

# The Shaping of Childcare and Preschool Education in Singapore: From Separatism to Collaboration

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The development of the childcare and kindergarten systems in Singapore took different paths historically before reaching common grounds for collaboration. While the objectives of kindergartens under the Ministry of Education have been very much focused on preparing children for school, that of the childcare system, under the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports have been very much influenced by various policies throughout the years – welfare, economic, population, social and education policies. All these policies have helped to shape the quality of the care, development and education of young children in the childcare system today. To benefit all young children in childcare or kindergartens, services for the early years need to be geographically and financially accessible, of good quality and address issues of equity as well. Singapore depends on the political will and private initiatives working in partnership with parents to bring the early childhood field to the next level of development.

Key words : childcare, kindergarten, policies, Singapore

## Introduction

Childcare centres and kindergartens in Singapore started for very different reasons in Singapore. But over the years, development had pulled these two services for children closer together until today they share some common areas. This article aims to trace the historical development of these two services to understand the evolving policies that lead them to the current situation in 2010 and to discuss the future of

childcare and preschool education in Singapore.

## Auspices of Kindergartens and Childcare Centres

Generally, institutional childcare and kindergartens may fall under the auspices of one or more Ministries. In the unified system, both childcare centres and kindergartens come under *one* Ministry. For instance, Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training is responsible for crèches for babies to kindergartens, primary and secondary schools and the universities. In the split system, kindergartens and childcare centres fall under *different* Ministries, each targeting a different age group. For example, in Malaysia, the Social Welfare Department is responsible for children

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below 3 years while those between 4 to 6 years old come under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. In a parallel system, different government bodies target similar age groups. This is reflected in Thailand, where a number of bodies are involved in the same age group. Singapore has a combination of split and parallel systems. Early childhood care, development and education come under the auspices of two Ministries in Singapore: the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) and the Ministry of Education (MOE). The parallel system is reflected in the fact that both Ministries provide preschool education for children between 4 to 6 years old. Both have the same teacher requirements and are guided by the National Kindergarten Curriculum Framework. The split system also applies as the MCYS focuses on infants from 2 months to 3 years as well. This group does not come under the purview of the MOE. Teachers working with this age-group need not have the same teaching diploma as the preschool teachers. As infant and toddler educators they need to have the certificate in infant/toddler care and development or are state registered nurses.

Childcare centres are open up to 12 hours a day and parents can opt for full day, half-day or flexi-care programme depending on parents' needs. These childcare centres target the holistic development of children, and incorporate kindergarten education as well. The MOE, on the other hand, targets children from 4 to 6 in a strictly kindergarten set-up with the aim of preparing children for school. Classes are usually for 3 to 4 hours. The private sector, non-profit social service organizations, religious organizations, cooperatives and a community foundation operate both childcare centres and kindergartens.

Historically, both Ministries function independently. However, since 2000, there is a merger in the realm of accreditation, teacher qualification and teacher training. Other areas of collaboration include the development of the MOE Kindergarten Curriculum Framework spearheaded by the MOE and adopted by the MCYS for kindergartens in the childcare

centres. MCYS is in the process of developing its own framework for the zero to three age-group and will attempt to bridge the programmes of the different age groups for a seamless flow in connecting to the kindergarten framework. There has been some call for all preschools to be nationalised under the MOE but the decision is to remain status quo as the kindergarten under MCYS also serves another function – that of childcare for working parents.

### **The Early Years: Development of Kindergartens**

Under the Education Act of 1985, kindergartens are defined as private schools that have to be registered with the MOE. It excludes kindergartens in the childcare system.

Kindergartens started very early in churches and in the private sector. Its role was very specific – to prepare children for primary school. Kindergartens were not widespread during the 1940s and 1950s, and attended mainly by children from middle and upper income families. An early major player is the People's Association (PA), a Statutory Board that ran kindergartens in community centres. In the 1960s, the People's Action Party (PAP)<sup>i</sup>, ventured into setting up 3 kindergartens. It was not until 1986 when the PAP went full-scale with the establishment of the PAP Community Foundation (PCF)<sup>ii</sup> that kindergartens were quickly made accessible to all children in every constituency. In one fell swoop, PCF became (and still is) the largest provider of kindergartens in Singapore while the PA kindergartens slowly faded off. The low fees made kindergartens affordable to the masses. Kindergartens were no longer the privilege of a few. Later, 'madrasahs'<sup>iii</sup> began offering kindergarten classes for Malay/Muslim children as well.

