Voices from the Early Childhood Care and Education Field in South Africa:

Research and Promising Practices for New Directions

Editors: Hasina Banu Ebrahim, Giulietta Harrison, Michaela Ashley-Cooper, Colwyn Deborah Martin, and Naseema Shaik

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Contributing authors work from a variety of contexts and as such different terms are used for various concepts; a nuance which has been accepted in this publication.

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Editors:

Professor Hasina Banu Ebrahim, Dr Giulietta Harrison, Ms Michaela Ashley-Cooper, Dr Colwyn Deborah Martin, and Dr Naseema Shaik

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Contents

Acknowledgements

About the Editors

Hasina Banu Ebrahim (PhD) is a research professor in early-childhood education at the University of South Africa (Unisa). She is also the UNESCO Co-chair in Early Care, Development and Education. As a rated researcher with the National Research Foundation, she has received institutional and national recognition for outstanding leadership in the category of women in research. She serves as the convener in the Knowledge Generation Working Group of the ECD Cluster in the African Union. In the early-schooling sector she served as a foundation phase teacher, manager and district curriculum facilitator. In higher education she has experience as a teacher educator, discipline head, head of department and researcher for ECD policy, practice and workforce development. She has numerous publications and has led national and international projects in ECD.

Giulietta Harrison (PhD), who is the current President of the South African Research Association of Early Childhood Education (SARAECE) has come from a background of many years of teaching in early childhood classrooms across a variety of contexts. She has been a school Principal, an H.O.D and a lecturer in Foundation Phase. She is presently the Director for Africa A+ Schools and H.O.D. for B.Ed. F.P. at SANTS, Higher Education Institute. She has a passion for helping teachers to provide positive spaces for learning which she expresses through her work in Emotional Intelligence. She did her Masters research looking at how to promote this in a Grade R classroom and her PhD was on understanding how children learn, using Grade 1 Literacy as her vehicle for analysis. She has written a variety of training programmes as 'open-source' documents for the NPO sector including parent and teacher programmes. As the Director of an NPO, she works closely with and conducts research with educators in the poorest communities in South Africa. She has published extensively in books and journals together with supervising Masters and PhD students when working at Rhodes University.

Michaela Ashley-Cooper is head of research at the Centre for Early Childhood Development, an early childhood development NPO based in Cape Town. She holds a master's degree in Research in Psychology from the University of Cape Town with a thesis on the neuropsychological effects of childhood trauma. Michaela has worked in the ECD sector for over 12 years; managing a range of integrative intervention programmes and research programmes. Her research has included conducting and writing ECD programme evaluations, writing research reports, journal articles, opinion articles and academic papers on ECD in South Africa, as well as analysing data and writing reports for all the Monitoring and Evaluation elements of the various intervention programmes CECD runs.

Colwyn Deborah Martin (PhD) is a senior lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand. She has worked as a foundation phase teacher, teacher educator and discipline coordinator in the early-childhood sector. Her teaching and research endeavours are largely influenced by a commitment to social justice, transformation and equity in the field of early-childhood teacher education, early literacy and pedagogy. She is engaged in interinstitutional research that focuses on programme development for inclusive early-childhood care and education as well as transformative pedagogy in the early years.

Naseema Shaik (PhD) is a senior lecturer at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in the education faculty. She is the coordinator of the Diploma in Grade R qualification programme, lectures to foundation phase students and supervises master's and PhD students. Naseema was a pre-primary and primary teacher and principal in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, from 1993 to 2006. Currently, Naseema is the Deputy President of the South African Research Association for Early Childhood Education (SARAECE) and is the lead coordinator for the project on developing a transformative pedagogy for the early years. Naseema's research interests are in participatory pedagogies and children's rights in early-childhood education.

A Note from the Editorial Team

As the editorial team we take great pleasure in launching an innovative publication which came together after the South African Research Association of Early Childhood Education (SARAECE) conference in July 2021. This conference coincided with the call to "build forward better and differently" (Save the Children, 2021 p.iii) in post-pandemic times. In this volume we bring together a chorus of voices from the early childhood care and education (ECCE) sector in South Africa. We present a glimpse of the work of ECCE researchers; developing methodologies to listen to ECCE teachers, managers and caregivers in authentic ways that allow for accessible goal-setting and realisation of hopes and dreams. The voices of teacher trainers are amplified as they demonstrate their collaborative efforts across different training institutions to build professionalism of the ECD workforce. At the frontline we hear the echoes of struggle as the ECCE teachers experience complex identity formations driven by policy imperatives and rapidly changing circumstances impacting on their work. Intertwined with ECCE teacher experiences are those of their leaders and managers who gel with the realities of delivering ECCE programmes and keeping them viable in uncertain times. Central to the concerns of all ECCE actors is the need to address the fundamental rights of young children, their caregivers and teachers.

