

## **Wash from the Start**

Diarrhoea is the largest preventable killer of children-under-five and it is the direct cause of death in more young children than AIDS, malaria and measles combined (UNICEF, WHO 2009). The highest rates of infection occur in the first two years of life with children in the majority world often suffering from 5-12 episodes per year. Diarrhoea is often deadly but attacks at any age of early childhood also have a long term impact on the child's learning achievement and health condition later (Niehaus,, 2002). Research has suggested that the safe disposal of faeces could reduce diarrhoea by 32 percent, the provision of safe drinking water by 39 percent, and the washing of hands with soap at critical times could reduce diarrhoea by 44 percent.

The aim of Millennium Development target 10 has been to cut in half, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. More ambitious targets are needed for the future and it is widely recognised that education provides a crucial component in meeting these challenges. The Organisation Mondiale Pour L'Education Prescolaire (OMEP) has been in the forefront of efforts to ensure that all those involved in the drafting of the next round of 'Sustainable Development Goals' are aware of the contribution that early childhood education has to make to these efforts (Pramling-Samuelsson and Wagner, 2012).

More effort is required to deal with these problems and a strong case for expanding WASH efforts significantly into the preschool phase of education can be made on two grounds:

1. Ethical practice requires our efforts be focused upon the youngest children as they are the principle victims.
2. It has been established that investments in early childhood education are more economic and effective;

### **The moral argument for *Wash from the Start***

Children have the right to be consulted 'in all matters that affect them' (Article 12 of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and diarrhoea is a direct cause of nearly one in five child deaths. In fact, every 20 seconds, a child dies from a water-related disease (based on estimates in the 2006 United Nations Human Development Report).

Young children suffer the most immediate impact of our failure to provide adequate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) education and resources. They bear a disproportionate share of the immediate impacts of shortages in safe drinking water, inadequate sanitation and hygiene and they have a right to be consulted and engaged in dealing with these problems.

In the context of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), Tanner (2010) cites a wide range of research evidence to argue that children from the age of 3 onwards are also have the capacity to reduce not just the physical aspects of risk, but also (and perhaps more significantly) the culturally constructed aspects of risk requiring behavioural change:

*"The focus of attention therefore needs to shift from one that considers children's agency not only in terms of their ability to enact direct, autonomous risk management practices, to one that that considers children as risk communicators to create behavioural change in other people in their communities. Such risk communication processes at household, school and*

community level remain poorly understood in different cultural contexts (Lindell and Perry, 2004).

### **The economic argument for supporting *Wash from the Start***

For those concerned about cost-benefits we need look no further than the evidence provided by Nobel Prize winning economist James Heckman (2006). Investment in early childhood education have been shown to provide a higher rate of return than investments later in life. In fact a series of studies have shown that a dollar invested in early childhood yields three times as much as for school-aged children and eight times as much for adult education:

*“Why should society invest in disadvantaged young children? The traditional argument for doing so is made on the grounds of fairness and social justice. It is an argument founded on equity considerations. There is another argument that can be made. It is based on economic efficiency. It is more powerful than the equity argument, in part because the gains from such investment can be quantified and they are large. There are many reasons why investing in disadvantaged young children has a high economic return. It is a rare public policy initiative that promotes fairness and social justice and at the same time promotes productivity in the economy and in society at large. Investing in disadvantaged young children is such a policy.”* (Heckman, 2006)

Evidence may also be drawn from robust longitudinal research studies such as the Perry Preschool project in the USA (Schweinhart et al, 1993) and the *Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years Research project in the UK* (Sylva et al, 2004). There is a growing consensus amongst economists and educationalists that the early years are of crucial importance and the body of research evidence continues to accumulate. Among the most recent are a Save the Children impact evaluation of preschool education in Mozambique and a follow up study of an early childhood intervention in Jamaica which has shown next generation effects (Zanolini et al, 2012).

