
SITE VISIT: ECD Policy in South Africa

Excerpted from the Coordinators' Notebook No. 17, "Creating a Shared Vision: How Policy Affects Early Childhood Care and Development," 1995.

A study of the status of children and ECCD programme was begun a year and a half before the first free election in South Africa that occurred in 1994. The impetus for the study was the high rates of repetition and dropout in education for a large percentage of the population. It was recognized that once the new government came into power there would be political demands to level the playing field. Therefore the new South African government would need to consider how to ensure that all children were ready to enter the first year of primary school.

A Study Team, consisting of eight ECCD specialists from South Africa and an international consultant, undertook an examination of the situation of young children in South Africa, looking particularly at the kinds of supports that are available to them and making recommendations in relation to how they can benefit more effectively from basic education. The Team was charged specifically with making recommendations in regards to the value and feasibility of creating a preschool programme for five-year-olds. While the Study Team did in fact conclude that an essential part of the strategy for upgrading education is to bring five year olds into the education system, the team felt that if this were to be the sole focus of state input to early childhood development, it would be too little too late for the majority of young children. Furthermore this policy fails to take into account the particular vulnerability of the first three years of life and the needs of working parents.

The Study Team also believed that a preschool year for five-year-olds could only be effective if it was part of a larger strategy designed to address the roles that government, non-governmental agencies, the private sector, communities and parents should play in supporting children's growth and development. Thus the recommendations placed the creation of a programme for five-year-olds in a broader, more appropriate context.

Results of the Study

The study included information on the following:

- The evidence from South Africa on the effects of preschool on repetition and dropout and on nonschool outcomes was summarized.
- The key skills that all children should have acquired by the end of the preschooling period were identified and elaborated upon.

- The types of skills required of preschool staff in order to support the development of children's skills were defined, and an appropriate cost-effective mix of staffing was proposed.
- There was an examination of the various 'bridging' modules being offered at the time to see to what extent these provided the skills defined above, and an assessment was made of the modules' strengths and weaknesses, including their impact on repetition and dropout.
- A mapping of the preschool provider network was undertaken. This included a description of the provision of ECCD programmes by various government and NGO providers, and the number of children served, and the geographic spread of provision. The process also allowed for the identification of programmes or programme elements (e.g., initial training, ongoing support, instructional materials) that could be used as models for future expansion of ECCD provision.
- Recommendations were made in relation to an appropriate cost-effective mix of preschool staff, and the availability of training for different levels of staff, and cost per trainee was determined. Given the capacity at that point in time an estimate was made of how many teachers could be trained in a 12-month period. There was also a specification of the conditions under which the existing training capacity could be expanded.
- The roles that government, NGOs, communities and parents should play were defined in relation to: setting standards and monitoring provision, the development of curriculum, training, paying staff, providing physical facilities, and covering the costs of recurrent materials. Also, recommendations were made in terms of the institutional arrangements that were needed in order to coordinate preschool if it were to be offered by government.
- An assessment was made of the recurrent costs associated with the existing models of preschool provision, and a description was provided of how these costs were being financed.
- A description was provided of the positions of the then-current government, political movements, parties and extra-parliamentary groups in relation to preschool provision.
- The key policy issues to be resolved by a new democratically-elected government were identified and, where appropriate, recommendations were made for consideration by the new authorities.
- An intervention strategy and programme were proposed to address the demand for preschool services over time. On the basis of different models of provision, the cost of a new government offering a year of preschool to every child in the country was estimated. Cost estimates were also made for a gradual increase in ECCD provision over a five-year time period.

In essence, the Study Team recommended that the government, in partnership with NGOs, the private sector, trade unions, the community and families, invest in the provision of early childhood services for children from birth through the early primary years. The recommendations focussed specifically on the provision of support to early childhood development programmes for selected children from birth through age four, and the provision of universal preprimary education for five-year-olds prior to entry into the formal school system. However, the report

made the point that it was important that this year not be offered in lieu of or apart from school reform at the junior primary level.

The recommendations made as a result of the study were based on resources already developed within South Africa. For example, there is a strong community of non-governmental agencies that have developed appropriate curriculum for young children, and a variety of outreach models allowing for the provision of services to isolated rural areas. The variety reflects a sensitivity to differing regional and local needs within generally accepted principles of development which seek to redress historical imbalances through appropriate and cost-effective strategies.

The NGOs involved in early childhood development (ECD) programmes have also developed extensive training systems that 1) provide ECD staff with appropriate skills and knowledge to work with young children and their families, and 2) enable communities to take ownership of ECD programmes and sustain them over time. It is these strengths that will be built upon in the creation of a national system of support to ECD programmes.