We believe that this unusual mix of voices presents a snapshot of an engaged sector that not only consciously strives to improve corners of classrooms but also work collaboratively to tackle the multiple challenges that the ECCE sector faces in South Africa. In bringing together the "strange bedfellows" of research, policy and practice we hope to make a contribution to addressing the fragmentation and the polarisations that exist in the ECCE sector in South Africa.

Deep commitment and reflection is required when acting in the best interests of young children. This volume goes someway in that direction. It is intentionally designed to expand the space for knowledge generation, debate, critical thinking, and collaborative endeavours among the ECCE actors in the variety of positions they hold. It is imperative that opportunities like this are created for the meeting of minds, to build shared understandings for ECCE reform. The latter is currently couched in terms such as "function improvement" as the Department of Education becomes the new lead responsible for ECCE.

We are also excited about the immediacy of an e-publication which creates possibilities for connecting with each other and inviting ongoing knowledge generation with the ECCE delivery workforce, policy makers, researchers, scholars, academics, families and communities.

The contributions in this volume highlight a variety of themes in ECCE, namely: Policy and Practice; Initial and Continuing Professional Development; Transformative Pedagogy; Parents, Family, Communities;

Inclusivity and Inclusive Education; and Leadership and Management. The problem of inequality is pervasive in South Africa. The narratives in this volume pick up on this critical issue in explicit and implicit ways. Government has acknowledged that ECCE is a key intervention to reduce inequality, however government funding and political will to adequately implement key policies like the National Integrated ECD Policy, is severely lacking. From an activist stance, the contributions in this volume, adds its voice for more investments in not only human capital but also human well-being, given the devastation of the pandemic on the lives of young children and their families.

In generating evidence from ECCE research and practice, this volume is also an experiment in data utilisation for different target audiences. What we attempted to do was to present the evidence in a format that can be easily understood. Knowledge accessibility is an important aspect for ECCE decision makers. Civil society organisations and policy makers urgently need to work in evidence-based ways for contextually appropriate policies and programmes. In the main, authentic evidence for action is needed if we are to change lives through early care, development, education and intervention. Equally important is authentic leadership to drive change. This volume alludes to the importance of advocacy through leadership, pedagogical leadership, as well as shared or distributed leadership for quality ECCE provision.

Finally, this publication is a first for SARAECE and forms part of the mission to offer mentorship to the many voices in ECCE. It is for this reason we have provided a means and method of enabling what for some of our authors, is a first attempt at publication. All contributions in this volume were subjected to a review process. This was a new process for some of our promising practice contributors.

We hope that this volume will take you on a wonderful journey about people in the South African ECCE field who present possibilities to bring change in the lives of young children in a way that respects not only who they will become in the future but who they are presently.

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Sub-theme One:
Policy and Practice

Research Reporting:

Predictors of Early Learning Outcomes in South African ECCE Programmes Targeting Low-income Children

By Andrew Dawes
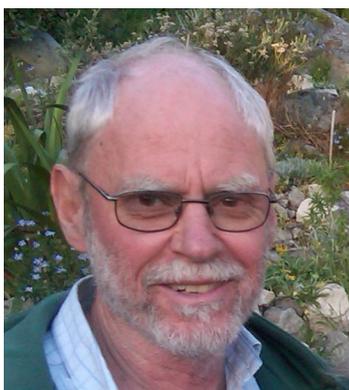
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The problem:

No comparisons of the relative effectiveness of playgroup and centre-based modalities had been conducted in South Africa prior to this study.

The aim:

The aim of the study was to investigate predictors of early learning outcomes and readiness for Grade R in playgroup and centre-based programmes in children from low-income backgrounds.

