Chapter 4

Empowering Practitioners Through Training to Ensure Safety and Health of Early Childhood Development Learners: Empowering Early Childhood Practitioners

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight importance of training Early Childhood Development (ECD) practitioners to ensure safety of learners in ECD centres, known as ECE in other countries. Several government departments have established policies to ensure effective implementation of health and safety practices in ECD centres. The problem with ECD policy implementation seems to be minimal training and support of practitioners and caregivers focusing on health and safety issues in ECD centres. Policy cannot always mandate what matters to outcomes at ECD centres because individual practices ought to be central to local responses. ECD policies in South Africa provide guidelines that direct the day-to-day practices of ECD practitioners. However, health and safety of young children appears to be in the hands of untrained practitioners and caregivers. Furthermore, ECD policy implementation reveals an uncertain relationship between policies and program implementation.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter intends highlighting ways of empowering Early Childhood Development (ECD) practitioners and caregivers through training. ECD refers to the process of development of children from birth to 4 years of age in families and early childhood institutions, as well as children from 4 and half to 9 years

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accommodated in the Foundation phase (Grades R-3) of schooling (DoE, 2001). These are both practitioners and care-givers working in community and school based ECD centres of South Africa respectively. ECD Centre: is any building or property maintained or used, whether or not for gain, for the admission, protection and temporary or partial care of more than six children away from their parents. Depending on registration, an ECD Centre can admit babies, toddlers and/or pre-school aged children (DoE, 2001).

Chimala-Kalenga and Fourie (2015) are of the view that in general, both practitioners and care-givers have no formal qualification. This statement is supported by Clasquin-Johnson’s study (2011) ‘Responses of Early Childhood Teachers to Curriculum Change in South Africa’ (p. 23) where she states that Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers often hold lower qualification. Muswala, (2014) agrees with this by further indicating that Short (1992) cited in Artmore (1998) gives an estimation of some 71% staff working in educare centres in the black communities as being untrained. Some of these practitioners have registered for a professional qualification with higher institutions of Open Distance Learning (ODL) to acquire a qualification especially those who are teaching pre-grade 1 classes in primary schools. According to Biersteker, (2012), ECD services and programmes provide ideal opportunities for the prevention, early identification and timely provision of assistance for children with disabilities and children requiring additional support for health, development and social problems.

The objective of this conceptual paper is to highlight how face-to-face training can be used to empower and support ECD practitioners and caregivers to ensure the promotion of health and safety in the ECD centres. Practitioners in ECD are referred to as persons who provide (ECD) services through formal ECD programmes, training, play groups and family services as well as those providing management support services to these workers, Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) (2017). ECD Services, according to DHET (2017), refers to a range of services provided to smooth the emotional, intellectual, mental, spiritual, moral, physical and social development and growth of children from birth to nine years. The chapter will discuss the following: Introduction, Background, Training and its importance, Planning for Training, Development and Evaluation of Training Material, Benefits of Training, Adult Training and Learning, Creating Conducive Learning Atmosphere during Training, Quality Assurance, Implication for Practice, Recommendations, Future Trends and Conclusion.

BACKGROUND

Early Childhood Education is receiving greater attention in many developing and developed countries. Majority of ECD practitioners and caregivers are not prepared in the same way for the task of teaching and taking care of young children. Some countries have specific programmes that ECD practitioners and caregivers have to go through before being placed in ECD classrooms. For example, in Turkey pre-school practitioners are prepared through a training period of four years at a university to obtain a diploma Kayhan and Kılıçça (2011). Pre-school practitioners’ training at Turkey is said to be offered by higher institutions like academics, colleges and universities. Unlike in South Africa where majority of ECD practitioners and care-givers are employed without any professional qualification especially in the previously disadvantaged groups. The focus of this chapter is therefore on the practitioners and caregivers of children from Birth to 4years and children from 4 and half years up to 6yrs (Grade R). The term practitioners is used to describe the teachers or care-givers in ECD centres. Copple and Bredekamp, (2009) refer to the person who is working in the ECD field as a practitioner and is interchangeably referred to as educator or teacher. Caregivers are in most cases taking care of children from Birth to four years. The term practitioners and caregivers will therefore be constantly used in this chapter.