

Overview of Quality Discussion

Notes distilled from ECD CoP Main Community Meeting [October 2014] and
Western Cape CoP Meeting [November 2014]

Please note: This is a work-in-progress document which will be integrated into the ECD Quality Toolkit currently under development

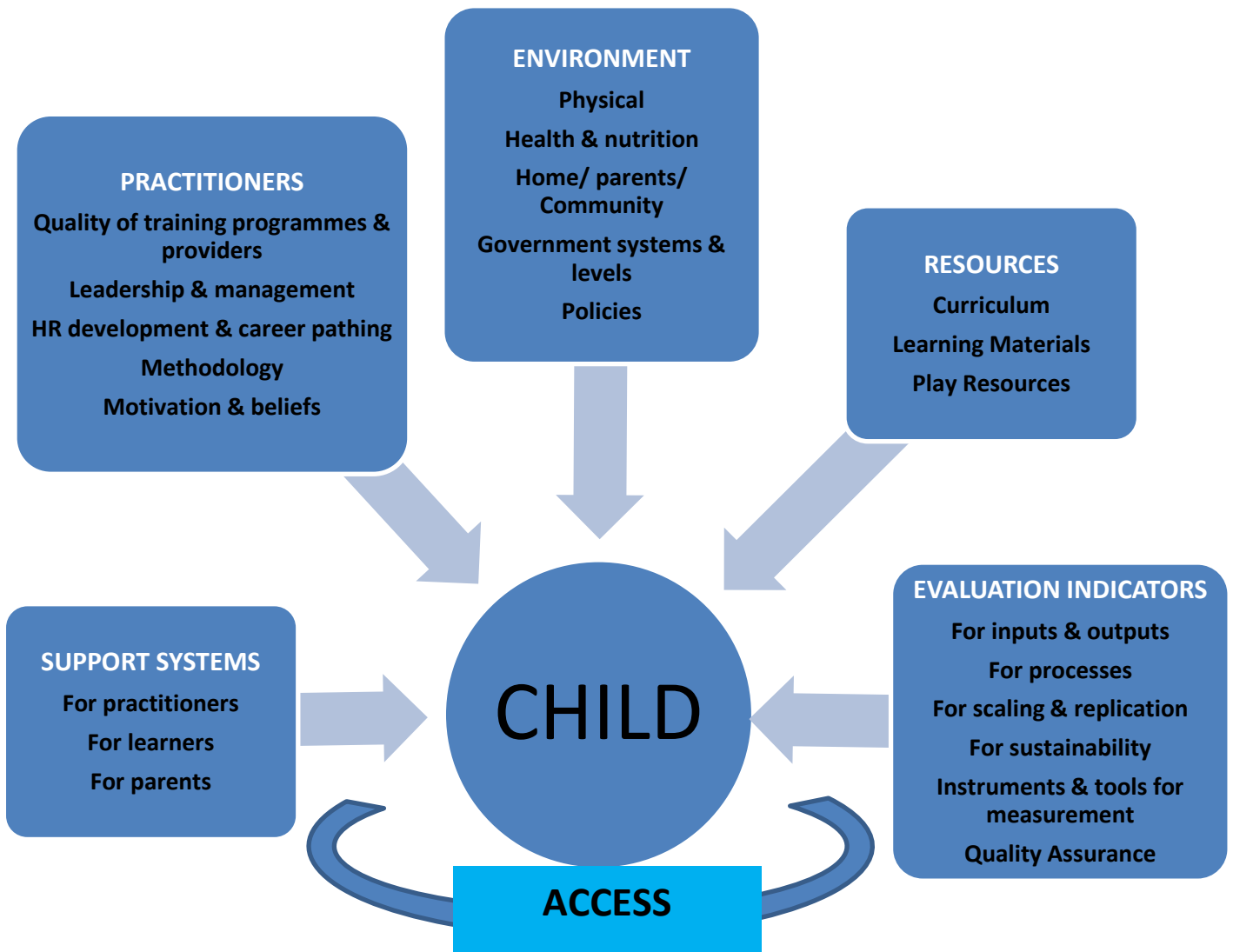
Towards a Quality Framework: What is Quality in ECD?

1. Key Framing Concepts

- A common understanding of quality would give us objective benchmarks or standards to measure for consistency across provision.
- At the same time we must understand that quality is manifested in different ways and in relation to different constraints, and we must recognise quality in context.
- Access is a key element of systemic quality, and implies the need for replication and scale.
- We need a system which includes agreed-upon criteria and indicators for quality, as well as mechanisms and tools which will measure quality.
- Quality has many dimensions, and is not an either/or concept.
- Quality is affected by external factors (such as the nature of provision and the socio-economic features of the environment) and internal factors (such as the practitioner's knowledge, skills, attitudes and professionalism).
- Terminology used in ECD needs agreement on key definitions.
- In defining quality we need to bring a number of players together: government, practitioners, social workers, parents, community and providers.
- Quality in ECD relates to children's cognitive development as the platform for progression towards active learning and citizenship.

**Placing the child at the centre and looking at
Quality Dimensions**

QUALITY DIMENSIONS



2. Unpacking the dimensions

ACCESS

- ❖ Access is a systemic dimension to quality, in that children should have access to all elements of an ECD system.
- ❖ In order to increase access we also need to consider how to replicate good practice and how to take effective interventions to scale.