How the topic was researched:

Two playgroup and two centre-based models targeting quintile 1-3 children were compared using a quasi-experimental pre-test post-test field design. The study was conducted in the Western Cape, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal, and Free State provinces of South Africa. The randomly selected child sample comprised 307 children (baseline mean age = 54 months) attending five day per week centre-based programmes (n= 195) or playgroups on one two or three mornings per week (n= 112). Children were assessed on the Early Learning Outcomes Measure (ELOM) at baseline and endline. Practitioners provided data on programme characteristics, and caregivers (n = 327) provided data on children's home learning environments.

What was found:

After accounting for covariates child (age and growth status), home learning environment, and socio-economic status variables likely to predict child outcomes, all four programmes made statistically significant gains in ELOM total and in Domain scores (from 13 to 20 ELOM standard score points). Children with higher height-for-age scores (healthier and less likely to be malnourished) performed significantly better. Those with lower baseline scores (less likely to be developmentally on track) improved most. Children who attended more sessions performed significantly better than those with less exposure. One playgroup programme offering either two or three sessions / per week performed as well as a centre-based programme. Support provided to practitioners was also associated with child outcomes. The contribution of the home environment was limited and likely due to the very limited time caregivers had for activities with their child (two thirds reported having two hours or less during the week and weekends). High proportions of caregivers or other family members never engaged in activities likely to improve early learning outcomes (e.g., reading and telling stories). However, children with more books and toys at home performed significantly better on certain ELOM domains.

We conclude that changes in ELOM scores were largely attributable to high levels of exposure to quality programme inputs rather than to opportunities for stimulation at home.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy:

This new evidence shows that well-designed and closely monitored centre-based and playgroup programmes can realize significant early learning gains in children from low-income backgrounds. In addition, high quality playgroup models are likely to improve readiness for Grade R as much as more expensive centre-based models. While our goal should be equity in providing quality centre based ECCE for all children, until that is realised, and provided they are of high quality, playgroups offering three sessions per week offer a promising alternative at considerably lower cost.

We find that low-income parents have little time for activities that support early learning. Programmes targeting this group and depending largely on parent education, are therefore unlikely to improve the learning outcomes of children significantly.

Reference to full publication:

Dawes, A., Biersteker, L., Girdwood, L., Snelling, M. & Horler, J. (2020). The Early Learning Programme Outcomes Study. Technical Report. Claremont, Cape Town: Innovation Edge and Ilifa Labantwana. Retrieved from: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScsshc-ZlfkgIP_IQ_cQTRhVzP3jNOk80Turi3d9IdCnTgwXw/viewform

Research Reporting:

Transforming Early Childhood Care and Education in South Africa

By Naseema Shaik

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Introduction:

Recently in South Africa, the professionalization of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sector which focuses from birth to four years has been prioritized. In supporting this initiative, the department of Higher Education and European Union as part of the Teacher Education for Early Childhood Education Project (TEECEP) funded many higher education and Training and Vocational Education institutions to develop Diploma and Degree programmes and research projects that would influence the preparation of these programmes. A successful application from the lead author resulted in funding for both a programme development and research project on 'Developing a transformative pedagogy for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) early childhood care and education' which involved seven institutions participating from five provinces nationally.

The problem:

Pedagogy known as the art and science of teaching and the interactive process between teacher and child (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden & Bell, 2002) in early childhood education is pivotal to strengthening children's overall abilities. While much emphasis has been placed on holistically developing children's abilities, there has been a dearth of research that focuses on how a transformative pedagogy is understood. Transformative pedagogies sit at the heart of democratic practice and should be understood and implemented at the inception of early childhood education. South African policies have exemplified the importance of ECCE such as Children's Act (2006), National Integrated

Policy for ECD (2015), South African National Curriculum Framework for Children aged Birth to Four (2015) and the Policy on Minimum Requirements Leading to Qualifications in Higher Education for Early Childhood Development Educators (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2017) teacher qualification framework for birth to four. Whilst important measures are in place for birth to four teacher qualifications and practice there is a dire need for implementing pedagogy that is inclusive, rights based and participatory. Considering this pivotal need, I deemed it necessary to carry out a research project for a transformative pedagogy which has the potential to contribute to quality practice, policy and research and is strongly aligned to the social justice issue in a democratic South Africa.

