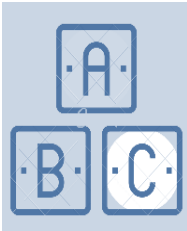


## KwaZulu Natal Early Childhood Development Community of Practice Meeting Highlights 3 September 2020

Virtual meeting



### WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

Patsy Pillay, the facilitator for the KZN ECD CoP welcomed participants to the fourth virtual KZN ECD CoP meeting for 2020. The CoP included Mpumalanga and Western Cape ECD CoP members in order to get perspectives from other provinces on the CoP topic: 'Changing lens in different ECD contexts'.



### SETTING THE SCENE

Patsy gave CoP participants a picture of the environment that the ECD sector currently has to operate in or find ways of operating in at the very least. With so many difficulties being faced on the ground and with minimal support from the government to the ECD sector, it was important that we share what changes we have had to institute in our different settings in order to cope and share how we were starting to see and define the 'new normal' in ECD. A Mentimeter questionnaire was shared with CoP participants to share one or two changes that they have had to make to adapt to the current situation.

Go to [www.menti.com](https://www.menti.com) and use the code 25 76 30 0

**Tell us one or two things that you have had to change in order to adapt to the current situation?**



The point of the Mentimeter exercise was to direct the participants thinking into the changes and impact that these changes have had on their different ECD settings throughout the CoP proceedings.

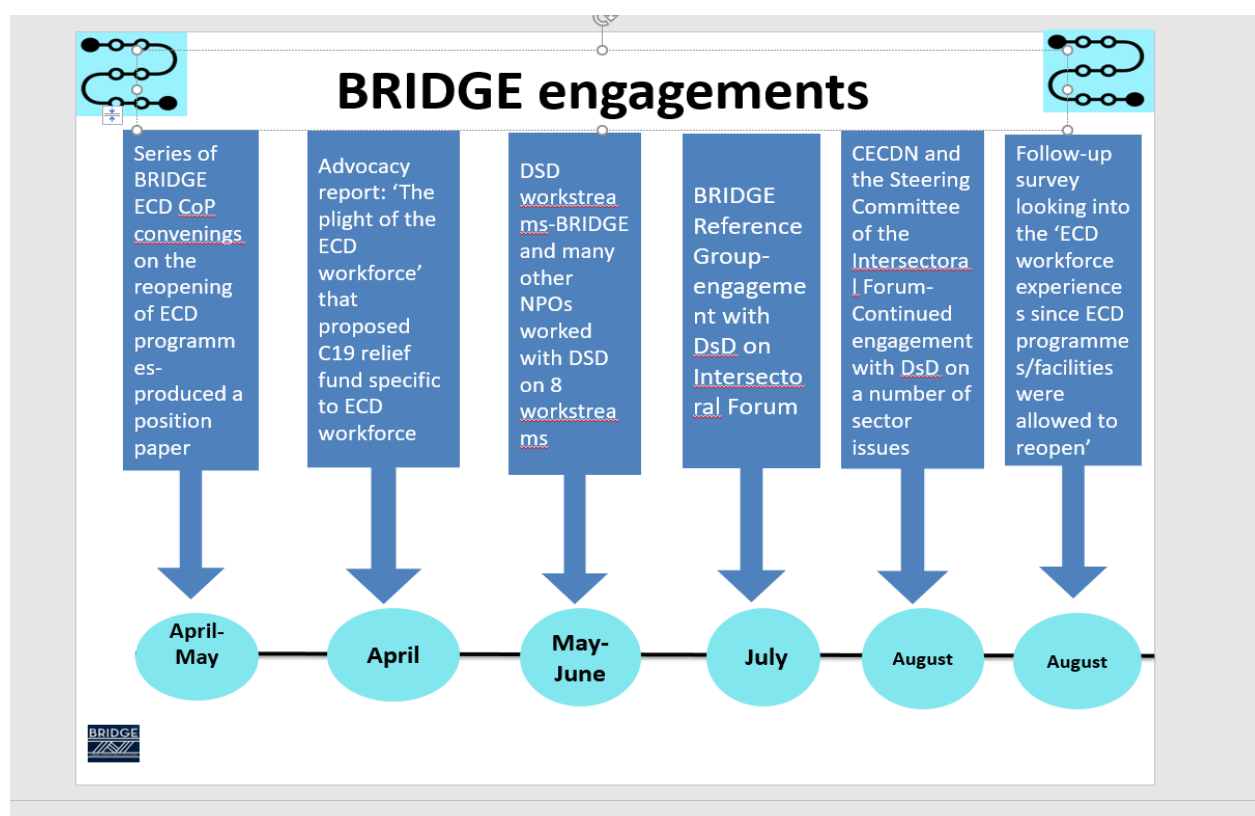
It was interesting to see how communication through virtual means had taken over many programmes.



