Twelfth Family Research Network (FRN) Forum
"Understanding the Early Years in Childhood – A Singapore Perspective"

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PRESENTATION II

Childcare Staff's and Parent's Perception of Quality Care for Infants and Toddlers in Singapore

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Acknowledgement

Note: **The findings & views expressed in this presentation are that of the Author & not that of the MSF or NIE**

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**Supervisors, Educarers & Parents
for their participation**

&

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Quality Care

- **Definition**
  - **subjective**
    - varies from culture to culture/context to context

- **Factors**
  - *structural* e.g. group size, staff-child ratio, staff training, physical environmental conditions, etc.
    - licensing regulations
  - *process* e.g. staff-child interactions, staff-parent relationship, programming (environment & activities, etc.), children's learning & experiences, etc
    - difficult to measure

- **Dimensions of Quality Care**
  - **care/affective aspects** e.g. warmth, safety, hygiene, etc.
  - **education/cognitive aspects** e.g. language, playing, learning, etc.

Context

- **Number of Infant/Toddler Care Centres**
  - 2009 – **152**
  - 2011 – **259**
  - Apr 2014 – **342**

- **Type**
  - Infant Care Centres
  - Childcare Centres

- **Age Group**
  - 2 mths to 36 mths
  - 2 mths to 18 mths/2 mths to 36 mths *–New!*

Quality Care

- **Childcare Staff (Infant/Toddler Care)**
    - Supervisor
    - Head Teacher (Infant Care)
    - Educarer
    - Para-Educarer **–New!**

- **Educational & Training Background of Childcare Staff**
    - **Educational Qualifications** e.g. GCE 'O'/'A' level, Poly Diploma, Bachelors Degree, etc.
    - **Professional Training** e.g. Fundamentals in ECCE (FECCE), Certificate in ECCE (CECCE), Diploma in ECCE (DECCE), etc.
    - **Specialized Training** e.g. Certificate in Infant &Toddler Care (CIT), Certificate/Diploma in Nursing, etc.

    Note: The positions & education/training requirements of Childcare Staff have since changed

Aim of Study

- **To explore Childcare Staff's & Parent's perception of Quality Care for infants/toddlers in Singapore**

Key Research Questions

- How do **Childcare Staff (Supervisors & Educarers)** perceive quality care in terms of their interactions & practices with infants/toddlers?

- How do Childcare Staff perceive the training which they had undergone to prepare them for their interactions & practices with infants/toddlers?

- What is the observed nature of the Childcare Staff's interactions & practices in centred-based programs for infants/toddlers?

- How do **Parents** perceive quality care in terms of Childcare Staff's interactions & practices with infants/toddlers?

Methodology

Start date: Mar 2011
End date: Feb 2013

Sample
- 12 Supervisors
- 12 Educarers
- 22 Parents

Data Collection & Analysis
- mixed method approach (quantitative & qualitative)
- face-to-face semi-structured questionnaire used to interview Supervisors, Educarers & Parents individually
- checklist used to observe Educarers
- video-clips used to collect data from Educarers

Background Information

Childcare Staff	Educational Qualifications	Professional Training (EC)	Specialised Training (Infant/Toddler)
Supervisor (including 1 Head Teacher)	GCE 'O' Levels – **1** GCE 'A' Levels/Poly Diploma – **4** Bachelors Degree – **6** Masters Degree – **1**	CECCE – **1** DECCE – **6** BECCE – **5**	CIT - **5**
Educarer (2mths-36mths)	Secondary – **10** GCE 'A' Levels/Poly Diploma – **2**	FECCE – **4** CECCE – **2** BECCE – **1**	CIT – **10** Certificate in Nursing – **1** Diploma in Nursing – **1**

Note: The positions & educational/training requirements of Childcare Staff have since changed

Key	
FCEEC	Fundamentals in ECCE
CECCE	Certificate in ECCE
DECCE	Diploma in ECCE
BECCE	Bachelors Degree in ECCE
CIT	Certificate in Infant & Toddler Care

Findings

1. **Beliefs & Practices** for quality infant/toddler care

2. **Beliefs about Professional training** for quality infant/toddler care

Findings

1. **Beliefs & Practices** for quality infant/toddler care

Affective Dimensions of Quality Care

- All Supervisors, Educarers & Parents expressed beliefs that quality comprised **affective** dimensions for infants/toddlers

- Some Supervisors articulated why these were important for promoting trust, security and communication

- A few Supervisors considered how effective parent interactions can support individualised care

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What do Participants say?