The aim

The aim of the larger study was to explore how teacher educators, practitioners, parents and policy makers understand a transformative pedagogy. The findings reported here are reflective of three studies and are only findings from the parents and practitioners. The aim of the first study was to investigate how parents understood their culture and the cultural aspirations for their young children attending diverse cultural centres. The second study explored whether practitioners support 'schoolification' which places emphasis on the acquisition of specific pre academic skills and knowledge transfer from the adult to child rather than a focus on learning that is experiential, enabling children's holistic learning (Doherty, 2007). Participation values children's agency, children are knowledgeable and capable of functioning in a variety of ways (Mayall, 2002). The third study's aim was to explore how practitioners use listening to create a sense of belonging and participation.

How the topic was researched?
- A qualitative approach was used via semi structured interviews.
- The studies took place in ten early childhood centres, five advantaged and five disadvantaged in five provinces of South Africa.
- Ten early childhood practitioners and nineteen parents were purposively selected as they suited the selection criteria. Whilst ten practitioners were selected not all ten practitioners' data is represented in all the studies as data was selected that was in particular response to the research questions asked. Participants needed an ECD qualification and two years teaching experience in an ECCE centre. Parents were drawn from all four official racial groupings. In study 1, the data is extracted from the nineteen parents; in study two, the data is extracted from ten practitioners and in study three, the data is extracted from four practitioners.

What was found?

All three studies used pedagogy in participation as the theoretical lens (Formosinho and Formosinho 2016) which emphasises the co-construction of knowledge by different actors, thereby encouraging active participation in the process of teaching and learning. Thus young children at ECCE centres are regarded as partners in promoting the co-construction of knowledge. The foundational principle of pedagogy in participation is that it occurs in democratic contexts, where learning is an interactive experience with stimulating support from the practitioner. This is underpinned by four interdependent axes: (i) being/feeling; (ii) belonging and participation; (iii) language and communication; and (iv)the

narration of learning journeys (Formosinho and Formosinho 2016).

The findings of the first study revealed that parents were initially reluctant to reveal what a culture means in a democratic country like South Africa. However, when they reflected on culture as enacted in the lives of their families they responded with conviction, revealing a range of views about the topic. Parents recognised the valuable opportunities that the language-diverse ECCE spaces offered for mixing languages and developing bilingualism and multilingualism.

The second article revealed that practitioners, in both well-resourced and under-resourced centres, showed warmth, care and respect to young children. Few practitioners spoke about teaching children letters of the alphabet, counting and the days of the week, however their caring instinct stood out in the data. Findings of the third study revealed that practitioners created a sense of belonging when they listened in relational and responsive ways, when they respected and encouraged children's agency. However, complexities and tensions were evident in instances of practitioners listening in relation to their own personal expectations.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy

The first study has important implications for practice and research. This research alerts us to the importance for teachers to have stronger understandings of the cultural aspirations parents have for their children as this will enable ECCE to promote social cohesion, respectful dialogues and culturally responsive teaching and learning. Further research about how teachers and parents share cultural views will also be contributory to enhancing understanding of culture. The second study has implications for practice, policy and research. Practice can be innovative if practitioners use appropriate strategies for stimulating young children and these strategies are shared with other practitioners to learn from one another. ECCE policy should also focus on pedagogical approaches that are participatory, where co-construction takes place. The final article has implications for practice, policy and research. Training should be organized for pre and in-service teachers on how they should genuinely listen to children in order for children to experience a sense of participation and belonging. Training is also required for teachers to move away from technocratic ways of listening that disfavour dialogue, responsive and relational listening. Policy should focus on ways in which teachers should listen, this has the potential to guide teachers with ways of how to listen that will support dialogue between teachers and children.

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Research Reporting:

An Interpretive Analysis of the Early Childhood Development Policy Trajectory in Post-Apartheid South Africa

By Eric Atmore
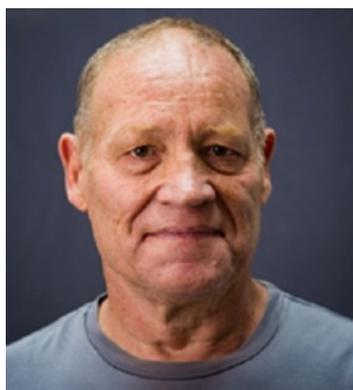
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The problem:

The period following the first democratic elections was a time of hurried education and social development policy-making, passing of legislation, appointing public officials aligned to the new democratic government and setting up systems.

