



National Early Childhood Development Community of Practice

MEETING HIGHLIGHTS 11 JUNE 2019

Meeting held at Sasol, Sandton

Setting the scene

BRIDGE's ECD Project Manager Thandeka Rantsi facilitated this CoP. The topic of Parental Involvement in the Early Years relates to a vital part of the essential ECD package, which should be used as a leverage point for ECD and education in general.

An exciting feature of this CoP was the attendance of a number of parents with young children, who were invited by one of our CoP members who is a primary school principal. She felt that this topic would help her learners' parents increase their understanding of their children's ECD needs. Thandeka also drew attention to the fact that BRIDGE is using ZOOM – a live video streaming tool, used to connect to members that cannot physically make the CoP meeting. We welcomed 25 participants from Midlands College as well as a few other individuals who had connected via ZOOM! The forty plus participants in the room represented the usual range of stakeholders for this CoP, including funders, training providers and government representatives.

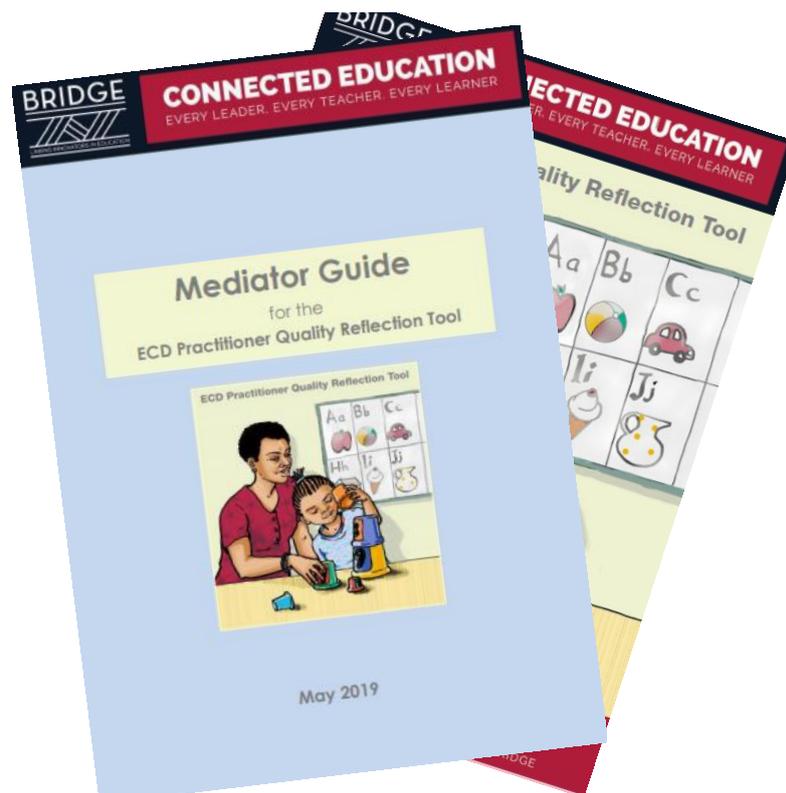


Presentation on the Mediator Guide to the ECD Practitioner Quality Tool

At the previous CoP, BRIDGE launched the **ECD Practitioner Quality Reflection Tool (QRT)** and requested willing participants to give feedback on the use of the tool. If you missed the last CoP meeting, click [here](#) to view the presentation. The CoP had previously agreed on the need for a Mediator Guide (MG) to accompany the QRT. This Guide is now available. Melissa King went through the Guide, which includes mediation guidelines, examples of mediation activities, and covers the user categories previously suggested by CoP members.

Click [here](#) to view the QRT

Click [here](#) to view the MG





The ECD Practitioner Quality Tool First Feedback: The Cotlands Experience

Mealang van Heerden from Cotlands has walked the journey that led to the ECD Practitioner Quality Tool (QRT); she was involved in the pilot and now talks about how Cotlands will be using the tool within the different teams working in their toy libraries and play groups. Mealang gave the CoP an understanding of exactly what Cotland does. Cotlands works in three major areas. The first is early learning, which consists of non - centre based playgroups for birth to two year olds and two to six year olds. Toy Libraries support this work as they are the resource behind these playgroups, providing a lending service, play sessions and training. Lastly, Cotlands offers capacity building which consists of parent support training, making toys from waste and implementing weekly learning plans.

Click [here](#) to view Mealang's presentation.

