

**O**n Friday 16 February 2018, South Africa inaugurated a new President to replace the disaster that was Jacob Zuma and his corrupt cronies, some of whom still hold a Cabinet position but who are surely on the way out. With the rise of President Cyril Ramaphosa, we have seen a renewed hope and spirit in our country. President Ramaphosa comes to the Presidency with a long track record of distinguished service (with the exception of Marikana) and much experience and ground-level support. He funded the Adopt-a-School programme from his own substantial resources. In his State of the Nation Address he said, “We know, however, that if we are to break the cycle of poverty, we need to educate the children of the poor. We have insisted that this should start in early childhood. Today we have nearly a million children in early childhood development facilities.”

The fact that this is incorrect is something that must worry us. He gets this information from his officials and often the information that they feed him is not accurate. In reality, about double that number of children is in ECD provision in South Africa BUT, and this is the important BUT, every one of those places has been created through community (read: women’s) effort. It also says nothing about ECD provision quality.

So what advice do we have for our new President. Firstly, appoint a top quality education minister. Angie Motskekga has had two terms and has not performed. While her heart is in the right place she has been ineffectual in improving education quality in our country. We are still bottom of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) ranking. Secondly, make a public statement on the importance of ECD to the future of our country. To assist you, we can write it for you. Thirdly, upskill the leadership and management capacity of your top ECD officials and provide them with the resources to make an impact. Lastly, instruct your National Treasury to make significant increases to ECD budget allocations the way you have done for tertiary education and ensure that it is all spent every year. If you do this you will see the benefits in a very short time.

President Ramaphosa – all the best for your stay at the Union buildings.

To our ECD NPOs, all the best in the year ahead. May you achieve everything this year that you wish for.

ERIC ATMORE  
Director



## FOUR WAYS POLICYMAKERS CAN SUPPORT THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE

~ Vidya Putcha

Child care workers, preschool teachers, teacher assistants, social workers, community health workers, nurses — these are just a sampling of the many women and men who work with our youngest children to ensure their healthy development. Through their day to day work and interactions, these individuals have the opportunity to transform a child's developmental trajectory, but often do not receive adequate pay, training, support, or incentives in order to maximize impact.

We know that these individuals, collectively comprising the early childhood workforce, need to be better supported, but how?

As part of the Early Childhood Workforce Initiative, Results for Development and the International Step by Step Association helped to answer this question by carrying out landscape analyses on two critical themes relating to the workforce: competences and standards, and training and professional development. We studied these themes to not only understand the size and scope of relevant challenges but to surface promising approaches to addressing them.



Based on our research, we found that policymakers can undertake several actions to better support this workforce. Here are four such actions:

### 1. Develop job descriptions and competences for roles within the early childhood workforce.

Competences, which lay out what an individual should know and be able to do, can help guide training, recruitment and monitoring and mentoring. With more clearly defined competences, training curricula can be designed to help

learners focus on specific areas based on their individual needs and the knowledge and skills important for their job performance. Competences can also guide recruitment processes and help staff and supervisors assess performance on a continuous basis. In particular, tools based on established competences can help supervisors assess performance, provide follow-up support and track progress over time.

Policymakers looking to develop competencies for a role for the first time should develop job descriptions which clarify the scope of a particular role if they do not already exist and also look to examples of competences from global or regional efforts to guide their process, such as the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance's competences for para-professional social service workers or ISSA's Competent Educators of the 21st Century.

### 2. Ensure that all members of the workforce, regardless of their role, have opportunities to learn and grow — both prior to entry and while in their roles.

Although some countries are prioritizing training and professional development for members of the early childhood workforce, opportunities remain limited for people who work with the very youngest children, auxiliary staff such as teacher assistants, and remote populations. In order to be effective in their roles, these individuals, often volunteers or staff without formal education, need a core set of knowledge and skills.

To ensure opportunities are available more widely, policymakers may consider using distance learning to reach remote and underserved populations or offering subsidies for training courses. Under the ECD component of South Africa's Expanded Public Works Programme, which aims to upgrade the quality of existing ECD services and also support the expansion of the sector overall, government funding is available to support training fees and stipends for prospective and current practitioners working with children ages 0 to 4 and in Grade R (pre-primary).

### 3. Offer sufficient opportunities for practical skill-building in initial preparation and in-service training programs.

Prior to entering into the workforce, professionals and paraprofessionals need a better understanding of what they will do on a day-to-day basis and how best to approach their work.

During field education or internships, they may be able to observe professionals and paraprofessionals in their jobs, apply theories and principles learned in the classroom to real life situations, and experience the issues inherent in working with different communities. Once they enter into their roles, members of the workforce can benefit from opportunities to receive feedback and discuss challenges in their day-to-day work through coaching and peer learning.

## EARLY YEARS

For example, the Madrasa Resource Centers in East Africa offers weekly reflection groups led by mentors which provide the space for early childhood development teachers to reflect on day-to-day practice. Such peer learning initiatives can be more effective than training and professional development imparted through lectures or presentations.

### 4. Ensure that training curricula and materials are relevant to local contexts.

Training and professional development curricula are often not tailored to local contexts and as a result, may not prepare early childhood workforce members to address issues that are relevant to the communities and populations they serve. For example, research from the social and child protection sector in West and Central Africa indicates that training materials and curricula are often imported from other countries such as the U.S. and the U.K., and not adapted to the needs of specific countries.

