

Relational Child & Youth Care Practice

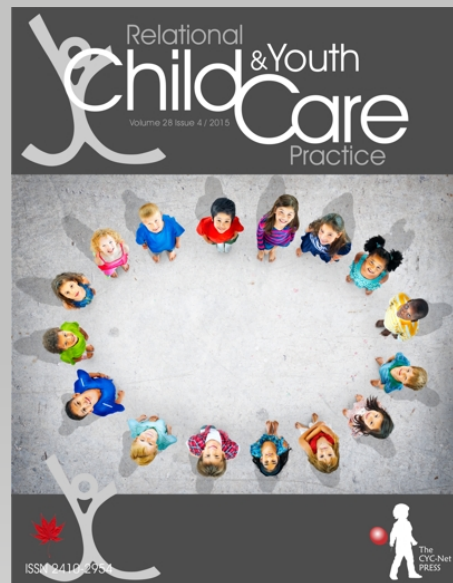
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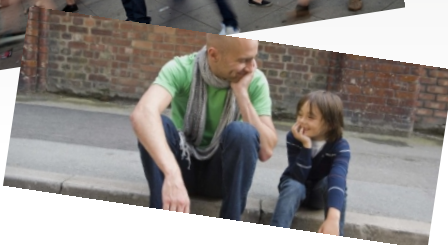
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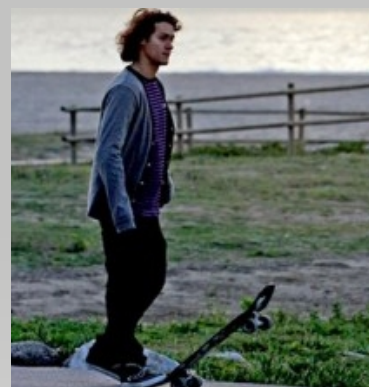
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Young people need models, not critics.

— John Wooden

Relational & Youth Child Care Practice

(formerly *The Journal of Child & Youth Care*, established 1982) is committed to promoting and supporting the profession of Child and Youth Care through disseminating the knowledge and experience of individuals involved in the day-to-day lives of young people.

This commitment is founded upon the belief that all human issues, including personal growth and development, are essentially “relational”.

Different Voices, Different Worlds

Rika Swanzen

I am writing the Editorial for this issue from a country I love with my very being. You will either herald South Africa as a beautiful and inspiring country or you will reflect on our troublesome challenges to stay balanced in our developmental and cultural strivings. We have again recently witnessed the demonstrations by students against fee increases at public South African universities.

For those looking from the outside it may be a strange sight to see how quickly the protest involves destruction of property and violence. It is a difficult rhetoric to understand if demands are made from a belief in individual rights to the detriment of the institution. If the history and underlying tensions are not understood, there are reasons to be concerned about a generation that already obtained access to higher education – demanded by the young activist voices of the past – but who seems perturbed and disgruntled.

While I will not venture into the political underpin-

nings of this movement, I will allow myself to wonder about solutions for this discontent. Albert Einstein said 'Any fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius – and a lot of courage – to move in the opposite direction.'

Another quote I came across recently by Dr. Steve Maraboli states that 'For most people, blaming others is a subconscious mechanism for avoiding accountability. In reality the only thing in your way is you'. Reflections on our society show our struggle with these difficult questions of who's to blame and what is needed for change.

We remain a proud nation with depth and richness in our cultural histories. The need for authenticity that may not always be understood by everyone, lies at our core and translates into an underlying resistance to accept the answers from the rest of the world. Empty promises stir anger because people do not have the luxury to relax for a moment, and to

trust that someone will pick up the tab for the opportunities and access our youth are told they have.

I may be biased through my involvement with this journal, but I do firmly believe that tensions are solved through a focus on relationships. We need to speak to each other in a way that is perceived as meaningful by all parties. In this issue I'm humbled by what is shared by *real* practitioners and fellow colleagues in Child and Youth Care. With each article that reflects on a piece of the relational picture in child and youth care, we build a foundation piece by piece to enable change in that small part we each influence each day.

This fourth issue of the first year of the e-format of the journal is very special for this moment in time – the editorial, guest editorial and four of the articles are written by South Africans. And for those who don't know this, the administrator and publisher are also South Africans. Together with our international colleagues that contributed to this issue with us, we do hope you get a glimpse of how serious we take the relational care of our children, youth and families. The contribution from various countries demonstrates the international status of this journal and of child and youth care workers speaking to

each other across geographical boundaries – remaining relational in our thinking – be it in a virtual space of sharing.

