

The Quality Care and Education of the Child: The Unspoken Realities

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ABSTRACT Human societies have always cared for the survival of the young child. Laws recognize that children are born with the rights to have their learning and care needs met. All child-care arrangements, including family and centre-based child care have the potential to provide high-quality, individualized, responsive and stimulating experiences that occur within the context of strong. As such, this paper examines the relationship and distinction between the quality of care and quality education of children and other salient issues affecting the overall development of children before entering elementary school, the effect of quality child care and education on the future well-being of the children. Data were collected through in-depth interviews. Qualitative research design as a mode of enquiry was employed in this research study. Purposive sampling was used as a method of sample selection. The paper recommends that there should be access to health services in most schools.

INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, childhood care and education (CCE) for children 0-8 years is an actively negotiated set of social relationships (Ehrle et al. 2001). As parents welcome their baby home and plan to return to work, what are the qualities they should be looking for in a child care setting? What is considered a high-quality child care setting for infants and toddlers? How do you prepare your baby or toddler for the transition to child care? Parents and other caregivers play a critical role in determining children's chances for survival and development, and they can empower children to become architects of their own lives.

While the home environment is critical to children's survival and development, care and education programmes are also important if children are to flourish. Quality care both at home and outside the home can provide children with the basic cognitive and language skills they need for school, while also fostering social competency and emotional development. In fact, early childhood care and education make up the foun-

ation of a quality basic education (Fowowe 2010).

There are two extreme points of view about children's needs and their development. One is that children are children; they are the same and develop in the same way throughout the world. The other is that children are different in every aspect, a product of their culture and environment, thus one cannot generalise about the development of children as a whole, because it must always be related to cultural context. All children have the same basic needs; how these basic needs are satisfied can be very different in different cultures. What are these basic needs?

The overall goal of childhood care and education is to provide a child with an environment which will promote his optimum development at a period when growth is rapid and the child is vulnerable to deprivation of appropriate experiences.

Principles Concerning the Care and Education of the Child

The child must enjoy the fundamental rights as set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child, as well as the right to develop his physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual potential to the full and to be respected as an individual in his own right. The child will normally depend primarily on his family to recognise and secure these rights. The family operates within a wider social framework

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from which it should be able to obtain the support it needs to fulfill its obligations. In providing such support, care should be taken not to undermine parental responsibilities towards the child.

All services with a contribution to make to the development of young children, especially health, education and social services, should work with, and through, the family to provide continuity of experience for the child (National Institute of Child Health & Human Development (NICHD): Early Child Care Research Network 2003).

The Rights of the Child

All children, no matter what their race, colour, sex, language or religion is, are entitled to these rights. Children have a right to special protection and a right to opportunities and facilities so they can develop in a normal and healthy way in freedom and dignity. Children have a right to have a name and nationality from birth. Children have a right to be given enough to eat, to have a decent place to live as well as to play, and to receive good medical care when they get sick. If children are handicapped in any way, they have a right to special treatment and education. Children have a right to grow up with love, affection and security. Babies should not be separated from their mothers, children should be brought up by their parents wherever possible and children without parents should be looked after by the government. Children have a right to be educated for free. They have a right to be among the first to be protected in times of disaster. They have a right to be protected from all forms of neglect, cruelty and exploitation. Children should not be made to work before a certain age. They should never be made to do work which is dangerous to their health or which harms their education or physical or moral development. Children should be protected from anything that causes racial, religious or other forms of discrimination. They should be brought up in a spirit of understanding, friendship among peoples, peace and universal brotherhood. Children should be brought up to understand that their energy and talents should be devoted to the service of their fellow men.

The current situation is that a very large segment of the total South African population lives in circumstances of political exclusion and ha-

arrassment, economic exploitation, poverty and malnutrition. It is within this context that one needs to look at the Early Childhood Education (ECE) provision in SA, as Pimento and Kernsted (2004) proclaimed:

“The neglect of child care in SA must be located in terms of the state’s lack of concern with the conditions under which South African labour power is reproduced generally. The neglect of state expenditure on child care is thus linked to a whole series of state policies such as the neglect of housing, education, health, pensions and welfare services generally for the South African working class as.”

