

CONNECTED EDUCATION
EVERY LEADER, EVERY
TEACHER, EVERY LEARNER

BRIDGE

LINKING INNOVATORS IN EDUCATION



THE ECD QUALITY REFLECTION TOOL

A pilot project conducted by the BRIDGE ECD
Community of Practice

 A BRIDGE Knowledge Product 

LINKING INNOVATORS IN EDUCATION



BY

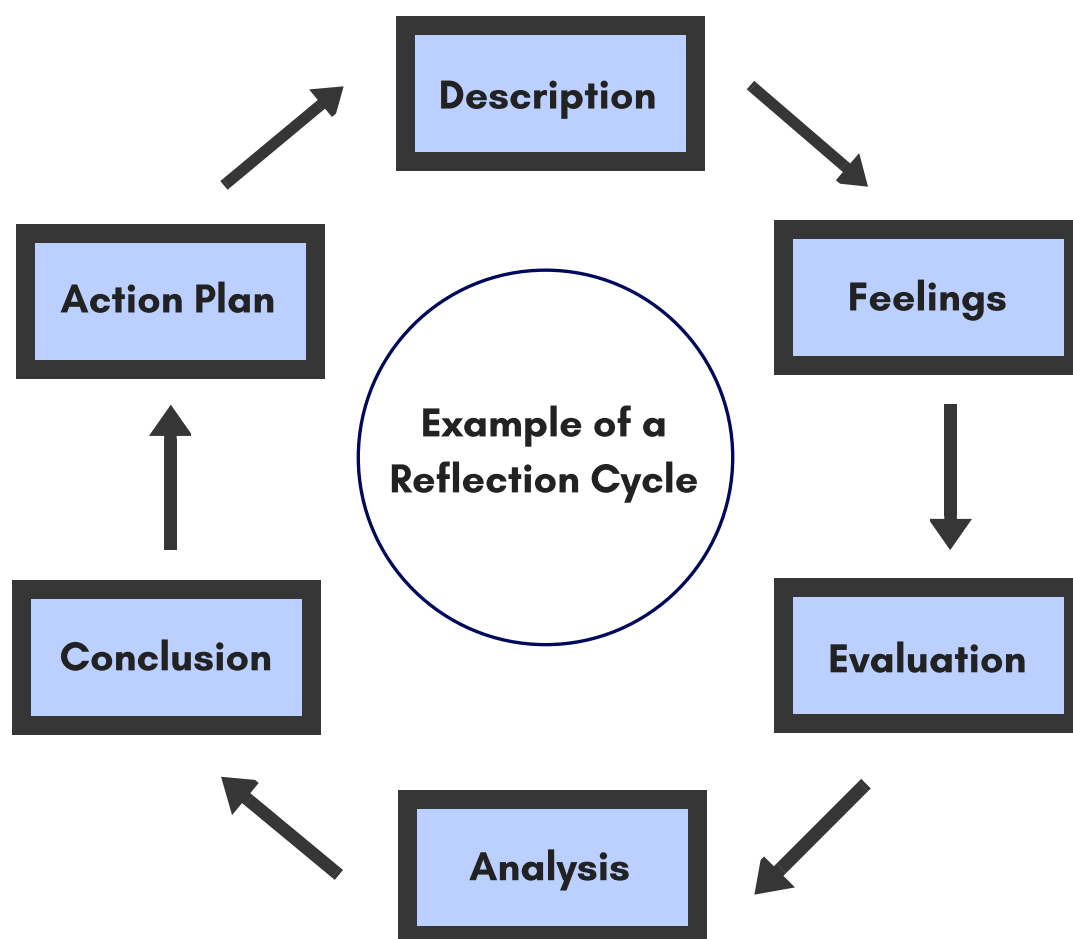
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What is the the ECD Quality Reflection Tool?

Reflective practice is a powerful tool for the professional development of educators. It can help practitioners deepen their understanding of their strengths and identify areas in which they need support.

The ECD Quality Reflection Tool was developed by the BRIDGE ECD Community of Practice to help practitioners share in the debates about what constitutes quality in ECD. The tool provides a set of questions about one's own practice in each of the aspects of quality given below. Practitioners use these questions to reflect on their views on quality and how these play out in their own ECD contexts.

BRIDGE and its partners piloted the tool during 2016. This brochure sets out the findings from this project.



