

Global Initiatives for Early Childhood Care and Education: Global Guidelines and Global Guidelines Assessment

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Global Guidelines and Global Guidelines Assessment

Abstract

This report focuses on the Association for Childhood Education International's (ACEI) Global Guidelines (GG) and Global Guidelines Assessment (GGA), which were developed in response to and in keeping with the prominence that the issue of quality early childhood care, development, and education has reached globally. Further, the paper positions the GG and GGA within the context of international initiatives addressing quality in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and identifies ACEI's future plans in regard to GG and GGA.

Introduction

Having a good education was listed as a top priority in the "Global Conversation" which began in 2012, facilitated by the United Nations. The "Global Conversation" sought to learn what people want for their future world. More than four and a half million voices, of men and women, children and youth, were included in the almost one-hundred national dialogues; and, to include a full diversity of stake-holders, the post-2015 sustainable development "conversation" agenda was brought to local levels on an even greater global scale for dialogues (United Nations Development Program, 2014, p. v).

As noted by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) discussion of its purposes (UNDP, 2014, p. 3), "Localization of the agenda can help to ensure that different parts of society are included and that diversity is embraced." Such efforts demonstrate the increasing recognition that, in order to build trust, each society's characteristics and approaches must be taken into account and local communities should be able to modify and adapt agendas and thus embrace goals reflecting their collective voices. This is as true of early childhood care and education as it is of other social processes. Early childcare and education may take different forms from country to country because of differing purposes in those societies (Cochran, 2011, p. 67).

That a commitment to improving and sustaining the quality of early childhood care and education (ECCE) has reached global prominence can be seen in the actions of many international organizations during the past fifteen years (Cochran, 2011, p. 65). *Progress for Children Beyond Averages: Learning from the MDGs* (11th edition), published in June 2015 by UNICEF, presents the latest data showing that tremendous advances in the lives of the world's children have been driven by the Millennium Development Goals. It is clear, however, that development efforts in the past fifteen years have failed to reach millions of the most disadvantaged (UNICEF, 2015, p. iii). The report offers recommendations for where attention and action should be focused to reach the most vulnerable children and achieve sustainable growth (UNICEF, 2015, pg. 2):

- End violence against children.
- Put ending child poverty at the center of global poverty eradication.
- Renew the global effort to end preventable child and maternal deaths.

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- Pay more attention to adolescence, the second decade of life.
- Leverage the growing ‘Data Revolution’ to support the rights of every child.
- Increase investments in all children, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized.
- Break the cycle of chronic crises affecting children.
- Prioritize education so that all children and adolescents are in school and learning.
- Stop girls being left out, held back and pushed aside.
- Tackle climate change for the sake of future generations.

Quality Early Childhood Care and Education

Global recognition of the importance of having a good education suggests that assessing quality in early childhood care, development, and education is a priority for many countries (Hardin, Stegelin, and Cecconi, 2015, p. 236). Moreover, international interest in quality ECCE programs is shared globally by stakeholders, including governmental leaders, policy makers, researchers, academics, and citizens (Raikes, Devercelli, and Kutaka, 2015, p. 238). However, defining quality is challenging due to diverse contexts internationally (Fontaine, Torre, Grafwallner, and Underhill, 2006, p. 157). Government policies, local resources, cultural norms and values, and language are among the diverse influences on the definition of quality ECCE. “Research increasingly points toward a holistic approach as including education with the [child] care is critical to ensuring quality” (Rentzou, 2015, p. 250). There have been agendas, conventions, and initiatives at the global level that address defining and improving quality programs and services internationally.

Positive developmental outcomes are realized by young children in ECCE programs deemed to be of high quality (Burchinal et al., 2009, p. 166), including providing high-quality inclusive experiences for children with disabilities (Kang, Kang, and Plunkett, 2015, p. 292). Further, high quality in ECCE programs is achieved more often when frameworks, guidelines, and evaluation criteria are monitored in an ongoing and consistent manner (Jalongo et al., 2004, p. 143). Research conducted by Burchinal, Vandergrift, Pianta, and Mashburn (2009) in eleven states in the United States suggests that “high-quality classrooms may be necessary to optimally improve social skills, reduce behavior problems, and promote reading, math, and language skills” (p. 175). Indicators of quality have been identified in several studies, including Burchinal et al.’s study, which found that young children from low-income families acquire academic skills and positive social outcomes in quality programs with active and engaged teachers and caregivers (2009, p. 175). In addition, DeMeulenaere (2015, p. 315) reports that quality exists in centers where attention is given to building positive relationships with families. Recognizing child and family uniqueness and striving for ways to provide many opportunities for families through parent-teacher conferences, community resources, and celebrations and special events contribute to and indicate quality. Further, evidence shows that quality is enhanced when ECCE programs partner with families (Romero-Contreras, 2015, p. 274).