- **Supervisor 6:**
Quality care means having an educarer who really loves children who believes that having a relationship with the baby… is the most important thing… To help the child feel secure and confident

- **Educarer 1:**
… safety, cleanliness… healthy environment… dangerous things have to keep away from the kids… appropriate tables and chairs… hygiene… clean our hands before feed(ing)… children must wash their hands… clean up the high chair, the table… all the toys have to wash, clean

- **Parent 4:**
Actually loving your child is quite important… the child must feel happy… if he is happy, he will be able to learn things… the care must be there, must be sincere…

Programming for Learning & Development

- Very few Supervisors, Educarers & Parents expressed beliefs that quality also comprised **programming** dimensions for infants/toddlers

- When asked, most Educarers said that infants/toddlers were not too young to do things by themselves

- When asked specifically about their views on **care** & **education** for infants/toddlers, the responses were divided as follows:

Care & Education

Participant	Care > Education	Care = Education	Care < Education
Supervisors	4	8	-
Educarers	6	6	-
Parents	10	9	3

What do Participants say?

- **Supervisor 2:**
  …develop their motor skills, language and cognitive skills…ample space… to create corners, play, move around
- **Educarer 2:**
  I think a child… an infant, need to be taught and scaffold… they actually have the right to explore… giving them that opportunity to explore… will actually let them grow better…
- **Parent 4:**
  … let them play… don't mind getting dirty… what I call experiential learning… I prefer an environment like this where they can come out and play, at least there's some outdoor space

Findings

2. **Beliefs about Professional Training** for quality infant/toddler care

Improved Knowledge & Skills

- Some Supervisors & Educarers expressed strong views that practical experiences (observations, planning hands-on activities, etc.) were important in training for infant/toddler care

- Some Supervisors & Educarers were able to explain these practical experiences in terms of learning & communicating with parents

What do Participants say?

- **Supervisor 5:**

  Communication… how do we communicate with parents, or with… whoever it is, the community… because a lot of our teachers don't know what to say to parents

- **Educarer 6:**

  … communication with parents… because when I started the course… it didn't cover much… I actually learn from experiences, I learn from mistakes that I made, what I told the parents, so I learnt from there

Training through Practice

- While most Supervisors felt that the length of the training course for Educarers should be lengthened; most of the Educarers said that it was either too long or just right

- Some of the Educarers felt that the length of the practicum was too short

Training through Practice

- Educarers' beliefs about training for working with infants/toddlers were focussed on
    - providing them with knowledge/skills
    - applying these knowledge/skills in their work

- There was little discussion of
    - how theory related to practice
    - why certain practices are significant
    - active & meaningful processes about their own learning (critical thinking & reflection)

What do Participants say?

- **Supervisor 3:**
  I think they could lengthen the practical component. Now it's a bit too short... maybe around half a year? I feel that the practicum component should be done concurrent when the course is on... I feel that when you are in the course, you're studying it and at the same time at the centre, you can visualize it better, much better

- **Educarer 7:**
  The length of training is not important but the content for training is important... when I am really on the job, I realised that a lot of things are not taught during the training and I need to find that out myself

Educarers' views about the nature of Interactions

- All Educarers could easily identify the good practices in the video clip & describe the contributions of good practices to the infants'/toddlers' learning & development

- Many Educarers were not able to articulate or explain the nature of interactions between the caregivers & infants/toddlers using appropriate terms – "**Responsiveness**", "**Autonomy**" & "**Involvement**"
  - "Responsiveness" – easiest to explain
  - "Involvement" – most difficult to explain

