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MANAGEMENT TASKS OF SOCIAL WORKERS SUPERVISING EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD) CENTRES: IDENTIFYING THE AREAS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Jessica Ronaasen¹ and Lambert K Engelbrecht²

¹Postdoctoral fellow, Department of Social Work, Stellenbosch University, South Africa

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4525-0367>  jessicabaker3@gmail.com

²Department of Social Work, Stellenbosch University, South Africa

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6549-7183>  lke@sun.ac.za

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ABSTRACT

Early Childhood Development (ECD) has become a priority area of social work, in both developed and developing countries. In this article, the term ECD supervisors refers to the social workers working with ECD centres in the capacity of supervisor. These social workers can provide valuable insight into the unique management tasks and associated professional development areas uniquely required when working in the ECD sector. The goal of this conceptual article is to identify these professional development areas of management tasks required from social workers who supervise ECD centres. Ultimately, these management tasks are synthesised into three categories, namely tasks which require technical, relational and administrative skills respectively. This is an attempt to preserve the institutional memory of South African social workers, given the current shift of ECD governance functions from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Basic Education.

Keywords: Early Childhood Development; Department of Social Development; Department of Basic Education; management skills, functions and tasks

INTRODUCTION

The dynamic nature of social work in a developing context like South Africa places new expectations on social workers as their roles are expanded to adapt to emerging sectors. The Early Childhood Development (ECD) sector serves as such an example. Traditionally, the role of social protection and supervision is well known in the social work scope of practice, but more recently additional tasks such as supervising ECD centres have increasingly extended the role descriptions and workload of some social workers in South Africa.

Social work management theory highlights a selection of professional management tasks required by social workers (cf. Rankin & Engelbrecht, 2019), but this same set of competencies has to be expanded in an ECD context. This article argues that the integration of management tasks can be supported by learning new skills through professional development opportunities for social workers involved in supervision of EDC centres. This novel approach could guide the Department of Basic Education when engaging with principals of ECD centres, and it could strengthen and preserve the role description of ECD supervisors in future to incorporate ECD tasks and noteworthy skills.

The preservation of the role description and management tasks of ECD supervisors in South Africa is vital, owing to the current migration of leadership and governance functions of the ECD sector from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Basic Education. This requires clarity regarding management tasks, as social workers will still be custodians of the Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 (RSA, 2006). Thus, in practice, the ECD sector does not "belong" to one government department in isolation (Britto *et al.*, 2014; Martin *et al.*, 2010; Meier, 2014). This creates a potential threat, in that management tasks and associated departmental responsibilities may remain inconclusive or shifted between departments without action being taken (Meier, 2014). Thus, tasks clarification may be one way of ensuring that existing institutional knowledge of the South African ECD is preserved.

The interrelated nature of the management competencies of an ECD social work supervisor means that a context-specific collection of tasks is included in their supervisory role (Rankin & Engelbrecht, 2019). In this context, management tasks are the actual tasks that social workers/managers perform in social service organisations, drawing in their execution on specific skills and by utilising specific functions. Engelbrecht (2012) proposed an integrated management competency framework, consisting of specific management skills, functions and tasks depicting the unique context of a social service organisation. This management competency framework offers insight into the management tasks of social workers within an ECD context, and will be the basis for the conceptual framework of this article.

This article is organised as follows: first, a brief description is offered of the conceptual methodology employed in this article, clarifying the approach that was taken to develop and elaborate on the management tasks of social workers supervising ECD centres, in order to identify the areas for professional development of these social workers; second, the South African context and current function shift in the ECD sector is presented; third, a description of Engelbrecht's (2012) conceptual framework of integrated management competencies will illustrate the interrelated nature of managers' skills, functions and tasks; and finally, the theoretical framework is applied to the management tasks of a social worker supervising an ECD centre in the South African context. The goal of this article is to identify the professional development areas of management tasks required from social workers who supervise ECD centres. Ultimately, the identified areas of management tasks are synthesised into three categories, namely tasks which require technical, relational and administrative skills. This is an attempt to preserve the institutional memory of South African social workers, alongside the

current shift of ECD governance functions from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Basic education.

