
Early Childhood Intervention in South Africa

All too often medical professionals, teachers and counsellors are faced with the daunting task of providing early childhood intervention (ECI) for children who are at risk due to developmental delays. They can often not see their way forward because the challenges and obstacles they face seem to be so overwhelming. The following case study typifies the overwhelming task that awaits any interventionist. However, just because cases such as these are complex and challenging does not mean that we do not have the obligation to support families and assist them to achieve the best possible outcomes for their children.

CASE STUDY: BABY B

A baby girl, 13 months old, is found abandoned in an informal settlement just outside of Witbank. She is admitted to hospital with severe malnourishment and weighs 4.5 kg. She struggles to gain weight and it is suspected that she is also HIV positive.

There is little information about her parents but she has been visited on occasion by a neighbour. Baby B receives occupational therapy to address significant developmental delays but is a quiet little girl and does not interact very well. Her future is unsure.

There is no social worker on the hospital staff to give her the care she requires.

If the scenario is familiar to you and you feel that you would like to acquire added knowledge and skills in the field of ECI, please contact:

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Fragmentation, duplication and the lack of an integrative approach to ECI at all levels, compromises the quality of healthcare service delivery in South Africa. This is exacerbated by manpower constraints as too few professionals qualify each year to be able to provide for the vast number of children who require early intervention services in our country.

It is therefore imperative that we think creatively and make use of available resources in the most effective manner possible.

A “transdisciplinary” teamwork approach to early childhood intervention has been proposed by leading researchers in the field as a means of addressing the constraints on intervention in our country. This approach requires professionals, family members and members of the community to work together, collaborating closely and sharing roles, responsibilities and information.

Unfortunately, professionals have not always been equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary for them to be able to work effectively and sustainably as team members in the field, where resources come under such pressure. Against this background, the Centre for Augmentative and Alternative Communication at the University of Pretoria has developed the multi-professional Master's Degree in Early Childhood Intervention (MECI), to ensure that students are better qualified to address challenges in the field in a more comprehensive manner.

This degree is the culmination of the collaboration that has evolved between disability stakeholders, government departments and various departments at the University of Pretoria.

It is a distance learning, coursework master's programme and is presented primarily via the world wide web. Students are also required to attend two onsite contact periods each year, on the University of Pretoria's Hatfield Campus.



Master's Degree

Early Childhood Intervention (MECI)

Administered through the Faculty of Health Sciences

Course code: 10258241

This degree equips professionals from various disciplines with specialised knowledge and skills in the field of early childhood intervention, enabling them to function optimally in a changing and challenging social context by:

- Working in teams with other professionals and community members to facilitate social development.
- Understanding their own roles in the team of early childhood professionals
- Developing comprehensive strategies for intervention
- Critically evaluating accountability in service provision and its appropriacy and sustainability.

For whom is the degree intended?

Medical practitioners, therapists, teachers, educational psychologists, nutrition specialists and social workers who work with children from birth to six years of age, and their families.

Requirements for prospective students

To qualify for admission, prospective students need to have an honours degree or an equivalent 4-year degree. Students must have full and consistent access to their own computers, as well as broadband internet and e-mail since educational material and lectures are primarily delivered on-line.

Degree structure

This is a 2-year blended learning degree programme (online and in situ contact sessions). It is compulsory for students to attend the week-long onsite contact periods arranged on the Hatfield Campus of the University twice each year. The degree is presented primarily via an online, web-based medium with support material like CD-Rom. Group work is required in collaboration with students from other professions.

First year		Credits
ECI 801	Critical Theoretical Analysis in ECI, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Theoretical framework and issues in Early Childhood Intervention• ECI in the community: Team building and management• Family- focused community intervention in ECI• Applied Research in ECI	90

Second year		Credits
ECI 860 - 868	Profession specific elective module	30
ECI 874	Evaluation and Intervention	20
ECI 873	Measurement in ECI	20
ECI 872	Collaborative problem- solving	20
Total credits		180

Additional information, applications and registration

The closing date for applications is 31 October of the year preceding study.

Please note that contact with the programme manager is essential before application!

Financial information

For information on fees, bursaries and loans related to the degree programme, contact the University of Pretoria, Client Service Centre. Email: csc@up.ac.za, Tel: 012 420 3111, www.up.ac.za/fao

Academic information

For more information on the degree programme, applications or registration, please contact the programme manager on: Email: saak@up.ac.za, Tel: 012 420 2001 Fax: 086 510 0841, www.caac.up.ac.za