Mealang then spoke about the implementation of the QRT in these contexts. She indicated that there would be different uses of the tool for the different teams working in the Playgroups, and for those working in the Toy Libraries that Cotlands offers to communities.

- The Regional Management Team uses the tool to plot the next quarter of self-improvements which cascades down to the practitioners that fall under their leadership team. They also have a mediated monthly meeting which is structured as a mentoring session.
- Toy Library staff use the tool as a process of self-reflection and a motivation to “bump it up a notch”. They also have monthly meetings/ mentoring sessions where they reflect on the feedback about Toy Library resources from the centres.
- In terms of capacity building, the Quality Reflection Tool has become a structuring tool for learning materials design in relation to a qualification. Cotlands is piloting an online programme for the Level 4 ECD practitioner qualification. They collated the Assessment Criteria (ACs) from all the fundamental, core and elective unit standards and regrouped them under the four sections in the tool: Teaching and learning, ECD environment, ECD Policy Framework, Leadership and Management. These were then easily translated into modules.



Implementing the QRF kit

POINTS FROM THE FLOOR

- Thandeka noted that the QRT can also give parents a sense of what ECD practitioners should be doing with their children.

- Cotlands own staff members have mediated the tool with practitioners, which has led practitioners to defining quality for themselves. This process has also helped in building relationships in that practitioners feel they are being listened to; practitioners often state they are ‘told’ what quality is, rather than being given an opportunity to explore this for themselves.

“Reflection questions can be used along any journey of discussions on quality.”
Rex Molefe



Side-by-Side Campaign

Buhle Mabaso spoke about her own rural background and upbringing and linked the memories of her childhood with ECD. She explained how she learnt through nature and through experiencing the stories told by the people in her community. She developed language skills and general knowledge through storytelling. Reading to and talking to children gives them an extra push in life, and Side-by-Side is essentially trying to help mothers to give their children a push in life.

Side-by-Side sees parental involvement from a health perspective. It is an ECD campaign supported by the Department of Health and rolled out by Ilifa Labantwana. The campaign aims to increase the uptake of existing resources and shift the mindset of parents/caregivers from ‘survive’ to ‘thrive’. The campaign is informed by 5 pillars (the same pillars found in the Road to Health booklet). The 5 pillars are:

1. Breastfeeding (resources and materials)
2. Love (through storytelling and communication)
3. Protection (immunisations etc.)
4. Health Care (access to health care services)
5. Extra Care (such as children with barriers to learning)

“When we know better, we do better.” Buhle Mabaso

The desired outcome is that changes at home will lead to changes in the community, which will in turn develop into best practice. Side-by-side works towards this outcome by using various communications materials, namely:

Printed materials – the Road to Health Booklet, *How to Raise A Healthy and Happy Child* (16 page A5 booklet), *Support Breastfeeding* booklets, Side-by-Side posters on the main messages of the campaign, Side-by-Side breastfeeding ICON identifiers, and Side-by-Side banners for immunisation and ICONs.

Digital materials – Mom Connect messages (1-2 years) which shares daily messages and have immunisation reminders; RTHB App; and Nurse Connect Messages where questions can also be asked and caregivers are reminded about upcoming appointments. There are also videos, such as orientation videos, animated videos etc.

Facebook – the Facebook page educates the caregivers and healthcare workers about the Road to Health Booklet, and encourages people to tune into the weekly radio drama. It also raises awareness about the help and child health services that are available at health facilities. It encourages parents to sign up with MomConnect and educates followers about the five pillars children need to develop to their full potential. Dads have also joined.

Resource website – a digital resource centre for child health and ECD practitioners which includes all campaign resources in easily

Click [here](#) to view Buhle’s presentation.

downloadable forms, and gives guidelines on how to use each of the materials.

Radio drama and Q&A Show- this is a 48 episode soapie which airs on 11 SABC African language stations and reaches close to 18 million people across the country each week. The drama follows a relatable character trying to take care of her baby. Each episode focusses on an educational health message and is followed by a 7-minute live question and answer discussion between the radio host and an expert from the Department of Health.

NEXT STEPS

- Targeting stokvels and taxi ranks etc. to engage more people
- Working with other NGOs such as SmartStart and Nali Bali to extend the scope of the campaign.

POINTS/QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q. Can training providers use these resource for training practitioners?

A. Digital copies are available on the website www.sidebyside.co.za. There are also guidelines on the dimensions for printing and what paper to use etc. These resources are free.

