

Gender-Responsive Pedagogy for Early Childhood Education: Building Equitable and Healthy Futures in South Africa

« When health educates and education cares »
Educaid Conference October 10 2025

“Gender Inequity Harms Health and Well-Being”

Gender inequality is not only a social injustice — it is a health risk.

Discrimination, violence, bias, and unequal power reduce mental, physical, and social well-being.

- Women are about twice as likely to experience depression and anxiety (Remes, et al, 2016).
- Around 1 in 3 women globally experience intimate partner violence — linked to trauma, chronic illness, and reproductive health issues (WHO, 2024).
- Gender norms that discourage emotional expression contribute to higher suicide rates — men are about twice as likely to die by suicide. (WHO, 2025)
- Norms of toughness and risk-taking drive higher rates of substance abuse, accidents, and violence in men (Courtenay, 200).
- Exposure to discrimination and restrictive gender norms increases stress, loneliness, and unhealthy coping behaviours (Krieger, 2011)

Gender Equality: Key challenges in South Africa



1 in 4 women experiences intimate partner violence in their lifetime



A women is raped every 36 seconds



Highest number of intimate partner murder in the world



Femicide rate in South Africa is five times higher than the global average



1 in 3 girls in South Africa leave school early, often due to pregnancy, safety concerns or financial pressures