Early requirements to start a kindergarten were minimum, pertaining mainly to the physical environment and brief teacher training starting with only 60 hours to qualify as a kindergarten teacher.

The number of hours increased to 90 and then to 120 hours. It was not until much later that professional development of kindergarten teachers came into being.

Kindergartens did not receive as much attention as childcare centres in the early years of development. It was only in the late '80s and especially from 2000 onwards that the MOE's extensive research into the effects of early childhood education that eventually lead to greater investment to upgrade the quality of kindergartens and teacher training leading to more funding for the kindergarten sector. And that was to change the face of preschool education in Singapore.

### **Development of childcare sector: Changing policies changing the face of childcare**

#### *Welfare policy*

The childcare sector has a more colourful history: its development shaped by changing welfare, economic, social, population and even education policies over the years. Singapore was for 140 years a British colony<sup>iv</sup> and children's services during the early years were very much determined and influenced by the British.

Childcare centres had its early beginnings under the Child Welfare Society, which was set up in 1942 but was disrupted by the Japanese occupation of Singapore. The Social Welfare Department (SWD)<sup>v</sup> was established in 1946 by the British administration to deal with the aftermath of the war - resettlement issues, malnutrition and poverty. Childcare centres began as a feeding scheme for poor and undernourished children. These feeding scheme evolved into the children's centres primarily for 2 to 7 year-old children with malnutrition and subsequently included poor children and those not in school up to 14 years old. SWD eventually took over the few centres run by the Welfare Society and the City Council to provide custodial care for children from

low-income families so that mothers could work to supplement fathers' income. Fees were highly subsidised so that parents only paid 10 cents a day! (MCYS, 2008, p.1).

#### *Economic Policies*

While the provision of childcare services was motivated by welfare for low-income families, the onset of industrialization in the '60s and '70s called for a different rationale for childcare services. At that time, the level of female participation in the labour force was rather low. With rapid industrialization, more workers were required in the industries. " The '70s rapid industrialization program led to an influx of foreign workers, and given the nature of policy then to phase out foreign workers by 1995 and given the full employment of males, the need to get women into the labour force became more urgent." (Khoo, 1990, p. 205).

Thus, the government's objective was to increase the female participation rate in the labour force, initially for the manufacturing industries, but subsequently for the professional sectors as well.

Meanwhile, the government found that it was too expensive to sustain the childcare services and the then Ministry of Social Affairs (MSA) divested its centres to the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC)<sup>vi</sup>. By 1979, all 11 centres under the MSA came under the NTUC. Childcare Services was made available to all families, regardless of union membership. With this transfer, the government relinquished its role as direct childcare service provider to assume the role of regulator and policy-maker.

Table 1  
*Women Participation Rate in the Labour Force<sup>vii</sup>*

1970	1980	1990	2000	2009
24.6	44.3	50.3	50.2	55.2

Table 2

*Total Fertility Rate in Singapore (1970 – 2002)*

1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002
3.0	2.1	1.7	1.6	1.9	1.7	1.7	1.5	1.5

Note. Extracted from Swee-Hock Saw's *Population Policies and Programmes in Singapore*, 2005, p. 217

Table 3

*Resident Total Fertility Rates (per resident female) (2003–2007)*

2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
1.27	1.26	1.26	1.28	1.29

Note. Extracted from *Singapore's Second and Third Periodic Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child*, 2009. p.19

Table 4

*Growth of Childcare Centres (1948 -2010)<sup>viii</sup>*

Year	Centres	Children
1948-1954	2	160
1955-1963	6	400
1964-1970	10	860
1971-1979	11	1,020
1980	21	1,136
1984	48	2,974
1985	79	5,255
1986	98	5,879
1990	222	14,572
1995	397	26,790
2000	558	35,201
2005	713	44,224
2010(Jan)	794	57,000

**Population Policies**

Singapore introduced two major population policies through the years that had long-term effects. In an attempt to control the population growth during the '60s when the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) was 6, a 1972 'Stop at Two' policy came into effect

with various incentives and disincentives. However, when the 'Stop at Two' policy stretched from the '60s to the early '80s, it led to an alarming decline of TFR to below 2.1 - beyond the population replacement level. The policy was then changed to 'Have Three Or More If You Can Afford it' in 1987.<sup>ix</sup> That did not help. The TFR went through a rapid decline and despite pro-natalist incentives, Singapore has not achieved the critical replacement level till today.<sup>x</sup> (see Tables 2 and 3).