Q. The engagement between caregiver and baby is vital. Do the videos in public hospitals show positive engagement between caregiver and baby?

A. There are two types of videos: one shows real people, such as a mother playing with her baby or talking to the nurses; and the second type are animated videos showing good caregiving practices. The whole idea is for parents/caregivers to mirror what they see.

“Congratulations on teaching love in such a practical way.”
[Edna Fienkel]

Q. A CoP member from a local primary school noted that the Department

of Health talks a good game, but that the problem is on the ground. She stated that she is from Katlehong and the clinic has only 5 nurses to treat about 200 patients daily with a wide range of medical conditions. She asked if Side-by-Side goes into clinics and assesses the situation on the ground, as in townships the nurses are overwhelmed and patients are hungry and irritated. Are there concrete relationship interventions from Side-by-Side?

A. We do try not to burden the nurses with extra work and are aware that nurses are overworked. In order to encourage nurses, there are regular visits and training that is offered. Through working with some nurses as champions, the ‘additional’ work is viewed as part of their jobs and in that way becomes easier to do. There was also a consultation process in the health sector to try and get a children’s charter (similar to the Batho Pele Principle charter); i.e. how do mothers want to be treated, how do nurses want to be treated. This would be an agreement between the community and healthcare workers.

Q. Do you see communities taking a more engaged and collaborative approach due to Side-by-Side?

A. The Side-by-Side campaign is a year old, and in Delft (Western Cape) they have seen changes in the Wellington community where there are high rates of alcohol intake by pregnant mothers. There is an uptake of mothers going to clinics/hospitals to access services, as well as some mothers wanting to start playgroups.

- Q. What is the motivation for nurses? Do they get any recognition for being involved? Can they get Continuous Professional Development (CPD) points?
- A. The reward that nurses get is a healthy patient. Ilifa Labantwana wanted to link to CPD points, but this is now proposed as part of additional training nurses get from the Department of Health.



Project Literacy Parental Involvement Showcase: an approach to involving parents in ECD

Steven Le Roux, Chief Executive Officer at Project Literacy, spoke about the Parental Involvement Programme. It is called *Run Home to Read* and is a non-centre based ECD intervention which aims to do the following:

“To be a good parent, you need to be a bit mad.” [Steven Le Roux]

- To provide pre-school age children opportunities to develop early literacy skills
- To develop the skills of Reading Champions with communities so they can support families as they read to their children
- To train adult caregivers on how to read to their children and engage them in stimulating activities
- To increase the use of and access to libraries by poor rural families
- To extend cognitive development and exposure to English as an additional language for pre-school children in their own households.

Project Literacy works directly with the caregivers (who are not always parents) as they are the primary connection with the children, taking literacy into the household and using Champion Readers from the community. However, caregivers are not always closely involved in children’s education. Steven did a quick poll of CoP members as to why this is so: some of the factors identified include lack of resources, lack of time, lack of energy and lack of confidence. Steven noted that we need to accept some of these realities and look to supplement and augment what is already there.

The programme is implemented for those children who do not have access to formal centres. Project Literacy hires Reading Champions who work with 10 families in a particular area. The Reading Champions meet the caregivers and coach them in using the starter pack provided by *Run Home to Read*. After three months the caregivers and children are taken to a local library, shown how to use it and given a membership. The Reading Champion also takes out books and lends them to participating families. After the three month intervention, the Reading Champion does quarterly follow-up workshops with the caregivers. Caregivers are then able to use the starter pack (which includes crayons, readers, activities and a caregiver’s manual) to use with their children. This helps children become more familiar with books and basic concepts before they begin school. Books in the starter pack are also available in local African languages. The programme starts with mother tongue literacy skills and later extends into English as an additional language.

Project Literacy also tries to help build family bonds and social cohesion through its interventions. As it began as an adult literacy organisation, programme developers tend to add in additional life skills such as HIV awareness or financial literacy.

Click [here](#) to view Steven’s presentation

Some more information on Project Literacy's Programme

- Project Literacy finds the children who are not accessing ECD. It goes into an area and speaks to councillors, other non-profits and ECD centres. They then convene a community meeting, get data from local governments and find children that are not already involved in other interventions. The second search level is to go to day care centres where children are being looked after but get no stimulation, while the third level is to go to centres which are under resourced.
- The role of a Reading Champion is to empower those people looking after the children. Reading champions come from the community and are known by the community. Reading Champions were initially all volunteers; however, they were then paid a stipend, and now a living wage, for continuity and job creation. Being a Reading Champion may also be the start of a career path for some.