METHODOLOGY

The conceptual methodology employed in this article focuses on the thought processes, logical reasoning and integration of existing knowledge applied towards identifying specific areas of management tasks required for professional development of social workers supervising ECD centres. Therefore, the account offered here is based on the relevant expositions of conceptual methodology as set out by Abma and Stake (2014), Alvesson and Sandberg (2011), Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011), and Smith (2008).

A comprehensive review of existing policies and legislation relating to the management of ECD centres in South Africa was analysed in order to delineate some management tasks of social workers who supervise ECD centres. The Education White Paper 5 on Education (RSA, 2001), the Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 (RSA, 2006), the National Development Plan (RSA, 2011) and the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECD Policy) (RSA, 2015) were specifically helpful. This policy analysis provides the context to determine which management tasks may be required from social workers who supervise ECD centres. To determine these management tasks, a specific conceptual framework on management competencies was needed, as this is the central focus of the article. The essential management competency framework of Engelbrecht (2012) was used to explain the skills, functions and tasks of social workers as managers in a social service organisation. How these key components interact and influence each other is graphically illustrated in Figure 1. Table 1 furthermore illustrates some associated tasks of a social work manager in the ECD sector, framed within both the policy analysis of the South African ECD sector and the chosen management competency framework. This application is explained with practical examples of main tasks and tasks in action, and supported with references to relevant policies, legislation and research findings. Each of the main management tasks is then discussed, with a specific normative perspective on what may be feasible for social workers who supervise ECD centres. This is an endeavour to understand the practical implications of the identified tasks in action for social workers. The practical implications are finally synthesised into three areas of professional development for social workers and linked with examples of tasks in action in Table 2. This will conclude the inquiry into the specific areas of management tasks for the professional development of social workers supervising ECD centres. Preservation of the institutional memory of South African social workers in the shift of ECD governance functions from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Basic education should be the worthwhile outcome.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN ECD SECTOR

Global trends in ECD management may set the trajectory for the field and so influence the South African ECD sector; however, the country has a unique context which should be taken into account and examined within an African perspective (Aubrey, Godfrey & Harris, 2013; Bassok & Engel, 2019). Prior to 1994, many South Africans did not receive equal formal education owing to the discriminatory apartheid system, and thus the educational divide within

South Africa sets a continual target for development (Atmore, 2013; Richter & Samuels, 2018). Multiple policies, specifically in the education sector, were formulated after South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, and have endeavoured to rectify the inequality woven into South Africa's education governance and systems. However, it is only over the past decade that the attention of policy makers and researchers has shifted from formal schooling towards the ECD sector (Atmore, 2013).

ECD, aimed at the holistic development of a child from birth to six years, is defined and positioned in the National Development Plan (RSA, 2011), which emphasises the right to education and the financial commitment of government towards supporting and monitoring the education sector. Several significant policies have been influential in the development of ECD in South Africa, namely the White Paper 5 on Education (RSA, 2001), the Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 (RSA, 2006), and most recently the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (RSA, 2015). Protection of children has been mandated and championed by social workers through the Children's Act. Chapter 5 (Sections 76-90) of this Act is dedicated to the standards of a partial care facility, whereas an ECD centre is defined as a centre which "takes care of more than six children on behalf of their parents or caregivers during specific hours of the day or night". An ECD service must, according to the Children's Act, register as a partial care facility and ECD programme (Section 79). Chapter 6 of The Children's Act adds an additional layer of guidelines to the ECD sector of social service provision in South Africa. As a result of this Act, the Department of Social Development took over the governing role for the ECD sector, which has been migrating into the patronage of the Department of Basic Education since 2022 (Harrison, 2019). ECD in South Africa gained its unique headline policy only with the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (RSA, 2015), when it was ratified and mandated as a policy with an intersectoral agenda. Notably, the South African government has progressively taken decisive steps, primarily in policy formulation, towards collectively prioritising the ECD sector (cf. Atmore, 2019; Fourie, 2018; Rudolph, 2017). However, the need for both the Department of Social Development and the Department of Basic Education to jointly ensure quality ECD in South Africa has come to the fore with a function shift pending (Harrison, 2019; Modise, 2021).