Thus, one of the government's policy, then and now, is to get more singles married and have children and for the married ones to have more. Incentives include the provision of quality, affordable and convenient childcare. A 1997 Population Planning survey on newly married couples showed that the decision on size of the family depends on finance followed by childcare availability.<sup>xi</sup>

**The Turning Point for the Childcare Sector**

The low participation rate in the labour force by women, especially higher educated women, the alarming decline in the fertility rate below replacement level due to the delay in couples getting married, increase in singlehood, increase in couples not having children or having less, were cause for much concern.

The situation brought together stakeholders in a tripartite collaboration among the Government (Ministry of Community Development, Ministry of Labour), the workers (the NTUC) and the employers (Singapore National Federation of Employers (SNEF)) to form the 'National Task Force on Female Participation in the Labour Force' in 1984. This proved to be the watershed and turning point for the childcare sector. The Task Force looked into various areas, including how to get more mothers into the workforce, incentives for workers, and alternative childcare arrangements. The recommendations from the Task Force saw several positive outcomes with long-term repercussions:

- **Legislation:** The establishment of the Childcare Centres Act and Regulations (1988, Amendment, 1992) set the standards and licensing requirements for all childcare centres.
- **Government subsidy:** Government subsidy helps to make childcare fees affordable to parents. It was extended to all licensed childcare centres when before it was restricted to NTUC Childcare centres. Childcare subsidy is universal regardless of income and has been revised to keep up with rising costs. There is a differential in quantum of childcare fees in favour of working mothers needing full-day childcare. The subsidy for both working and non-working mothers is S\$150 per month per child for a half-day programme. For full day programmes, working mothers receive S\$300 pm whilst a non-working mother will continue to receive S\$150 pm. Subsidy for infant care is S\$300 for a half day programme and S\$600 pm for a full-day programme for working mothers.
- **Other financial incentives.** More financial incentives were later offered to encourage couples to have more babies by defraying costs of raising young children. The Baby Bonus Scheme in 2001 targeted at the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> child. It was further enhanced in 2004 and 2008 to extend the benefits to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> and beyond the 4<sup>th</sup> child. The Scheme grants an outright gift of S\$4000 to the first 2 children and S\$6000 for the 3<sup>rd</sup> child and beyond. The Child Development Account (CDA)<sup>xii</sup> is a matching account where the government will match dollar-for-dollar contribution made by parents up to S\$6000 for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> child, S\$12000 for the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> and S\$16,000 for the 5<sup>th</sup> child and beyond. Parents can use the funds for childcare, kindergarten, enrichment programmes offered by approved institutions for the child concerned or for his siblings.
- **Increase in number of childcare providers.** The government invited new players, particularly the private for-profit players to enter the childcare sector and encouraged existing ones to play an even more significant role. The Ministry provided considerable support and guidance to meet requirements. Several operators soon started their own chain of centres. Employers were also encouraged to set up workplace childcare but this was not successful, especially multinational companies that felt it wasn't their role – but the government's to provide childcare for workers. Eventually the response came from mainly government and quasi-government bodies (Ministries, Statutory Boards, Universities and Polytechnics).
- **Rapid expansion of childcare centres:** More players in the sector lead to a quick proliferation of childcare centres from VWOs, NTUC Childcare and the private for-profit centres. VWOs targeting at low-income families were offered capital grants. The Housing and Development Board (HDB), which is responsible for the public housing of almost 80% of the Singapore population, collaborated with the MCD to set up void deck childcare centres.<sup>xiii</sup> Building void deck childcare centres made it easier for the government to speed up the number of centres. The number of childcare centres doubled from 48 in 1984 to 98 in 1986. Since then, the expansion has been exponential reaching 800 centres in 2010 (see Table 4).
- **Training:** The Task Force started a more concerted effort to develop professional pathways for teachers – resulting in the establishment of a 3-tiered training, the Fundamental Course for childcare assistants, the Intermediate Course for childcare teachers and the Advanced Course for centre supervisors. Years later, the required training was raised to

the current Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education (Teaching) for teachers and another Diploma in leadership for centre supervisors.