The evidence isn't all correlational either. We now know a great deal about *why* the early years are so influential. Some of the most cutting edge evidence from brain studies are confirming over 100 years of research in child development and learning from around the world. Developmental psychology has identified the remarkable progress in cognitive development that can occur in early childhood and now neuroscience is also showing us the foundational importance of early brain developments. Research also shows the major impact of early childhood on social and emotional development, and on the processes by which the foundations to moral development are set in the early years. Recent sociocultural studies are also contributing significantly to our understanding of the massive impact of social contexts to early learning.

A case for supporting *Wash from the Start* may also be made in terms of programme 'reach' and in applying some simple demographic arithmetic:

The average family size in the UK is less than 2 children, but in Benin and Cameroon it is about 5, and in Kenya's North-Eastern Province it is 7. According to the UK Office of National Statistics, the average interval between births in the UK is 33 months. While we were still hunters and gatherers, the average age gap was apparently 36 to 48 months. This was probably out of necessity and practicality, as mothers breast fed their children for 2 or 3 years, which prevented ovulation.

Recent US Aid statistics covering 72 countries now show an average 32.1 month interval between births. The average child in a preschool may be taken as 4.5 years of age and the average number of children per family in the high child mortality countries that are of most concern may be taken as 5. So we can reasonably assume that every average child attending the preschool (with 50% of his siblings older, and 50% younger) will have a baby

brother or sister under the age of 1.... So that we can target the highest risk group (under 3s) through engagement with their parents in the pre-school - and as a bonus the preschool children can also be agents of change in the home themselves...

- Open box –
- *The average preschool child is 4.5 years of age.*
- *The average number of children per family in high child mortality countries is 5 or above.*
- *There is an average 32.1 month interval between births.*
- Therefore:
- ***The average child attending preschool has (or will soon have) a baby brother or sister under the age of 1...***
- We can therefore target the highest risk group (birth to age 1) through our engagement with their parents in the pre-school.
- ***...and as a bonus the preschool children will themselves be agents of change in the home***
- Close box –
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### **Effective hygiene education in Early Childhood**

The World Health Organization defines life skills as those; “abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable children to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life” (WHO, 2003). Given the opportunity, young children can internalize behaviours associated with good sanitation and hygiene; using clean water, using latrines, washing hands after elimination and before eating, covering coughs and sneezes. The more automatic hygienic behaviours become during early childhood, the more likely it is that children will maintain them and expand upon them when they get to school, especially with further education about water, sanitation, and hygiene. Much more needs to be done to develop resources, guidance, and disseminate good practice in this area:

*“Effective hygiene education for children is not just about teaching children facts about health risks and bad hygiene practices. Skills-based hygiene education is an approach to creating or maintaining hygienic lifestyles and conditions through the development of (1) knowledge, (2) attitudes, and especially (3) skills, using a variety of learning experiences, with an emphasis on participatory methods. Hygiene education should enable a child to apply knowledge and develop attitudes and skills to make positive decisions and take actions to promote and protect one’s health and hygienic conditions, not only for him/herself but also of others” (Mooijman, 2006).*

Attitudes are really important in all of this and many of our strongest attitudes regarding hygiene are developed in early childhood. In the early years children come to conclusions about what they like or dislike, what they consider good or bad, important or unimportant, worth caring about or not. The early childhood hygiene curriculum is crucial and Mooijman (2006) summarises some of the most suitable methods to be applied by teachers for 4-7 year olds as follows:

- *Listening to and telling stories*
- *Reciting poems and songs, and singing songs*
- *Drama/short skits*
- *Seeing and doing various types of puppet plays*
- *Simple sorting games*
- *Language and number games and assignments*
- *Reading and reacting to stories*

- *Walks, doing simple observations*
- *Skills demonstrations, with peer observation and analysis*
- *Movement games, competitions*
- *Conversations and discussions*
- *Drawing, painting, colouring, claying*
- *Doing simple hygiene tasks*

