

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Consultants wish to acknowledge the generous support of many people at the Mauritius Institute of Education, the Mauritius College of the Air and UNICEF Mauritius in making possible this Summative Evaluation of the Certificate in Proficiency in Early Childhood Education – Pre-Primary.

Everyone was willing to collaborate and give and arrange access to information about the program and the client group. The information was given with good will and in a spirit of cooperation, all of which facilitated the work of the Consultants.

The organisations/people who made this possible include:

UNICEF (Mauritius)

Mr Stanislaw Czaplicki,	Resident Representative
Mr Fock Seng Ho Tu Nam	Program Officer

Mauritius Institute of Education

Professor Prem Saddul	Director,
A/ Professor Sheila Thancanamootoo	Deputy Director
A/ Professor Roshan Maudho	Head, School of Education & Program Director.
Ms Nadine Fanchette	Program Assistant (UNICEF staff support)
Ms Brinda Ramen	Program Assistant (UNICEF staff support)
Ms Mariam Oudin	Confidential Assistant
Ms Jodish Mauree	Confidential Assistant
Ms Manoda Moonien	Clerical/Secretarial Team
Ms Kamla Ernest	Graphics Designer

Mauritius College of the Air

Ms Meena Seetulsingh	Director
Mr Isswar Jheengut	Senior Lecturer & Officer-in-charge Division of Distance Education
Ms Assodah Tirvassen	Lecturer

and many other people behind the team members of MIE, MCA and UNICEF Mauritius.

TERMS OR REFERENCE FOR THE CONSULTANCY

1. To examine the role and relevance of the CPECE in relation to the emerging needs of the pre-school sector in Mauritius, including career structure prospects.
2. To assess the design, content, delivery and evaluation mode of the CPECE against trainees' perceived needs and expectations.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the CPECE against its stated aims and objectives.
4. To review resources made available to students beyond course material, that is library, resource facilities such as study centers and workshop venues.
5. To identify possible improvements and/or redirections, which would make the CPECE responsive to merging trends in the ECD sector in Mauritius.
6. To propose strategies for improving quality assurance.
7. To recommend phase II of the project in context of UNICEF transition.

THE CERTIFICATE OF PROFICIENCY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION – PRE-PRIMARY - (CPECE)

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to a demonstrated need, UNICEF Mauritius, the Mauritius Institute of Education and the Mauritius College of the Air developed an innovative, inter-institutional model program utilizing distance education practices that enabled over 1000 pre-primary teachers who had no prior formal tertiary training to participate in a program leading to a Certificate in Proficiency in Early Childhood Education .

The program was conducted over a two-year period (2000-2002) on a part-time basis.

The program can be deemed a great success as demonstrated in the following Report of the Summative Evaluation of the program commissioned by UNICEF Mauritius. The success of the program is evidenced in a number of ways first, by the very low attrition rate (6%) over the period of two years. By any standards this is an extremely low attrition especially given that most of the students had not studied formally for quite a number of years and that studying in the distance education mode was quite foreign to them. In addition, the academic success of 94% of students was above expectation and particularly as 132 students (14%) reached a Grade Point Average (GPA) of 4.0 (the maximum) and 806 students (83%) reached a GPA of between 2.99 and 3.99. These results indicate also the sincere commitment of the students to the program.

Second, the success of the program can be attributed to the quality of the program itself and to the management of it. The dedicated staff at the Mauritius College of the Air (MCA) who had the day-to-day management of the program and the staff of the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE), who were responsible for the academic content and the level of the program, worked in a collaborative manner. This collaboration ensured that no student was disadvantaged despite the considerable distance some students had to travel to attend face-to-face sessions and their insecurities in relation to higher education and training. The mentoring of the students by both MCA and MIE, along with the advising and teaching roles of the tutors in the program, all contributed to the students' success as well as satisfaction with the program.

One remarkable outcome of the program was the achievement of a cohort of women in a workforce that, until now, had been neglected and their work un-recognised. The increase in their senses of self-worth, professionalism and empowerment came evident most clearly when they were asked how the program affected them personally. This new program created an access and equity milestone of a unique kind for these women.

As said earlier, the tutors in the program had considerable responsibility for the successful implementation of the program and credit must be given to them for the effectiveness of their work. They believed that there was a good balance between theoretical and practical

aspects in the program's curriculum and this belief was supported by over 90% of the students who said in their summative questionnaire that the content of the program challenged their thinking, added to their teaching skills and changed their views about teaching.

As a result of this successful program and the enthusiasm of the students, one unanimous appeal from the students has been for the opportunity for further study to the Teachers Certificate (Pre-Primary) level, again by distance education mode. The interest in and commitment to higher learning are indicators of professionalism and the work has begun as a result of this program.

Of course, the initial implementation of any new program is not without its problems. As content material in a number of academic areas had to be developed in a hurry and with no prior model to fall back upon, the earlier Course Books are of limited academic and practical value and, as a result, are in need of major revision. This work should be done in time for any further expansion of the program. Overall, there is an unevenness in the quality of the Course Books across the program. As well, there is a need for certain content in Course Books to be brought up-to-date with current thinking in the particular field and be made culturally relevant. Hence the recommendation in this Report for further work to be done on program materials.

The production of the materials and the setting of assignments and examination questions, however, were very good.

A second matter that needs further thought by the program management relates to the selection of tutors. As mentioned earlier, the effectiveness of the tutors as facilitators of the program's curriculum is crucial to the program's success. Whilst all the tutors met the selection criteria for employment, a few did not have relevant experience at the pre-primary teaching level. Where such situations occur it is difficult for the tutors to meet students' expectations for specific practical advice related to their teaching.

A further matter to be addressed by the program management is that of providing suitable teaching venues that are conducive to student learning. Coupled to this issue is that of access to appropriate early childhood resources and library facilities. The provision of basic and carefully selected books of readings would assist in ameliorating this lack of access to resources/library provision.

The above background information is pertinent to the Recommendations made in this Report.

The successful collaboration by the three partners in achieving the goals of the program was evident and clearly demonstrated in the following Report. Support for this collaboration came from all stakeholders: the students, tutors MIE, MCA and UNICEF Mauritius.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- That a higher-level program be made available as soon as possible to successful applicants as specified in the original program material given to participants.
- That due credit be given for the successful completion of the Certificate of Proficiency in Early Childhood Education Pre-primary towards a higher level qualification.
- That consideration be given to offering the next level program in the Distance Education Mode.
- That the program materials be reviewed and redeveloped in line with the comments made in the Report.
- That a detailed cost analysis be made of the total program with all cooperating partners. Without this the cost benefits of the course cannot be accurately calculated. This would also seem essential if the program is to be mounted again.
- That in any further offering of this program students be given access to selected readings and/or basic texts in order to maximise tertiary study opportunities.
- That in any subsequent implementation of the program the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of the partners be agreed upon and documented in a formal Memorandum of Understanding.
- That the current form of quality control be continued in any subsequent expansion of the program.
- Given that UNICEF Mauritius will phase-out its work in Mauritius, there is a need to ensure that funding be found for the review and rewriting of the program materials and that a person with specialist expertise in early child development and curriculum be sought for this important task.
- That the Government of Mauritius acknowledges the importance of this program and of its value to the early education of the nation's young children by providing the necessary resources, both human and financial, to enable the program to be sustained.