The Gibbs Reflective Cycle above is typical of many self-reflection tools, helping to structure thinking on different aspects of professional practice.

What is quality in these 4 dimensions?

TEACHING & LEARNING

- Learning theories
- Teaching methods
- Attitudes, beliefs & ethics
- Classroom management
- Self – management

THE ECD ENVIRONMENT

- The physical environment
- The mental & emotional environment
- External influences
- Resources

THE ECD POLICY FRAMEWORK

- Curriculum guidelines
- Compliance requirements
- Support systems
- Internal policies & procedures

LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

- Instructional leadership
- Organisational management
- Quality Assurance

What is the ECD Quality Reflection Toolkit Pilot Project?

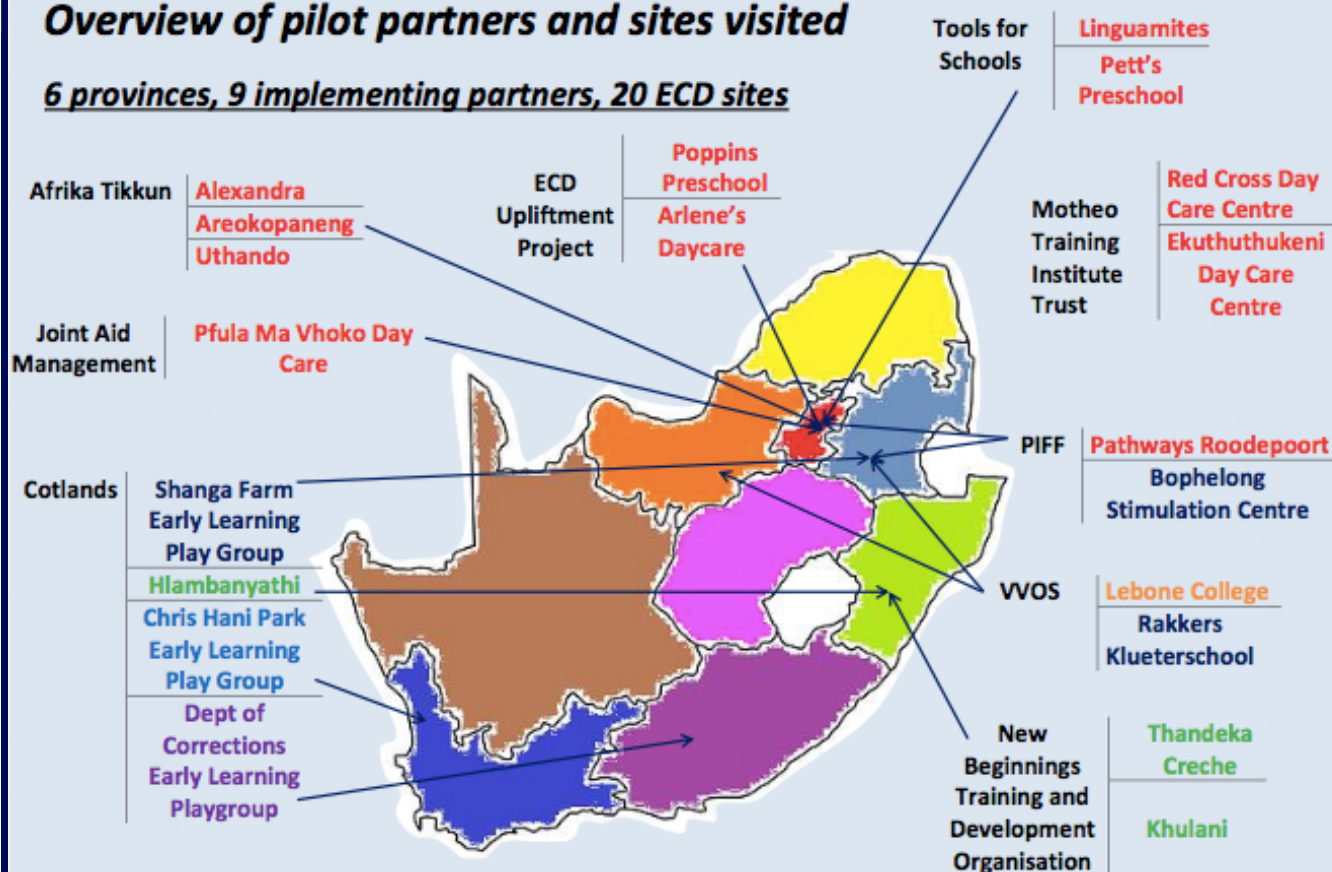
- BRIDGE partnered with 9 ECD organisations from the BRIDGE Community of Practice.
- The pilot team trained 10 mediators to conduct 20 site visits in different provinces and at different site types.
- Mediators showed the Reflection Tool to practitioners, and used some of the reflection questions from the four quality dimensions as the basis for a 'conversation' on quality.
- We received and analysed interview and observation data from 20 sites. A total of 24 practitioners were interviewed, with 7 of these having an additional interview component on the Leadership and Management dimension in relation to their roles as principals or centre managers. We also ran a feedback workshop with mediators to explore their views on what the site visits showed, and brought this feedback into the pilot findings as well.
- The pilot report was completed in November 2016.
- The Reflection Tool will be reviewed and shared with the field during 2017.