Among the many common areas in the variety of global ECCE initiatives that were identified by Hardin and Bergen (2015, p. 259) are the importance of indoor and outdoor learning environments; curriculum content; learning and teaching interactions that produce positive outcomes for young children; and access to education and other services for all children, including children with disabilities (p. 259). In regard to childcare and education, there is growing international concern

for access, equity, quality, and sustainability, as well as strong educator and caregiver preparation (NAEYC, n.d.).

Association for Childhood Education International

Recognizing the importance of globally inclusive dialog plays a large part in the agenda of the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI). In other words, educators committed to global efforts “must always keep in mind the diverse history, demographics, cultural mores, and attitudes that affect national and local policies, routines, and interpersonal interactions” (Hardy, Barnot, and Anthony, 2015, p.308). An example of international dialogue comes from 1999, when an international symposium co-sponsored by ACEI and the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP) was held in Zürich, Switzerland. More than 80 early childhood professionals representing 27 different countries participated. The definition of quality, representing the collective voices of individuals at the ACEI/OMEP Symposium, took “into account individual and local variations, as well as a global perspective of what constitutes quality early care and education” (Bergen and Hardin, 2013, p. 14). The basic elements of quality identified at the symposium include:

- attention to environment features and resources,
- developmentally and culturally appropriate curriculum,
- well-educated early childhood staff,
- meaningful parent and community involvement, and
- attention to the needs of diverse young children, including children with disabilities. (Bergen and Hardin, 2015, p. 14)

A set of guidelines, *Global Guidelines (GG) for Education and Care in the 21st Century* (ACEI, n.d.) that attendees believed address the fundamental elements necessary to create quality ECCE for young children around the world represent a major outcome of the 1999 symposium.

The mission of ACEI (ACEI, n.d., para. 1) is “To promote and support the optimal education, development, and well-being of children worldwide.” ACEI members believe the GG and the Global Guidelines Assessments (GGA), which reflect years of commitment by members, contribute to worldwide initiatives on several levels, from awareness to utilization. The GG and GGA are intended for use by all ECCE program professionals as a self-assessment of programs. They are accessible, via the Internet, to all programs and members, including those that have limited resources. Research suggests that use of these resources, the GG and GGA—accessible to the global community—can enhance the quality of ECCE programs (Barbour, Boyer, Hardin, and Wortham, 2012, p. 327).

Global Guidelines

The five key philosophies, identified at the 1999 Symposium, frame the work engaged in by members since that time. The philosophies are: (1) “Children are both the present and the future of every nation—they have needs, rights, and intrinsic worth that must be recognized and supported”; (2) “Every child should have the opportunity to grow up in a setting that values children, that provides conditions for a safe and secure environment, and that respects diversity”; (3) Knowledge about human development is more substantial now than at any time in history. The new century offers opportunities to consolidate recent gains and respond to new challenges that lie

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ahead”; (4) “Children must receive appropriate nurture and education within and outside their families from birth onward if they are to develop optimally”; and (5) “Attention to the health, nutrition, education, and psychosocial development of children during their early years is essential for the future wellbeing of nations and the global community” (ACEI n.d. para. 3). Based on these philosophical premises, the GG address the following six areas of program quality (Hardin, Mbugua, and Trube, n.d.):

- Environment and Physical Space of Settings for Children
- Curriculum Content and Pedagogy
- Early Childhood Educators and Caregivers
- Partnerships With Families and Communities
- Services for Young Children with Special Needs
- Accountability, Supervision, and Management of Programs for Children

As these six areas are addressed, the guidelines recommend that programs use intergenerational approaches whenever feasible; work to empower communities, families, and children; identify a mechanism for adequate and uninterrupted funding; and demonstrate accountability through cost analysis, monitoring, and evaluation of program quality.

Global Guidelines Assessment

Once the GG were created in 1999, an assessment tool based on them was developed in order to help educators and caregivers self-evaluate and, based on their findings (appropriate to contexts), improve their program services. ACEI members who worked on the GGA understood that “developing a program self-assessment tool with global applicability requires a balance between sensitivity to cultural differences and meaningful constructs that are reliable and valid across cultures” (Hardin, Bergen, and Cecconi, 2014, p. 235). Moreover, when the “stakeholders . . . have the opportunity to examine the various aspects of their own programs through the lens of a self-assessment tool, they can gain greater understanding of program quality indicators and thus make changes to improve program quality” (Bergen and Hardin, 2015, p. 237).