The aim:

The aim of the study was to trace, describe, analyse and interpret the unfolding of the ECD policy trajectory in South Africa over the period 1990 to 2015 and to explain how this ECD policy trajectory shaped the evolution of ECD in post-apartheid South Africa.

How the topic was researched:

TA qualitative approach was used. The study took place nation-wide and 19 individuals who were involved in ECD policy-making between 1990 and 2015 were interviewed. They were asked to participate because of their experience as contributors to ECD policy. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews on the policy-making process, challenges and then the policy choices.

What was found:

The findings of the study showed that over this post-apartheid period until 2012, government ECD policy-making was haphazard, contradictory, inadequate, unplanned and uncoordinated. ECD policy

was developed with little political support and political leadership. Because of the haste to make policy for the new government, critical aspects of the ECD policy-making process were weak. It was only in 2012 that ECD policy-making matured and a comprehensive and integrated ECD policy was formulated.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy:

This study draws attention to the need for the South African government to have the political will to meet the early developmental needs of young children, to ensure that public officials in ECD are competent; and that National Treasury makes funds available to achieve the goals of the National Integrated ECD Policy approved by Cabinet in December 2015.

Reference to full publication:

Atmore, E. (2019). An Interpretive Analysis of the Early Childhood Development Policy Trajectory in Post-apartheid South Africa. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch.

Research Reporting:

Perceptions of Parents and Teachers Regarding Policies Related to Fathers' Engagement in Children's Early Education

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The problem:

Context: The early education of children has become the major concern of early childhood care and education teachers. The engagement of fathers is critical to the quality of children's early childhood education. However, research shows that many South African fathers are not actively involved in their children's early education (Okeke, 2014). The reality is that most children in South Africa do not live with their biological fathers (Statistics South Africa, 2019), resulting in the lack of fathers not carrying out their fatherhood roles especially fathers who are still school-going (Clyde, 2016). Mufutau (2015), Clyde (2016), Mufutau and Okeke (2016) all noted that this makes it difficult for most young fathers to actively participate in educational matters related to their children.

Problem: Several authors observed that there are negative consequences of the contested concept of fathers' absence on the overall development of the children (Okeke, 2014; Change, 2015; Mashiya et al., 2015); Noel et al., 2015; Mathwasa & Okeke, 2016; Okeke, Ugwuanyi & Mufutua 2020; Okeke, Okeke & Ugwuanyi, 2020). Despite that, there is a scarcity of literature on the specific policies to achieve active engagement of fathers in the early education of their children.

Causes of the problem: The major cause of the father engagement problem, is the inability of the policy document on early childhood development (ECD) to adequately outline the specific programmes for effective engagement of fathers in the early education of their children (Government of South Africa,

GSA, 2015). For example, in policy references to pregnancy, the mother is the object of attention. The overemphasis on maternal role in caregiving leads to devaluing the role of the fathers.

The aim:
This study explored the perceptions of parents and teachers regarding relevant policies for ensuring the active engagement of fathers in the early education of their children.

How the topic was researched:
A quantitative approach was used using a descriptive survey research design. The study took place in King William's Town Education District in the Eastern Cape Province. There were 309 (215 parents and 94 teachers) participants who were chosen because they were very instrumental in the collection of the required data for the research. A stratified random sampling technique was used for sampling. Data were collected through a questionnaire.

What was found:
The findings revealed that fathers and teachers had favourable views of the measures to be put in place to ensure fathers' active participation in their children's early education. Based on the findings, the following were recommended:
- working out an education policy that includes parents' support;
- making a policy that allows parents to be co-educators/caregivers;
- having a policy on family learning programmes;
- having a policy that allows fathers to participate and contribute in school activities;
- having a policy that allows fathers and teachers to work in harmony.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy:
Based on the findings of this study, there is the need for ECCE policy documents to place greater emphasis on the implementation of the relevant fatherhood policies to ensure the active engagement of fathers in the early education of their children. When the fathers are actively involved in the early education of their children, there will be proper emotional, social and cognitive developments of children. This will pave the way for the firm foundations at higher levels of education.