In 2019, the South African Cabinet announced a planned transfer of functions within the ECD sector from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Basic education. Prior to April 2022, the Department of Social Development also administrated the registration and funding subsidies for ECD centres, which are considered partial care facilities (DSD & EPRI, 2014). While the ECD sector navigates the implications of the function shift, a learning opportunity is presented for the Department of Basic education to begin to access a wealth of knowledge unique to the oversight, support and monitoring of ECD centres and support ECD programmes by the Department of Social Development (Richter & Samuels, 2018; Steenkamp, Ronaasen, Williams & Feeley, 2019). Be that as it may, social workers will and should be continuously part of the learning processes within the ECD sector as the function shift is being strategically implemented across the country.

INTEGRATED MANAGERIAL COMPETENCIES: WHERE DO MANAGEMENT TASKS FIT IN?

Management is a concept involving skills, functions and tasks which determine the performance of a manager. The interrelated nature of the essential management competencies of an ECD social worker means that a collection of tasks is included in their role (Rankin & Engelbrecht, 2019). In the context of this article, ECD social workers are practitioners who manage ECD centres in the capacity of supervisor, and management tasks are described as interrelated outcomes performed by an ECD social worker. A “manager” in the context of social work can thus be defined as someone who utilises their own expertise, knowledge and skills to manage social work interventions, for example case work, group work and community work (Coulshed & Mullender, 2006; Rankin & Engelbrecht, 2019).

Engelbrecht (2012) presents a conceptual framework of management skills, functions and tasks (see Figure 1), describing the relationship and complex nature of a management role in a social service organisation, for example an ECD centre. The integrated nature of this framework illustrates the complex connectedness between the professional functions and the output of tasks that a manager would need to perform in an ECD context.

