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From Policy to Practice:  
Implications from the IEQ Educare Study for Monitoring and Evaluation  
for the Implementation of the Interim ECD Policy

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**Introduction**

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The information collected in the IEQ studies is disseminated for utilization by different stakeholders for the improvement of quality of education at the classroom level. Evaluation information has great potential for utility in policy formulation and implementation of programmes. The IEQ has been disseminating information from its impact assessments of INSET and ECD programmes to practitioners, policy makers and education planners. For example, in July and August this year, the IEQ team shared with policy makers in the national and five provincial ministries of education, how the monitoring and evaluation approach used in the IEQ could enhance mechanisms of quality assurance in the departments.

The purpose of this paper is to share methodological issues related to monitoring and evaluation in the process of conducting evaluation studies of ECD programmes, with policy makers and other stakeholders. This is done with the view to contribute to discussions of implementation of the interim ECD policy specifically related to monitoring and evaluation.

This paper begins by providing a synopsis of the IEQ Educare assessment study and an overview of the Interim Policy on ECD. Issues to be considered in monitoring and evaluation processes will be highlighted with the view of sharing how the IEQ study could contribute to the implementation process of the Interim ECD Policy.

### **The IEQ Project Assessment Study of Educare NGO's Programmes**

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For the first time in 1995, a study involving seven USAID-funded training and resource educare organisations was conducted to assess NGO non-formal training of educare teachers (Dlamini, Ebrahim, Ntshingila-Khosa & Soobrayan, 1996).

The IEQ Project undertook the study which focused on the status of educare centres which were staffed by teachers who had received NGO training. The purpose of the study was to inform USAID if its funding was making an impact in the field of early childhood education and to provide useful information to educare organisations about the effectiveness of the different aspects and levels of their training.

The approach adopted by the IEQ in conducting the study was a collaborative one. This was done to fulfill one of IEQ's goals, viz, to strengthen the capacity of USAID grantees to establish and maintain monitoring and evaluation systems for individual projects. The plan was that each organisation participating in the study would appoint one person who would pair off with an IEQ researcher in a partnership type of relationship. The staff member would learn from the IEQ

researcher the technical skills of evaluation, while the researcher would gain a better understanding of the programme from the staff member.

The study examined the relationship of NGO educare training with variables associated with high quality. Specifically, the study assessed teachers' abilities to provide high quality educare, in terms of the health and safety of centres; the arrangement and management of learning sites; classroom interactions both between teacher and children, and among children; and the involvement of parents and communities in the management and administration of educare centres. The ages of children involved in the study ranged from birth to five years.

The design for the study was a comparative one, in which untrained teachers were compared to teachers with basic training and those with advanced training. For the purpose of the study, teachers with basic training were defined as those who had received training for a period of up to two years, and teachers with advanced training were defined as those who had received training for a period exceeding two years.

An observation protocol and a teacher questionnaire were used for data collection. The observation protocol consisted of a checklist which recorded presence or absence of essential educare facilities. It also required an observer to give descriptions of classroom interactions and learning environments. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed to assess if teacher

behaviours satisfied the key indicators of high quality educare provision. These indicators of educare quality had been developed by the IEQ research team, drawing from the expectations of the NGOs' training programmes, as well as from international literature (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1991).

The main finding of the study was that NGO training made an important contribution in enhancing high quality educare provision. Training carried the most relative weight in determining quality educare in relation to other variables such as years of experience, formal education background, and level of resources. This was an important finding as it has serious implications for the formulation of new policy for ECD. Implications relate to the recognition of existing human resources and capacities through training by the non-formal sector, and the need for accreditation of ECD teachers with non-formal training.

As part of utilisation of the results of the study, this paper critically reflects on the process of the IEQ research in conducting the Educare NGO assessment study. It attempts to draw implications, particularly in relation to methodological issues of monitoring and evaluation, for the implementation of the existing Interim ECD Policy.

## **The Interim ECD Policy**

The Interim Policy, as part of a developmental process towards the formulation of a comprehensive policy for early childhood development in South Africa, provides a vision for the ECD curriculum, as well as the framework and guidelines for, inter alia, the accreditation of practitioners who fall outside the formal school system. The Pilot Project of the Reception Year Programme, a strategy of the implementation of the Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development, will begin in January 1997. The Pilot Project provides subsidies to support community-based centres which cater for children in the reception year aged five to six years.