## NATIONAL ECD COP UPDATE

### BRIDGE Engagements

Thandeka provided an update of the National ECD CoP that took place earlier in the month of August 2020. She started off with a brief update on engagements that BRIDGE had with other organisations and at an individual level. These engagements are summed up below



### Sector developments

Next, Thandeka gave an overview of sector developments that included advocacy work and the reopening framework that was led by the Department of Social Development (DSD). She explained that advocacy work was done quite extensively by different people and organisations in the sector on the reopening of the ECD sector and on support for the ECD workforce and some of that work still continued. Patsy shared with participants on the work done particularly by the Covid-19 People's Coalition in advocating for the support of ECD practitioners and support for ECD programmes/facilities'sustainability. The C19 People's Coalition ECD workstream had managed to execute a mass-wide campaign of practitioners in many provinces in the country. They had submitted letters to the ministry's, created a petition that generated over 10 000 signatures and facilitated a week of action with people picketing physically and digitally to express frustration and lobby support. This was in response to the DSD minister's announcement that the department

would make R1,3 billion available for the employment of 36 000 youths as monitoring compliance officers. Subsequently, an intersectoral forum meeting has been held where DSD communicated that a proposal to treasury had been sent. This proposal includes support for compliance officers as well as support for 153 000 practitioners with a R750 stipend over 6 months. We have not heard back from DSD yet.

#### *Summary of National ECD CoP*

The topic of discussion was 'Experiences since the reopening' and the slide below provides a summary of the main highlights of the discussions. Click [here](#) to read the full presentation.

## Summary of National ECD CoP

- Participants largely expressed frustration with the lack of financial support that was perceived to be a great risk to the sustainability of the sector
- Many ECD CoP members who are ready to reopen have been reporting to having to wait for government officials to instruct them to actually reopen
- The need for psychosocial support was highlighted
- The attrition rate of ECD practitioners

### **Participants also mentioned positive experiences due to the C19 lockdown citing that:**

- The role of parents as the 'first teachers' was being emphasised and reinforced
- Nutritional support through the ECD sector throughout the lockdown

The CoP is reminded of BRIDGE's knowledge management role. All meetings, presentations and discussions are captured and shared on BRIDGE's Knowledge Hub, as are any other specific knowledge products relevant to ECD. [Here](#) is the link to this.



## PRESENTATIONS

To facilitate a conversation around changes and the way forward in the new normal, BRIDGE had requested a number of speakers from different ECD settings to share the changes that they have had to make. The following presentations were share:

### **Romany Roberts-Sunbeam ECD Centre adaptations**

- Children have come back to find teachers that they had grown to love no longer at the centre and this has made them insecure
- Parents have become very demanding and so they have had to reassure parents through constant messaging and updates
- Job losses for parents have also contributed to less children attending
- Even though Covid-19 compliance was met, it would not have been possible without the support received from GROW because the centre did not have the funding.
- It was frustrating to hear that R1,3 billion would be allocated to youth to work as compliance officers when Romany had suggested to a DSD official who was verifying the centre, that they should please consider using unemployed ECD practitioners to conduct verifications
- The new normal requires additional manpower with all the screening and cleaning required
- There is a lot pf policing that has to happen and it creates a very stressful environment
- It is not normal to block children's eyes and noses and it is difficult to think beyond this 'new normal'

'What sort of children will we hand over to basic education because parents are not sending them back to ECD centres?' Romany Roberts

### **Julie Hayes-Singakwenza Support to practitioners and parents**

Singakwenza works with about 20 ECD sites, practitioners and parents in assisting them with stimulating children through toys and resources made from recyclable goods. To access the presentation please click [here](#)