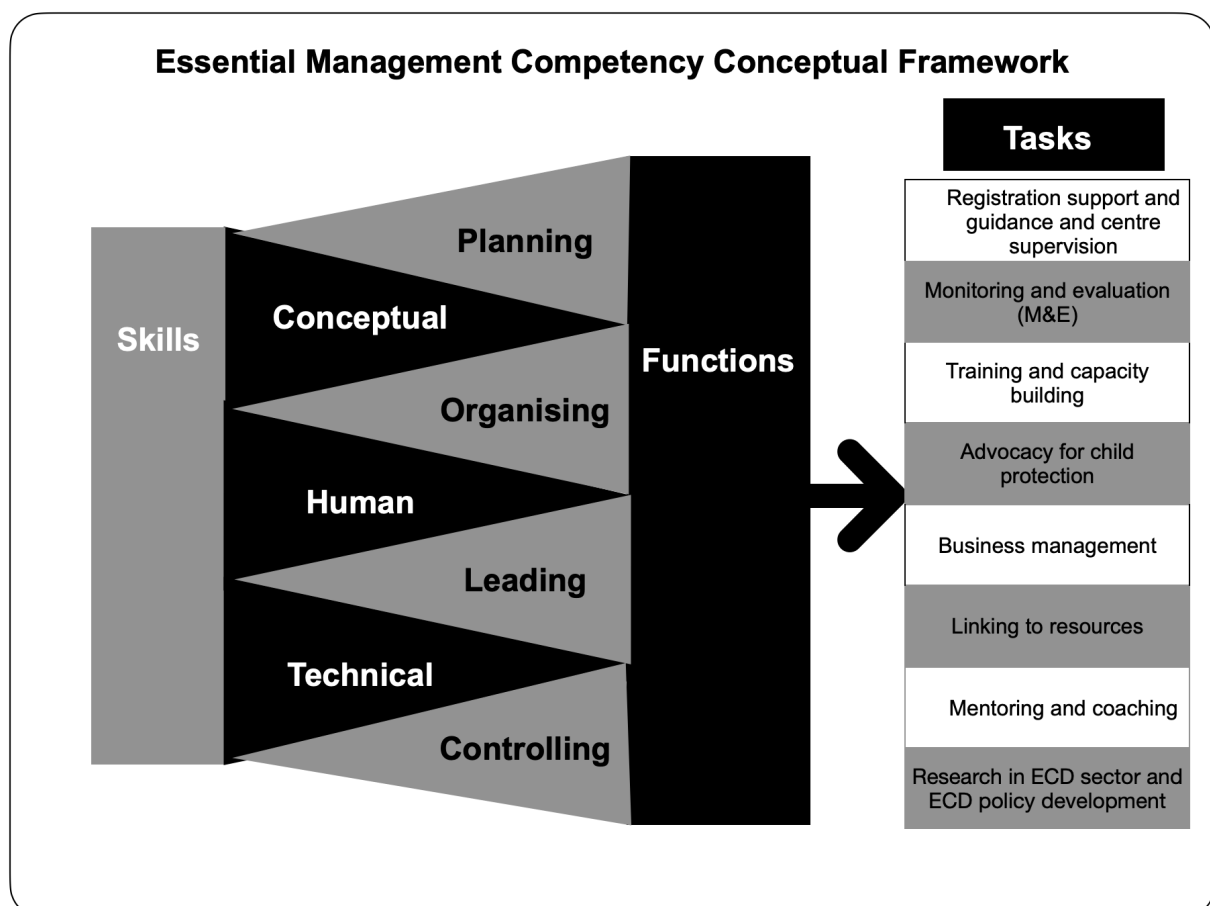


Figure 1: Essential management competency conceptual framework within an ECD context (Adapted from Engelbrecht, 2012)

As illustrated in Figure 1, it can be argued that a social worker who operates in the field of ECD needs conceptual, human and technical skills, and is required to fulfil functions of

planning, organising, leading and controlling (cf. Rankin & Engelbrecht, 2019) in a number of tasks, each with its own set of expectations. Some of these tasks fulfilled by a social worker are detailed in Table 1 below with specific examples of the task in action in the ECD context based on relevant legislation, policy documents and research findings.

Table 1: Main tasks and examples of tasks in action of a social work manager in the ECD sector

Main tasks	Examples of tasks in action
<p>Registration support, guidance and centre supervision (Children’s Act No. 38 of 2005, RSA, 2006, Partial Care Section 79(2); Sotuku, Okeke & Mathwasa, 2016)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NPO registration • ECD centre registration and compliance • ECD programme registration and compliance
<p>Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) (Clampett, 2016; Desmond <i>et al.</i>, 2019; Children’s Act No. 38 of 2005, RSA, 2006; Govender, 2015)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental standards upheld • Practitioner-child interaction • Age-appropriate ECD programmes • Link activities to daily programmes • Child participation • DSD funding allocations
<p>Training and capacity building (Atmore, 2013; Department of Basic Education, 2009; Govindasamy, 2010)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualifications and training • Capacitation for staff • Curriculum support
<p>Advocacy for child protection (Azzi-Lessing, 2010; Children’s Act No. 38 of 2005, RSA, 2006; United Nations, 1989)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education regarding rights and responsibilities • Custodians of the Child Care Act No. 38 of 2005 (RSA, 2006)
<p>Business management (Applewhite, Kao & Pritzker, 2018; Corrinna, 2018; Partial care in terms of Section 79(2) of the Children’s Act No. 38 of 2005, RSA, 2006)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating business plans • Financial literacy support • Promoting management skills and processes
<p>Linking to resources (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014; Lau & Ho, 2018)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donations • Resources for business administration and centre management • Links between DSD and DBE and government services
<p>Mentoring and coaching (Azzi-Lessing, 2010; Moodie-Dyer & Collins, 2013)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support • Encouragement • Role modelling
<p>Research in ECD sector and ECD policy development (Atmore, 2019; Herman-Smith, 2013; Kahn, 2014; Lo, Das & Horton, 2017)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying needs in the sector • Exploring social issues to inform practice, policy and further research • Impact studies on ECD intervention

These main tasks and examples of tasks in action are deemed essential for the delivery of quality ECD centre supervision and are discussed in the following sections.