Given these circumstances, we should not be surprised to find that a very large proportion of the young children in SA are likely to grow up in a context of inadequate care. These children are likely to face the prospect of undernourishment, and are less likely to receive adequate medical attention or monitoring. They likely live in housings that are far from adequate and overcrowded. Once they reach school-going age, the recycle of poverty and of under-provision is likely to be extended by inadequate schools staffed by hard-pressed and under-qualified teachers (Mishra 2008). Even the privileged children will have one deprivation that is common with their peers:

“All will grow up separated from and ignorant of each other, divided on the basis of ethnic policies that treat separateness as normal and any inter-ethnic contact and experience as exceptional” (Mishra 2008).

Children also take in more air when breathing, eat more foods and drink more liquids per pound than adults so they have the potential to be more exposed to chemicals. The normal behaviour of smaller children also places them at greater risk to be exposed to chemicals. In their younger years, children spend most of their time close to the ground where they may be exposed to dust, soil, or pesticide fumes. Children also put many things from their hands into their mouths (Morrison 2003).

Children are the most sincere and unpretentious human beings. When they are ill, you will know that they are ill, when they are better, they will leave you in doubt, they will begin to smile, chat and run around, no pretence, no exaggerations and no malingering (Morrison 2003). Because of this tender nature of children, they however need special care, stimulation and protec-

tion against childhood diseases. God in the bible even corroborates this assertion in Psalm 127 verse 3 when He says:

“Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward, like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth.”

This biblical quote is a corroboration (testimony) to the premium placed on children in many cultures, communities and even heaven, efforts to make the heritage (children) educated, nurtured and stimulated in all ramifications has been the business of the stakeholders (government, Religious bodies, Parents and community). Hence, without any of exaggeration, the childcare business has now become an important venture around the world as some and more parents are working and need care for their “beloved children”. Societies, religious bodies are equally interested in providing educational experience and stimulation for all children to improve their chances of doing well in school and later in life (Palenchar 2003).

In South Africa, for instance, the demand for early childhood care and development programme has continued to increase as more vulnerable children survive, family situations and child care practice change, more women join the labour force and health crises such as the mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS are addressed (National Institute of Child Health & Human Development (NICHD): Early Child Care Research Network 2003). These experiences therefore can be provided in a full-day settings referred to as crèche (reception) or part-day programmes such as nursery schools, kindergarten, as more children are placed in these child care and education settings, understanding how the children are fairing has become critically important. Children’s safety is only one issue that is very important in this setting, other concerns relating to children are learning and development as they grow in the care of the caregivers (Mishra 2008).

Quality Child Care and Education

Educational provision and quality child programmes for the early years of life has been made compulsory through conventions (UNESCO 2007) on Education for all, in fact, in its 6-point goals, the major provision is:

Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

As a signatory the National Institute of Child Health & Human Development (NICHD) Early Child Care Research Network (2003) agreements, South Africa has accepted to contribute to good children development and the outcomes that set the foundation for lifelong learning commitment to the monitoring of health and nutrition status during the critical period of development. This position is in the line with Popoola (2010) which includes the provision of care, stimulation and support that will ensure the rights of the child in the following Areas. Good nutrition and health, healthy and safe environment psycho-social stimulation and security and safety. The care and education of early childhood children should meet the child’s need for security and affection and social life, including leisure activities, with other children and adults. Provide the conditions for good physical and mental health; stimulate the child’s creative and intellectual development and his capacity for expression. Help the child to become integrated in his environment and cope with life, and encourage the child’s independence, initiative and free play. Respect the child’s cultural and psychological identity and recognise his uniqueness and individuality. Open up for both family and early childhood circles to the wider society to enable the child to meet other people of all ages.

Educational provision should be made available for all children whose parents wish them to have it during at least two years preceding the start of primary school. The lack of financial means should not be a barrier to children who need such educational provision. Support services, including health, social services and education, have an important role to play in the development of all children, but the form of provision should take account of their particular needs, which differ according to their stages of development, their personal capacities and their cultural backgrounds (Myers 2008).

Children who live in urban areas have great need of care and education owing to living conditions in towns; lack of space, pollution of various kinds, and dangers in the streets, parents’ absence (time spent at work plus travelling time). Children who live in rural and sparsely polluted areas are more difficult to cater for. It is therefore necessary to find untraditional and flexible so-

lutions to bring early childhood education to these children. Children who live in circumstances of extreme socioeconomic deprivation have special needs. Children of cultural minorities, whether native or immigrant should receive an education which promotes their integration into the regional or national community, as a basis for mutual enrichment. Handicapped children should, whenever necessary, have available to them establishments which meet their special needs.