Reference to full publication:
Ugwuanyi, C.S., Mufutau, M.A., & Okeke, C.I.O. (2021). Perceptions of parents and teachers regarding policies related to fathers' engagement in children's early education. Asia-Pacific Journal of Research in Early Childhood Education, 15(2), 19-38. Retrieved from:
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Research Reporting:

Parents and Principals' Perceptions of Children's Healthy Eating Habits Following a Nutritional Programme in Nelson Mandela Bay By Odwour E. Midigo

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The problem:

Children establish their food preferences during childhood and pre-school years. Research reveals that for children below the age of five good nutrition has a strong correlation to a child's overall health including their growth and development (Flint, Blaauw & Van Niekerk, 2018). Further, Flint, Blaauw & Van Niekerk (2018) shows that poor dietary practices such as higher consumption of junk foods and soft drinks are the main cause of malnutrition among pre-school children. In South Africa (SA), 27% of children are stunted 12% underweight and 5% stunted (Loots, Yan & Vember, 2021). With no intervention, these children remain nutritionally and mentally vulnerable based on their rapid growth and development. Most parents and principals in the townships provide junk foods and soft drinks that are easily affordable and accessible in the preschool environments (Bucher & Siegrist, 2015). Furthermore, during a 2018 nutrition baseline survey conducted by a local Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), the researcher noted that fruits and vegetables were rarely served in the preschools. This suggests that children were not getting sufficient vitamins and minerals for proper growth as highlighted in most Paediatric Food based Dietary guidelines (Lee, Burrows, Yoong & Wyse, 2018). These challenges are further intensified as many Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres are not registered with the Department of Social Development (DoSD). The result is that many centres are not receiving government subsidy, resulting in the nutritional needs of the children in the centres in question remains compromised (Chakona & Shackleton, 2017). Most ECD centres either allow lunch boxes from homes; provide meals from the centres or a combination of both. Either way, the quality of food served to children in ECD centres

have been noted to fall short of micronutrient and energy density contrary to the Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) of children (Flint, Blaauw & Van Niekerk, 2018). Nutrition programmes play significant roles to healthy food choices by improving awareness and skills to a healthy lifestyle (Loots, Yan & Vember, 2021). In the present study, the aim of the nutrition intervention was to foster nutrition behaviour change by providing interactive hands-on training sessions that would provide the needed knowledge and skills to parents and principals in making healthy food choices for the children. The programme involved both home-based activity learning (parents and the children) and peer-to-peer learning (parents and parents/caregivers) in the schools using a step-by-step guide. The researcher played the role of a facilitator in the interactive learning sessions.

The aim:
The study aimed at exploring parents and principals' perceptions of children's healthy eating habits in underprivileged communities following the implementation of a nutrition programme. The intention was to guide interventions and strategies in promoting healthy food options for optimum growth and development of children.

How the topic was researched:
A qualitative approach was used. The study took place in the townships. Twenty-five parents were selected conveniently while five pre-school principals were purposively sampled. During the nutrition programme which involved parents and principals' trainings using step-by-step nutrition activity and colouring booklets, the researcher interactively engaged the principals and parents on using songs, plays and games at influencing children's' preferences for locally available healthy foods. Data was then collected through five Focus Group (FG) discussions and five interviews and was thematically analysed. The focus groups and interviews aimed at (among others) stimulating in-depth conversations and information to better understand the lunchbox rules (if any) in the schools, reasons for providing specific foods in the lunchboxes and challenges towards healthy lunchboxes after the nutrition programme. The ethical principles that guided the study included justice, beneficence, and autonomy.

What was found:
The findings of the study showed that socio-economic challenges and poverty limited parents and the principals from choosing healthy and diverse foods in the lunch boxes. The findings also revealed that most parents relied on the pre-school nutrition subsidies to meet the nutrition needs of the children. The principals in these preschools reverted to using personal resources such as their own vegetable gardens and out of pocket expenditure to provide meals that supplement the nutritional needs of the children. The results also show that the support from the principals was unsustainable, hence hunger and malnutrition in some children from lack of food.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy:
These findings reveal that more support for principals and parents towards preschool healthy eating habits is needed among ECCE stakeholders. This can include nutrition subsidies and supporting the