If local environmental, economic or social concerns are to provide the focus for curriculum activities and children are to be given the opportunity to suggest their own solutions, then it is important to acknowledge that young children often find it difficult to express their ideas verbally. Davis (2010) suggests the following additional strategies:

- *The use of mapping techniques (Hart, 1997)*
- *Encouraging children to express their ideas through 3D constructions (e.g. blocks)*
- *Facilitating dramatic play through the use of relevant environmental or other props*
- *Taking note of children's concrete actions*
- *Encouraging discussion during 'circle time' or meetings which may involve adults from outside the setting*
- *Documenting the children's sustainable achievements so that; 'success can be celebrated, contributions acknowledged and actions reflected upon' (Davis, 2010 p177)*

Davis (2010) also provides the following account of a preschool project that was implemented in an area of Australia suffering a period of drought:

"One day, a conversation arose from the children's wishes to use water in the sandpit. The teacher responded by providing a limited amount of water and reminding the children that 'once this is all gone there won't be any more'. Seeing the children's disappointment, it was decided that collecting and reusing water could be an alternative solution. The children were asked to think about what might be possible. One child responded: "Why don't we get it from the sky?" In the following weeks, there was an ongoing discussion about the issue. By chance, one of the teachers found an article about rain harvesting in India. She brought the article to the centre and discussed the idea with the children, encouraging them to think about how they might harvest the water from the sky. The article inspired many suggestions. One of the most practical ideas seemed to be to collect water from the roof of the outdoor shed. The teacher shared this idea with the parent committee. There was much enthusiasm for this idea and, once an agreement was reached on how to progress the project, a local contractor visited the centre while the children were present. This provided an opportunity for the children to see and contribute to the plan for guttering and a storage system. Parents were invited to contribute recyclable materials, in order to keep the costs as low as possible." (Davis, p178)

OMEP is seeking funding to extend the work further to involve many more preschools in the Global North supporting their partner preschools in the global South. It is intended that these preschool partnerships should be built upon carbon partnerships rather than patronism. This initiative follows up directly upon United Nations (2012) *The future we want*, Rio+20 Agenda item 10:

*230. We recognize that the younger generations are the custodians of the future and the need for better quality and access to education beyond the primary level. We therefore resolve to improve the ...capacity of our education systems to prepare people to pursue sustainable development, including through **enhanced teacher training**, the development of sustainability curricula, the development of training programmes that prepare students for careers in fields related to sustainability, and more effective use of information and*

communications technologies to enhance learning outcomes. We call for enhanced cooperation among schools, communities and authorities in efforts to promote access to quality education at all levels.

232. We emphasize the importance of **greater international cooperation** to improve access to education, including through building and strengthening education infrastructure and increasing investment in education, particularly investment to improve the quality of education for all in developing countries. **We encourage international educational exchanges and partnerships, including the creation of fellowships and scholarships to help achieve global education goals.** Ref: United nations (2012) *The future we want*, Rio+20 Agenda item 10: Outcome of the Conference, United Nations A/CONF.216/L.1 <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N12/381/64/PDF/N1238164.pdf?OpenElement>

Many schools and preschools in the Global North have raised funds for African schools in the past. This can be helpful but sometimes it has a negative affect on the children's impressions of Africa – it can reinforce stereotypes that all African people are poor and need our help. And this would lead to unbalanced partnerships:

“Raising money for poor people can encourage children to feel pity or at best sympathy and there is a very real danger that this can lead to a feeling of superiority. This is reinforced by encouraging children to reflect on ‘how lucky they are’ “ (Griffin, 2010, Siraj-Blatchford, 1999)

Carbon partnerships provide a means of developing equal partnerships that are founded upon commitments to justice rather than charity. A significant contribution of the comparatively sustainable pre-schools (children, parents, educators) to the ‘carbon unsustainable’ pre-schools will be in educating them about what it means to live a more sustainable life. See: <http://www.omep.or.ke/>

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