- **Quality issues.** MCYS set up the Child Care Qualifications Accreditation Committee in 1999 involving expertise from the early childhood field to look into the quality of training and trainers. The following year in 2000 it merged with the MOE to form the Preschool Qualification Accreditation Committee (PQAC).
- **Change in Image:** Childcare centres and childcare staff suffered from an image problem. This image of childcare services - custodial care for low-income families and staffed by nannies - stayed for a long time. The attempt to move away from that image included raising the academic qualification of childcare teachers, raising the level of training, improving curriculum and increasing public education. Centres became child development centres, moving away from custodial care to include development and education.

The recommendations of the Task Force in 1984 lead to efforts to increase the quality of childcare centres at the national level in order to attract more mothers, especially the higher educated mothers, to place their children in childcare centres with greater confidence so that they can go to work. At the same time, the population policy hopes to encourage more married couples to start their family and to have more children with the hope that quality childcare and infant care are there to support the family through the provision of childcare subsidies. More incentives were to come later.

### **A New Era for the Early Childhood Sector: 2000- 2010**

Year 2000 started a new era that would bring early childhood care, development and education to the next higher level. This decade saw greater collaboration between the MCYS and the MOE at the Ministerial level (Steering Committee on Preschool Education) and at the inter-ministry departmental level (Preschool Qualification Accreditation Committee - PQAC).

The formation of a joint Steering Committee on Preschool Education and the involvement of the respective Ministers from MOE and MCYS indicate the seriousness of the government in raising the quality of early childhood education in the two sectors. The Committee was lead by MOE, chaired by the Senior Minister of State for Education and included the Minister of State from MCYS, representatives from both Ministries and representatives from the childcare and kindergarten sectors. The outcome was the development of the national curriculum guideline for preschool children.

The joint MOE-MCYS Preschool Qualification Accreditation Committee (PQAC) has Directors from each Ministry, and advisors and representatives from the kindergarten and childcare sectors. It aims to develop consistencies for both sectors and to enhance teachers' qualifications, professional training, and trainers experience and qualification. This move raises the professionalism of teachers from certificate to diploma level. The standardization of teachers' academic qualification and training for the two sectors made it possible for teachers to work either in the kindergartens or childcare centres, thereby making for a more flexible workforce.

Early requirements of training agencies and trainers were more liberal in view of the backlog of staff that needed to be quickly trained. Trainers were urged to upgrade themselves. Eventually, course content and duration, especially practicum hours, as well as trainers' requirements were raised to meet

higher quality standards. Preschool training agencies come initially from the private sector. During the past 10 years, the polytechnics have started to offer the Diploma in Early Childhood Education – the first being the Ngee Ann Polytechnic in collaboration with the then Regional Training and Resource Centre (RTRC) Asia – a major training provider. Two other polytechnics have recently started offering Diploma courses to their students as well. The entry of the polytechnics brings in a different group of teachers – younger, academically stronger but with minimal life and field experience compared to the non-polytechnic teachers already in the service who tend to have lower academic qualifications are older and more experienced.

Because of the economic crises and in an attempt to keep jobs, the government pushed for training and retraining of the workforce. For those who were made redundant or who wanted a change in mid-career the Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA) has been developing training for mid-career switches to various sectors, including the early childhood sector. Working with the two Ministries, and the early childhood sector, it has developed an alternate route to obtain the necessary qualifications to work in the field.

Today, Singapore recognizes the importance of early childhood development and education and has over the past years been working towards increasing access, improving quality and ensuring equity. In 2008, 97.5% of children in Primary One had at least a year of kindergarten. There is a concerted effort to have all children experience kindergarten before they enter compulsory primary school. To take it to the next level, and in tandem with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the following issues need to be addressed so that every child in Singapore may benefit from quality early childhood programmes in this country.