3.0 POSSIBLE FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- The initial program has been so successful and well-received by the students, tutors and stakeholders that it should be offered on a continuing basis until the need is satisfied.
- The successful completion of a CPECE should become the entry criterion to the next level of training/study, that is the Teachers Certificate (Pre-Primary). This strategy has been detailed in the publication by Maudho and Naeck entitled *Baseline Proposals – Towards an Integrated Early Childhood Development Strategy*, Mauritius Institute of Education (2001) page 77.
- Tutors and teacher educators should have the opportunity to undertake a degree level program in ECE. A review of the qualifications/experience of tutors currently working in the program clearly shows this need. None of the tutors had a degree in ECE and some had inappropriate qualifications for this type of work. The field of early childhood in Mauritius will continue to be perceived as a low-level and semi-profession unless there is a cadre of qualified ECE professionals at the degree level and beyond to raise the status, standard and quality of early childhood provision.
- With future modification of the program materials as suggested in this Report, the program could be shared with other countries in the Region as it is an excellent model of basic training in ECD. It is apparent that the level of training/educating the target of this program is the right one.

4.0 SUMMATIVE EVALUATION

4.1. BACKGROUND

An initial appraisal of the program was conducted in August 2000. This current evaluation takes account of that earlier appraisal but makes judgments about the outcomes of the program given that it is now in its final implementation stage. It is a summative evaluation. It takes account of both the specific client group, those early childhood teachers undertaking the program, and the basic level required of a Certificate of Proficiency (CPECE).

History & Need

The need for some form of training for Pre-primary teachers was identified clearly in the sector some years ago. The need for upgrading was identified in a number of earlier Consultancy Reports to UNICEF. The introduction of the CPECE to meet this identified need was a significant achievement and, given the numbers of students enrolled, some 1,047 at the initial stage, was a huge undertaking.

An Inter-Institutional Concept

In times of economic rationalism, governments around the world have challenged organizations to come together and pool scarce resources, both physical and human. In this project this pooling of resources has happened with great success.

Due credit must be given to those involved in the creation and delivery of this CPECE. The program was the result of a collaborative effort between the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE), the Mauritius College of the Air (MCA) and UNICEF Mauritius. From the very outset this collaboration has been a strong feature of the program as it allowed for the complementary experience and skills of both MIE and MCA to be brought together for the achievement of common goals. The support of UNICEF has also been a crucial feature of the program for it was the major funding source for the program as well as the two program appraisals.

The strengths and challenges of mounting an inter-institutional model are clearly evident in this Report. It must be acknowledged at the outset that the collaborative structure has worked and has allowed for the successful delivery of a unique, distance education program for some 1,047 early childhood teachers working in Mauritius. Mutual goals were identified and the structural processes to achieve these were also worked out and modified as new demands arose throughout the delivery of the program.

To mount a program for 1,047 students initially enrolled was a huge undertaking. Given that this was a new program with no prior resources to draw on, it required the creation of new materials in the distance education mode. In addition, the planning and implementing of student face-to-face teaching and support required considerable effort by all people involved in all phases of its delivery. Given the enrolment size, the infrastructure needs for successful program delivery were great for both of the major parties involved – MIE and MCA. The program was unique for Mauritius in that it utilized face-to-face teaching, workshops and

supervisory placement visits in addition to the use of the distance education materials. This orientation made the program far more enriched than the traditional distance education approach, which is heavily reliant on print materials. However, the orientation did create additional demands on delivery.

The client group

The participants in the course were all early childhood teachers identified as eligible for admission to the program. They were, in fact, a group of people who prior to this study opportunity had little formal training. However, all participants had considerable teaching experience, a minimum of 3 years, many had longer. The client group brought a background of experiences that could be used as recognition of their prior informal learning even if they lacked formal qualifications to gain entry to higher education institutions in Mauritius. In essence, these were a marginalised group of women without access to formal higher education training in their field. This new program created an access and equity opportunity of a unique kind. The entry criteria recognised their prior learning of at least 3 years of proven practice in a registered early childhood setting along with some relevant, basic/orientation training from a registered agency. It was also stated in the entry criteria that participants needed adequate access to an early childhood setting in order to carry out the program requirements. The retention rate of 94% was a remarkable achievement in a program of this kind and was indicative of student commitment.

Limitations to the evaluation

Time did not permit a review and appraisal of the views of the students (62 in total) resident in Rodrigues. However, an appraisal was made of all other aspects of the program as these relate to the Rodrigues cohort of students. In addition, the Officer-in-charge (pre-primary) who is one of the two Rodrigues tutors travelled to Mauritius to meet with and provide information to the Consultants. This information is located elsewhere in this Report.

Definition of terms

The Report has used the term 'Program' to represent the total CPECE program. The term 'course' has been used to represent the various academic elements of the program.

4.2. METHOD OF APPRAISAL

There was a time constraint of two working weeks in order to conduct this summative appraisal. Therefore, an approach was taken which would allow for a rigorous review, yet draw conclusions about the outcomes of the program implementation.

The appraisal used the following approaches to obtain and analyse data:

- Critically reviewing of the program materials.
- Conducting a focus group and individual interviews with tutors working on the program.
- Reviewing 15 % of student assignments – the project and portfolios.

- Implementing a modified form of the student survey form used in the initial evaluation to include summative questions. Input was sought from MIE and MCA who suggested changes to some questions.
- Applying the student survey form to 15 % of 924 students (the Mauritius cohort).
- Conducting a focus group with the students who were available – approximately 100 to verify the accuracy of the data gleaned from the survey.
- Reviewing academic transcripts of all 986 students, including those living in Rodrigues.
- Conducting interviews with main stakeholders in the administration of the program: MCA, MIE & UNICEF.

The Consultants, in undertaking the evaluation, addressed their terms of reference. In gathering and analysing this data for a summative evaluation, the overall premise was to see if the aims of the program as stated in the program material were achieved and could be measured in terms of outcomes. In addition, it was important to identify issues/problems raised by students, which could be considered for further action by the course teams as they modify the program materials and processes.