In association with child care and child psychological services, health services should operate within early childhood education care and education provision to detect, assess and treat handicapping conditions. Early researches in child care and the literatures on pre-school intervention have equally provided a backdrop for understanding more recent studies of quality child care and education. Quality is amongst other concepts in research typically used to describe features of programme in the environment involving children experiences that are presumed to be beneficial to their well-being. Quality education in this article therefore refers to the education which is inclusive of all population, especially, the most vulnerable. It equally seeks participation of stakeholders of all constituencies which ensures gender equity in the short and long term (Popoola 2010).

Researchers like Mishra (2008), Morrison (2008) and Palenchar (2003), have equally shown the quality of early child care and education in many ways. All the descriptions reflect two main dimensions, or type of ingredients that correspond with the following conceptual features. Firstly, the structure of a programme or classroom, that is, the basic set up that does not change much from hour to hour or day to day. Secondly, the dynamics of the programme or classroom and this implies the behaviour and interactions of the adults and children which change constantly and are interdependent.

Structure of a programme the physical environment constitutes the structure, which is arranged to assure the safety of children, with electrical outlets covered, cleaning supplies locked up out of reach of children, and facilities for adults to wash after diapering or toileting. The size of the class and the ratio of children to care giver or adult constitute a classroom structure, for example, A classroom of twenty (20) children and two (2) caregiver or adults having a

group size of twenty and ratio of 10 to 2. This structure is different from a classroom that has thirty (30) children and the caregivers or adults. It therefore means that, different numbers of children at different ages alters the composition of a class.

Dynamics in Child Learning Centres

This involves the interaction patterns of the adults and the children in the learning centre. It has four components, teacher's behaviour, children's behaviour, teacher-child interactions and the stability and community of interaction (Mishra 2008).

A teacher's behaviour may be viewed as being negative or positive or even both, it is positive, when the teacher pays attention, encourages the child, engages the child and be sensitive always to their plight and respond quickly to their changing needs. While negative behaviour includes harshness, detachment, non-tolerance, etc. A quote from Dr Haim Ginnoth (1975) says:

"I have come to a frightening conclusion that I am a decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool for torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humour, hurt or heal. In all situations it is my response that influences whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, a child humanized or dehumanized."

These behaviours identified above can be measured through observation and recording techniques. Other interesting dynamics in the learning centres are explained below (American Public Health Association & American Academy of Pediatrics 2011):

Teacher-child Interaction: this aspect is very important because, teacher's behaviour affects children and often a response to children's behaviour. Such expected behaviour of teachers to children are quick response to children when they talk and do things; giving them interesting toys for play and responding when a child asks simple question like, What is this? Can we play? And finally teachers should offer words of encouragement when a child builds a tower of blocks and other interesting games.

Stability and Community of Interactions: children need caregivers or adults who are constant in their lives and teachers equally need to

be consistent in the ways they respond to children. Teachers and caregivers therefore need to be always there for the children because these children appreciate who come to their aids, chat with them and do not discriminate against them.

Human societies everywhere in the globe always make provision for the survival of their children no matter, how bad or worse their economy is, even with or without considering the age for formal education. Childcare in this article, deals with the treatment a child is exposed to before starting a formal education. It is important, at this juncture, to note that most brain development of the child happens before the child reaches three years old even long before many adults realize what is happening, the brain cells of a new infant has proliferated, synapses cracked and the patterns of a life time are already established (Baker 2003).

In a short 36 months, children develop their abilities to think, speak, learn and reason the foundation for their values and social behaviour as adults are already laid because, these early years or a time of such great change in a young life and of such long-lasting influence, hence, ensuring the rights of the child must begin to the very start of life (Mishra 2008). In fact, to guarantee this overall development of the child, a lot of care, safety measures, nutritional needs, social, moral cognitive and emotional preparatory must be done during these early years. Researchers have equally corroborated the fact that a child learns better when such a child is given the appropriate good health, care and nutritional needs at different stages in life. Popoola (2010) also confirms that for one to have good health, enjoy good education and survive, a host of factors such as food heredity, climate, hygiene and exercise come to play. Of all these factors, the most important according to him is food, because it plays a vital role in the physical growth of the child.

Choices made and actions taken on behalf of children before starting the formal education (pre-school) affect not only how a child develops or learns in school but also determine the overall development of such a child. As such, every care and other necessary measures that have been identified earlier in this article combined with the later should be provided for the child during this critical period (birth to age three). The time of early childhood should merit the highest-priorities attention while responsi-

ble government and parents should make decisions about laws, policies, programmes that will promote responsible (Fowowe 2010).