Registration support and supervision

ECD centre registration is the mandated requirement by the Department of Social Development to standardise and monitor the services delivered to preschool children. However, a matter for concern is the rise in the number of unregistered ECD centres which function outside of compliance standards in South Africa (Johnson, 2017). Defined by policy as a partial care facility, an ECD centre is a building that cares for and protects six children or more on behalf of the primary caregiver (Children's Act No. 38 of 2005, Chapter 5 Section 76, RSA, 2006). This child care situation should include an ECD programme for developmental outcomes for children between the ages of birth to six years (RSA, 2015). An ECD centre can also be termed a crèche, day-care centre or pre-school (DSD & EPRI, 2014). Registration status may not ensure quality service, but it does require minimum standards to be met. A social workers doing supervision encompassing a combination of administration, support and education can help establish the ECD centre or initiate programme improvement with the application of registration standards and management practices (DSD & EPRI, 2014; Fourie & Fourie, 2016; Kemmis *et al.*, 2014).

While the Department of Social Development requires compliance of ECD centres, social workers are the agents of compliance change as they guide ECD principals through the extensive list of criteria necessary to complete the Partial Care Registration Process (Biersteker, Dawes, Hendricks & Tredoux, 2016; Harrison, 2019). Once registered, a social work manager or a "suitably qualified person" often from a social service organisation is assigned to each registered ECD centre by the provincial Department of Social Development office to supervise centre compliance (RSA, 2008:35). Prior to registration, clear communication between the ECD principal and social worker is vital to ensure that adequate understanding and clear expectations of the centre are conveyed. There are notable delays and bottlenecks in this supervision process due to social workers supervising a large number of centres simultaneously (Govender, 2015). Tasks involved in this function could include site visits, practitioner observations, assessments of learning programmes, environmental safety briefings and explanations of compliance standards. Once again, administrative supervision is needed as the registration process is administratively demanding (Biersteker *et al.*, 2016). The ECD sector has historically been characterised by high levels of informality, with the majority of ECD programmes being unregistered (van der Walt, 2020). Therefore, there is a growing issue around the registered and non-registered ECD centres who may receive different forms of supervision or support from the Department of Social Development. One may question the quality of education and protection being offered at ECD centres and this is a call to action for the Department of Social Development to actively support the unregistered centres to meet registration criteria. Therefore, social workers overseeing ECD centres should respond and rise to the challenge of educational, supportive and administrative supervision to effectively increase registration and compliance of ECD centres.

Monitoring and evaluation

Legislation positions social workers at the forefront of monitoring and evaluation of ECD centres and ECD programmes (RSA, 2006; RSA, 2015). Elements of an ECD setting which could be monitored include the environmental standards of the centre, the practitioner and child interaction, age-appropriate ECD programmes as part of the daily programme, child outcomes, the nutrition programme, levels of child participation at the centre and, of considerable importance, the facilities' use of Department of Social Development funding allocations (Desmond *et al.*, 2019; Govender, 2015).

Monitoring and evaluation in an ECD context generally occurs internally for social service organisations, which are often local NGOs supporting ECD centres. The Department of Social Development also requires a certain capacity for tasks related to the collection of data from these facilities. Using data for evaluation purposes should extend beyond funder accountability and be geared towards learning for all stakeholders through informed decision-making and planning processes (Mandinach, 2012). A social worker would require a skill-set founded upon assessment and research principles and procedures (Hodgson, Papatheodorou & James, 2014). That said, trustworthy and reliable data can continue to ensure quality intervention and service delivery within the ECD sector.

