics and cultural heritage. Help children learn the differences between feelings of superiority and those of self-esteem and pride in their own heritage.
- ❖ Provide opportunities for children to interact with other children who are racially/culturally different from themselves, and with people who have various disabilities.
- ❖ Respectfully listen to and answer children's questions about themselves and others. Do not ignore, change the subject, or in any way make the child think she is bad for asking such a question.
- ❖ Teach children how to challenge biases about who they are. Give them tools to confront those who act biased against them.
- ❖ Use accurate and fair images in contrast to stereotypes, and encourage children to talk about the differences. Help them to think critically about what they see in books, films, greeting cards, comics, and on television.
- ❖ Let children know that unjust things can be changed. Encourage children to challenge bias, and
- ❖ involve children in taking action on issues relevant to their lives. Building a healthy self-identity is a process that continues all our lives. Help children get a head start by teaching them to resist bias, and to value the differences between people as much as the similarities.

Hawa S. Kawara (2008) Early Childhood Education for a Sustainable society, in Pramling Samuelsson, I. and Kaga, Y. (Eds) The Contribution of Early Childhood Education to a sustainable Society, Paris, UNESCO

Appendix Two

One example of national policy can be taken from England, their *Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage* (EYFS) for children under 5, introduced in September 2008 (DfES, 2007), provided a platform for promoting good practice in this area. This national guidance included:

'You must promote positive attitudes to diversity and difference within all children' (Sect 1.8). 'Provide positive images that challenge children's thinking and help them to embrace differences in gender, ethnicity, language, religion, culture, special educational needs and disabilities' (Enabling Environments, p. 23).

'Give children accurate information which challenges cultural, racial, social and gender stereotypes' (Knowledge and Understanding of the World, p. 76).

'Help children become aware of, explore and question differences in gender, ethnicity, language, religion, culture, special educational needs and disability issues' (Positive relationships, p. 75).

The publication also provided numerous relevant examples of 'good practice' in the more detailed guidance for practitioners. These included:

- *8-20 months*. Planning and resourcing: 'Work with staff, parents and children to promote an antidiscriminatory and anti-bias approach to care and education'.
- *16-26 months*. Note: 'Young children's interest in similarities and differences, for example, their footwear, or patterns on their clothes and in physical appearance including hair texture and skin colour'. Note: 'Young children's questions about differences such as skin colour, hair and friends'. Effective practice: 'Talk with young children about valuing all skin colour differences'.
- *40-60+ months*. Note: 'How children express their attitudes such as about differences in skin colours'. Effective practice: 'Develop strategies to combat negative bias and, where necessary, support children and adults to unlearn discriminatory attitudes'.

Appendix Three

Put simply, the curriculum is the content of what is taught, the particular skills, knowledge and understandings that children learn. But young children are learning all the time, and however hidden the curriculum may be in settings where children are encouraged to make their own choices in play, the material resources (toys, furniture, props and technology), the activities, and the environments that we offer children define both the opportunities, and also crucially the limitations for their learning. The curriculum content is therefore always determined by the adults who care for them and the notion of totally 'free' child initiated play should therefore be recognised as a myth. The linguistic and cultural context that children are immersed in fundamentally determines what it is that they learn. The evidence for this is all around us in the world.

The curriculum content that we select should ultimately reflect the character of an interdependent global society, transforming:

"...content about cultural, ethnic, and racial groups - and about women - from the margin to the centre of the curriculum." (Banks, 1996, p339)

In educating children about 'difference' it is important not to make the 'other' groups (e.g. Europeans/Africans/Chinese) appear 'exotic' – this may reinforce prejudice and not undermine it. If a project is planned on food teachers should therefore begin with the theme of diet – emphasizing the importance of balance to everyone around the world. By doing this you will be emphasizing the commonalities of human experience. Then you can show how different groups (*cleverly*) solve the problem of creating a balance diet. Similarly, rather than focusing first upon the clothes worn around the world – start with 'How do we keep ourselves warm?'/ 'How do we keep ourselves cool?'. Another example would be how do we provide shelter?

The following diagram shows how the curriculum emphasis should begin at the centre, building upon the child's own familiar experience. Examples may be taken from learning about Air, Clothing, Warmth, Water, Food, Shelter and Sleep. Suggestions are made on how each of these topics may be developed to identify the realities, practices and solutions applied in less familiar contexts.

Progression in Intercultural Project Work