THE CHILD

- ❖ Our own beliefs about children inform our beliefs on quality. Do we see children as:
 - Vulnerable, needing care
 - Willing to be open and exploratory
 - Vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge?

- ❖ In general, there is agreement that ECD should not be just about keeping children safe and protected, but also about challenging children to extend themselves and activating their cognitive abilities so that they can get a foundation which will help them deal with further learning. ECD should help children cross the threshold into confident learning.
- ❖ ECD should focus on values as well as cognition, skills and content.
- ❖ The emotional, physical, intellectual and social well-being of the child is key. The child must want to go to crèche or school; it should not be seen as a place of constraint or fear, but of play and exploration. Children need a voice.

THE PRACTITIONER

- ❖ Pre-service training needs to give teachers a number of tools:
 - Understanding of how children learn and their developmental stages
 - Ability to use appropriate methodologies and resources, and to adapt the curriculum to context
 - Self-reflection capacity to understand their own stereotypes about children and how this might affect their teaching
 - Strategies to communicate with parents and community members and bring them into ECD
 - Strategies to deal with an ECD environment or centre management that doesn't support good practice (for example, those that support stereotypes of 'good' children as quiet and well-regimented children).
- ❖ In-service intervention should focus on contextualised support according to needs.
- ❖ The quality of practitioners is also determined by the quality of training programmes and training providers. Developments such as the new ECD practitioner qualifications, provider accreditation requirements and mapping of training providers will contribute to this quality dimension.
- ❖ Qualification pathways should be clearly set out; the length of time required for qualification into Grade R teaching is of concern.
- ❖ Practitioner quality also has an attitudinal dimension, in that practitioners need empathy and social awareness, and a desire for ongoing learning for themselves as well as for their charges.

THE ENVIRONMENT

- ❖ Practitioners need to be linked to other roleplayers such as social workers, who can help them understand the context and environments of the children.
- ❖ Non-practitioners linked to centres also need to be made aware of what constitutes good practice in ECD so that the environment is supportive.

- ❖ The role of parents (or other primary caregivers) role is vital, but it is sometimes difficult to get their involvement. Parents need to be included as a dimension in quality, and this may require different kinds of approaches. Parents need to be helped to understand the importance of engaging with children (talking, playing, telling stories) from a very young age.
- ❖ Parents have been disempowered and don't even know how to demand quality.
- ❖ Practitioners need tools to help them talk to parents. The broader community may provide a starting point for a discussion on quality with parents.
- ❖ The National Development Plan has prioritised ECD. Home visits are a strategy to include parents (primary caregivers).
- ❖ Quality is also determined by the different roles and responsibilities of different levels of government, official systems and departmental policies.

RESOURCES

- ❖ The curriculum and learning materials:
 - The role of play in learning is central, and should take the psychology of the child into account
 - 'Structured' or task-focused play needs to be more closely defined, but any individual or group play can help with noting developmental milestones.
 - Early literacy and numeracy through colour, shape and number is foundational, but needs to be taught through age and cognitively appropriate methodology
 - Learning programmes should incorporate fields such as art, drama and music which have value for fostering creativity.
 - Assessment of children has a role to play in quality, but the 'tick box' mentality needs to be avoided; good assessment in ECD requires understanding of child development, and we need to monitor whether practitioners can implement appropriate assessment.
 - There is a need for a standardised curriculum in support of quality, but practitioners also need to be able to interpret and adapt the curriculum to their own contexts and learning materials. How is this balance to be achieved?
 - A curriculum that foregrounds social justice and equity is preferable.
 - What happens to age-appropriate activities in mixed age groups?

EVALUATION INDICATORS

- ❖ How is the quality of ECD provision and programmes measured? We need to get agreement on criteria and indicators for quality ECD.
- ❖ It needs to be noted that norms from other parts of the world are not always applicable to our contexts.

- ❖ The establishment of a database of all measuring, evaluation and quality assurance tools is a priority. This information needs to be shared and accessible. Standardised tests such as ECERs and ITAS and Grover are available but their limitations need to be understood.
- ❖ Quality assurance systems and performance management tools are needed to support quality.
- ❖ We need more rigorous, evidence-based examples of effective and appropriate practice, and discussion and research about what does not work in order to understand what does work.
- ❖ Whose version of quality counts? All stakeholders should be involved in defining quality.
- ❖ We could look at our progress towards achieving quality in ECD in terms of short-term, actionable interventions (such as social franchising models) and longer term systemic changes.

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- ❖ Mentoring or co-operative relationships between more affluent and less affluent centres is one form of support.
- ❖ Other models of mentorship for different levels of ECD provision should be investigated.
- ❖ Current monitoring processes are inspection-focused rather than support-focused. More clarity is needed on what is being monitored (the site, the teacher, the learner outcomes?) and how this translates into support.
- ❖ There is some competition between government departments and this does not support quality.

3. Quotes to note

"Quality is 'best practice' in relation to a context."

"Quality is about teaching at the right time and in the right way."

"Quality is a complex, subjective and contested concept."

"By bringing parents in we stimulate a demand for quality; once there is a demand we have to respond."

"A good practitioner is one with excellent training, and confidence and flexibility in implementation."

"Quality is something you measure against standards. But if flexibility and context are important, how do you apply standards consistently? Does this mean that all standards must be learner-centred?"

"Quality is systemic in nature."

"A model must work in the context it is in."

When setting the standards for quality, we need to ensure inclusivity and think about quality in every context."

"Quality is about attitude and aspirations."