
SITE VISIT: Searching for a New Child Care Policy—First Steps in Gauteng, South Africa

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To work, a child-care policy must be contextual; that is, it must grow out of the specific historical and social circumstances of the society in which the policy is to be implemented.

Lamb et al. (1992)

Introduction

South Africa is unique. We have traditional and modern societies living side by side, and sometimes even within the same family. In a rapidly changing society, a new child care policy must recognize the full spectrum of the population, and not, as was seen in the past, the culture most familiar to policy makers.

In the past, South Africa has uncritically imported day care centre models from Europe and the USA. Good quality expensive services are available to only a few. The rest have extremely low quality replicas.

The current search for a new child care policy must be guided by socio-economic realities, including the following:

- recognizing the discrepancies between children's needs and the resources available to meet those needs;
- acknowledging childrearing goals and strategies;
- determining the circumstances of children.

Many families cannot meet children's basic needs. They need help from outside and they need to find partners who can help them meet those needs. Therefore, ECD must be firmly located within family and community development.

This presentation describes the way in which the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) in South Africa has accepted the invitation of the new National Department of Education's interim policy to begin the search for a new ECD policy through collaboration with all ECD stakeholders, using the broad headings:

- intersectoral collaboration
- the *Impilo* Project as a mechanism for transformation
- stakeholder consultation

GDE has started to collaborate with other government departments.

- There is an inter-sectoral committee, including the 3 biggest departments (Health, Welfare and Education) that meets regularly (about every second month). There are several subcommittees, including street children, youth policy, the Gauteng Provincial Plan of Action for Children (GPAC), life skills at schools and work, substance abuse and chemical dependence, child and women abuse, subsidies, grants, institutions and facilities, HIV-AIDS, NNSDP/PSMP, and rehabilitation workers. Each subcommittee is led by one of the three departments.
- ECD district development officers (DDOs) in each of the GDE 18 districts have started meeting with counterparts from the other departments.
- GDE has held meetings with the Department of Development Planning and Local Government.
- GDE has held an initial meeting with Local authorities. One of the proposals for collaboration is a joint *ECD programme management committee*.

Interdepartmental ECD Working Group

The initial decision to create the working group was taken at the Gauteng Cabinet retreat in May 1996. MEC recognises the challenges and is passionately concerned about young children and transforming current policies and approaches. The ECD sub-committee of the intersectoral committee was set up with GDE as lead department.

The goals of the subcommittee were to:

- take an inter-departmental approach
- make maximum use of state resources
- involve local government
- expand partnerships to include NGOs, labour movements, businesses

- support the development of family and community-driven care
- instigate statutory change
- validate existing alternative approaches
- link with national government
- promote and popularize child care

The first intersectoral ECD workshop was held February 18, 1997. Since it was the first step, it involved only those involved in provincial government. Health, Welfare and Education all presented their definition of ECD, as well as their vision for the future, their scope of work, and their plans for ECD transformation. Through discussion there was agreement on a common definition of ECD and a delineation of possible obstacles. The group also determined the way forward.

Outcomes of the meeting included the following:

- to include children from conception to the early school years in ECD;
- a strong commitment to collaboration;
- a decision on a single system of registration, monitoring and subsidising services;
- a commitment to collect information; and
- to involve other local players (local government and NGOs).

The obstacles that were identified included:

- the need to clarify roles and ensure delivery of services;
- the lack of a clear definition of the geographic borders of the different departments;
- the complexity and fragmentation in the sector;
- high expectations and limited resources; and
- the limited capacity in departments still in transition.

The Impilo Project: Transforming Existing ECD Provision

GDE has started collecting data about ECD services and needs in the province. There are a large number and variety of ECD services and role players in each district. These are:

- state funded pre-primary schools;
- primary schools with classes for children under compulsory school-going age;

- private educare centres, pre-primary schools, creches, etc.;
- family-based services, play groups, child minders and large home-based services;
- resource and training organisations (RTOs); and
- a variety of ECD stakeholders.

Perceptions and Misconceptions

The GDE has started to try and understand the circumstances of young children and the views and attitudes of their caregivers. One of the most troubling misconceptions is that children will be better off in a large service rather than in the loving care of family members. It is important to find out how many children need full day care as opposed to the support of different kinds of family members who are able to take care of children. The term 'home based services' is confusing because often 'centres' are operating in homes or back yards. These services are very different from 'family-based services' which assume that children are accommodated within the framework of the extended family. Family-based needs to be better understood. There needs to be a better guide for understanding that one adult can give good care to only a limited number of children.

There can be no doubt about the inequality in existing state provision. In order to redress this inequality it is necessary to focus not only on the child but also on his/her wider environment. We need to pay more attention to family and community support systems. We need a multi-disciplinary approach that responds to the welfare and development of the child. Specifically, there is a need for the following:

- a comprehensive policy for children that involves the coordinated efforts of all government and non-government role players to overcome fragmentation and inequality;
- a mechanism to restructure GDE ECD funding;
- opportunities to develop and test new multi-functional models of ECD provision;
- state funding to be targeted for children in greatest need;
- the empowerment of families as primary caregivers;
- support for community and family-based ECD services;
- research and evaluation.

Three broad areas for policy development have been identified:

- GDE pilot projects;
- developing a single system of registering, monitoring and subsidising ECD services through inter-departmental collaboration;

- locating ECD within broad family and community development.

GDE Pilot Projects

Cycles of action and reflection to provide information for future planning

Provincial pilot

National pilot for 5/6 year olds outside the school system

- national standards for ECD practitioner qualifications
- R3.1 million per capita subsidies and R1.2 million for training
- GDE is adding funds to include 3 and 4 year olds

ECD pilot in Kathorus

This is a more extensive pilot, which will focus especially on the youngest and oldest phases of ECD. R1.5 million from RDP funds are to be used as part of the broader Kathorus RDP project, which will have three components:

- research: understanding the context and needs of children 0-9; evaluating new models and strategies.
- training and resourcing small family-based services: This will be the largest component. There will be funds for resources as well as training (not per capita subsidies). The first step is to get a development planner to help us design a model for resourcing these services. The task of developing and testing this proposed model for resourcing will go out on tender.
- project to bring compulsory aged children back into the school system and then develop and test models for fast tracking the children who need to catch up with their peers.

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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.