- Sngakwenza could not go into ECD sites, so the focus was on online communication
- They embarked on a Whatsapp campaign where step-by-step instructions were provided for different activities
- Because data was an issue, particularly for parents, Singakwenza made little booklets of the activities (in English and isiZulu) that could be shared with parents
- Booklets were shared with other ECD networks
- Delivered recyclable goods in a 'learning box' along with a 'Parent Instruction Booklet' to help parents understand and facilitate activities
- The activities had been designed in a way that children could be able to do them individually in the event that parents cannot read or unable to help them

*Singakwenza provided support that included*

- Regular contact throughout lockdown to share accurate information about Covid-19.
- Assisted each crèche by completing the Vangasali questionnaire online for them.
- Shared all documents issued by DSD via Whatsapp, followed by discussions and help with answers.
- Shared guidelines and posters to assist with reopening and helped to structure the day to include cleaning routines.
- Donated two adult masks to each practitioner and extra children's masks for those that need.
- Rallied donors to provide child-sized handwashing stations for each crèche.

Child-handwashing stations were sourced from a company in the Midlands. They are toddler sized and designed to recycle the water used by children to wash their hands.



### **Puleng Motshoeneng-Ntataise Training Adaptations**

Ntataise offers a number of programmes centred around ECD provisioning including practitioner training which was the focus of Puleng's presentation.

- Ntataise offers a full accredited ECD level 4 on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)
- Traditionally, this programme is offered face-to-face with regular on-site support
- The lockdown was unexpected and required changes in terms of the facilitation of the training
- In 2018, Ntataise developed a digital literacy programme to build comfort levels and proficiency of trainers and practitioners for personal and learning development

- Covid-19 and social distancing measures meant that Ntataise had to fast-track the strategy to integrate digital platforms to extend the training and development programmes the organisation offers.
- Ntataise piloted the delivery of two modules between April and July 2020
- They had to prioritise the theory based component and committed to pick up the practical learning when alert levels allowed
- Data had to be provided to practitioners so they can access the training through budget reprioritisations

Click [here](#) to view the full presentation.

***The new normal for Ntataise:***

*A blended training methodology has emerged from this pilot programme and all the practitioners completed the activities and generally performed well. Since the alert levels have been relaxed, there have been face-to-face interactions between practitioners and trainers to reinforce elements of the training and to address gaps.*



**Blended Training Methodology:**

Used what was readily available to us:

- Mobile devices – Android mobile phones; WhatsApp and Google platform
- Ntataise allocated data to participants
- Digital orientation sessions

The modules delivered digitally included daily activities such as reading, responding to verbal and written questions, and participating in group online discussions and reflection activities.

Video clips and voice notes were sent to practitioners to reinforce key points and to address any gaps in understanding.

The practitioners demonstrated creativity and innovation by involving their own children and families in some of the activities.

All 30 practitioners completed the activities and generally performed well in gaining knowledge on Child Development and performed practical activities..



## **Professor Hassina Ebrahim (UNISA)-Moving ECD forward with the Educator Workforce Post Covid-19-An HEI Response**

Professor Ebrahim started her presentation by giving an account of what she and colleagues in the higher education space were observing:

- Inequalities in the sector mean that there is a 'survival for the fittest' response and for those who may not survive, closures are a reality
- Fragmentary systems are playing out the vulnerabilities that have always been there in the sector
- Chronic under-resourcing
- Corrupt practices related to resources for young children and their families
- Loss of livelihoods for the women workforce (whose wellbeing is tied to that of children)-the most vulnerable continue to be further marginalised
- Positive response is mobilisation of sector efforts to build evidence through surveys and advocacy to show dissatisfaction

### *Key changes in the higher education space:*

1. From an HEI perspective, research designs have been restructured- observations have been watered down and only permissible in certain contexts with stricter ethical protocols
2. The work-integrated learning where there is a range of demonstrations that students have to complete has been adversely affected
3. Stress and wellbeing due to working online
4. Face-to-face universities are experiencing something completely new whereas institutions like UNISA have had to unlearn some old ways of online-facilitations through new and other platforms


**Key message to be taken through this pandemic is, how do we build back better for ECD? Not just for now, but for the future?**

### *Career Path for the future*

A clear career path has to be implemented for different ECD workforce members informed by the supply that is required to achieve universal access to ECD services as we head to 2030. The career path that is being offered at HEIs was presented as follows:

- Through policy released in 2017, HEIs have determined a horizontal and vertical progression
- The starting point is level 5 (level 4 could be considered with partnerships with NGOs)
- Of importance is the higher certificate-it is introductory for those who do not know much about ECD - and the diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), which is a professional response to the ECD workforce
- The bachelor's degree is a professional and academic response to the field
- Postgraduate qualifications consist of academic and professional strands

- As an example, the principal or owner of an ECD programme might need to develop their leadership/managerial expertise and this could be done through a post-graduate qualification in order to focus or specialise
- UNISA is mostly interested in the professional route as opposed to the academic route. From 2022, UNISA and four other universities will start offering the Dip (ECCE)

<div> <div>What is the career path that HEIs offer in ECD?</div>  </div>			
NQF Exit Level	Certificates	Degrees	Diplomas
10		Doctorate	
		Professional Doctorate	
9		Master's	
		Professional Master's	
8		Bachelor of Education Honours	Postgraduate Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education
7		Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Care and Education	Advanced Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education
6	Advanced Certificate in Early Childhood Care and Education		Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education
5	Higher Certificate in Early Childhood Care and Education		

*Professor Ebrahim ended off by looking into the 'promise of building a thinking educator workforce for quality ECD':*

- We need to think about how we shift the reconceptualization and practice of teaching of ECCE and competencies we build in the workforce
- Technical practices or activities are a large focus in the sector but there is a lack of focus or vision in terms how practitioners are aligned to the rational of these activities and this is something related to the lack of professionalisation of the sector
- The aim must be to develop an educator workforce with an enquiring mindset-people need to be able to question, have a goal in mind for their careers, be able to innovate and think about things differently and this is termed the 'thinking teacher'
- We need 'the thinking teacher' because ECD is context bound, there is no one-size fits all
- The approach that will be used in the Dip (ECCE) at UNISA is a developmental one that is framed at three phases:
  1. Beginning- myself and the profession
  2. Emerging- myself, the profession and others
  3. Establishing- myself, the profession, others and my identity

Click [here](#) to view the full presentation.





## PLENARY DISCUSSION

### *Professionalization in a largely informal sector*

Whilst we look into professionalization of the sector, we should ensure that we are cognisant of the informal nature of the ECD sector and be careful to not exclude members of the ECD workforce

Some international trends emerging include grouping children into ‘smaller pods’ and a large focus is also given to outdoor learning. Should we be revisiting those old ways of facilitating ECD in the new normal?

Out of all the workforces, the teacher educator workforce is best to handle early childhood from an education point of view. We have a data system, EMIS, and we could have budget and sector planning dedicated to the 3-5-year-old educator workforce. The educator workforce can be held by bodies such as SACE. Other categories of the workforce require more advocacy. As an example, home based visitors could become community development officers or social workers and their career pathing is a conversation that is highly needed. Essentially, there is a lot of work when considering the entire ECD workforce.

The idea that ECD could function well under education must be considered in tandem with the reality that most ECD programmes operate in a more informal way. The result is that those who can uplift themselves will do so, but poor and marginalised women in this sector will have challenges in developing themselves. The KZN ECD community proposes a **Basic Income Grant** for ECD workers that do not have to be linked to education or any EMIS system.

There is a need for a deeper discussion with DBE and DSD in the context of the function shift. How are they thinking about these issues? Will practitioners be allocated to Gr RR learners and provided stipends in schools/DBE registered centres? We also need to understand registration in the context of Vangasali because the issue of registration is a barrier to access of many opportunities such as funding from DSD.

There has to be room for the informal nature of the sector. It cannot be professionalization at all costs as this brings about the risk of criminalising the largely informal operations of the sector

### *Reopening of ECD programmes*

The challenges that practitioners face are horrendous. There are ECD centres that have been built from nothing and progressed and developed expertise over time currently facing permanent shutdowns. Meeting the reopening requirements is a problem because many of the ECD

programmes have been closed for the entire lockdown and have no funding. We need to give support, we cannot afford to lose these services!

Patsy closed the meeting and reiterated the following points that had been shared by the CoP participants:

- R1,3 billion that is part of the stimulus package must benefit the sector
- We have to hold government accountable
- BRIDGE will continue to share CoP inputs through platforms

She thanked the participants and the organisers of the meeting.

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