POINTS/QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q. Is a long term objective taken into account? i.e. as the children grow up, what is the long term projection for parental involvement beyond ECD?

A. Project Literacy has now expanded to Grade 4 level – this involves similar interventions and includes the Grade 4 reading test which aligns with international assessments. Word also spreads in the community and other children start coming to houses, which has led to starting homework classes.

Q. To what extent are places of worship or other community venues used as a platform to scale up?

A. These are mainly used as venues and not much more. We find that faith-based places are not as focused on ECD as they are on other areas of education.

Q. Has there been any longitudinal research to show impact done?

A. Yes, funders usually want this but don't always want to pay for it. We looked at children that started in 2006 and are now in Matric and went back and tried to track and trace them and get some comments. We managed to get some testimonials from their principals and teachers and found that some do perform better than their peers. We have also had principals contacting us trying to find out which ECD centres some children attended.

Q. Could the model be replicated in health care centres – would it work in a clinic setting?

A. Yes, they do run it from a clinic and go into homes. Health care places could be a source of information about the programmes, or for implementation.

Q. Are the books provided available in African languages?

A. Yes, they are. Project Literacy has always gone into literacy via the mother tongue and notes the distinction between literacy (decoding letters and sentences in any language) and language acquisition (learning to read and write English or any other language) You don't want to be learning to read and write in a language you can't speak (i.e. English).

Further points made were:

- The project has the potential for ripple effects in terms of scale and sustainability. For example, the Reading Champions gain employment, and caregivers themselves sometimes become Reading Champions and gain employment. There could be opportunities for Project Literacy to partner with other NGOs in respect of youth development and further pathways for Reading Champions.
- Getting parents involved is difficult. Spark Schools has an example of how it does this. Parents have to commit to being involved (for example, in after-care, or in repair and maintenance) and contribute 30 hours a year to the school. There are charts of parental involvement which are made public in order to motivate parents more.



Group Work: thinking about involvement of parents in ECD interventions

CoP members were asked to put themselves in the shoes of parents and think about parental interventions.

What are the challenges in getting parents involved?

What are the enabling factors for parents getting involved?

CHALLENGES

- Illiteracy: parents that are illiterate are often discouraged and lack the confidence to assist their children
- Language and cultural barriers prevent parents from engaging with ECD practitioners
- Lack of early intervention in terms of barriers to learning and disabilities: this could lead to frustration on parents' part as the child may be behind and need extra time and effort
- Lack of resources: e.g. time, money to buy reading books etc.
- Single parent households: often single parents are overstretched trying to do the job of both parents
- Ignorance: parents not understanding the importance of their role and relying too heavily on the school or technology
- Exhaustion: parents that work late hours and travel long distances hardly have time for themselves.

ENABLING FACTORS

- School communication via WhatsApp groups etc.
- Parental support through faith based organisations
- Local clinics providing primary health care with full disclosure to parents, stressing what is important and why
- Instead of telling parents what to do, engage with them on what to do, include them in practical explanations
- Encourage parents to read and tell stories to their children
- Educate parents on practical activities, such as chores that they can do with their children
- Encourage parents to understand the importance of play
- Include parents in classroom activities.



Updates and event announcements by CoP participants

- CECDN (The Collaboration of ECD Networks) – after the announcement of the migration, this structure came up with surveys which were presented to the NECT at a dialogue held by the Nelson Mandela Foundation. DG Murry Trust showed interest in this and a proposal for a process to get more input was developed. These inputs, in the form of dialogues will be presented provincially.
- The Project for Inclusive Early Childhood Care and Education (PIECCE) – the PIECCE communiqué is an overview of progress in its third year, and has been widely disseminated in the sector. PIECCE now has a website for access to all its knowledge products. <https://piecce.co.za/>. PIECCE will be holding its second Community of Practice meeting on 23 July 2019. The PIECCE CoP focuses on teacher education for ECCE practitioners.

The next ECD National CoP will be held on the 13th of August 2019.



Check out & meeting close

Closing remarks from CoP members:

“We often speak about the missing father, so I am happy to see lots of men engaging with this topic today.” [CoP member]

“If we choose to do nothing, then we need to take all the blame – people in the ECD sector must help parents.” [CoP member]

“We want to commend Morojaneng Primary School for bringing this group of parents to engage with this CoP, and to thank the parents for attending.” [Thandeka Rantsi]

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