registration of the preschools in the townships with the DSD. Considering that the South African (SA) government recognises and supports early childhood nutrition programmes, registering more ECD centres in NMB metropole with the DSD may improve children's access to healthy foods. Moreover, preschool nutrition subsidies can enhance the learning capacity of children besides their general health and wellbeing of the children. It is important for ECD policy makers in the Eastern Cape (EC) to hold capacity building workshops with board members and principals of the informal ECD centres to provide opportunities for the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) nutrition training sessions for the practitioners. This would enhance awareness of the nutrition needs of the children as well as help integrate healthier menus and lunchbox rules in the schools. In addition, the local non-governmental organisations and volunteers should also collaborate to support healthy feeding programmes for children who cannot afford lunch boxes. Besides improving the nutrition of children, improved access to healthy nutrition in the schools can help influence the perceptions of parents about healthy foods as well as establish healthy food preferences in children.

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Research Reporting:

The Cost of COVID-19 on Children's Mental Health in South Africa – Averting the Next Tidal Wave

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The problem:

The protracted ebb and flow of the COVID-19 wave after wave, have bashed the mental health and wellbeing of our youth, leaving a widespread trail of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in an already traumatised South African society, in its wake. The only constant seems this languishing uncertainty. The frequency and threat of economic lockdown and restrictions are burdening already stressed-out parents with crippling financial anxiety. Job losses are exceeding 1,5 million since the pandemic (Whitfield, 2021). School closures, with dire long-term consequences in unrecoverable loss of teaching time, also disrupts that regular rhythm, essential social contact and sense of belonging for the children. For those dependent on subsidized feeding, that too removes their only daily meal.

Seldom has there been synchronicity between survival of jobs or livelihoods and obligations for care on parenting in South Africa. Especially emerging from the initial deep lockdown, we witnessed the re-opening of the economy without the re-opening of schools. The biggest impact fell on the most vulnerable, 6 years and younger. Victims of inequity, they were exposed to substance abuse, domestic violence and child abuse. Close to a million under 6s were left at home alone, with two-thirds of caregivers as sole breadwinners and single working parents with no choice. Whilst the elderly might have paid with their lives prematurely, the youth is likely to pay for the pandemic during their whole lives (Van der Berg & Spaull, 2020).

The aim:

The aim of this study was to examine the impact of COVID-19 on hospitalisation and mortality rates, in contrast to the perceived cost on the mental health of under 6 year-olds in South Africa. Furthermore, to examine and highlight promising practices of supporting their socio-emotional wellbeing in the classroom, in response to this pandemic. Insights were gleaned from literature reviews, observations within the classroom and interviews with prominent paediatric specialists, to explore new directions to help avert a mental health tsunami.

What was done:

The methodology is essentially a document analysis / literature review on the cost of the COVID-19 pandemic, not just in terms of hospitalisation and mortality rates among the youth, but specifically the impact on children's mental health. The investigation of literature focused specifically on the early years of childhood development. The author's own daily observations of a shift in psycho-social dynamics within a registered preschool, run over 2 decades pre- and now post COVID-19, also form part of new practices that help contain these challenges in the classroom. With consent, three specialists in the paediatric therapy field were directly consulted on their observations of the current state of children's mental health and recommendations to augment future directions.

Firstly, the level of research available in South Africa in terms of infection rates, hospitalisation and mortality trends since the start of the pandemic was examined. SA based National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) surveillance reports yielded increased rate of infections and hospitalization especially among young adolescence, although it remained significantly lower than their adult counterparts. The incidence of COVID-19 mortality among under age 19-year-old children, appears negligible at 0,7%, and yield virtually a flatline throughout the rising peaks of the waves.

It should be noted that the South African quantitative, publicly accessible COVID-19 research content is extremely limited when it relates specifically to preschoolers, even within that reported by NICD compared with international data via WHO. In SA, families are still forced to pay for COVID-19 tests for children, so by inference that will exclude the majority without the necessary financial means, and therefore cannot represent a realistic trended measure.

What was found:

NICD reported COVID-related hospital admissions at a higher incidence for under 1 year old babies, compared to toddlers of ages 1 to 4, or 5- to 9-year-olds. No publicly accessible information is easily available on the age breakdown for COVID-related deaths for the early learning sector. NICD only reports deaths for under 19-year-old children as a total category, of which HIV infection is noted as a major underlying cause of child mortality in the third wave.