As we end the year and start to think about celebrating the holidays, this issue provides a look – a reminder – of what it means to be a child. With all we do, we know never to forget what lies beneath our strategies when working with children: the best interest of the child.

The authors in this issue raise reflective questions such as what we want for children and remind us whose responsibility they are. We realise that with diversity comes vulnerability if society does not respond to the needs of children. The importance of play is highlighted with a practice idea that provides resources for play to under resourced communities. We are also informed of the outcome and impact of early childhood intervention and how a quality assessment focus can increase the success of a programme that uses play for a purpose.

A warning of the effect of an overemphasis on wrongdoing in child care centres is given through with an experiment on social behaviour and transformation behaviour in role-playing prison guards. A sobering reminder of the few protective factors with which children in care enter the system. A provoking statement is

made: “Punishment gets redefined as discipline which is further redefined as behaviour management – a much more acceptable concept”.

In the information age we are reminded that the generation of youth we are working with has been ‘plugged in’ most of their lives. What does the social media reality say about the life space we work in? Should our conversations change or do we need to ‘unplug’? A study on vicarious trauma and caregiver burn-out reminds us of the cost of caring and provides further strategies for practitioners.

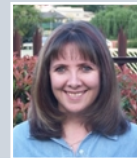
A number of authors touched on the ecological model that encourages us to consider that the environment influences most of what we do. In work with families we are directed to look at the conditions for supporting change, “with change as movement that requires a collaborative engagement”. The impact of environment on the experience of vulnerability is further explored through a heart-warming reflection on dyslexia and reiterating the matter of accessibility. Another focus in this realm is on the creation of a sensory-safe class environment for traumatised children.

Words related to these topics that sound like an echo through our practice and remind us of the relational walls that can keep

people safe or which can become obstacles to overcome, are homesickness, reflection, personal awareness, challenging behaviours, resistance, chaos, action, cultural ceremonies, position, data management, security objects and transitions.

As Nancy Getty says in her article in this issue: “Listen closely to the song you sing and do not fear to share your authentic song with others. Join together and we may one day become a choir and sing in unison.” May we remain unique when we join in the melody of the song with others, and may differences add to exciting variety instead of conflict.

Happy holidays.



Rika Swanzen

worked in different child and youth care settings over the past 18 years, obtaining her PhD in 2006. In 2009 she joined Monash South Africa (MSA) to develop a degree for Child and Youth Care, successfully completed by 2013 with the introduction of Honours. In 2011 Rika won the Pro-Vice Chancellors Distinguished Teaching Award at MSA and has been featured through various forms of Media on a variety of topics in Child, Youth and Family Well-being. She has authored 14 peer-reviewed publications and presented at 14 international and national conferences.

Reflections on the implementation of the Play-With-A-Purpose mentorship programme

Robyn Wienand

Keywords

Play-with-a-purpose, mentorship, early childhood development, pre-school, Heckman Equation

Introduction

Play-with-a-Purpose (PWAP) is an early childhood development programme developed to impact South African and international early learning centres. This article records what has been observed in the 86 early education centres that Play-with-a-Purpose mentors and quality assures through its non-profit training programme. It touches on the challenges faced by the early childhood sector from governmental agencies and the community. On examining the focus areas of our programme, challenges and opportunities for improvement are highlighted.

The Need for Quality Early Childhood Development

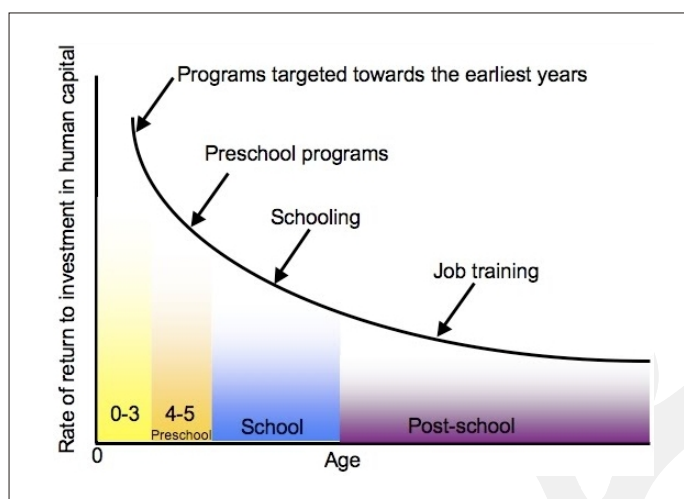
School readiness and achieving at school are at the

forefront of our country's agenda. It is a concept embodied in the National Planning Commission's new National Development Plan 2030 (South African Government, 2012). The now well-known Heckman Equation explains in economic terms the pressing need of

providing good quality early education to all. (Heckman, 2008).