Women remain disproportionately affected by poverty and unpaid care work

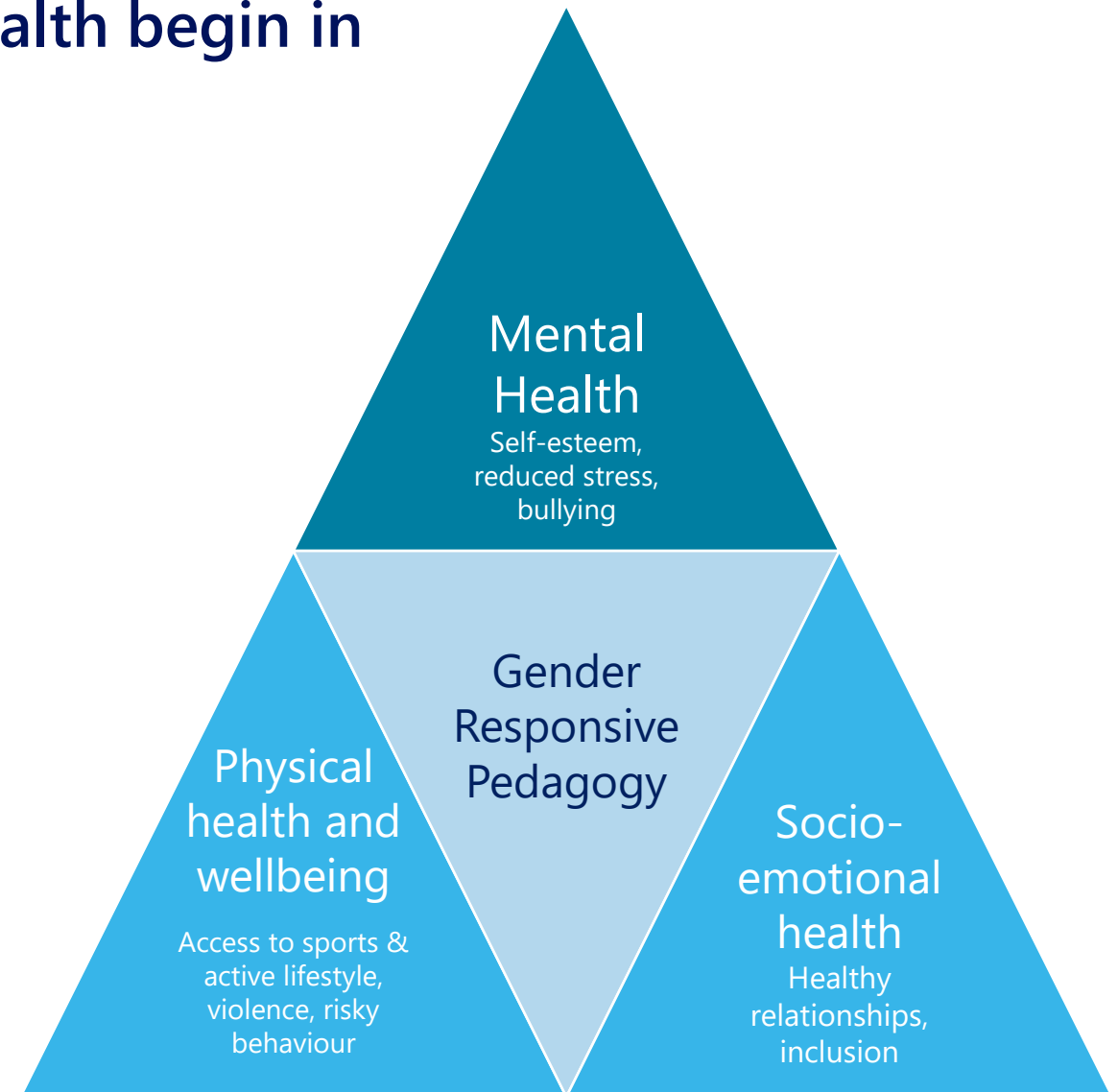


LGBTIQ+ children face high levels of stigma and bullying

Starting Early: Gender equity and Health begin in Childhood

- Gender identity forms by age 2; stereotypes are learned early.
- Gender biases and stereotypes contribute to gender discrimination and inequality which have a lasting influence on children's beliefs, attitudes and behaviours, impacting on learning outcomes, life-choices and relationships
 - Boys exposed to positive, non-violent role models → less GBV later in life.
 - Girls in supportive, equitable environments → stronger self-esteem, better mental health.
 - Early childhood interventions reduce adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) linked to adult health risks.
 - Men's early childhood experiences (such as low levels of violence in the home) → more equitable attitudes in adulthood

→ through early intervention and positive role modeling, it is possible to foster more equitable and non-violent attitudes in future generations.



The GRP4ECE Model: South Africa's Preventive Approach

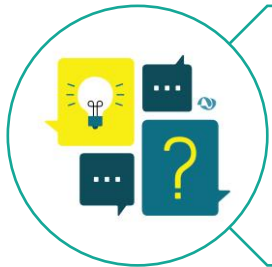


Teacher and School Leader Development

- Contextualised GRP4ECE toolkit (guides, videos, online courses).
- Blended CPD for teachers through training and Professional Learning Communities (PLC) support.
- Lean CPD for school leaders through orientation session and reflection session.



Outcomes



Teachers understand gender concepts and the importance of play-based learning

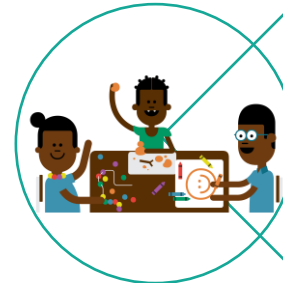


Teachers reflect on their gender beliefs and influence on their teaching practice

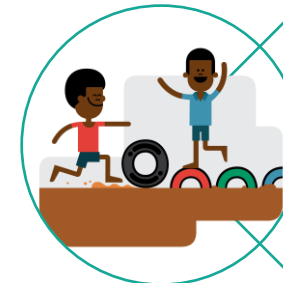


Teachers create a gender-responsive teaching and learning environment for play-based early childhood education

Impact



Children socialise in a playful and equitable learning environment



Children demonstrate play behaviour free from gender stereotypes

From pilot to scale



Achievements

PILOT (2020) - Results

- Quasi-experimental design, with pre- and post-testing and a comparison (control) group.
- A mixed-methods approach: Surveys, interviews, observations.

Research Questions

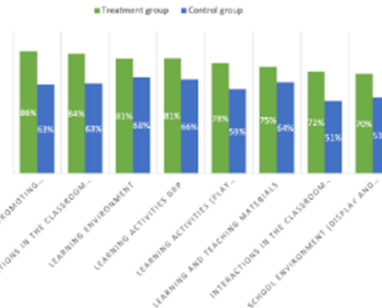
- To what extent do the knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) of teachers and school leaders who participate in the GRP4ECE pilot intervention change compared to teachers and school leaders who do not participate?
- Are there differences between the control and treatment groups in children's gender normative behaviour measured?

Evidence

Increase in gender responsive pedagogy and practices



CONTROL VS TREATMENT GROUP



Promising effects on ECD practitioners' beliefs regarding gender stereotypes



A significant increase in gender non-concordant play among children

Pilot in 83 Centres (2020-2021)



8000 Educators Trained (Govt Track)



Uptake by 5 Non-government TPD Providers



Questions?

Operational partners:



basic education
Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



education
Department:
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Funding partners:



Belgium
partner in development



Flanders
State of the art



Thank you