The appraisal has been grouped into main headings as follows:

Executive Summary and Recommendations

- 1.0 Executive Summary
- 2.0 Recommendations
- 3.0 Possible Future Directions
- 4.0 Summative Evaluation
 - 4.1 Background
 - 4.2 Method of appraisal
 - 4.3 The structure of the program and the materials
 - 4.4 The delivery of the program including support services
 - 4.5 Review of student progress through the program and review of assignments
 - 4.6 Analysis and interpretation of all data gained from students, tutors, administrators and other stakeholders
- 5.0 Quality Assurance
- 6.0 Outcomes of the program

4.3 STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAM, MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

The Program

The program was sequential, delivered over a period of 2 years part time with main study areas of: child development, curriculum, and field supervision. Distance education materials were provided in 4 main designated areas as follows:

Professional studies	14 credit units	
Curriculum studies	16 credit units	
Project write up	5 credit units	
School based experience	5 credit units	Total of 40 credit units

The definition of a 'Credit Unit' was supplied in the Course Regulation Book (2000).

Planned face-to-face teaching and workshops occurred to supplement the Distance Education materials and to give students the opportunity and benefit of teaching contacts.

Areas of study were identified and six (6) sets of materials developed in the Distance Education mode. Academic content was developed by MIE and the instructional design aspects were carried out by MCA.

There were limited resources in the forms of texts and journals available to students and given the high student numbers access to what was available created logistic problems.

In the main, the four basic areas of the program were fundamental to this Certificate level and to the needs of the pre-primary aged child. A practical approach was attempted with a blend of theory and applied practice.

The inclusion of field experience supervision was an excellent component of the program.

Linking of all elements of the program was another strong feature

The Program Materials.

It is recognized that the program developers (MIE & MCA) had little lead-time to prepare the materials and there was also the necessity for materials to be prepared to fit in with the MCA's distance education timetable for production and distribution. In all countries of the world Distance Education Providers (DEP) have tight schedules that academic staff located in other departments find difficult to comply with. However, in academic institutions throughout the world it is usually part of inter-departmental contracts with a DEP to comply or breach contract and be penalised in some way. It is obvious from discussions with staff in MIE and MCA that concessions had to be made on both sides in order to get materials out to students within time constraints. If the program is to continue then it is important that some

form of memorandum of understanding be made between the major partners so that roles, responsibilities and accountabilities are clearly stated and adhered to.

A general comment about the materials is that they are uneven in quality. This unevenness relates to the currency of content, knowledge presented, length of each course, interest level to students and cultural relevance.

A main reference source from South Africa for much of the child development seems to be dated in thrust and is a 1988 publication which, in and of itself is acceptable if backed up with more recent work. However, the field of child development has progressed in the last 14 years and important research findings have changed views about child development. It is the view of the Consultants that the content of this Course on child development is more akin to traditional courses in educational psychology than to child development. For early childhood the developmental approach is considered more appropriate.

The production of study materials by

MCA was of good quality and in the main found useful by students. However, specific comments by students are located in Survey Results ([Appendix 6](#)).

The strengths of the materials are as follows:

- produced by local staff who understand the specific contexts,
- local examples in the content questions and the use of local photographs made the materials meaningful to the students,
- sequential approach used with content made for good progression of learning.

Many of the Study Books on the curriculum areas of study are very good. For example, *Area of Study 2: Curriculum Studies Part 5: Curriculum Practice* is very sound and highly relevant for application in Mauritius. *Professional Studies Part 3: Assessment and Evaluation* is also very good and of relevance to early childhood teachers. However, not all curriculum area Study Books are of this quality.

Areas that need to be considered for possible change:

Supplementary reading

The impact of the materials is weakened by the lack of provision of basic supplementary readings or a basic text for each unit of study. This matter should be reviewed if the program is to be offered again.

Note that this action was suggested in the Appraisal Report but not followed-up. It was said:

There is a need to supply a book of readings for each unit to support and extend students understanding. It is impossible to cover the breadth of content without this and without the use of a text.

(Appraisal Report, Ebbeck, 2000: 8).

The content in the Study Books can be strengthened by taking students through readings or a basic text. If the content of the Study Book is outdated or restricted then students do not get exposure to tertiary level study.

Specific Study Books

(i) *Area of Study: Professional Studies Part 1: Child Development-An Introduction*

The child development elements throughout two of the Study Books are lacking in accurate, updated knowledge. As these studies come at the beginning of the program they do not set a sound foundation for understanding growth and development. It is recommended that the Study Book be reviewed and if possible re-written for any subsequent use.

Some of these weaknesses were mentioned in the first Appraisal Report and are still valid. The Report noted:

The course seems to lack an orientation to what early childhood education encompasses including child- centred approaches and how Pre-Primary fits into the overall field. This could have been included in the Area of Study Part 1 which as is lacks a practical application. Some of the History of Child Development, although interesting, could have been deleted.

(Appraisal Report, Ebbeck,2000: 5)

It is strongly suggested that much of the historical content be deleted and replaced with a cogent discussion on three or four of the major current theories of child development and their application today. Some of the information presented is now out-of date and of little practical value.

This important introductory course lacks depth and substantive child development content.

(ii) *Professional Studies Part 2: Domains of Development*

These studies have much relevant material in them and a great effort has been made to relate the material to the application of child development (pp 19-62). Again, however, the approach taken is very dated and needs to be supplemented with more holistic approaches to development, which show how interrelated development is. Sections on normative development need to be balanced with explanations that development is not now viewed as occurring in discrete separate stages but more cumulative and continuous. Rather than using Gesell, the course developers are referred to the work of Bronfenbrenner, Vygotsky, Bruner and Gardner and others more recent than Gesell, Freud, Froebel et.al. Piaget needs to be placed in a modern day context with the critiques of his stages of development included.

Given the complexity of language in the Mauritian context, the study of language acquisition needs much more emphasis and prominence in relation to cognition than occurs in the current material (Parts 2.1 - 2.4). The issue of bilingualism also needs some attention, somewhere in the material. The same comments also apply to *Curriculum Studies Part 4* where Language Arts is presented. Some discussion on the richness of language

acquisition and usage in Mauritius should be presented in relation to children's cognitive development and cultural identity.

(iii) *Area of Study 2: Curriculum Studies*

As mentioned earlier, the quality in the various sections of this Area of Study varies greatly. The domain of science (Part 4.8) is treated successfully but mathematics (Part 4.4) is given half the amount of coverage and is linked with creativity rather than with science. There is a degree of commonality between science and mathematics and a process approach is common to both areas. The mathematics section needs to be reviewed in terms of assessing the presentation of content and the depth of it.