Interactions - *Responsiveness*

- **Interacts with children in a warm & friendly manner**
  - e.g. talks to children even if they are very young & cannot respond with language
- **Displays affection to children & engages in warm physical contact**
  - e.g. indicates liking through gentle touch, pats or cuddles
- **Engages in playful interaction with children**
  - e.g. interactions have elements of fun & light-heartedness
- **Responds to children's verbal & non-verbal initiatives for communication**
  - e.g. children make attempts to communicate through eye contact, waving arms, reaching, calling or crying
- **Interacts with children in ways that are not intrusive or disruptive**
  - e.g. reads the child's mood well; interactions are paced appropriately

Interactions - *Involvement*

- **Supports leaning through teachable moments that arise spontaneously**
  - e.g. using different sensory modalities to draw attention to experiences – "Look at that", "Hear that", "Feel that" or "Smell that"
- **Encourages language development by listening to children & engaging them in conversations that involve turn-taking**
  - e.g. imitating sounds made by infants, elaborating conversations with toddlers using simple questions or comments
- **Facilitates children's engagement in planned or unplanned activities**
  - e.g. providing easy access to materials; music, singing, reading or movement activities
- **Extends children's knowledge & skills through incidental teaching**
  - e.g. teaches children new things through simple directives or modelling

Interactions - *Autonomy*

- **Provides children with opportunities to learn for themselves**
  - e.g. provides help only if necessary to avoid frustration by being ready to step in, model actions or providing verbal prompts
- **Expresses approval to children's actions with an appropriate intensity & gives praises for ordinary behaviours**
  - e.g. interactions are characterised by smiles or positive comments that provide encouragement
- **Encourages positive behaviour without criticism or negative reactions**
  - e.g. directions are phrased in positive terms; behaviours are ignored, if appropriate

Source: Brownlee, J., Berthelsen, D. and **Segaran, N***.(2009) 'Childcare workers' and centre directors' beliefs about infant childcare quality and professional training', Early Child Development and Care, 179: 4, 453-475)   ***a.k.a. Karuppiah Nirmala**

Parent-teacher Partnership

- Focus on **Parent-teacher Partnership** in training of Supervisors & Educarers is also in line with what parents wish for when they enrol their infants/toddlers

- Many parents were generally satisfied with the care & education that their infants/toddlers received in the centre

- Some parents provided suggestions on how the Supervisors & Educarers can further support/communicate with them about their infant's/toddler's learning & development

- Very few parents offered suggestions on how they themselves could contribute or support the Supervisors & Educarers in their work

What do Participants say?

- **Parent 17:**
  Curriculum wise… they have done a better job than me taking care of my child… I saw a lot of improvements in my child. Teachers here are very patient… The teachers here are innovative and think of ways to accede to the parent's request which I feel is very touching

- **Parent 3:**
  So far we are very happy with the program in the centre, our oldest (child) has already gone on to primary 1, and he was well-adjusted, even in terms of the curriculum, Chinese and English, he was well prepared in terms of confidence, in terms of knowledge, so I think the centre is doing whatever is necessary, even better than expected, in preparing our kids for school, the actual primary school

Conclusion

Generally,

- **There are strong links between epistemological beliefs & qualifications as suggested by a substantial body of research**
    - Individuals exposed to multiple theoretical perspectives in higher education contexts seem to be more sophisticated in their thinking & reflections
      i.e. conceptualise knowledge & knowing as pluralistic, tentative, evidenced-based and evolving rather than absolute & transferable
- **Research also indicates that formal education is the best predictor of quality care as measured by caregiver responsiveness & overall practice**
    - In the case of infant/toddler care, **educational qualifications** & **professional training in EC education** with a **specialisation in infant/toddler care** are strong predictors of quality care