Training and capacity building

The ECD sector is not different from others in terms of inequalities stemming from the unique socio-political history of South Africa. Without training and accredited qualifications to support the quality of education and care services provided at ECD centres, professionalisation will remain a concern (Atmore, 2013; Fourie & Fourie, 2016). Inadequate management training is a common stumbling block hindering ECD principals from performing their role, particularly with regard to new principals (Onguko, Abdalla & Webber, 2012). Social workers may not be early education experts, but should nevertheless encourage the training of ECD centre staff.

Furthermore, social workers can provide opportunities, and endorse and advocate for the vocational training of ECD centre staff and parents as directed by the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECD) (RSA, 2015). Promoting organisational learning in ECD centres encourages strengths-based practices by social workers through a shared learning exchange between social workers and ECD principals. In addition, curriculum support and training should be offered to ECD principals and practitioners to ensure sufficient understanding of curriculum documents such as the National Early Learning Development Standards (Department of Basic Education, 2009) and National Curriculum Framework (Department of Basic Education, 2015). It would be helpful for South African social workers to contextualise curriculum documents for an African context (Awopegba, Oduolowu & Nsamenang, 2013). Education is a developmental opportunity for ECD practitioners and principals to integrate the tasks of sound governance and optimal centre management into their daily operations.

Advocacy for child protection

Social workers are mandated custodians of the Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 (RSA, 2006). This function of advocacy is not one that social workers take lightly. Issues of child protection need to be a priority, and without a social worker in place to advocate for at-risk children, they may be vulnerable to abuse or neglect. Registration as a partial care facility is required to ensure safety in an ECD care setting (RSA, 2006). When attending an ECD centre, one would assume that a child is protected; however, this is not always the case. Discipline, classroom management and children-to-teacher interactions can potentially be derailed if standards are not upheld (Conroy *et al.*, 2019; Schmidt & Azzi-Lessing, 2019). A child has the right to be educated, but also to be cared for in an environment conducive to ensuring their safety, nurturing and protection (United Nations, 1989). A rights-based approach further encourages social workers to educate service users and their communities regarding children's rights and responsibilities. The pursuit of children's rights in this setting is crucial for parents, teachers and communities who interact with children. Therefore, the Department of Social Development remains the umbrella under which the tasks of child protection, policy change and rights-based education are delegated. The National Integrated ECD Policy (RSA, 2015) confirms this allocation, thus requiring social workers in the ECD field to assume leadership in these tasks.

Business management

Social development is founded upon the mission of improving both social and economic objectives. While progress has been made in South Africa, a need remains for sustainability in social service interventions and community-based programmes such as ECD centres (Gray, 2006). As asserted by Moss (2015; 2017), a strong neoliberal view on the services provided by ECD centres promotes the idea that education is a commodity sold to a market of demand motivated by both politics and economics. ECD centres are hubs of education but should also be seen as businesses run and managed by an owner, in this case, an ECD principal who is monitored by a social worker. Business management tasks required of social workers would include assisting the principals to create and document ECD business plans, offering financial literacy support with regard to budgeting and use of funds, and promoting ethical management skills and processes (Applewhite, Kao & Pritzker, 2018; RSA, 2006). While social workers are generally not trained in small business accounting or financial management, there is a sound argument for social workers to develop basic business skills, their own financial literacy and a culture of social entrepreneurship whereby philanthropic work can also reap sustainable financial returns.