### *Increasing access*

Access to childcare centres and kindergartens

relates to geographical access and financial access. Geographically, centres need to be in close proximity to the home or workplace of parents. It also has to be flexible and responsive to different needs – in terms of need for certain programmes and flexibility in hours of care. For instance, working parents may need infant care in the same centre as an older child but most centres do not provide the full range of service for 2 months to 6 years. Some parents may also work certain days a week while others may be late or are on shift duties requiring extended hours. Flexi hours within the 12 hours a day is available but not many centres have extended hours.

Childcare centres have increased exponentially over the years, especially in the Housing and Development Board (HDB) estates. There are now about 800 childcare centres in Singapore and more are planned for the years ahead. 200 more childcare centres are projected by 2012 to raise the number to 1000 centres that will target 40% of this age group. Infant care has gained more popularity and is offered in 159 centres. The MOE on the other hand, has about 500 kindergartens, many of which run double sessions. Overall, MCYS has 61.7% of centres under it while the MOE has 38.3% centres (kindergartens) serving children from 2 months to 6 years. However, MOE has a higher enrolment of 75,000 children compared to 57,000 children with MCYS.<sup>xiv</sup> Both childcare centres and kindergartens will continue to grow, especially in the public housing estates. Unless childcare is required, children between 4 to 6 years have more choices than those 3 years and younger.

Financial accessibility is just as important. The MCYS provides childcare subsidy for all Singapore children regardless of income of parents. Low-income parents could apply for additional subsidy from another government funding source, the Centre-based Childcare Financial Assistance Scheme as well as from other community-based financial assistance scheme. The NTUC centres, which target the masses, also offer financial assistance to low-income families.

Kindergarten fees in PCF centres are generally low

and affordable to many parents. Nevertheless, families with low income can still apply for additional financial assistance through government and community related agencies. VWO centres that charge low fees are also eligible for capital grants from the government. Fees for childcare and kindergarten centres vary considerably. Private centres tend to charge much higher fees whereas the NTUC centres, PCF centres and voluntary welfare organizations tend to charge much lower fees.

### *Improving Quality*

The Child Care Centres Act (1988, Revised 1992) and Regulations set standards for facilities, staff child ratio, programme guidelines, health, nutrition and safety, qualification of teachers and parent involvement. Licenses can be renewed every 2 years if a childcare centre maintains the required standards. Childcare centres are required to refer to the MOE's Curriculum Framework and the Kindergarten Curriculum Guide for its kindergarten programme. Further developments to upgrade quality are also being studied. The MOE-registered kindergartens also have to meet certain criteria. Apart from the Kindergarten Framework and Curriculum Guidelines, there is also a self-monitoring Quality Assurance instrument for kindergartens.

Over the years, both the MCYS and MOE have been steadily increasing the quality of teachers. Preschool teachers are now required to pass 5 subjects with credit instead of 3 subjects after 9 or 10 years of formal education. Almost all preschools are bilingual in English and Mandarin, while a few are bilingual in English and either Malay or Tamil. The concern for the quality of English spoken and taught in preschools prompted the PQAC to raise the English language requirement for English language teachers in order for them to be better language role models. The professional qualification has also been raised for teachers, especially kindergarten teachers, from a Certificate to a Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education (DECCE-Teaching). Principals of

kindergartens and childcare centres need to have an additional Diploma, the DECCE (Leadership) as well.

The PQAC regularly reviews and upgrades required courses in terms of duration, content and trainers' qualifications and experience. Recently, MOE and MCYS as well as WDA are offering scholarships at the diploma and degree level. Although current requirement for teachers is a diploma in early childhood education and care, the government is encouraging early childhood educators to upgrade themselves by offering scholarships at both the diploma and degree level. The degree courses are offered through the local universities and foreign universities in collaboration with local institutions. The aim is to attract, upgrade and retain quality personnel in the early childhood sector. Chinese teachers are not left behind. While government scholarship is not yet available, some training institutions are offering degree programmes in collaboration with Chinese Universities in order to upgrade the Chinese teachers.

