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## INTEGRATION IN ECCD: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Attention can be given to children’s holistic development through *integrated programming*. Integrated programming means addressing the child’s multiple needs. The evaluation of single-focus programs has demonstrated their ineffectiveness. For example,

- Growth monitoring that charts children’s development is a waste of resources if mothers are not educated on how to provide the child with better nutrition.
- Nutrition supplementation programs bring only short-term gains for the child, if they do not work with the family to change the family dynamics that produced a child’s malnutrition.
- Pre-school programs that try to teach a child who is hungry or who has suffered abuse at home will not produce a child capable of learning.

Programs that are effective see the child as a whole child and take an *integrated* approach in the creation of programs. One of the problems has been that there is no clear understanding of what *integration* means. The dictionary sheds some light. According to the Oxford Concise Dictionary, (1987), the word *integrate* has two meanings:

1. complete by addition of parts; combine parts into a whole, and
2. bring or come into equal membership.

If we were to take the first definition, integrated programming might be accomplished with relative ease. What tends to happen, however, is that people assume that the second definition obtains; there is the implication of *equal* partnership, and no one sector—be it health, education, or social services—is quite willing to be equal with another. In the final analysis, it comes down to who will really be in charge, be responsible, have decision-making power, be held accountable? Perhaps a less threatening term should be used. The word, *coordinate*, for example, which means to bring parts into proper relation, cause to function together. Perhaps *coordination* is more easily accomplished.

However, rather than struggling for a definition of integration or looking for a word to replace it, it makes more sense to look at the nature of the relationships that actually occur as two or more sectors attempt to work together. Doing that, we find that a variety of words may apply. For example,

- **LIAISON** (connection) could be used when groups are at least meeting together to learn more about what the other can provide.

- **COOPERATION** (working together toward the same end, mutual reinforcement of messages and practices) would describe instances where sectors work together to reduce duplication of services, perhaps jointly identifying gaps in services that need to be filled and deciding who might best address the gap.
- **COALITION** (temporary combination of parties that retain distinctive principles), a stronger word, could be used when two or more sectors actually work together toward some common goal, where the coming together is goal-specific and/or time-limited.
- A **FEDERATION** (forming a unity but remaining independent in internal affairs) suggests that separate sectors actually accept each others goals and together focus on the best way to meet community needs. In a federation the approach is consciously planned rather than “ad hoc”, even to the point of agreement on budgeting and organization of services. Federation appears to be necessary to formulate national policy/guidelines.
- The ultimate in integration is **UNIFICATION** (reduce to unity or uniformity), which occurs when there is a single administrative system for the delivery of all services.

At this point there are some guidelines as to how child care and education programs might *cooperate* with the health sector to introduce maternal and child health components, and suggestions have been made about how a *federation* can be created which links the intersecting needs of women and children, and there are examples of *unification* where child care is used as an entry point for community development. However, it is quite evident that the mechanisms for and potential of integrated programming have only begun to be explored.

## The challenges

Integrated, holistic programs take into consideration a child’s need for a healthy body and the need for psychological and social support. These programs provide a variety of activities that stimulate the development of cognitive skills, imagination, and creativity, and provide opportunities for children to take responsibility for themselves and their learning within the context of a social-cultural environment. It is unrealistic to expect that there is going to be one model of *integration*; in different situations integrated programming can take various forms. Frequently there are partnerships formed between social welfare, health, and education to ensure that children’s multiple needs are met. A variety of relationships can be established that build on what exists and help fill the gaps in services in relation to what children need. These can include:

- short-and long-term cooperation in the provision of specific services;
- joint training of health and education workers so they are providing consistent messages to families;
- the mapping of a community to identify services that exist and the families that are being served by those services in order to see where there are gaps and then planning new programs to fill the gaps;
- the creation of coalitions to advocate for increased support for services for young children and their families.

Taking a holistic perspective on child development and providing integrated programming that addresses the multiple needs of children does not always mean providing services directly to children in center-based programs. For the youngest children, in particular, it is important to provide supports to the family. Thus programs that support parents in their parenting role and programs that help change the economic situation of the family are important and ultimately have an impact on the child. Similarly, community development (empowerment) efforts are important, as they change the environment within which children are being raised. The strengthening of the institutions which work with families is another strategy that can be used to support the development of quality programs. Ultimately all of these efforts are supported (or inhibited) by national policy. Thus an appropriate programming strategy is to advocate for the implementation of national policies supportive of young children and their families.

In sum, in looking toward the creation of integrated projects, the challenge is for all actors involved in any one project to agree upon a definition of the term as it is to be used in that context. Perhaps over time clusters of programs can be created that exemplify the various ways sectors can work together.

*The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development, 1996.*