The area of curriculum study on nutrition and health (Part 4.5) contains a great deal of very good background material with a high level of interest. However, this needs to be supplemented with ways of teaching health to young children.

It is suggested that the program team reviews the placement of *Area of study 2: Curriculum Studies Part 5 Curriculum Practice*. It would serve the overall structure of the program if this could be introduced earlier than its current placement, which is towards the end. Students need this information early in their program in order to have a broader understanding of curriculum and then the other curriculum studies could be utilised from that framework.

The curriculum area of social studies does not appear to have been presented in a separate way. In fact, content in this area seems to be missing. All of the foundation areas of the curriculum in early childhood need similar treatment or students may think that by omission they are unimportant.

4.4 THE DELIVERY OF THE PROGRAM AND SUPPORT SERVICES

The program was designed to be delivered in the main in the Distance Education Mode, a relatively new mode of teaching/learning for the early childhood field in Mauritius. For the program participants it was a new learning style and one which they had not experienced before. All students would have been educated through methods of learning, which were highly reliant on the teacher as a source of information and in traditional ways of interacting. Distance Education, by contrast, requires the learners to be more independent and function as adult learners who are motivated to organize and progress in their learning in an individual, self-paced way. This method also requires the learners to be less dependent on immediate feedback of their work.

The program and individual course materials were distributed by MCA on a personal collection basis, and students signed for the materials.

Students then worked their way through the materials on a self-study, self-paced approach.

Face-to-face teaching and workshops were held in two main regions on Mauritius and one at Rodrigues at designated times.

Tutors for the face-to-face teaching and for the marking of assignments were assigned with each having approximately 30 students in a group. Students had one main tutor assigned but then a second tutor expert in a curriculum area also assisted.

Student support

Student support was an integral part of the program and there were two sources, the MCA and MIE.

MCA support:

The support of MCA was a strong feature of the program and the Distance Teaching Model used by MCA provided an excellent supportive framework. The approach by MCA was clearly outlined in the comprehensive publication *Induction Course for Distance Education Tutors* (2000).

Support by MCA involved a range of activities but the one most valued by the students seemed to be the face-to-face teaching. At the focus-group session students spoke of the crucial role this face-to-face teaching played in assisting them to understand program content and requirements (see Appendix 1 for dates of sessions).

Students also were given a copy of the handbook: *The Distance Learning Experience* (Feb. 2000), which is an informative and well explained document describing both process and product dimensions of distance learning courses.

The success of the support can be demonstrated in specific outcomes such as:

- The low attrition rate of the students
- Academic success of some 94 % of the students
- The requests and enthusiasm of the students for the continuation of further study opportunities in this distance education mode
- The unanimous positive endorsement of the Division of Distance Education for the support services provided, the continual monitoring of quality assurance and immediate response to identified problems.

MIE support:

Some of the student support was supplied by MIE in the form of organising the workshops and other activities for students. This support was also valued by students. The information provided to students in relation to assignments was excellent. A sample of this information is included as Appendix 2.

Another strong feature was the opportunity given to students to redeem failed assignment work or examinations. Sample of these requirements and processes are included as Appendix 3.

A strength of the academic support was the range, diversity and relevance of the set assignments and examination questions. These must be noted as being excellent and as they were of a continuous nature they allowed for a fair, just and rigorous assessment of the students over the entire program.

The Challenges of support services for both MIE and MCA included:

- Working through problem issues such as inconsistency of marking standards, student complaints in relation to their assignment tutor and grading.
- Acknowledging the interface and independence of both MCA and MIE in providing consistent, on-going, responsive support.

The role of the tutor

Both MCA and MIE were aware of the important, indeed crucial role that tutors played in the overall program. This understanding was evident in the careful recruitment of tutors. The duties of the tutors were documented in their contract of employment. A sample contract is included in [Appendix 4](#). The tutors underwent an induction/orientation program provided by MCA and also were given an Induction Course Handbook and Distance Learning Experience Handbook.

Tutors were given a great deal of assistance by both MCA and MIE in the provision of guidelines for marking. See [Appendix 5](#) for some samples of guidelines for tutors.

It is obvious that the range, qualifications and experience of the tutors varied considerably. Some were highly qualified for ECD tutoring whilst others were marginally qualified in this field. However, it appears to the Consultants that there was informal staff development occurring constantly as tutors worked in teams so as to get marking/grading consistency, and as they grappled with face-to-face teaching demands of a very diverse client group.

As with the students, tutors were unanimous in their endorsement of the meticulous planning and responsiveness of the MIE/ MCA support staff and the respective team leadership was highly praised.

4.5 REVIEW OF STUDENT PROGRESS THROUGH THE PROGRAM AND REVIEW OF STUDENT ASSIGNMENTS.

Student progress

The review of student progress was gleaned by looking at academic results supplied by MCA and MIE.

As final student assignments were still being graded at the time of writing this Report, academic transcripts of student progress were available calculated at the end of Semester 2, 2001. However, the Program Director was confident that the GPA's of students at this time were a reliable predictor of end results.

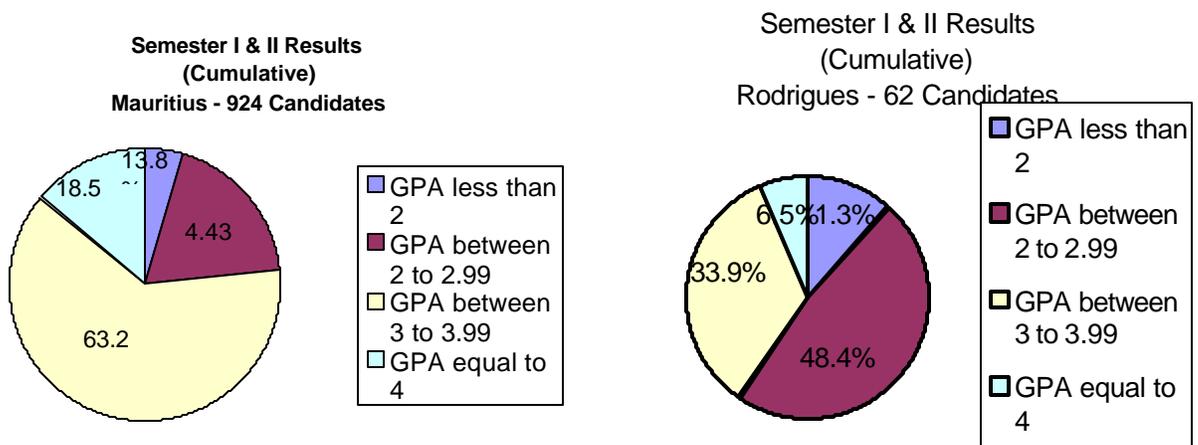
As shown in the Tables below, the GPA's of students are extremely high, especially when considering their academic entry level.