Regulatory support from social workers could assist ECD principals to meet business norms and standards. Offering both education and childcare services, an ECD centre is an organisation which requires unique leadership, training, monitoring, funding assistance and coaching to emerge as a sustainable business (Britto *et al.*, 2014; Meier, 2014). Social workers do need to understand business principles and the value of social entrepreneurship in community development, particularly in low socio-economic areas (Chand & Misra, 2009; Lombard & Strydom, 2011; Shawar & Shiffman, 2017; Woodhead, Featherstone, Bolton & Robertson, 2014). Again, the need to support ECD principals becomes critical. To support the sector's growing workforce, adequate funding mechanisms and innovative support systems should be

in place for partial care facilities. Examples of these could include professional development for the ECD workforce, training opportunities that are supported with adequate funding and mentorship, and platforms that utilise technology to assist ECD principals toward submitting documentation and meeting compliance standards. Business management skills are not a standard competency of a social worker; however it would be helpful to possess business management skills to support ECD centres to achieve financial sustainability.

Linking to resources

Education is one of the services that is offered by an ECD centre. These centres are multifaceted and able to offer several services to a number of stakeholders, families and communities. Traditionally, social workers involved with schools have been referred to as communicators and linkers to resources in the community, yet have untapped potential to function as educational leaders (Sherman, 2016). According to Lau and Ho (2018) and Azzi-Lessing (2010), there are a few cookie-cutter tasks which social workers could perform in an early education setting, for example, operating as mediators between the Department of Social Development, Department of Basic Education and other government services. More out-of-the-box tasks could include steering and linking centres to donations as well as motivating for resources to assist with business administration necessary for optimal centre management.

Viewing human and community resources from a strengths-based approach could further improve the likelihood of an ECD centre's economic success. A social worker could make use of the indigenous knowledge within the community and bring together resources from other nearby communities and networks (Müller & Korsgaard, 2018). Social workers can positively contribute to the perspectives, narratives and experiences of ECD principals who are often under-resourced despite industriously seeking to develop, educate and care for young children, while generating livelihoods for themselves and their staff.

Mentoring and coaching

Mentorship is a relational exchange of knowledge, skills and experiences which can be useful for professional development and for support of those in a context of ECD principal supervision. Frequently used as an interchangeable term with mentorship, coaching is defined as a process of enhancing either an individual or team performance which may be suitable for an ECD centre functioning as an ecosystem of teams (Mullen, 2012). Coaching offers training and oversight to improve performance, whereas mentoring includes a counselling experience with the intention to guide and support a person, usually towards career development (Schuneman, 2019). Social workers functioning as mentors may not be common practice, but findings in the ECD sector show the dire need for this to occur if professionalisation, innovation and sustainable interventions are to be achieved (Kruger, 2020). Variations in models of mentorship within school contexts have been explored across the world (Kemmis *et al.*, 2014), but there is a need for further investigation in South Africa. Through supervision, ongoing support and self-development, mentorship can be a golden thread which in future will create a tapestry of strong leaders in the early education field as a direct consequence of the knowledge that is passed on from mentor to mentee.

Practical descriptions of a mentor include one who guides, encourages, supports, connects, serves as role model and, distinctively, partners with the mentee; in this case, the mentee is an ECD principal. These descriptive terms refer to the interpersonal skills already held by social workers which could be useful for cultivating an effective mentoring relationship with an ECD principal. Mentoring and supervision of ECD principals can take a number of forms, including individual in-person site visits, group meetings, forum gatherings and online engagement, to name a few. Barriers to mentorship could include a lack of organisational support by the Department of Social development of the ECD principals, lack of a shared learning culture in the ECD sector, fear of inspection, negative power dynamics, ineffective accountability structures, and the time and financial costs involved in mentoring (Bridge, 2020). Further investigation is needed for a better understanding of these barriers to mentorship within the context of ECD.

Research in the ECD sector and ECD policy development

Social workers should aim to generate, disseminate and preserve an institutional memory to create organisational innovation and sustainability in the ECD sector. They can also take advantage of collaborative platforms for sharing knowledge, which may resolve sector-specific social and economic challenges. Legislation and research are sometimes seen as tasks separate from those of frontline social work; however, research and policy development can be enablers of action for leaders in the ECD sector, which is strongly supported by evidence (Desmond *et al.*, 2019; Sotuku *et al.*, 2016). As noted by Oke and Fernandes (2020), every study and research output is contributing towards deeper understanding, increased investment and innovation in the field.

