

## **Windows of Opportunity: Early Childhood Development Prospects in South Africa**

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**ABSTRACT** Early childhood development (ECD) is regarded as critical for establishing the foundation for academic success in schools. The results of the South African Annual National Assessment systemic evaluation (ANA) register particularly poor school performance in the first three years of school in literacy and numeracy. The question that comes up irresistibly, therefore, is whether the provision of ECD in South Africa is opening windows of opportunity for young children, and if so, whether such windows are being opened to best advantage. These questions will be examined through a systematic literature review by utilizing a fusion of contextual as well as conceptual review methods which will focus on selected child development theories that are predicated on the huge potential that every child has for self-actualisation, the latest findings on neurological research, the universal right to education and policy development in the ECD field. These issues are mirrored against 'care' as the overarching conceptual framework. It is found that the South African government seems to display a mediocre 'caring-about' attitude towards the provision of ECD in that it contributes funds and policies but do not see to the implementation thereof. Several interventions are considered imperative prerequisites for immediate implementation in order to vitalise the prospects of ECD in South Africa.