Background to Play-With-A-Purpose

Initially conceived as a tool for Smile Education (Pty) Ltd.'s educational toy development and manufacture,



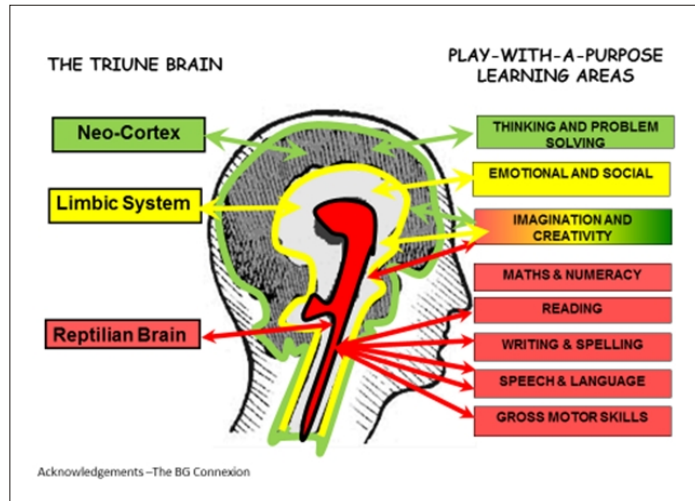
This figure indicates the Rates of Return to Human Capital Investment at different ages. The return on investment significantly increases, the earlier the intervention.



Play-with-a-Purpose developed into eight specific learning areas. (Wienand, 1992) These learning areas initially reflected Paul MacLean's Triune Brain theory (MacLean, 1973).

The figure alongside indicates the Triune Brain and the eight corresponding Play-with-a-Purpose learning areas. Three areas – maths and numeracy, writing and spelling and reading – are 'pre-skills'. That is pre-maths etc. Each area has its own 'stepping stone skills'. These are smaller developmental skills which are the core building blocks for the learning area. The Play-with-a-Purpose Planner® is an essential element of the programme. Here is a simplified version indicating the learning areas and the stepping stone skills. It is used to do an inventory of the toys the pre-school has; to sort the toys into one of the eight boxes of the Nursery-School-in-a-Box® (see below); to plan what the centre needs to purchase and lastly to ensure that the child is being stimulated in all areas.

Play-with-a-Purpose then developed into a preschool programme for the Play-with-a-Purpose founder's children almost twenty-five years ago and has now expanded to over 80 Early Education Centres in Gauteng and North West



Province. It continues to grow exponentially. From the beginning it was grounded in solid research and adjusted through experience.

Perspectives

Surrounding and permeating the programme is the Play-with-a-Purpose philosophy.

The research of Vygotsky and Piaget were incorporated

from inception and as more research was conducted, the learning through play model (Britton, 1992) was thoroughly explored particularly through the use of toys and games. As the programme developed, various elements were added taking cognisance of other development theories – such as Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory (Gardner,