For the 924 students located in Mauritius, only 41 have a GPA of less than 2.00. In Rodrigues (62 students) only 7 have a GPA of less than 2.00.

Considering the other end of student achievement, In Mauritius some 128 students have a GPA of 4.00. In Rodrigues, 4 have a GPA of 4.00.

Some 755 students have a GPA between 2.99 and 3.99. In Rodrigues, 51 have a GPA between 2.99 and 3.99.

In all, this is a remarkable achievement of the students and of the staff who have shown enduring commitment to the academic and professional welfare of the student body.



Student Assignments

As mentioned elsewhere, the assignments and examination questions were of a high quality and appropriate for ECE students. There was a good balance between the practical and theoretical dimensions.

Approximately 15 % of two major assignments were reviewed as follows:

The Project

This was a very worthwhile assignment and of benefit to the students for it allowed them to integrate theory with practice. Assignments reviewed showed a wide range of demonstrated skills and knowledge. A few of the projects reviewed by the evaluators were definitely below pass level standard. The Project was appreciated by the students as indicated in their evaluation comments, both verbal and written.

The Portfolio

The idea behind this assignment is sound but the interpretation of it by students needs clarification. For some of the assignments reviewed, it had turned out to be a quantity, not quality activity with hundreds of somewhat dubious value copied resources with little to no indication of how these resources may be applied. The thrust of the portfolio should be on self-reflection. In the sample reviewed this was lacking greatly. It is suggested that a strict word limit be adhered to, that the collection of resources be limited and that the self-analysis of teaching and students work be increased.

Rodrigues

Whilst it was not possible during the evaluation period to visit Rodrigues one of the two tutors made a special visit to Mauritius to speak with the Consultants. Her comments as these relate to student progress and support can be summarized as follows:

Strengths: the great strength is the motivation of the students who have cherished the opportunity to study at certificate level. The client group in Rodrigues is very varied from young to elderly participants.

Areas that could be changed: The comment mainly was made in relation to the materials: Professional Studies Part 1 Child Development and Professional Studies Part 2 Domains of Development in particular. It was felt that the child development material could be strengthened. Mathematics seemed to be rushed and more practical content is sought as it is important for the students in Rodrigues in view of their poor mathematical background. They lack confidence in this area.

In addition, the students in Rodrigues would like more face-to-face teaching with the tutors. The tutors have given more tutoring time in a voluntary way with the present cohort of students. They also believe that there should be more content on special needs children, for some assistance with information technology (IT) and for there to be increased resources available as Rodrigues is quite isolated.

Administrative problems are significant for Rodrigues such as transport availability for contact with students.

However, the students have said that their self-confidence in their role as a teacher has improved considerably and they have gained a greater understanding of early childhood curriculum. Their self-analysis of their teaching methods needs further work for they are unwilling to be critical of their own effort.

4.6 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA GAINED

4.6.1 *The Student Survey*

The complete survey can be found as [Appendix 6](#) to this Report.

Section A Objectives of the Course

This Section sought to gain the view of the students as to how well the implementation of the program reached the Objectives as stated.

Tables 1 to 12 show the results and [Appendix 6](#) shows in more detail the comments and views of the students.

In order to minimise the complexities of language for the students a Supplementary Annex to Section A was given the students to assist them in answering the questions 1-5.

What is important to note is that whilst the 'Overall Rating' given for each Objective showed student satisfaction (ratings 4 and 5), when taking into consideration rating 3 (the middle point), ratings 3 and 4 combined added a slightly different dimension to overall student satisfaction.

Added to the rating result were the students' comments under "further suggestions".

These were many and varied and, in the main related more to the program implementation in general than they did to the specific five Program Objectives. It is important, however, that mention be made here of the students' major concerns, all of which are reflected elsewhere in this Report, for it is believed the students made their comments in good faith expecting them to be considered. Their major concerns in Section A related to:

- the experience in ECD of the tutors
- the desire for more practical work and face-to-face teaching
- the pressures of time
- more assistance with ECD curriculum

It would seem that the above major concerns influenced their overall ratings for the Program Objectives.

On the other hand, apart from the responses to each question as shown in [Appendix 6](#) the students stated how the program assisted them professionally by

- understanding their role as a mentor of children
- assisting them to understand better the importance the family and home environment
- accepting the importance of observing and recording of children's development as the basis for their programming
- being better planners of their work with children
- being more active with parents
- changing their way of thinking about children and their role as a teacher/carer.

SECTION B Delivery of the Program

This Section sought the students' views about how the program was delivered and as to the quality and appropriateness of the materials, teaching and tutorial support.

Question 6 – Table 1: The Content of the Study

n = 138 (varied)

	Yes	No
1. Was well organised	135 (98%)	2 (2%)
2. Was easy to understand	121 (88%)	17 (12%)
3. Added to my teaching skills	137 (99%)	1 (1%)
4. Gave me ideas to try out in my classroom	134 (97%)	3 (3%)
5. Challenged my thinking	135 (98%)	3 (2%)
6. Added to my understanding	135 (98%)	1 (2%)
7. Changed my views about teaching	121 (88%)	13 (12%)

It can be seen that there was overall a high satisfaction with the level and degree of study materials. It could be that the response to Item 7 reflected the level and kind of previous training of the students and to their length of ECD teaching. The "additional points" to this question noted in [Appendix 6](#) are positive and perhaps can best be summed-up by the comment of one student "We were not aware of what we were doing before attending the Course". There were many more similar positive statements made along with some suggestions for improvement such as:

- the distribution of the materials (by post or at face-to-face sessions)
- sometimes materials arrived late
- wording sometimes difficult
- could have more examples in texts
- introduce and develop thematic approach
- give the correct answers to tasks in the books

Question 7 – Table 2: Presentation of Materials

The materials presented in the course:

n = 137 (varied)

	Yes	No
1. Were attractive	113 (82%)	20 (18%)
2. Were interesting	137 (100%)	0
3. Were helpful	136 (100%)	1
4. Were clear to read	125 (91%)	9 (9%)
5. Were easy to understand	117 (85%)	20 (15%)
6. Were informative	135 (99%)	2 (1%)
7. Presented new ideas	133 (97%)	2 (3%)

In the main, the results were very positive. The Program Coordinators might review the materials in light of the results for Items 1 and 5. Concerning Item 5 further mention of this item is made under "Review of Course Materials" Section 5.0 in this Report.