Child-care programmes and other preparations equally entails the assurance that every child without exception, is registered at birth and starts life safe from violence with adequate nutrition, clean water, proper sanitation, primary health care etc. In the final analysis, governments at all levels and parents irrespective of their socio-economic status should ensure compliance to the following aspects. They should make the rights and well being of children a priority, create, find and reallocate the resources that are necessary to adequately fund or take care where applicable of early childhood care as the first essential step in ensuring the rights of the child. They should accept responsibility and accountability to ensure that every child has the fundamental prerequisite for healthy growth and development during school age and adolescence.

Scope of Early Child Care and Education

The important point to be stressed here is that educational aspect of Pre-formal school, which in most cases is wrongly perceived as the only component of ECE, is just a small part of the entire ECE programme. There are other components that make up the ECE program.

Living with the belief that education is all about ECE amounts to disregarding other factors that make school readiness (education) possible. Intact, the care dimension which involves; family care, health and nutritional needs, psycho-social, pre and post natal, etc are equally important. The table below equally best illustrates the neglected and the catered dimensions of ECE programmes.

METHODOLOGY

The analysis in this paper is based on in-depth interviews conducted with child care and education centres (Early Learning Centres) in South Africa with casual conversations and observations during regular visits and participation in family gatherings. The research was described to potential participants as exploring the care givers and the education centres working together to raise children, this meant having or sharing primary responsibility for a child's well-

being, especially food, school fees and clothes, for a period longer than a school break. Classroom observation and interviews with centre directors and teachers provided data on centre characteristics and program quality, and on teachers' qualifications, commitment, and compensation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The departure point for all ECE policy development is that the primary responsibility for the care and upbringing of young children belongs to parents and families. However, because of the inequality in income distribution, and because ECE is a public good whose benefits spill over from individual parents to society as a whole, the Department of Education sees it as the state's responsibility to subsidise and assure the quality of ECE services, the challenge facing Government is to convert its wide-ranging and critically important post-1994 response into an integrated, targeted, government-wide programme of action on ECE. In this regard, a key challenge facing Government is to increase access to ECE programmes, correct existing imbalances in ECE provision improve the quality of ECE programmes and plan and deliver ECE services in a coordinated way (White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education 2001).

Many elements of comprehensive ECE support and services are already in place and some are performing well. These include infrastructure (water and electricity) provision for households, citizenship through birth registration, social security, health care for women and children, early child care and education (ECCE), and preschool attendance in preparation for formal schooling. Improvements in access and quality are being, and must continue to be, sought in all areas. However, important gaps remain, very little is in place to support parents and families, despite the fact that they constitute the strongest and most enduring influences on children, especially in the early years. More must be done to prevent and remediate stunting due to undernutrition, and disability, both of which have lifelong adverse consequences for children and society. Few children between zero to two years of age are in formal ECCE centres, which is the only type of day-care supported by government.

Most parents who need assistance, including working mothers and families with children

who have disabilities, place their young children in the care of home-based childminders, a system which should also have a training, registration and funding framework. Children between three to five years old from poor families are eligible for government subsidized ECCE, but receive the benefit only if they are fortunate enough to live in an area that is served by a registered centre run by a non-profit-organization (NPO) and if their parents can afford the user-fees. Although the subsidy covers increasing numbers of children, only about 20 percent of 0-4-year-olds from the poorest households have access to ECCE centres of variable quality.

CONCLUSION

Until our government step up the responsibilities of providing the right education for their citizens, especially children, the families, will be left to absorb the effects of poor policy into their private lives, and even pass it to the next generation. Also as long as a nation through its leadership allows its public policies and budgets decisions to violate the rights of children and woman, there will be little hope of changing the realities and future of children or of achieving sustainable development. Hence, government at all levels, parents and communities, individual school owner should strive hard to balance the care and the educational requirements of the South African children in the school system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the importance of other aspect of ECE programme, apart from the learning dimension discussed in this article, the following recommendations are made. There should be adequate provision or all categories of children in terms of education and care. There should be access to health services in most schools. Trained counselors should be posted to schools to provide psycho social support to school children particularly those in disadvantaged, challenged or vulnerable positions. Nutritional services should be rendered to South African pre-primary schools. Security personnel's should be employed by pre-primary schools to protect children from kidnappers. Washing rooms, water facility and toilet facilities should be provided for all the pre-schools. Separate toilets should

be provided for boys and girls and facilities for hand washing should equally be provided.

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