It was the belief of the Study Team that over the next five years the current training agencies could develop the capacity to train the required number of ECD workers, provided that they were given the necessary resources to do so, and provided that appropriate linkages were established with formal teacher training institutions. Within the recommended Plan of Action the services provided by current Resource and Training Agencies will be expanded and strengthened.

Selected Recommendations

- Support for the development, expansion, management and funding of early childhood provision is the joint responsibility of the state, provincial and local governments, the private sector, the community and parents.
- Responsibility for the development of policies and guidelines for the implementation of early childhood development programmes should be the responsibility of central government.
- A Department of Early Childhood Development (ECD) should be created within the Ministry of Education and Training, responsible for creating policy and guidelines.
- Curriculum guidelines for early childhood development should be established by the National Institute for Curriculum Development (NICD), taking into consideration children's needs in health, nutrition, education and psychosocial development.
- Responsibility for interpretation and implementation of guidelines and policies for ECD programmes should be based at the Provincial level.
- Implementation of ECD programmes should be the responsibility of Local Authorities and ECD management committees. They would be responsible for stimulating the development of ECD programmes, registering and monitoring the activities of individual early childhood programmes, and they would be involved in direct provision.
- At the programme level, parents will have responsibility for management of early childhood provision. They would be responsible for establishing and maintaining the facilities

and paying the teachers whose salaries would be provided through a combination of state subsidies, local funding and parent fees.

- An Interministerial ECD Committee should be created to promote integration across sectors of services in support of young children and their families.
- A Reception Class for five-year-olds should be created. This is to be phased in over a period of five years. By the end of the fifth year 100% of the five-year-olds should have access to a Reception Class.
- Resource and Training Centres (RTC) should be established in each Province to provide training and support to ECD programmes. Current NGOs can be accredited and contracted to serve as RTCs. These should be subsidized by government.
- A Reception Year for five year olds should not be implemented in isolation. It must be linked to reform within Junior Primary.
- Alternative ways of reaching those under 5 need to continue to be explored.

The costs of implementing the recommendations were calculated. The per capita costs of provision, inclusive of the costs of facilities and the training of teachers and appropriate support staff, decrease as more children have access to the services. In the first year there would be state subsidies of ECCD services for 579,000 children, from birth to 5 years of age, in a variety of settings. The average per capita cost is R1,960 (US\$ 653/year). By the end of the fifth year more than 3 million children would have access to ECCD provision, at an average cost of R1,504 (US\$ 501) per child per annum. This is a small investment to make in the foundation upon which a nation is being built.

When the new Government came into power the Report was submitted to those formulating government policy. What follows is what was written into the Draft White Paper on Education and Training. (Staatskoerant Government Gazette 1994)

57. The care and development of infants and young children must be the foundation of social relations and the starting point of a national human resource development strategy. The national and provincial Departments of Education will have specific roles to play in this field. They cannot undertake the full responsibility for ECD, which is a multi-disciplinary field. Instead, the national Department of Education will liaise with the Departments of National Health and Welfare in order to establish an inter-departmental committee or working group to develop their joint interests in policy for the infant and young child.

58. The Department of Education has particular responsibility for the education components of ECD, especially the development of policy frameworks, norms and standards in relation to curricula and teacher education, including paraprofessional training.

59. The new national department is planned to have a directorate for Early Childhood Development, and Lower Primary Education, in the light of the continuity in developmental approaches to the young child and the need for a reshaping of curricula and teaching methodology for the early years of school.

Hopefully, similar units will be established in provincial Departments of Education, which will undertake similar liaison functions with Health and Welfare.

60. The new national directorate will have the major responsibility for developing policy for the reception phase, the first year of compulsory general education, in consultation with its provincial counterparts. These new provincial units would therefore take up the massive challenge of spearheading the phasing in of the policy, in conjunction with NGO providers and accredited training agencies.

61. However, before the policy process could properly begin, it would be necessary to consult with all national stakeholders in the field, including the national representative body of ECD practitioners, in order to develop an appropriate statutory consultative group to advise on ECD policy, resourcing and development.

62. State funds will not be sufficient to mount a major developmental programme in 1995, but the seed money should be made available, as in the new ABET programme, to begin the startup phase and attract other funders. This process needs to be driven through a partnership of local government, community, business, worker and development agency interests, in order to build public awareness and develop a funding strategy for a national ECD programme.

The South Africa case study provides a good example of how recommendations can be turned into policy language. The policy has not yet been put into place and implementation has not begun, so it is not possible to evaluate the effort. However a start has been made toward a policy that unifies diverse efforts into a cohesive nationwide response to the needs of young children.

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Early Childhood Counts: Programming Resources for Early Childhood Care and Development.
CD-ROM. The Consultative Group on ECCD. Washington D.C.: World Bank, 1999.