 PLANNER®	
 GROSS MOTOR SKILLS/BODY AWARENESS Climbing. Balance. Hand-eye/Foot-eye Co-ordination. Spatial Orientation. Midline Crossing	
 SPEECH AND LANGUAGE SKILLS Auditory Memory. Auditory Discrimination. Listening. Vocabulary. Music and Movement	 WRITING AND SPELLING SKILLS Fine Motor Co-ordination. Visual Motor Integration. Descriptive Language. Texture. Memory.
 READING SKILLS Visual Discrimination. Language. Love of and Knowledge of Books.	 MATHS AND NUMERACY SKILLS Visual discrimination. Counting. Sequencing and Memory. Patterns.
 IMAGINATIVE AND CREATIVE SKILLS Creative Artwork. Imaginative Play.	 EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL SKILLS Independence. Time. Concentration. Discipline.
 THINKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS Verbal Reasoning. Spatial Reasoning	
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Philosophy	Rationale	Academic Research
<i>Children are strong capable beings</i>	Children are born full of potential to learn and have a natural curiosity to discover	Britton (1992), Brendtro et al (1990); Nelson (2009)
<i>Choices</i>	There must be a balance between Educator-led and Child-led activities. If an educator dictates all that a child is doing every day, the child is being deprived of the skill of learning to choose and the consequences thereof	Brendtro et al (1990), Kohn (2003)
<i>Repetition</i>	Repeating skills is critical for developing strong learning pathways in the brain	MacLean (1973), Kohn (2003); Kawashima (2005)
<i>Separate Concepts</i>	Scaffold and isolate learning concepts. The only variable to change is the variable being taught. EG: when teaching colours only the colour should change	Britton (1992), Wienand (1992)
<i>Developmentally Appropriate</i>	The environment and lessons need to be developmentally appropriate for children	Britton (1992), Dunn & Kontos (1997)
<i>Environment Provokes Learning</i>	Believe in creative environments which encourage learning. The classrooms and playgrounds need to be set up for DISCOVERY	Britton (1992); Nelson (2009)
<i>Observation and Documentation</i>	Educators need to listen, look and document their observations carefully and appropriately through posters and photographs and if necessary the written word	Shepherd et al (1998); Forman & Hall (2005)
<i>Learn through Play</i>	It is appropriate to learn through toys and games before written worksheets	Britton (1992); MacLeod (2007); Kamii & de Vries (1996); Schonkoff & Phillips (2000)

1983). These intelligences are useful in that they assist in identifying and encouraging strengths and minimising weaknesses. The educator can avoid focusing on traditional academic intelligence typically measured by IQ tests. A brief summary of these intelligences are:

1. Visual/Spatial (picture smart) – incorporated into the Play-with-a-Purpose daily planner during the structured skill stimulation time using toys and games – particularly jigsaw puzzles and spatial reasoning games. Creative artwork is an integral part of our programme.
2. Verbal/Linguistic (word smart) – stimulated during theme discussions and story times.
3. Logical/Mathematical (problem solving smart) – Play-with-a-Purpose's emphasis on games with patterns, and 'what happens next?' assist learners to build good skills in this area.
4. Bodily/Kinaesthetic (body smart) – outside play using physical apparatus is specifically incorporated in the daily programme
5. Musical – music and movement is encouraged through songs and rhymes
6. Interpersonal (people smart) – the children work in groups and learn to interact with one another.
7. Intrapersonal (emotionally smart) – Learning to label feelings through using equipment such as our purpose-made Mood Mirror is an important



- component of emotional intelligence.
8. Naturalist (nature smart)
- Nature tables in the classroom, making bird feeders, scheduling pet days and using many found materials provide inspiration for those with a naturalist intelligence.

Play-with-a-Purpose provides theoretical and skills training and on-site mentoring of the principals and staff in the early education centres associated with them. Standards and norms such as health and safety standards, stipulated developmental guidelines and adult: child ratios are monitored according to a specific quality assurance programme including focus areas mentioned hereunder, which are duplicable and simple despite the underlying depth of research (Wienand, 2007). Mentoring sites is crucial to success in this area (Van der Berg *et al.*, 2010) therefore each early childhood development centre receives weekly visits from a site trainer who will train and guide the principal and educators.

Ramey, Ramey and Mayer (2003), in their study of why early education initiatives fail, elucidate the following top reasons:

- Poorly prepared teachers
- Educational programs
- Remedial rather than preventive focus

- No direct teaching of important cognitive and linguistic concepts, vocabulary
- Redundant or poorly coordinated family and early childhood services.

This has been Play-with-a-Purpose's experience and this article is a brief overview of our attempts to redress the first four problems.

The centres Play-with-a-Purpose works with are in a combination of areas – informal settlements, townships and suburbs. As specific detailed differences in application and standards in these respective areas is beyond the scope of this article only general trends applicable to all areas are discussed. In order to examine what is found occurring within the early childhood development centres which Play-with-a-Purpose works with, a focus will be on the quality assessments conducted.

Play-With-A-Purpose's Quality Assessment Focus

The focus of our quality assessments is developed particularly for the South African context. According to the White Paper 5 approximately 40% of young children in South Africa grow up in poverty. Historically the majority of early childhood educators have little to no formal training or qualifications. Parents do not know the importance

of early childhood development. Breaking the ECD services into the different racial groups they found that

"White children have access to ECD services of considerably higher quality than Coloured, Indian or African children, while in poverty-stricken rural and informal areas ECD provision for African children from birth – 5 year old is far lower than in formal urban areas, both in terms of quality and quantity." (White Paper 5, 2001. p12).