However, there are some promising approaches that have been utilized. In supporting community health workers to integrate early childhood screening and counselling in their work in Mozambique, PATH utilized resources from the Care for Child Development (CCD) package as a starting point for developing training materials, which were then adapted to the Mozambican context. Due to the linguistic diversity in Mozambique and low literacy levels, PATH made the decision to use pictures in the training and counselling materials as much as possible. These visual tools are used as a basis for generating discussion and facilitating interactive exercises, and have been well-received by health workers.



Developing the next generation of the early childhood workforce will require a number of actions, including policy reforms which address difficult topics such as remuneration and incentives. And while the recommendations above will not, on their own, address the entirety of challenges facing this workforce, they may offer examples for how policymakers can better support these individuals through the establishment of sound competences and standards and investment in effective training and professional development.

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*Article available at  
<http://earlychildhoodworkforce.org/node/307>*

## FOUR RULES FOR RAISING SUCCESSFUL CHILDREN FROM AN ECONOMIST

*~ Simon Kuper*

**James Heckman says programmes with simple parenting techniques can make all the difference.**



Nobel prize-winning economist James Heckman raves about a 1980s programme for growth-stunted toddlers in Jamaica. Trained health aides visited mothers living in poverty for an hour a week and coached them in how to stimulate their children through play.

The intervention, run by British researcher Sally Grantham-McGregor, was simple but it changed those toddlers' lives. Monitoring into adulthood shows they have gone on to do better at school, earn more money and enjoy better psychosocial skills than their origins would have predicted. They were also less prone to committing crime.

In short, training the parents while their children were still small seemed to be a magic bullet for a wide range of social problems. "Programmes like this are cheap, effective and don't require large infrastructure," says Prof Heckman, who, at 73, runs the Center for the Economics of Human Development at the University of Chicago in his hometown.

Prof Heckman won his Nobel prize in 2000, shared with Daniel

McFadden, for his work in microeconometrics. Since then, he has applied his expertise to the field of early childhood development (ECD), the premise of which is that the best time to try to influence a person's life path is before the age of three, while the brain is still developing and can be easily moulded. Simple steps taken during early childhood can transform a child's prospects.

Prof Heckman estimates that another ECD programme, the high-quality Perry pre-school for poor African-American children in Michigan in the 1960s, gave society a return of \$7-\$12 for every dollar invested. The participants went on to rely less on welfare, commit less crime and be more productive than their peers who didn't follow the programme. In short, pre-school proved a lot more cost-effective than university or prison.

Early childhood development is a rare policy that excites policymakers on both the left (which hates inequality) and the right (which hates funding unproductive adults). So far, so good — but how is it best achieved? Few have thought harder about this question than Prof Heckman.

"Basically, the field is overrun by advocates," he complains. "A lot of individuals have thrown money into it." He says the evidence suggests that many programmes are not "as powerful as some people had hoped". Prof Heckman is keen to find out why. By gathering data on the children in several early-childhood programmes, often tracking them into adulthood, he has learnt about what works. Listening to him, it is possible to distil four lessons about ECD.

### Target only disadvantaged children

Lesson one is to aim programmes only at disadvantaged children. Most privileged parents already know - from their own life experiences or from parenting books - that they should read to their children and play with them. They can afford to feed their children healthy food, and they start stimulating them before birth, explains Prof Heckman.

For many poorer parents, however, "reading to the child, stimulating a child, however commonsensical that is, comes as a revelation", says Prof Heckman. Yet since almost all parents desperately want their children to thrive, most drink in the advice once they receive it. Often the tips can be very simple: for example, to sit on the floor to play with a child, who learns more by being able to see your face.

Prof Heckman's belief in targeted programmes makes him sceptical of New York's "naive" plan, announced last year, to offer free pre-school to all three-year-olds. "The argument for universality is just political," he says — free pre-school is of most benefit not only to poorer children but also to poorer parents, who can use the spare time to educate themselves or earn more money for the family.

### Parental input trumps genetics

His second lesson: "It's not about genetics. It's about having input from parents who are engaged." You can send children to the most expensive preschools and it won't help much without good parenting, he says. The importance of hands-on parenting "has not fully made its way into the consciousness of some advocates, but it's so obvious".



### Keep it simple

The corollary is lesson three: "You don't need lots of money or MBAs." Just sending relatively low-skilled people to train parents can be enough, as it was in Jamaica.

### Girls are different to boys

Finally, lesson four: boys and girls are different. When Prof Heckman, his research assistant Jorge Luis Garcia and others evaluated two 1970s childcare programmes in North Carolina, they found that boys benefited more than girls from good childcare (largely because their health improved and their crime levels fell). However, boys also suffered more from bad preschools. "Girls are more resilient," he concludes.

Overall, Prof Heckman is despondent about his own country's take-up of his cherished ideas. "The argument that should be made is [one that links] investment in children to growth in the economy," he says. "But there is a shortsightedness to the American political discussion. For many politicians, this is too distant — there are too many steps to complete." Outside the US, Prof Heckman praises Brazil, Colombia and China for having good ECD programmes but notes that "in India, as far as I can tell, there's no activity" [in the field].

His model country for ECD is Denmark. By focusing on under-threes, the Danes have sharply boosted cognitive skills among disadvantaged children, he says. Even so, Prof Heckman adds, full equality has not been achieved. Children of less-educated Danish mothers still enter adulthood with considerably lower qualifications than their privileged peers. Even in the best of cases, ECD can only do so much.

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