There is currently a shortage of trained teachers due to the quick expansion of childcare centres and kindergartens. The situation is also attributed to the attrition rate of teachers as they leave the industry for better paying jobs or to work in enrichment centres that have sprouted in Singapore. <sup>xv</sup>

### *Ensuring Affordability and Equity*

Universal childcare subsidy doubled in 2008 to make fees still affordable to parents as fees have been increasing to keep up with rising costs of doing business. Low-income families have various accesses for more funding. The centre-based financial assistance scheme together with the universal subsidy cover 75% to 95% of the fees of a non-profit childcare centre. The NTUC First Campus<sup>xvi</sup> has a special fund to ensure that the poorest child will have a place in its centres. Another programme - the Healthy Start Programme - targeted at vulnerable children from families at risk who receive special funding and social workers' support. A Back-to-Work scheme for

mothers returning to the workforce offers a one-off payment for initial expenses in sending the child to childcare. It pays for uniforms, registration fees, deposits, the first month's fee and insurance.

The MCYS encourages integration of special needs children who could benefit from mainstream childcare centres. The Integrated Child Care Programme (ICCP) is currently available in 17 centres run by voluntary welfare organizations. These teachers receive additional training to work with special needs children. There are probably more special needs children who could benefit from mainstreaming than there are centres ready and able to accept them.

Even with various financial aids, some children still do not attend kindergarten – either because of poverty, parental ignorance of value of preschool education and absent parents due to incarceration or who are in drug rehabilitation. Other reasons include families with multiple problems dealing with survival issues or logistic problems of sending a child to kindergarten because of distance or the need to look after other young children. Since 2007, the MOE and MCYS have been working with grassroots organizations to reach out to children who are not in preschool. The outreach resulted in a decline of preschool kids who are not in preschool from 4.2% in 2007 to 2.5% as at end of 2009 (Tan, 2009, October 5, p. A8)

The issue of equity needs to address access of these children to just *not* any early childhood programmes, but access to *quality* programmes as well. Such programmes tend to have better staff child ratio, more and better qualified teachers and superior resources, because of the higher fees. Poor and vulnerable children would benefit most from such quality programmes. This is a more difficult issue to resolve. Apart from the afore-mentioned programmes, the NTUC First Campus and the PCF kindergartens receive funding to raise the quality of its childcare centres and kindergartens so that with various financial aids, children from low-income families may experience quality care and education of some

standing.

### ***Beyond 2010***

Childcare and preschool education in Singapore has been evolving and both have come a long way. While kindergartens have always enjoyed a positive image in the eyes of parents and the public, this is not the case for childcare centres, which had to struggle through an image problem for decades. This has its roots during the Social Welfare days when it was a service for poor families and subsequently for blue collared workers. When the NTUC took over all the centres under the government it further reinforced the perception of childcare centres as a nanny service for blue-collared workers. It took a long time before the public began to recognize the professionalism in NTUC centres, in particular, and the sector in general. The change in image is helped by the trend in the past 10 years to increase the academic qualifications of teachers and the raising of the teacher training from the Certificate level to Diploma level. The collaboration between the MOE and MCYS lend to raise both the quality and image of the early childhood sector.

Increasing number of parents now value early childhood programmes for their toddlers to socialize and learn as soon as possible, even though they may not need childcare. Because parents are now more educated, their expectations have also increased. The Marriage and Parenthood Study (2007) indicated that the key issue in placing children in childcare centres has to do with trust and reliability of childcare giver (70%) followed by affordability, ability of caregiver to care and develop their child and the proximity of the centre to the home. It was also interesting to note that almost 8 in 10 married respondents surveyed wanted 2 to 3 children (MCYS Press Release, 2008). This is hopeful for Singapore which has been trying to raise the TFR but only time will tell if this will be a reality in years to come.

The MCYS is currently on a mission to upgrade the quality of infant and toddler care and development.

An Early Years Development Framework is being developed to guide infant/toddler programmes and teachers. A review of current training aims to raise the image and professionalism of those who work with infants and toddlers.

At the same time, the MCYS is planning to develop a Child Development Network (CDN) to support the industry players, especially the teachers. The CDN aims to support local research, provide a directory of good practices, offer continuing education, and make available an online forum among other initiatives that are still on the drawing board.

At this stage, there is greater imperative for both the childcare and kindergarten sectors to raise the quality of programmes through five areas of intervention for children from 2 months to 6 years: first, through teacher training in terms of academic and professional upgrading, second, through the development and implementation of national curriculum guidelines, third, through development and implementation of evaluation instruments, fourth, through working in partnership with parents and fifth, through encouraging research into best practices.

