

The Children's Rights and Health Services Curriculum in the Latin-American Region

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Introduction

Fulfilling and protecting children's rights, including their right to optimal health care, are growing concerns throughout Latin America. The Children's Rights and Health Services Curriculum in the Latin-American Region (Curriculum) was developed to train health professionals to translate the principles of children's rights into practice to help ensure access to affordable and quality health services for all children. The curriculum is the adaptation of the manual "Interface Between Child Rights and Health, A Course for Professionals" developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics in cooperation with the Royal College of Pediatrics and Child Health² (UK) into the context of the Latin-American Region. The Curriculum prepares health professionals to fulfill the rights of children by applying the principles of children's rights to clinical care, community development and health policies in their daily work.

The first version of the Spanish Curriculum was implemented in Buenos Aires during the Xth Argentinean Congress of Social Pediatrics in 2005. The curriculum was a translation of the original manual developed by Lansdown (UK), Waterston (UK) and Goldhagen (US). As a consequence of the synergies generated during the first Spanish-training experience, and with the support of UNICEF (UK), CRED PRO (Child Rights Education for Professionals) and other cooperating agencies, the Southern Cone Initiative on Child Rights and Health (Initiative) was launched to orient and train health professions in Child Rights. The first agenda of the Initiative was to reconstruct the Curriculum into a Curriculum culturally and linguistically relevant to Latin America.

Characteristics of the Curriculum developed for the Latin American context

The pedagogical approach used to develop the Curriculum is based on the Constructivist Theory of Learning. This theory recognizes that individuals have

1 FLACSO: Latin American School of Social Sciences (www.flacso.org.ar)

2 "Interface between Childhood Rights and Health, Course for professionals" Gerison Lansdown, Jeffrey Goldhagen and Tony Waterston.

previous knowledge, and that learning happens in the context and on the basis of this pre-existent knowledge. Applying this theory, the Curriculum uses activities that actively engage professionals in their learning in critical and conscious ways.

The pedagogy of this Curriculum also includes Permanent Learning Theory in Health. This considers the services and places of work of the participants as the core site for educational processes, sources of learning and transformation. This Theory prioritizes collective and multi-disciplinary participation, and favors the construction of new learning through investigation, analytical management of information and the interchange of knowledge and experiences.³

The Social-Ecological model for health provides the foundation and framework for all aspects of learning. Participants are required to contemplate and consider the multiple determinants and multi-dimensionality of children's health and well-being, its interrelations and interdependencies with family, community, environment, policies, culture, and social and economic determinants. Health is defined in the broadest context of the child's physical psychological, cognitive and social well-being.

The curriculum has six units/sections. The contents and methodological approaches to learning are fully integrated in each session.

- Children's needs and rights
- Outstanding aspects of the United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child
- Respecting the Rights of the Child in the Pediatric Practice
- Health policies and health services
- Integral child protection
- Health professional as an advocate for Child Rights.

At the end of the Curriculum, participating professionals are expected to identify concrete strategies and projects to promote children's rights in their respective work places.

Implementing the Curriculum

After adapting the Curriculum to a Latin American context, a workshop was convened in Chile (March 2007) with participants from Ministries of Health,

3 Roschke, M.A, Davini, M.C., Haddad, J.: Educación permanente y trabajo en salud: un proceso de construcción. Educ. Med. Y Salud, Vol. 27 N°.4. Pan American Health Organization.

hospitals, universities and colleagues from Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Uruguay and South Africa⁴ to disseminate the curriculum and discuss approaches to its implementation in country-specific environments. Each country identified relevant strategies to reach their priority audiences and stakeholders.

After the workshop in Chile, each country then initiated its implementation processes through training, advocacy, resource development, and partnership building.

- In **Argentina**, interventions were mostly oriented toward the health system. The largest pediatric care facility (National Garrahan Hospital) implemented the curriculum in 2007 to train staff personnel. Since then, this hospital has sustained this training. Other initiatives involved primary care facilities in urban-marginal neighborhoods and rural communities.
- In **Chile**, a cross-national cooperative project was implemented that involved Chilean and Argentinean training teams to orient and prepare health managers to implement the national child protection policy: Chile Crece Contigo (Chile Grows with You). This national program was supported by the former President Michelle Bachelet.
- In **Colombia**, activities were implemented through the collaboration of the Colombian Pediatric Society (CPS), academy (Javeriana University and National University), and the National Child Rights Observatory. Dr. Hernando Villamizar, former President of the CPS was a key actor to promote the commitment of the CPS to child rights and social pediatrics. These initiatives included training undergraduate students and members of the CPS, participating in the Congresses of the CPS, and advocacy activities.
- In **Uruguay**, the collaborative involving the Uruguay Society of Pediatrics (SUP), UNICEF, UDELAR (University), INAU (Institute of Child and Adolescence), focused their efforts and resources to train undergraduate and postgraduate health professional students in child rights. This included the development of instruments, adapted to the local context, to analyze clinical cases through the lens of child rights.

Regional and global networking

As part of the dissemination activities, teams from the four original participant countries were invited to participate in projects regarding child rights in other venues and countries in Latin America and other regions. These endeavors included:

- Cooperation with Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador.
- Presentations in meetings of the Latin American Association of Pediatrics (ALAPE, www.alape.org) in Puerto Rico and Panama.

4 South Africa participated as a guest institution.

- Development of the Declaration of Puerto Rico⁵, an agreement of the Latin American Pediatric Societies to promote child rights in their respective countries.
- Implementation of a collaborative research project to monitor how pediatric societies in Latin America are accomplishing their commitments to promote child rights.
- Participation in training activities for health professionals in other regions, e.g., Ankara (Turkey) for 8 Eastern European countries, and, more recently, in Cape Town, South Africa.
- Training of health professionals from the Ministry of Health (MOH) of Paraguay, with the support of PLAN International. After this training, initiatives were implemented in 4 regions and at the hospital level. Since then, child rights and health have become part of the National Program of Child and Adolescent Health.
- Cooperation with the Child Inter-American Institute (Organization of the American States) in three different areas: child policies, virtual training in child rights, and strategies for institutional communication with a rights perspective.
- A training workshop at the Canadian Pediatric Society, involving pediatricians of Canada, US and Latin America.

Knowledge generation, networking and harnessing hope

With the support of CRED-PRO, UNICEF, PAHO, ALAPE, PLAN International and many other international and country-specific organizations and institutions, annual meetings have been held to promote the exchange of experiences, share new knowledge, collaborate on publications and strengthen the capacities of the participant institutions. The meetings have been structured to provide the space and environment to optimize critical discussions. There are no conflicts of interests or corporate pressures to limit the vision and thinking of participant stakeholders.

Perhaps the best definition of success has been the increasing numbers of participant countries, breadth of institutions and individual expertise, numbers of participants and accomplishments. Participants have come to embrace this endeavor as a place to recognize and share the complexities and challenges they are facing in their own countries and to expand the currency of hope by renewing their collective commitment to advance the child rights as a means to rethink and reshape society.

5 Declaración de Puerto Rico