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Implications

Future research could

- investigate the extent to which the nature of **epistemological beliefs & qualifications** influence the quality of infant/toddler care
- look into effective professional preparation for Childcare Staff & focus on their **pre-existing beliefs** about infant/toddler care in order to:
  - develop the **image** of Childcare Staff as a "researcher" rather than as "substitute mother" role (Moss, 2006)
  - promote **flexible, evidenced-based learning, critical thinking & reflection** to adopt multiple perspectives as well as construct **a knowledge base of good practices** for quality infant/toddler care (Brownlee & Berthelsen, 2004, 2006; Bethelsen, Brownlee & Karuppiah, 2011)

Note: A similar study was carried out in Queensland, Australia & the findings were also similar
Brownlee, J., Berthelsen, D. & **Segaran, N***.(2009) 'Childcare workers' and centre directors' beliefs about infant childcare quality and professional training', Early Child Development and Care, 179: 4, 453 — 475

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Personal Epistemological Beliefs

Teachers' Beliefs about Knowledge & Knowing

- **Objectivist Beliefs**
    - believe that knowledge is absolute & able to be transferred from teacher to learner
- **Subjectivist Beliefs**
    - refer to the construction of personal opinions
    - give less emphasis to the analysis of knowledge or experience
    - believe that everyone is entitled to his/her own opinion with no opinions considered better than others
- **Practical Evaluativistic Beliefs**
    - believe that evidence about preferred practice is analysed but this evidence came from observation & experience rather than theory
- **Complex Evaluativistic Beliefs**
    - knowledge used in practice is based on evidence carefully weighed from a variety of sources from experiences to theoretical ideas
    - recognise that "truth" is not absolute but is personally constructed & changes over time

Source: Berthelson, D., Brownlee, J., & Karuppiah, N. (2011). *Teachers' beliefs and practices in early childhood education in Singapore*. Singapore: Pearson Education.

Limitations

- Sample size was small (childcare centres were closed to visitors/researchers due to HFMD)

- Educational background & language proficiency of the Educarers could have affected their response

- Researcher bias could have existed but as far as possible, measures were taken to avoid it

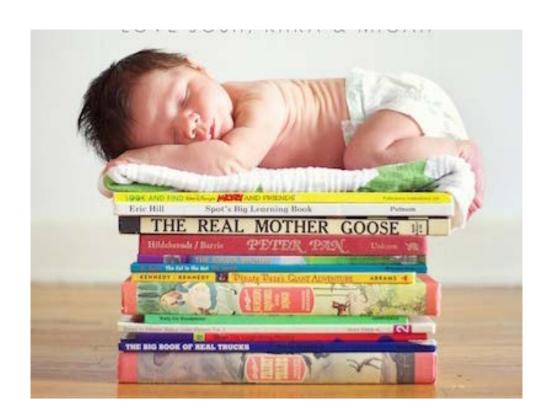- The educational/training requirements of Childcare Staff have since changed

Job Positions & Requirements – *New!*

Childcare Staff	Educational Qualifications	Professional Training (EC)	Specialist Training (Infant/Toddler)
Supervisor[1]	3-yr Poly Dip + credit in EL1/ Degree	SDECCE	-
Teacher[1]	3-yr Poly Dip + credit in EL1/ Degree	WSQ PDECCE (CC)/ADKET	-
Supervisor[2]	5 GCE 'O' Levels + credit in EL1/MTL	DECCE(T & L)	-
Teacher[2]	5 GCE 'O' Levels + credit in EL1/MTL	DECCE-T	-
Teacher[3] (18mths-4yrs)	3 GCE 'O' Levels + credit in EL1/MTL	CECCE/ITE Higher CECE	-
Para-Educarer[1]	3 GCE 'O' Levels + IELTS5.5 or SOA5(WPL-Written)		WSQ Advanced CECCE (24mts)
Educarer[1] (2mths-3yrs)	Sec 4 + SOA Av 5(WPL) + credit in EL1 or IELTS5.5/ SOA5(WPL-Written)		WSQ Advanced Certificate in Early Years (18mths)
Educarer[2] (2mths-18mths)	At least Sec 2	FECCE	WSQ Higher Certificate in Infant Care (8mths)
Para-Educarer[2]	At least Sec 2	FECCE	

Thank you!

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