ECD Quality Toolkit Pilot Project Aims

1. To refine/ adapt the reflection tool by testing whether the questions encourage practitioners:
 - To reflect on own practice
 - To estimate own areas of strengths and weakness
 - To identify potential areas for change
2. To test self-reflection as a methodology in the ECD sector
3. To gather data on practitioner views on dimensions of quality in which they need assistance/ resources / guidance
4. To use data to inform a subsequent phase of implementation

Overview of pilot partners and sites visited

6 provinces, 9 implementing partners, 20 ECD sites



What were the Pilot Project findings?

We checked practitioners' depth of understanding or degree of familiarity with some of the quality concepts and their indicators through a three level system: this ranged from a weak or narrow understanding (level 1), to a reasonable scope of knowledge or understanding (level 2), to clear notions of good practice and insight into indicators (level 3). We found that our pilot group showed the highest level of understanding around environment issues in ECD (such as safety concerns or centre resources) and the lowest level in relation to policy (such as the National Curriculum Framework or ECD policy legislation).

LEVELS		DIMENSIONS	INDICATORS
LEVEL 1 LEVEL 2 LEVEL 3 N/A	25% 38% 29% 8%	TEACHING & LEARNING	- Understand theories of teaching and learning - Know and use different teaching methods and learning activities - Be aware of how values and beliefs affect teaching and learning - Use procedures for effective classroom or group management
LEVEL 1 LEVEL 2 LEVEL 3 N/A	15% 37% 38% 10%	THE ECD ENVIRONMENT	- Be aware of physical dangers, safety & emergency procedures and hygiene - Recognise that environment includes the mental and emotional atmosphere in the class, and that children have different mental and emotional needs - Understand that environment and available resources need to be stimulating and attractive to encourage learning and development - Recognise that 'environment' includes home environment and the role of parents/ caregivers and the wider community

LEVEL 1 LEVEL 2 LEVEL 3 N/A	46% 37% 13% 4%	 THE ECD POLICY FRAMEWORK	• Be familiar with government policies on curriculum and teaching, and of roles and responsibilities of government departments • Understand types and content of internal policies and procedures and how to implement these • Understand policies around professional development, support and training for ECD practitioners • Understand policies and systems of support for parents and caregivers of children
LEVEL 1 LEVEL 2 LEVEL 3	14% 43% 43%	 LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT	• Understand instructional leadership and its role in professional developments for staff members • Have skills in day to day operational management and maintaining sustainability • Be informed about funding and all forms of support from government • Understand quality assurance and compliance from a leadership perspective