Social workers could function as researchers by exploring social issues not only to inform their own practice, but also to influence policy and stimulate further research (Atmore, 2019; Herman-Smith, 2013; Kahn, 2014). Lo, Das and Horton (2017) and the National Integrated ECD Policy (RSA, 2015) indicate that impact studies and further evaluations of the ECD comprehensive package of services are crucial for paving a sustainable road ahead for young children. As social workers are considered child protection experts, they are the advocates of children's rights, whether it be for education or safety. The ECD movement, locally and globally, needs a strong and effective voice to carry the message of quality assurance as regards children.

If the development of social policy is not empowering and protecting children, it should not be business as usual; a social worker has the power to challenge or intervene through policy development and consultation. Policy improvements are often informed by research and in many ways research should be intrinsic to a social worker's role. For an ECD social worker, policy development and research could become part of their contribution to the work in the sector and add credibility to the effective work achieved in the sector.

CONCLUSION

The above management tasks can be synthesised into three categories of professional development areas for social workers, supplemented with examples of tasks in action.

Table 2: Synthesised professional development areas for social workers and examples of action

Synthesised professional development areas for social workers		Examples of tasks in action
Tasks requiring technical skills	The ECD-specific tasks requiring knowledge of the field and an understanding of quality ECD programmes	Supervision, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), training and capacity building, advocacy for child protection, research in ECD sector, and ECD policy development
Tasks requiring relational skills	The ability to interact with people, effectively communicating while building relationships, understanding diverse cultures, political awareness, networking ability, showcasing active listening, and managing human resources	Mentoring and coaching
Tasks requiring administrative skills	Understanding and interpretation of registration and compliance process and documentation	Registration support, guidance and business management, and linking to resources

Apart from exploring and identifying the areas for professional development in terms of management tasks of social workers in ECD centres, this article also advocates the preservation of the institutional memory of South African social workers alongside the shift in governance functions from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Basic Education. Amidst the uncertainty of this migration from one department to another, ECD social workers are all the while managing and supervising ECD centres and implementing unique functions that warrant acknowledgement and description. Social workers should continue to be active stakeholders and advocates for ECD in South Africa by applying their technical expertise, as well as their relational and administrative skills. With a reinvigorated view of management functions and tasks, the ECD sector can be typified by social workers who not only strive for social protection alongside the optimal development of children, but also serve to promote ECD centres as businesses and social enterprises.

The upshot is that ECD social workers need personal and professional development opportunities to upskill themselves, because they are functioning in a developmental socially driven service sector, which demands new skills from even the most experienced manager. Additional ECD-specific roles may be considered by expanding job descriptions, detailing the needs for initiative, creativity and motivation. Social workers who are already meeting the requirements of a broad job description of frontline social work may be hesitant to expand the scope of their practice into the ECD sector. However, institutional support, political will and personal commitment could yield outcomes for improved quality and development of ECD centres.

This article supports Engelbrecht's (2012) conceptual framework for essential management competencies by showcasing the complexity and interrelated nature of management tasks and functions. Generic social work skills, knowledge and experience need to be adapted and incorporated into an early childhood education field, as ECD social workers are change agents who impact on the lives of vulnerable children. Therefore, social workers and ECD principals need to be equipped through training and professional development opportunities with the

necessary competencies to understand education and child development, as well as understand businesses within a social development paradigm.

Regardless of the governance structure, social workers bring unique institutional knowledge of management and supervision to ECD centres in South Africa. Therefore, social workers need to rise to the occasion and continue to contribute from their unique set of skills, particularly in the areas of advocacy for children's rights, child protection, developmental community interventions and social research.

This article presents some actionable tasks for social workers supervising ECD centres, which could assist sector planning towards proactive roles for social workers in the future. The ECD sector requires strong management capacity, as it heads into a new season of governance. Professional development of managers in the identified areas may be of inestimable value here.

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