Question 8 – Table 3: Teaching Support

My tutors were: n = 136 (varied)

	Yes	No
1. helpful	129 (95%)	7 (5%)
2. available by phone	86 (63%)	43 (37%)
3. gave me good advice	125 (92%)	10 (8%)
4. understood the course requirements	117 (86%)	10 (14%)
5. helped me to understand the assignments	111 (81%)	12 (19%)
6. answered my questions	102 (75%)	31 (25%)
7. organised the tutorial sessions well	120 (88%)	14 (12%)

Throughout the Questionnaire the role and work of the Tutors have received considerable attention. This is not surprising for the tutors played a crucial role in implementing the Program and were, in fact, the teachers of the participants. So much depended on the previous background experience in ECD of the Tutors as to whether or not they were credible to their students. This matter, again, has been dealt with in more detail in elsewhere in this Report.

The results shown in Table 3 indicate an overall satisfaction with the Tutors as teaching support. Item 2 is of concern as approximately 1/3 of the students indicated the Tutor(s) were not contactable by telephone. In a 'distance learning' course this behaviour by tutors is serious.

Item 6 also needs further consideration by the Program Coordinators and relates to the Tutor(s) background knowledge and expertise in ECD.

Question 9 – Table 4: Assignments

The assignments were: n = 137 (varied)

	Yes	No
1. challenging	130 (95%)	7 (5%)
2. useful for my teaching	133 (97%)	3 (3%)
3. understandable	116 (84%)	21 (16%)
4. well spaced out	88 (64%)	46 (36%)
5. was clear about assignment requirements	114 (83%)	19 (17%)
6. I had difficulty in understanding the level expected on assignments	45 (3%)	87 (67%)

Two items (Nos. 3 and 4) are worthy of further attention by the Program Coordinators. Item 3 relating to whether or not the assignments as worded could be understood shows a sufficient number of students having problems. Throughout the responses to the entire Questionnaire the comment was repeated that there was a difficulty here and that not all Tutors were helpful in explaining the assignment clearly (see Item 5, Question 8). Wording should be simple, direct and couched in a systematic way especially at the Certificate level.

Item 9 – the spacing of assignments has presented a real problem for the students (1/3 with problems). Elsewhere in this Report this matter has been raised. It is, unfortunately, a common problem but one that can be lessened with prior planning.

Question 10 – Table 5: Feedback on Assignments

The feedback was: n = 133 (varied)

	Yes	No
1. Adequate	120 (90%)	13 (10%)
2. Given before the next assignment was due	83 (68%)	39 (32%)

Item 2 highlights a problem, mainly of timing of setting the assignments, but also of tutor action, or lack of it, in marking and returning the assignments to students. Some delays could also be caused by management if corrected assignments are not returned until all are received and marked. This matter needs further investigation for it is important that timely and helpful feedback be given to students.

Question 11 – Table 6: Use of the Library

N = 136

	Frequently	Sometimes	Not at all
I used the Library	8 (6 %)	55 (40 %)	73 (54 %)

It is disturbing to find that more than 50% of the students did not use the library at all. Such a situation calls into question the breadth of study undertaken in the Program especially as there were no set texts nor book(s) of supplementary readings. The Certificate is a tertiary level study, albeit at the basic level, but many (perhaps the majority) of students wish to continue studying at more advanced levels. The availability of appropriate and current resources is a necessity for all students. The number of students (55) indicating “sometimes” also adds to the concern especially when distance from/to the MIE library (or others) is great for many students and that when there, they had to locate resources and photocopy the relevant sections – a difficult task for all students, more so for these students.

Question 12 – Table 7: Inter-Semester/Term Workshops

n = 139

I have found the workshops to be	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Of limited use
	77 (55%)	48 (34%)	14 (11%)
The venues/facilities were	Comfortable	Somewhat comfortable	Not comfortable
	57 (41%)	40 (29%)	41 (30%)

The responses show that overall the students found the Workshops a useful part of the Program and their studies. Elsewhere in this Report comment has been made by students that they would like to have more workshops, particularly in curriculum areas.

However, the indication that the venues, or certain venues, were uncomfortable should be considered further by the Program administration. There is nothing worse than being in an uncomfortable venue where the facilities are poor (no A/V resources) and the noise level high. The tutors also made mention of poor venues.

Question 13 - Table 8 - Face-to-Face Sessions

n = 137

I have found the face-to-face sessions to be	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Of limited use
	115 (84%)	15 (11%)	7 (5%)
The venues/facilities were	Comfortable	Somewhat comfortable	Not comfortable
	76 (55%)	38 (28%)	24 (17%)

The same comments apply to these results as for Question 12. The suitability and comfort of venues for the face-to-face sessions must be considered further.

Question 14 – Table 9: Student Support Services/Activities

n = 136

I have found the activities to be	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Of limited use
	112 (82%)	19 (14%)	5 (4%)

In general, the results show student satisfaction.

Question 15 – Table 10: Study Centre Facilities

n = 133

I have found these facilities to be	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Of limited use
	76 (57%)	25 (19%)	32 (24%)

There would appear to be a misinterpretation of the question by the students in as much as they commented on all study facilities/venues whereas there was only one designated study center located at MCA. However, even in the case of this study center the resources were not adequate to cater for the 1000 students.

Question 16 – Table 11: Summary Points about the Delivery of the Program

n = 137

	Low			High	
<i>(Circle one)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. The delivery of the course has created an environment conducive to learning.	0	1	22 (16%)	41 (30%)	73 (53%)
2. The delivery of the course has facilitated my learning.	0	2	1	43 (31%)	93 (68%)
3. The delivery of the course has motivated me to continue my studies.	0	1	1	36 (26%)	99 (72%)
4. The delivery of the course has allowed me to meet other students/teachers.	0	1	3	22 (16%)	104 (76%)

On the whole, the responses to the Items in this question are high to very high – indicating student satisfaction and appreciation. Perhaps Item 1 should be considered further as 15% (22 responses) marked 3 (the middle) rating. Again, any less than a positive view could relate to venues and timing matters mentioned elsewhere.

SECTION C SUMMARY POINTS ABOUT THE PROGRAM

This Section asked the students three main questions as indicated below. Question 17 had nine separate summary questions and for sub-questions 1-6 the students were asked to rank their responses on a 1-5 ranking scale. Sub-questions 7-9 asked for specific statements to be made. Question 18 gave the students the opportunity to make any further point(s) they wished to make. Question 19 asked the student to rate the overall program on a scale of 1-5.