In order to attempt to redress the disparity in both quality and quantity a precise daily timetable is taught to the centre's staff and monitored by Play-with-a-Purpose site trainers.

The Play-with-a-Purpose programme ensures that there is:

- A fair balance between child-led and teacher-led activities
- Sufficient structure for an educator with little qualifications to cover all necessary developmental areas
- Parental involvement.

The areas Play-with-a-Purpose focuses on when monitoring and training are briefly listed in the table above.

Examining the above focus areas sequentially, our experience in the field is dis-

PWAP Focus	Brief Explanation	Academic Research
a The Play-with-a-Purpose daily schedule is adhered to.	This daily timetable is carefully researched to provide a balance between learner-led and educator-led activities. It follows a child's need to interweave movement activities with static activities. Basics of the Circle of Courage introduced.	Brendtro et al. (1990); Britton (1992), Sylva et al. (2003); De Jager (2006); Fleer & Richardson (2004) Goleman (1995), Kawashima (2005), Nogar (2010); Ramey et al. (2003)
b A term planner is prominently displayed.	This quarterly curriculum planner includes community and family involvement.	Brendtro et al. (1990); Ramey et al. (2003) Epstein (1995); Nogar (2010)
c Newsletters to parents	Importance of parent involvement in learning	Epstein (1995) ; Arnold et al (2008)
d Knowledge of community services	Involving the community in the pre-school. At the centre of community.	Epstein (1995), Macleod (2007), Maxwell (2001)
e The pre-school is registered to operate as required by provincial and national law	To access funding, provide security and sustainability of service.	Children's Act 38. 2005, Department of Social Development Department of Labour
f Qualified educators and ongoing training	Professionalism of educators to be increased.	Van der Berg et al., (2010) Ramey et al (2003)
g Continuous assessments of learners	Self-reflection, making decisions before, during and after lessons to ensure appropriateness.	Shepherd et al. (1998); Forman & Hall (2005);
h Classroom management	Discovery classroom. Behaviour management.	Britton (1992); Dunn & Kontos (1997); Gottfredson & Hirshi (1990); Goleman (1995); NSCTDT (2010) Varni & Corwin (1991);
i Using toys and games to stimulate identified skill areas	Concrete hands on experiences, learning through play.	MacLeod (2007) Britton (1992) Gardner (1983) , MacLean (1973) Nelson (2009)

cussed in the sections to follow. The process of mentoring other centres will also become clearer through the discussions.

Discussion of PWAP focus areas

a. The Play-with-a-Purpose daily schedule is adhered to

When a preschool first joins Play-with-a-Purpose, less

than one out of ten centres were completing lesson planning in advance of the school day or week. A typical daily schedule *before* training with Play-with-a-Purpose looks like this:

Arrival (from as early as 6am)

8.30am Toilet time
Wash hands
9.00am Breakfast

9.30am Repetition of the days of the week and sing a song.
10.00am Free play (blocks and soft toys may be put out) May colour-in a book or do a worksheet.
10.30am Toilet time
Wash Hands
11.00am Read a story or sing songs
11.30am Lunchtime

12.30pm Nap time
15.00pm Snack
Home time

It is noted that this daily schedule established by untrained principals and educators has almost no place for early maths, reading or literacy skills. It has an over-emphasis on cleanliness and conventional baby-sitting activities. This is in strong contrast to the Play-with-a-Purpose programme which is structured and comprehensive.

Play-with-a-Purpose's intervention takes place over three years. In year one the principal and perhaps a senior educator is trained. Year two sees the remainder of the educators being trained. However new principals and educators find it difficult to plan ahead and to follow the schedule. As they reach year three of following the programme the breakthrough happens. New habits are formed and basic curriculum work is completed which can be built upon year by year in order to ensure that all necessary developmental milestones are stimulated and reached. The routine provided by the daily schedule is an integral part of the programme, as it is shown to develop social competence. Structure and consistent consequences in early childhood help a child achieve later scholastic success, good interpersonal skills

and overall improved health (Wittig, 2005).

b. A term planner is prominently displayed

One of the consistent circumstances met by our site trainers is that the inclusion of parents and community at the Early Education level is not happening. It is not uncommon to see signs at preschools reading "Parents – do not enter the classroom". Within the communities themselves, early educators are seen as caregivers or baby-sitters (Van der Berg *et al.* 2010). This leads to a perception that early education is not important and plays no role in future outcomes for the learner.