Practitioner attitudes to quality

TEACHING & LEARNING	THE ECD ENVIRONMENT	THE ECD POLICY FRAMEWORK	LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT
Play in learning is important. It is hard to know how to use play for learning. You need to use variety, active learning, and a loving approach to interact with children. We are not sure how to plan and implement good daily programmes. Cultural practices and religious influences are sometimes difficult to deal with. We switch to different languages in the classroom when needed to make sure that children understand. General note: Many practitioners were not aware of the National Curriculum Framework for Birth to Four, and relied on specific programme-based curricula. Many practitioners lacked explicit knowledge about different theories of learning and different teaching methods, and only knew about their provider-specific training.	Love and commitment to the children is the key element in quality ECD. We worry about safety in the environment, but are not given enough training on different procedures. Quality ECD responds to the needs of the immediate community. The learning environment and the resources we use need to stimulate learning, and therefore need to be interesting, appropriate and safe. It is difficult to create or improvise resources in resource-poor environments. We know that it is important to involve parents but it is difficult to communicate to them about their children's development. General note: Practitioners tended to prioritise different things according to their own contexts.	Nearly all practitioners see the need for training and professional development in all aspects of ECD, ranging from curriculum knowledge to issues related to child care and psychology. Nearly all practitioners feel strongly that government needs to provide more support to ECD in order to achieve quality. General note: Ideas on quality were not linked to national policies, as many practitioners were not familiar with these. Ideas on quality were not linked to internal policies and procedures at sites, as these were not well understood.	Quality depends on professional development for ECD practitioners. Good relations between the principal and his/her staff members are essential for quality ECD. Staff need to be able to trust the leader and come to her with any problems. We need to bring the parents into the system more closely. We need clearer communication from government around regulatory issues. General note: Ideas about quality were not linked to issues such as sustainability and succession planning. Leadership is mainly seen as 'organisational management' of staff, resources and finance. There was little focus on 'instructional leadership' in terms of curriculum.

Some examples of areas where practitioners say they need support

TEACHING & LEARNING

- Dealing with mixed cultural groups and contexts
- Planning lessons and planning themes and activities for different age groups
- Finding examples of learning-through-play activities/ a play method that works
- Managing discipline
- Receiving training on different methodologies
- Mediating phonics
- Understanding the new Birth to 4 curriculum
- Learning about different learning theories
- Understanding barriers to learning

THE ECD ENVIRONMENT

- Accessing affordable resources & equipment for outdoor play
- Getting additional resources such as games, crayons, posters
- Receiving support and training in dealing with parents and community so that parents understand ECD and can support their children's development
- Growing vegetables and accessing food programmes
- Learning and administering first aid
- Creating own resources and materials

THE ECD POLICY FRAMEOWRK

- Improving qualifications and understanding career pathways
- Seeing evidence of clear guidelines on support for parents/community in terms of understanding of ECD (see Environment)
- Attending more workshops on curriculum
- Receiving communication and updates from government
- Improving computer skills
- Getting support from local government / DSD in relation to drugs in the community, and a proactive response to community problems which affect children in care

LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

Requested by school principals and centre managers

- Receiving clearer communication and assistance from government, especially on regulations, compliance, legislation
- Improving fundraising, budgeting and overall financial management skills
- Improving administration and human resource skills
- Understanding labour relations and Children's Education Act
- Understanding how to manage different personality types
- Learning ways of motivating/ improving teachers' attitudes
- Receiving instruments and guidelines to help with giving feedback to teachers and parents

Quality Quotes to note

"The site visits showed me how different environments impact on what a person thinks is quality in ECD."

"Quality is systemic in nature."

"Children learn best when they know we love and care for them."

"Quality means to do the best we can and to be committed in difficult conditions."

"Many practitioners can say the right words about quality but this is not shown in practice. This means we need to reconsider the way we train practitioners."

"Quality is a complex, subjective and contested concept."

"Quality is something you measure against standards. But if flexibility and context are important, how do you apply standards consistently?"

"Quality ECD needs the centre, the parents and the community to work together for the children."

"Quality is 'best practice' in relation to a context."

"Quality involves managerial skills as well as teaching skills. It also includes awareness of your own values and the values you are teaching."

"A good practitioner is one with excellent training, and confidence and flexibility in implementation."

KEY

blue – practitioner quotes
red – mediator quotes
green – cop member quotes

This brochure has described how the Reflection Tool uses questions about aspects of quality for practitioners to reflect on their practice. Using what we have learned from the pilot, BRIDGE will revise the tool and make it available to ECD practitioners and ECD centres in a user-friendly format by the end of 2017. In the meantime, the [Reflection Tool](#) as set out on the website is an open education resource, freely available to all.

The full report on the ECD Quality Toolkit Pilot Project gives details on the following:

- The history and development of the Reflection Tool
- The conceptual foundations of the Reflection Tool
- The pilot processes and all the supporting instruments used
- Findings, conclusions and next steps.

You can read the report on the BRIDGE website
www.bridge.org.za