The collated responses for Section C are as follows: -

Question 17 – Table 12

n = 137

	Low		High		
	1	2	3	4	5
<i>(Circle one)</i>					
1. The course helped me to develop my ability to work as a teacher.	0	0	4	20 (15%)	114 (83%)
2. The course developed my problem solving skills.	2	0	11 (8%)	36 (26%)	87 (63%)
3. The course helped me to better understand the role of an early childhood teacher	0	0	4	24 (17%)	110 (80%)
4. The overall organisation of the course, that is distance education learning materials, workshops and face-to-face sessions was effective.	0	0	16 (12%)	40 (29%)	81 (59%)
5. The course improved my written skills.	0	1	11 (8%)	38 (28%)	86 (62%)
6. The course improved my English skills.	0	1	7	33 (24%)	96 (69%)

Comment should be made in relation to Items 2, 4 and 5 that the rating 3 in each case, when combined with rating 4, presents a slightly different result than when ratings 4 and 5 are combined. This matter should be considered further by the Program administration.

The following are the qualitative comments for Questions 17 (7), 17 (8) and 17 (9). In addition the qualitative comments for Question 18 are shown.

Question 17(7)

The question asked “ In what ways have you changed your teaching practice as a result of completing this Course?” and required four questions. The following represents the seven most frequent responses to this question:

- | | | |
|------|--|--------------|
| 1. | To plan my work better, write clear objectives, conduct evaluations and be as flexible as possible | 68 responses |
| 2. | Better ways of understanding how to think and talk to children. | 47 responses |
| 3(a) | To organise my classroom better (including management and room arrangement) | 39 responses |
| 3(b) | By using new methods of teaching, various techniques and developmentally appropriate practices. | 39 responses |
| 4. | To plan my activities to meet the child’s needs and interests. | 22 responses |
| 5. | It helped to upgrade my self-esteem and self-image as a professional (gained in confidence). | 19 responses |
| 6. | To provide more material to help with creativity. | 18 responses |
| 7. | To put into practice all that we have learnt through the Course (sharpen our skills). | 17 responses |

Other responses that were common included comment about understanding the overall development of the child (11); how to relate to parents (10); play as a way of learning for the child (12); improved my English Language (12); made me aware of the need for observing children and recording these observations to become a good facilitator (9); to understand better children with difficulties (7).

Question 17(8)

The question asked the participants the note approximately four responses to the question: "What were the best aspects of the course?"

The following represents the eight most frequent responses to this question:

1. The Workshops where the participants could work face-to-face with their Tutor 68 responses
2. Able to improve (my) teaching and chance to study, upgrade qualifications and salary and to gain a Certificate at the end. 57 responses
3. The opportunity to meet fellow teachers and friends including the Tutors face-to-face. 41 responses
4. Gaining a better understanding of child development (stages of growth and their learning). 28 responses
5. The challenge of preparing a 'portfolio' and the 'project' study (Area 4). 25 responses
6. The materials and their presentation. 24 responses
7. The Assignments were practical, at teaching level. 16 responses
8. The chance to exchange ideas with colleagues. 13 responses

Other responses included: the differing opinions of Tutors (12); the practical help of the Tutors (11); the Creative exhibition visited (8); the curriculum studies areas (11).

Question 17(9)

The participants were asked to note (approximately 4) responses to the question: "what were the aspects of the Course most in need of improvement?"

The following represents the 6 most frequent responses to the question:

1. The need for more practical workshops, they be better organised and closer to the home locations of the students, so providing more face-to-face contact with Tutors. 53 responses
2. The need for tutors to know the subject being taught and for them to know about pre-primary aged children. 27 responses

3.	There be more materials and workshops on the curriculum especially music (8), PE (7), Maths Literacy and Language.	23 responses
4.	Tutors should relate better to the participants, enjoy the 'human touch', be on time, correct assignments meaningfully and keep to the level of the participants.	18 responses
5.	Venues could be more comfortable and less noisy.	10 responses
6.	More time should be given to participants for assignment work.	10 responses
	In addition comment was made that materials could be distributed by post	5 responses

Question 18 ADDITIONAL POINTS

The participants were asked to make any additional points related to the Course that they felt would be of value to the Course administration. The following were the most frequent comments made.

1.	There were varied comments made about the effectiveness of the Tutors and these ranged from helpful (6) to not helpful (10), not punctual (5) and did not respect the participants (5), need for uniformity when marking assignments etc. (4)	30 responses
2.	The general feeling was that the Course assisted the participants.	20 responses
3.	The desire to continue to study and improve their work by having access to further challenging courses and refresher programs.	17 responses
4.	The need for more face-to-face workshops/sessions	16 responses
5.	In relation to the course materials, most participants agreed they were helpful and well presented. A number (12) suggested they be posted or handed-out during face-to-face sessions.	12 responses
6.	The desire for more practical sessions-workshops	10 responses

Other comments included: the need for more group work (5); better access to the library (5); the services of MCA were very good (and this comment was made in responses to other questions).

Question 19 – Table 13 Overall rating of the Program

The collated responses to this question are:

n = 139

	Low				High
(Circle one)	1	2	3	4	5
Please give an overall rating for the course, its objectives, content and method of delivery and its positive impact on you.	0	1	14 (10%)	54 (39%)	69 (50%)

4.6.2 Tutor Interview

Questions asked of tutors:

1. *What do you perceive to be the strengths of the program?*

Considerable planning done – schedules of operation – materials – course content – Coordination by MCA excellent.

Good balance between theory and practice. Enthusiastic participants who readily contributed to their self-evaluations, proud of their work. Students able to contribute their experiences. Built up student’s teaching capacities and their personal knowledge and capacity. The program allowed these students to be trained and therefore have a degree of professionalism not enjoyed previously. The program provided access to study for students who represent a group of E.C. workers previously marginalised and without access to any professional study. Enhanced students’ feeling of self-worth. Gained a sense of unity through their training.

At last there is recognition of prior learning (RPL). Also tutors given recognition and status in education

2. *What do you perceive to be areas for change?*

Review of program material needed for some units. Content of units should be reviewed and made more practical where possible including latest work on brain development and the implications for teaching. More A/V resources desired and facilities available for A/V use. Lack of reading reference material for students. More workshops on curriculum desirable.

3. *If you were able to change anything to improve the course what would you recommend?*

Better venues. More face-to-face opportunities. Some unit content to be updated. Some books (course guides) have been produced hastily and could be revised. Desirable to have a number of Readings to accompany the course booklets. Smaller groups for Tutorials if possible. Climactic conditions reduced value of workshops.

4. *What aspects of student learning have improved most during the program?*

Students began to self-evaluate and become more critical of their work. Their sense of professionalism increased dramatically. Greater and more realistic understanding of young children's development and behaviour. Can see the need for observations and planning.