In the almost complete absence of long term planning in the centres and lack of involvement of the learner's family and community at large, Play-with-a-Purpose produces a Term Planner. In this planner themes to be taught are expanded and ideas for the parents to do at home in support of the learner's learning are given. Activities for the whole school which involve the families and community at large are detailed. The school is expected to display this planner prominently and distribute copies to parents.

As the educators get more confident in their abili-

ties to comply with the daily timetable, Play-with-a-Purpose observes their confidence growing in distributing the planner to parents.

c. Newsletters

Regular newsletters or written communication to parents takes place depending on the resources available to the centre and on the literacy level of the principal. Announcements are often written on a board outside the centre and oral information passed on. Play-with-a-Purpose noticed that this is an area that increases as the educators confidence in their skills grows.

d. Knowledge of Community Services

Knowing how to access a social grant, who the local Health Inspector is, where the closest clinic is located and other knowledge of community services is known mostly to the under-resourced centres. The information is made available through state representatives, community ECD forums and through Play-with-a-Purpose forums.

e. The Preschool is Registered to Operate as Required by Provincial and National Law

This is by far the most complex area of compliance. The registrations of the cen-

tres – whether affluent or not – is tortuous and complicated. In order to conform the following paperwork and departments need to be complied with:

i. Essential Compliance:

- Title Deed
- Building Control Approved Building plans – signed off by engineer
 - Plumbing Certificate
 - Electrical Certificate
 - Glazing Certificate
 - Occupational Certificate
- Town Planning - 'Zoning Pad' Consent Use (Rezoning in extreme cases)
- Environmental Health Services
- Emergency Management Services – Fire compliance
- Roads Department
- Department of Social development
- Police Clearance
- South African Revenue Services
- Department of Labour - Unemployment Insurance Fund
- Workman's Compensation – Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act.

Play-with-a-Purpose does not perform these registrations for the centres but rather educates the centres

on compliance and provides guidance where necessary. In this way we endeavour to empower the community with knowledge and skills.

ii. Optional Registrations:

- Register the business as an Association, Non-Profit Company or Trust
- Department of Education – Grade R
- Non-Profit Organisation
- Public Liability Insurance
- Public Benefit Organisation for Section 18a (Donations certificate).

In order to access a government subsidy the *essential* registrations need to be in place. Obtaining funding is critical for the sustainability of a centre so that staff can be paid a competitive wage, funds can be made available to train staff, and to purchase necessary equipment.

Having finances that go with a more affluent centre should make it slightly easier to register the centre– but the fact is that most of the affluent centres in the suburbs find it difficult to register as the norms and standards are not equally applied. An example is that of parking spaces. Regardless of the number of cars used by parents and educators, parking bays and drop off points must be provided. This applies

even in instances where most of the learners are dropped off by taxi. However in townships and informal settlements there is often not even space for two cars to pass each other in the road, yet the centre can register without any parking bays – a case in point is a centre in the informal Settlement of Zandspruit. However a more affluent centre in Weltevreden Park provides an ECD service to children who similarly walk to preschool or have a few cars dropping children off. However due to the area – they cannot register as there is no room for parking bays on the property. Both fall under the same controlling authorities. Yet the parking rule is waived for one and not the other.

However the centres in informal settlements are excluded from registering and obtaining a government subsidy on the grounds that there is typically no clear land ownership of their centres. Therefore it is in Play-with-a-Purpose's findings that it is the poorest children in our country who are most unfairly treated. A government subsidy would go a long way in helping the educators earn sufficient income to be trained, to buy educational equipment and to buy nutritious food. The average earnings for an educator in

Play-with-a-Purpose mentored preschools in informal settlements and townships are less than the prescribed minimum wage and in only one out of 20 preschools is Unemployment Insurance Fund deductions made.

The whole area of registration is either unfairly applied or onerous to implement.

f. Qualified Educators and Ongoing Training

New legislation indicates that principals should obtain an NQF6 qualification and educators at least an NQF4. Challenges Play-with-a-Purpose encounter when trying to assist the educators are:

- There are few, if any institutions that offer a full NQF6 qualification on a part time basis and if they do it is expensive.
- Many centres are owned by women with low education (grade 8), however they have the children in their care. Quick-to-learn skills are needed in the short-term to ensure the futures of these children.
- The founder of Play-with-a-Purpose has written approved manuals for SAQA's Further Education and Training Certificate: Early Childhood Development – NQF level 4 which is the basic minimum

level for early educators.