The first draft of the GGA was developed in 2000 and initially tested in ECCE programs in San Antonio, Texas, USA. During fall of 2000, the GGA was translated into Spanish and used informally at two sites in Concepción, Chile. In 2001, ACEI members further tested the GGA in two locations in the United States (California and North Carolina); in one location in Botswana, Nigeria; and in one location in the People’s Republic of China. From 2000 to 2002, initial trials provided information about the feasibility of the GGA as a method for gauging program quality in a variety of countries with different types of ECCE programs.

In 2002, an ACEI international early childhood professionals’ workgroup reviewed feedback from all of the initial informal self-assessments and made changes to the content and format of the GGA. In 2003, the first published English version of the GGA became available on the ACEI website. It contained 98 indicators across five areas of program quality, that included: (1) Environment and Physical Space; (2) Curriculum Content and Pedagogy; (3) Early Childhood Educators and Caregivers; (4) Partnerships with Families and Communities; and (5) Young Children with Special Needs (ACEI, .2011, p. 1).

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During the same time period (2002-03) a formal process for translating and adapting the GGA was put in place by the GG Task Force to help ensure the integrity of the instrument, as it began to be used more extensively across different regions of the world. The translation/adaptation process used (and which continues to be used) is the consensus method. Following the consensus method, the Spanish edition was revised and reviewed by Spanish-language-fluent early childhood educators from seven countries.

In 2003, a subcommittee of the GG Task Force developed procedures for examining the reliability and validity of the GGA. During 2003-04, a study was conducted in five Latin American countries to examine the effectiveness of the updated Spanish edition of the GGA. This study included 69 programs and 138 directors and/or teachers from five Latin American countries: Colombia, Guatemala, Peru, Mexico, and Venezuela (Hardin et al., 2005). Less formal pilot testing of the GGA occurred in Kenya, Korea, India, Hong Kong, Macau, People's Republic of China, Russia, and the United States during this period. Reporting of formal and informal assessments took place at ACEI annual conferences from 2004-2006.

In 2006, a working group of the GG Task Force used this feedback to revise the GGA, which resulted in the 2nd edition, with 88 indicators (down from 98). A cover page was added with space for recording demographic information about the user and program. The five subscales remained the same (Sandell et al., 2010). Translations and adaptations for the *GGA, 2nd Edition* began.

During 2007-08 a reliability and validity pilot study was conducted at six sites across four countries: Guatemala, People's Republic of China, Taiwan, and the United States (Hardin, Bergen, and Hung, 2013). A total of 168 programs and 336 administrators and/or teachers participated in this study. During 2009-10, researchers coordinated a formal study using a Greek translation of the GGA in preschool and infant/toddler classrooms in Greece (Rentzou, 2010). Informal use of the GGA instrument continued internationally, and annual reporting was made at ACEI Summits on Childhood and Institutes for Education Diplomacy.

In 2010-11, a final analysis of the data from the 2007-08 study was conducted. Response differentials were mapped across groups of questions in each program area to examine whether clusters of questions measured similar concepts. After this Rauch analysis, 12 items on the *GGA 2nd Edition* were removed and another seven items were reworded to reduce redundancy (Hardin et al., 2015). Sections with background information, instructions for use, and a summary page were added to the instrument. The resulting third edition of the GGA contains 76 items across the same five program areas and is the most current edition. The ACEI GG Task Force approved the *GGA 3rd Edition* in April 2011 (ACEI, 2011, p. 4).

The work of updating translations/adaptations for the 3rd edition is now underway. Current available translations of the *GGA 3rd Edition* are in Arabic, English, French, Greek, Mandarin, Nepali, Russian, Slovak, Swahili, and Turkish. Korean and Italian translations are in progress.

From spring 2012 until late spring 2014, a systematic and scientific investigation of the psychometric properties of the GGA was conducted. This worldwide reliability and validity study was organized by two principal investigators, Dr. Belinda Hardin and Dr. Doris Bergen. Funding for their study, "Developing a Tool for Improving the Quality of Early Childhood Care and

Education Programs Internationally,” which affirmed the usefulness of this assessment tool (Hardin, Bergen, Busio, Boone, and Grace, 2015), came from the Smith Richardson Foundation.