According to the Implementation Plan a research team will be set up to “report regularly to the DE (Department of Education) and will complete comprehensive reports on interim policy efficacy, community-based ECD provision and the subsidy system” (Education Department Early Childhood Development Implementation Plan). The role that is suggested here is that of monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Interim Policy. The assessment of this project is expected to contribute to the development and formulation of a final ECD Policy. It will also provide valuable information on issues related to developing interim accreditation and standards for ECD practitioners and building capacity of provincial departments of education and NGOs. Equally important and crucial, therefore, will be the validity and reliability of the findings of the research team, which in turn will depend on the appropriateness of the design

and the methodologies employed in such studies. This is the area in which this paper wishes to make a contribution.

### The Evaluation Context in South Africa after 1994

Evaluation processes and products are always contingent upon the climate surrounding such evaluations. In South Africa the evaluation of NGOs was feared as it was largely commissioned by donors and it was linked to decisions about funding. It was very important to organisations that evaluations highlighted positive aspects and strengths of the programmes. Therefore, evaluations were summative rather than formative. In order to ensure objectivity, evaluations were also to be conducted by an outsider. Consequently, the organisations hardly considered building capacity within organisations to monitor and evaluate their own programmes.

### **Issues to be Considered in the Monitoring and Evaluation Process**

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It would be useful for anyone involved in classroom-based assessments of teaching and learning to consider the following process issues, based on IEQ work in assessing NGO training.

- **It is important to involve key stakeholders in all phases of the assessment process.**

Involvement throughout the assessment process builds ownership and an understanding of the purpose and process of the assessment. It also reduces

fears of those who are assessed. A point about collaboration can be drawn from the participation of NGOs in developing the instruments and processes used in the IEQ study. Staff of the organisations know their programmes and intended outcomes best. For a variety of reasons, however, staff of different NGOs were involved in differing degrees in the development of instruments and processes used in the study. Where participation was high, IEQ researchers noted that trust, rapport, and commitment to the assessment process were also high.

While collaboration takes longer, and consequently costs more, it is crucial to identify and involve key stakeholders (e.g., ECD providers, teachers, teacher unions, community representatives, etc.) in the design and implementation of any assessment system. Trust and rapport are critical ingredients in building a system that works. The end result is the ability of participants to use evaluation tools to examine the impact of their efforts--an investment well worth the time and money spent.

- **Indicators of quality at the classroom level need to be specific and measurable.**

Quality outcomes in the ECD interim accreditation guidelines are stated as broad outcomes such as to “advance the physical and intellectual development of the children by...developing co-operation, conflict resolution and negotiating skills”. While such statements are appropriate at the policy level, they can be subject to various interpretations in observation of teaching

and learning at the classroom level. For example, what is meant by “to develop co-operation, conflict resolution, and negotiation skills”? In operational terms, perhaps it means that children help each other to do something, or share toys, or do not fight, or talk together, or devise ways to settle an argument, and so on.

Indicators from the IEQ study can serve as examples for appropriate indicators to assess teaching and learning at the classroom level. Indicators such as “children helped each other,” “children shared toys,” “children talked together,” and “children did not fight” focus on specific behaviours. Using such indicators, observers can assess classes consistently. To measure the achievement of broad quality outcomes in the ECD guidelines such as the example cited, a combination of specific indicators may need to be identified.

- **Objectives for training (and levels of training) need to be clearly defined.**

Learning is a life-long process, and teachers experience developmental changes as they learn new skills of teaching. Many NGO ECD providers recognise this and provide different levels of training for teachers. For example, lower levels of training may provide teachers with skills to set up learning areas or develop and follow daily schedules. Rather than “more of the same,” teachers who have mastered the basics need to have qualitatively different experiences, exposing them to more complex teaching behaviours

such as developing thinking skills and fostering creative abilities of children.

If there are levels of training, there could be levels of accreditation to reward teachers for their efforts to enhance their teaching. An initial accreditation could be offered to teachers who have completed “basic” training and demonstrated basic competencies through on-the-job assessments of teaching and learning (child participation and engagement); a higher level of accreditation could be offered to experienced teachers who demonstrate competencies at a higher level. Criteria or benchmarks for initial and advanced accreditation would need to be developed and piloted with the input of teachers and other stakeholders.