There is minimal practical implementation requirement in the qualification.

Play-with-a-Purpose trains early educators with no qualifications up to and including those with Honours degrees in education. The need they all have is knowledge to implement the theory into practice in order to run an excellent school. Play-with-a-Purpose does this through formal training once a week supported by on-site mentorship in their centres. Quarterly workshops are conducted for ongoing professional development and management training for principals is conducted monthly.

In addition to the above due to the lack of understanding in the centres and communities of the importance of early education (ibid) there is a mind-set amongst educators that they are being trained so they can tick a box and not for the development of the children.

An illuminating anecdote is that recently the Department of Education introduced the New Curriculum Framework for 0-4 year olds.

Play-with-a-Purpose sent two trainers to be trained on it. During the week-long training – the PWAP trainers were called upon numerous times by the facilitators to assist in explaining to the group how to implement the NCF. This

noticeable gap between theory and practice has to be bridged. At present the country is emphasizing qualifications without skills and without practical experience. In an environment where there are few examples of good practice to learn from, this is unacceptable (Van der Berg *et al.*, 2011). In a field which relies on concrete application to be successful (Britton 1992; MacLeod 2007), this is untenable.

g. Continuous Assessments

In order to assess the effectiveness of one's teaching, continuous assessments of the learners and lessons need to take place appropriately (Fleer and Richardson, 2004). Play-with-a-Purpose encourages visual documentation and record-keeping of levels reached in the graded toys and games used. Excessive paperwork on the part of the educator is discouraged and paperwork in the classroom is not suitable until the learner's development dictates it. (MacLeod, 2007)

h. Classroom Management

Children who do not have the correct stimulation and behaviour management in the first five years have a greater chance of being arrested for a crime (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990)

and a slight chance of attending tertiary education (Heckman 2008). Classroom management is a crucial part of a successful early education centre (Goleman, 1995; Fler & Richardson, 2004). Play-with-a-Purpose's experience is that an adult office approach to classrooms is prevalent. What this means is that everything is hidden in cupboards and kept safely out of the children's reach. Children need to make choices, discover for themselves within guidelines set by the educator (Kohn, 2003). Educators need to learn to teach learners how to use equipment and take care of their environment – then stand back and monitor them. This is unlike the Montessori Method where there is an emphasis on self-discovery. Play-with-a-Purpose classifies toys and games into eight learning areas. These are placed in eight different toy boxes called a Nursery-School-in-a-Box®. The educator plans which learning area and corresponding toy box the children will play from during the time of structured skill stimulation. In this way even a reluctant child will be developed in all areas as there will be a game they find interesting. So the educator determines the purpose of the learning and the child can choose the manner of learn-

ing through the choice of toy. In South Africa Play-with-a-Purpose has found that less educated and poorer parents have little idea of how to play with under five year olds thus the educator needs to actively teach certain toys and games with children making choices as they grow older.

Teaching children to use toys and games is difficult if there is over-crowding in the classrooms and if there is not adherence to the minimum learner: educator ratio. Presently this ratio is:

- (i) Birth to 18 months: 1:6
- (ii) Between 18 months and 3 years: 1:12
- (iii) Between 3 and 5 years: 1:20
- (iv) Between 5 and 6 years: 1:30

(City of Johannesburg, 2004)

Compare this with an Australian standard:

- (i) Birth to 24 months: 1:4
- (ii) Over 24 months and less than 36 months: 1:5
- (iii) Over 36 months and not yet attending school: 1:10 (from 1.1.2016)

(New South Wales, 2015)

Managing the learner's behaviour is a skill that needs to be taught to the educators. Play-with-a-Purpose uses techniques which ensure suit-

able consequences are given to learners whose behaviour is inappropriate (Varni & Corwin, 1991; Gottman, 1997). This assists the child in learning impulse control – a skill which may prevent crime related activity when older (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). Prior to Play-with-a-Purpose intervention reports were given of inappropriate educator behaviours using slapping, beating and screaming at the children. They are unaware that corporal punishment is unlawful (Department of Education, 2009). A look at the newspapers of the day reflects this trend (News24, 2015). The General Household Survey for 2012 states, that 15.8% of all children reported having experienced corporal punishment in school during that year. This is a total of 2.2 million children being hit in South African schools within one year (Veriava, 2014).