While childcare has been shaped by welfare policies, economic policies, social trends, and population policies in the past, what future policies will further shape the early childhood sector? Education policy is one – as Singapore has always placed a premium on education that will now begin before primary school.

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## NOTES

- <sup>i</sup> PAP was (and still is) the political party of the ruling government
- <sup>ii</sup> PCF was set up to provide specific social services, starting with its network of kindergartens, followed by childcare centres and infant and toddler care.
- <sup>iii</sup> Madrasahs' is Arabic for schools and preschools which include religious studies of Islam in the curriculum.
- <sup>iv</sup> Singapore was under British rule from 1918 - 1959, except during the Japanese Occupation period (1942-1945).
- <sup>v</sup> The Social Welfare Department changed its name several times to reflect the change in its focus over the years. It subsequently was named Ministry of Social Affairs (MSA), Ministry of Culture and Social Affairs, Ministry of Community Development (MCD), Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS) and today, it is referred to as the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS).
- <sup>vi</sup> The NTUC is a national confederation of unions in support of the labor movement.
- <sup>vii</sup> The source for 1970, 1980, 1990 is from Stella Quah (1994) p.61. For 2000 and 2009 the statistics come from Ministry of Manpower Labour Force Survey 2000 and 2009 (Table 4.4).
- <sup>viii</sup> Earlier statistics are from Social Welfare Department Annual Reports. Statistics from 1990 onwards come from MCYS (2008).
- <sup>ix</sup> Reference Angelique Chan's Singapore's Changing Structure and the Policy Implications for Financial Security, Employment, Living Arrangements and Health Care.
- <sup>x</sup> Professor Swee-Hock Saw provides an excellent and thorough review and analysis on the population issues over the years in Singapore.
- <sup>xi</sup> Item (397) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Consideration of Reports submitted by State Parties, under Article 44 of the Convention. Initial reports of States Parties due in 1997, Singapore UN CRC.
- <sup>xii</sup> The CDA applies to only children born after 17 August 1998. The contributions by the government will stop when the amount reaches the maximum or when the child reaches 6 years of age, whichever comes first.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Void decks refer to the ground floor open space below the HDB high-rise flats. The space can be easily converted into childcare centres and kindergartens within working distance of many homes. The void deck itself may be used for community activities, e.g. weddings, funerals, and senior citizens corner.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Figures from MCYS presentation at the Inaugural Meeting on the Early Years Development Framework on 18 February 2010, at MCYS building. Infant care programmes target infants from 2 months to 17 months.
- <sup>xv</sup> Enrichment centres offer a variety of programmes (usually between one to two hours) in dance, speech and drama, phonics, music, art, and more. These are not licensed by MOE or MCYS.
- <sup>xvi</sup> NTUC First Campus refers to the NTUC Childcare chain which has been the largest provider of childcare in Singapore since 1977.

**Annex A**

**Early Childhood Care and Education in Singapore**

	<u>Childcare Centres</u>	<u>Kindergarten</u>
Auspices	Ministry of Community Development Youth and Sports	Ministry of Education
Legislation	Childcare Centres Establishment Act, & Regulations	Education Act
Licensing	License required for centres with over 4 children.	Registration with MOE compulsory
Objectives	Support working parents Encourage bigger families Provide care, development, education of young children	Preparation for school
Funding	Government capital grant and subsidized rental to selected VWOs and PCF kindergartens and childcare centres.  Childcare subsidy  - Financial assistance & ethnic community-based assistance -	- none -
Providers	NTUC First Campus, VWOs PCF Private sector	PCF (main provider) Private sector VWOs
Age group	2 months - 6 years	4 to 6 years
Duration	Monday - Friday (7am to 7pm) Saturdays (7am - 2pm hours)	3 to 4 hours (2 shifts) Monday to Friday
Program	Full day, half day, flexi-care	3 to 4 hour programme
Curriculum	Guidelines (adopt MOE's framework), Variety of curriculum	National Kindergarten Curriculum Framework
Focus	Children's overall development	More cognitive development
Training	Required courses are accredited by the Joint MOE-MCYS PQAC. Training is provided by accredited agencies from the private sector and selected Polytechnics. Course fees are subsidized by the government. Although not a requirement, the bachelor and master degree are offered at the local universities and by foreign universities in collaboration with local training agencies.	