Ongoing Work

In 2013, Sue Clark Wortham’s edited volume *Common Characteristics and Unique Qualities in Preschool Programs*, Volume 5 in the *Educating the Young Child* series, was published. The volume highlights formal and informal use of the GG and GGA in ECCE programs in 11 countries including Burkina Faso, Guatemala, Italy, Kenya, Korea, Mexico, People’s Republic of China, Russia, Slovakia, Sierra Leone, and Senegal (Wortham, 2013, pp. 1-10). Additionally, in July, 2015, a special edition of *Childhood Education, Enhancing the Quality of Early Childhood Care and Education Globally*, was published by ACEI.

With the assistance of ACEI members, educators continue to use the GG and/or the GGA as a framework for reflecting upon and/or self-assessing their programs. Studies are currently being conducted in Nepal, the People’s Republic of China, and extensively in ECCE programs in several African countries. Updates by ACEI’s Training and Technical Assistance Special Interest Forum members will be presented at the 2016 Summit on Childhood, where there will be representation by ECCE international experts and stakeholders.

Global Training and Technical Assistance Special Interest Forum

The GG and GGA are ongoing projects of ACEI’s Global Training and Technical Assistance Special Interest Forum (TTA-SIF), formerly known as the GG Task Force. The process of updating the GG, representing a global perspective on quality, and bringing the language of the GG into current contexts began in March 2015 at the ACEI Institute for Global Education Diplomacy in Washington, D.C. Twenty-seven Institute attendees, representing more than fourteen different countries, participated in the session. The international ECCE professionals currently invited to review the GG number forty-five ACEI members representing more than twenty-four countries. Outcomes will be presented in April 2016 at the ACEI Global Summit on Childhood in San Juan, Costa Rica.

ACEI members have suggested choosing a different title for the GG in place of the title, *Global Guidelines for Early Education and Care for the 21st Century*, because there appears to be some confusion between the GG and GGA. Among the suggestions for a new title are *Quality Guidelines for Early Childhood Education and Care*; *Quality Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education*; *Global Guidelines for Quality Early Childhood Education, Care and Development*; *Global Guidelines for Quality Early Childhood Education and Development*; and *Framework and Guidelines for Quality Early Childhood Care, Education, and Development Worldwide*.

The five key philosophies are being revised in order to reflect topics and issues in the field. The suggested revisions to the current key philosophy stated above are as follows: (1) “All children are both the present and the future of every nation; they have needs, rights, intrinsic worth, and capacities that must be recognized and supported”; (2) “Every child should have the opportunity to grow up in a setting with adults that value children, that respect diversity, and that provide

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conditions for a safe, secure, and sustainable environment”; (3) “Knowledge of human growth and development and research-based best practices is critical to the processes of consolidating recent gains, responding to challenges, and establishing quality programs for young children”; (4) “All children must be nurtured and receive care and education within and outside of their families from birth onward if they are to develop optimally”; and (5) “Attention to holistic development of all children during their early years is necessary in order for children to thrive, for the future well-being of nations, and for the sustainability of the global community.”

As the GGA, created in 2000, addressed five out of six program areas, the Global Training and Technical Assistance SIF is adding Area 6, Accountability, Supervision, and Management (ASM), to its list of resources. The GGA-ASM will be a separate document available to programs wishing to engage in self-evaluation of program quality around the categories of accountability, supervision, and management. Area 6 Accountability, Supervision, and Management is undergoing review by Global Training and Technical Assistance SIF members; it will be piloted in the USA and in countries that want to participate in the piloting of the document. The document will be revised based on feedback from the pilot testing; and the revised document will be translated into additional languages and piloted in the countries that speak those languages, where it will be further assessed for reliability and validity.

Conclusion

Since its initiation in 2012 by the United Nations, the “Global Conversation” has found that having a good education, especially for children and youth, emerges as a high global priority. Initiatives of numerous world organizations focus on establishing and sustaining quality programs for children and youth. In this context, “good” denotes “quality,” and methods to recognize and document indicators of quality remain part of a global conversation. Of primary importance is localizing agendas for sustaining goals, thereby, establishing trust and ensuring that each society has a voice in modifying and adapting initiatives that directly impact its members’ lives and rights. Work toward carrying out the mission of ACEI, reflected in members’ desire to sustain its initiatives from 1999 with the *Global Guidelines for Early Childhood Education and Care in the 21st Century*, is gaining momentum today. There is renewed commitment to creating resources that societies can adapt for use in their local contexts. The ability to establish a set of guidelines and self-assessments supporting a framework of quality indicators lies in the hands of educators across the globe. As an organization working “To promote and support the optimal education, development, and well-being of children worldwide,” ACEI members are committed to supporting such interest and to working toward improved sustainability on behalf of children.

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