I. Using Toys and Games to stimulate identified skill areas

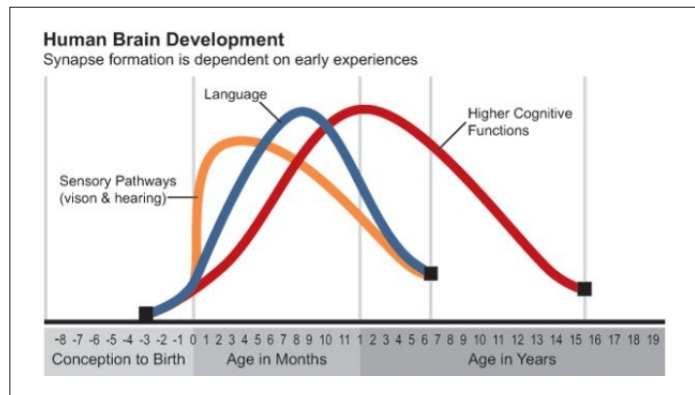
As mentioned above, Play-with-a-Purpose has developed a set of eight boxes of specially selected educational toys. These toys cover all areas needed for brain stimulation for pre-schoolers (MacLean, 1973). Play-with-a-Purpose calls it the

Nursery-School- in-a-Box®. The educators are taught how to use the equipment. The only previously disadvantaged educator trained by the founder of Play-with-a-Purpose to date, who has played with a jigsaw puzzle is a young lady who was in the founder's first under-privileged preschool class. The educators also do not know how to play simple games such as dominoes.

The consequences of this lack of basic skills are evident in our ongoing failure to achieve in mathematics as a country. There is a direct correlation between games like puzzles and being competent at maths in primary and high school (EPPE, 2003; Britton, 1992). South Africa was recently placed 138 out of 140 countries in Mathematics by the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness report (WEF, 2015). It is clear something is needed to be done differently to change this.

The diagram alongside demonstrates the window of opportunity for all learning is primarily in the first five years.

The Play-with-a-Purpose programme is taught in the classroom in a way that all learning areas are covered in the curriculum ensuring learners are exposed to the basic stimulation needed for school readiness (Ramey *et al.*, 2003, Van der Berg *et al.*; 2011).



(Schonkoff and Phillips, 2000)

The Way Forward

If the rapid expansion of low quality ECD centres continues to occur, it will probably be difficult to improve the quality at a later stage. Effective mentoring with monitoring and support will therefore be crucial (Van der Berg *et al.*, 2010).

Play-with-a-Purpose will continue to provide theoretical training and on-site mentoring of the principals and staff in the early education centres according to our quality assurance programme and skills training, whilst guiding educators towards suitable qualifications.

Young (1996) explains that the World Bank recognises five key approaches to developing young children: a) Delivering services to children. b) Training caregivers and educating parents. c) Promoting community development. d) Strengthening institutional resources and

capacity building. e) Public awareness and enhancing demand. Play-with-a-Purpose believes that governmental agencies will achieve this only with help from the Non-Governmental Organisations such as Play-with-a-Purpose – who need to be the eyes, ears and feet on the ground at grassroots level.

Conclusion

There is a growing recognition that investing in early education makes sense if South Africa wants our country to get on the road to greater prosperity shared by all. However words without action are not going to get us there. Van der Berg *et al.* (2011: 23) warns that “If an expansion of low quality ECD centres occurs it will probably be very difficult to improve the quality at a later stage. Effective oversight with monitoring and support will therefore be crucial.”

Non-Governmental Organisations such as Play-with-a-Purpose are effectively leading the way with structured mentorship.

In order to continue to effectively impact the early education arena in our country, Play-with-a-Purpose's challenge is to continue implementing the mentorship and quality assurance programme to make real learning in the field transpire swiftly and transform early education centres.

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Robyn Wienand

After graduating from the University of the Witwatersrand, Robyn Wienand worked for a decade in Human Resources for a large multi-national corporation. With the birth of her own children Mrs. Wienand wanted to ensure they obtained the best possible start and the first Play-with-a-Purpose pre-school started in her lounge. She trained the concepts locally and internationally before developing it into a social franchise. She has appeared in the media many times and has been on the professional panel of judges for the SA Toy Association. In addition to serving as the Early Childhood Education Specialist at Education Africa, she serves on Monash University (South Africa)'s Child and Youth Development Advisory Group and is a guest lecturer.

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