- **Instruments for classroom assessments of teaching and learning need to be able to differentiate between quality of teachers’ performances.**

Instruments used for classroom observation must be specific enough to identify ways in which teachers differ. This specificity is often a function of the ways the questions are asked. For example, a forced-choice response, e.g., “yes” or “no,” to an item such as “interactions are appropriate” would probably not differentiate greatly between teachers. In this case, an observer would probably choose “yes” unless the teacher yelled at a child or did something that was clearly inappropriate.

A system which provides a range of alternative ratings provides for a greater range of responses and the increased likelihood that differences between teachers will be identified if they exist. For example, observers responding to “teacher involves all children” might choose from a range of responses such as “not at all,” “sometimes,” “most of the time,” and “always.” In this way potential differences between teachers could be more easily identified.

- **Observers need to be trained to be able to assess teachers consistently (reliably).**

Even among “expert” observers, questions arise about meanings if guidelines are not specific. Observers need training in the meanings of indicators, multiple opportunities to practice observing and rating teachers, and opportunities to discuss rationales for rating decisions. Practice in rating both videotaped lessons and in actual classroom settings is desirable to develop skills in rating. Results of classroom ratings (of the same lesson by different observers) can then be compared to determine if observers are rating with an acceptable degree of consistency.

Once a degree of rating consistency has been established, observers need to be “certified” to observe teachers independently. The degree of consistency required depends on the stakes involved. While always desirable, rating consistency becomes even more important in “high stakes” conditions where a teacher’s accreditation or salary are on the line. These decisions can never

be completely objective (due to the human factor), but steps such as these can be taken to ensure reasonably objective results.

- **Teachers need to be observed on multiple occasions.**

Teachers need to be observed on multiple occasions to increase the reliability of the results. This becomes crucial when assessments are linked to high-stakes conditions such as accreditation or salary increases. Teachers observed in the IEQ study sometimes had what one might consider “good days” or “bad days”---special conditions which hindered or helped their performance. For example, a teacher may have new pupils on a particular day and must make adjustments in teaching and learning activities to fit the needs of these new pupils. A teacher may not feel well. Visiting teachers and observing on more than one occasion creates a fairer system for all teachers.

- **Contextual factors need to be taken into consideration.**

Observers need to be sensitive to contextual factors surrounding the assessment. In one class visited by the IEQ team, children in a remote rural area seemed to be frightened by the presence of a white observer. Language differences also pose potential problems in observing and interviewing teachers. These factors need to be taken into consideration when planning an assessment study.

- **Teachers should not be held responsible for conditions beyond their control.**

Conditions such as large groups of children, inadequate physical facilities, uncomfortable room temperature, the lack of material resources of classrooms, etc. should be taken into consideration. Teachers should not be held responsible for such conditions per se. What is most important is how teachers deal with such situations. For example, in one educare centre visited by the IEQ team, the teacher could not use the classroom, a shipping container with inadequate ventilation, for indoor activities because it was extremely hot. This teacher dealt with the situation by conducting the day's activities outdoors. Such a teacher should not be penalised for not conducting indoor activities as might be indicated in the daily programme.

## **Conclusion**

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The IEQ South Africa Project recognises that there are a number of issues that contribute towards policy development and formulation. Among these issues are monitoring and evaluation activities which ascertain to what extent policy objectives are being achieved. When the ECD Implementation Plan is piloted in 1997, it will need to be monitored and evaluated throughout the three year period. Development of a monitoring and system will entail refining criteria for assessing teaching and learning in the educare centres; providing operational definitions for the accreditation guidelines of teachers; developing contextually

appropriate indicators; and developing appropriate instruments for data collection.

The evaluation of the Pilot Project is expected to inform policy makers whether the interim ECD Policy objectives and implementation strategies have been realised. To make objective judgements, it is important that careful consideration be given to the methodological issues surrounding the monitoring and evaluation processes.

## REFERENCES

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Research in South Africa has provided rich knowledge about the need for institutionalising the education, care and development of young children (IDT , 1994; Kvalsvig, 1994; Padayachie, Atmore, Biersteker, Muthayan, Naidoo and Plaatjies, 1994; Short and Biersteker, 1994). Consequently has called for investment in educare, provision of educare service by government, and the promotion of health through educare. The contribution of IEQ research has focused on teaching and learning at the classroom level.