5. *What aspects of student learning have improved least?*

Difficult to say for whole group as there was such a marked change in attitude, confidence and professionalism amongst all students. Probably their capacity to observe and document/analyse their observations needs further work. Their portfolios could be strengthened to show greater concentration on self-analysis, observations and planning.

6. *What other side benefits have improved? For example, did the program improve self-confidence?*

Self-confidence of the students increased dramatically as did their sense of self-worth. Tutors also gained in sense of professionalism and feeling of being valued by the educational community. A sense of purpose developed.

7. *Did the program empower the student in any way?*

Developed a sense of self-worth, confidence and empowerment as a result of being 'trained' and receiving a Certificate to prove it.

Comment.

Absences were noted in workshops. Questions as to why – time of workshops (done in school holidays), venues and location? By comparison, fewer absences were not noted in face-to-face sessions.

8. *How were the student grades moderated to get consistency of marking?*

Co-ordinator worked with Tutors to resolve problems. Randomly assigned marking across all tutorial groups and to include peer reviewing. Where disputes continued these were referred to the Program Director for resolution as overall academic and administrative responsibility rested with MIE.

4.6.3 Stakeholder Interview Summary

Views of the Stakeholders – MIE, MCA and UNICEF Mauritius were sought.

All three partners agreed that the strengths of the program were:

- The collaborative, distance education program for over 1000 teachers was a highly ambitious undertaking
- The commitment of all partners and the acceptance of their strengths and weaknesses.
-
- The unique human resource capacity of all staff in working together and in achieving the objectives of the program.
- Reaching consensus whenever there was an issue/problem that needed resolution.
- The excitement in being part of the program.

The challenges were:

- Delivering a distance education program to over 1000 students including the geographically isolated region of Rodrigues – an unprecedented undertaking.
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities of the different partners.
- Meeting the specific objectives of the program.
- At times, there were some slow decision-making processes.
- Library and documentation services for the students.

Suggested changes:

- Some further joint collaboration needed to work-out tutoring/support arrangements in view of the withdrawal of UNICEF funding.
- Further clarifying roles and responsibilities especially at the outset of the next phase of the program.

4.6.4 Student Evaluation Summary

The meeting provided an opportunity for the Course Evaluators to share with the students The collated summary of Part C of the Student Questionnaire: "Summary Points about the Course" and to seek their agreement as to whether or not this was a fair and accurate summary.

The meeting also gave the students the opportunity to add any further information they wished to their completed Questionnaires.

In general the students expressed great satisfaction with the Course and appreciated the opportunity presented to them to upgrade their work and professionalism.

The students were invited to comment on what were the *best aspects* of the Course. Their comments follow:

- The course was interesting, it provided them with new teaching methods and brought them up to date Agreed
- The Course upgraded their level of teaching Agreed
- The visits of the tutors to their classrooms and subsequent feedback Agreed
- The Course materials Agreed
- The Assignments were useful Agreed
- The Workshops were of particular value Agreed
- The face-to-face teaching Agreed
- The student support given by MCA (phone, morale, help, coordination) Agreed

They were asked the comment on aspects of the Course that they believed *could be improved*. The comments follow:

- Tutors who knew the subject being taught were helpful, those who did not know it and who lacked knowledge and experience in ECD were less helpful Agreed
- Some tutors visited the students' classrooms unannounced Part Agreement
- The portfolio, whilst considered a good activity by all was found to be too demanding of time and there was some confused advice given regarding the requirements for the portfolio and its marking. Some students felt the format was too restrictive Agreed
- The timing of the Assignments clashed thereby causing a heavy workload. A better scheduling of assignments is desirable. Agreed
- The Assignment grading was uneven. Some Assignments were done by other people yet graded as the student's own work. Part Agreement
- Difficult to access the library and with the added problem that books etc. could not be taken out. Agreed
- The student ID card was of no use for transportation Agreed
- The full-day workshops considered too long, especially for students with family commitments. Agreed
- Some venues for the workshops were poor and uncomfortable Agreed

In addition, the students were invited to suggest what the next phase in their studies might be. They commented:

- Whatever it might be it should happen as soon as possible now that their study momentum had been activated. Agreed
- Whatever the next phase, it have more face-to-face teaching and workshops where practicable. Part Agreement
- Whatever the next phase that there be more resources made available to be students: library facilities; books of readings duplicated; more practical workshops and face-to-face teaching in more comfortable venues. Agreed

The students agreed that the summaries of responses to the Questionnaire Section C as presented by the Course Evaluators were fair and accurate summaries.

5.0 QUALITY ASSURANCE

Both MCA and MIE worked hard to ensure that sound quality assurance procedures were in place throughout the duration of the program. This process was done at both macro- and micro- levels. Program planners established procedures at the outset (macro-) and then took a 'grass-roots' approach, particularly with student issues, to ensure that quality control procedures were in place.

The establishment of an agreed upon quality circle involving staff from MIE, MCA and UNICEF Mauritius ensured a continuous and effective quality control mechanism. It was particularly effective in relation to the development and monitoring of course materials.

The main areas of quality assurance were evident in:

- *The development of program materials* – teams worked together and went through a defined process to get adequate feedback. A planning cycle was adhered to.
- *Academic progress of students* – student assignments were carefully devised and consultation occurred with all the relevant staff and partners. Assessment responses of students were carefully monitored and again adequate processes were implemented in order to monitor and, if necessary, moderate overall grades.
- *A system of peer review* and moderation attempted to ensure that grading was fair and just. However, it was noted that with over 1000 students and 20 tutors some difficulties were experienced over the duration of the program. Staff from both MIE and MCA did their best to ameliorate problems when they arose.

6.0 OUTCOMES

- The program has achieved its main goal of educating, that is of upgrading some 1000 teachers to the Certificate of Proficiency level.

This is evident in:

- the low attrition rate
 - the overall endorsement of the program by the participants.
 - the academic success of the students.
 - the strong request by the participants to go on to further study.
 - the demonstrated improvement over the two years in the skills, knowledge and understanding of the participants.
-
- There must be some improvement in the general teaching of the participants thus raising the overall quality of pre-primary education in Mauritius.
 - There are now women who, on completion of the program, have increased their self-confidence and self-esteem. Their sense of empowerment has increased as evidenced by their written and verbal responses.
 - The inter-institutional concept has worked in this context and does provide a model for other developing countries in this region.
 - The materials developed and used in the program are in need of modification as suggested in this Report and could then be sold under licence to other countries. There is a great need for basic course material at a certificate level in the geographic region.
 - There is now a cohort of early childhood teachers ready to go on and further develop their skills through advanced study.
 - UNICEF's thrust to build the capacity of local staff to be self-sufficient has been realised through this project and full credit should be given to UNICEF for perseverance with this Project initiative.

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