Whilst the COVID-19 mortality rate among young children remain extremely low, thousands more have been devastated by the loss of family members and loved ones. Uncertainty, lack of consistency, and sense of helplessness fuel their trauma. Globally, it is estimated that millions of children have lost their

parents since the first wave, yet with such psychological devastation and the dire state of food security, the needs of children have clearly been side-lined in favour of adults and adolescence (Stoltz, 2021). The level of neglect and abuse that escalated during this pandemic has acutely increased PTSD among not just adults, but particularly children. Young children take on the emotional texture of their environment. The psychosocial impact of this pandemic on their mental wellbeing has been profound. (Gosh, 2020). The South African Stress and Health (SASH) study indicated 56% of South Africans experienced more than one trauma. The compounded effect is more lasting if experienced in the early years. (Naidoo, 2020).

Cape based specialist, Child Psychiatrist, Dr Lesley Carew, also points out a marked increase in depression, social and generalized anxiety, tics, obsessive-compulsive disorder and panic attacks among children (Carew, 2021). Fear-based anxiety is a definite appropriate response to an unnatural situation, says SA-grown now UK based psychotherapist Talya Ressel (Ressel, 2021).

In SA the psycho-social impact on young children has been profound with the forced quarantine and isolation following the abrupt closures of early learning preschools first and then the economy. The fundamentals of Erikson's Psychosocial development, namely trust and values are shaped in the Early Years. The primary development task for Middle Childhood is indeed integration (Saurabh & Ranjan, 2020). Quarantine and isolation, albeit necessary self-incarceration, are both jarring to the human soul. A study done in India showed more than two thirds of quarantined children experienced worry, helplessness, and fear (Saurabh & Ranjan,2020).

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy:
The atrocity of neglect from the Department of Social Development required a court order on 6 July 2020 to force Minister Lindiwe Zulu to allow the Early Childhood Development (ECD) sector to re-open. Some ECDs never recovered, with meagre ECD staff Stimulus, sprinkled a year later. Many ECD owners remain empty handed and still feel totally ignored and aggrieved. Social Services withdrew dedicated area social worker support to ECDs, since October 2017. Fewer resources are available to parents and preschools in SA to help support the emerging rise in mental health challenges, Ressel (2021) says. To facilitate this, the mental wellbeing of ECD owners and teachers, with additional financial backing, play-therapy based training, and access to preschool support services, need urgent attention.

Given the importance of the sector to changing future learning outcomes, agility and innovation are key to produce world class excellence in education from young. Instead of focusing on covering the curriculum, the focus should be on mastery of skills (Whitfield, 2021). There is no better place to internalize skills, confidence, and a dearth for knowledge than in the early years through concrete learning and creative problem solving. From experience pure on-line platforms for under 6s are not ideal, as it sets them back socio-emotionally, especially in collaborative, creative play and conflict resolution. Ressel (2021) echoes this, encouraging any on-line engagement to start with bonding and checking in on their mental and social health first.

Given the relatively flat-line mortality rate despite the peaks, and marginal incidence of 0,7% among the young, there is no plausible reason to further disrupt and close schools again. Remove artificial and isolating impact of screen dividers and relax physical distancing for under 6s. They need interaction not isolation. Once pre-schoolers have been adequately screened before entering the school with frequent hand washing, they should be allowed the freedom of engagement in creative play. Paediatric Occupational therapist, Peggy Shnaps, also urges teachers and parents to compensate for the deprivation of sensory experiences that lockdown has caused. Let them play for play's sake, with supportive and caring facilitation, and limit excessive screentime. No-one can learn under stress (Shnaps, 2021).

As the tide of COVID-19 sweeps with yet another variant in SA and around the globe, it may very well increase the gulf of fear, level of worry and anxiety (World Health Organisation., n.d.). However, it is our response that counts. The ECD directive and freedom of no masks for under 6's in January 2021 should be transferred with the migration of Grade Pre-Reception to the Department of Education in April 2022. Pre-school is the time for magical thinking says Ressel (2021). Ignite curiosity and promote resilience. Create a nurturing climate of positivity and hope. Acknowledge their feelings. As Cowen (2021) points out educators should encourage early learners to name the emotion to tame it, respond rather than react and breathe through it all and talk about what is wrong, and what they know about the situation. On a practical level simulate current day events by creating a PCR teddy bear test station. In the voice of health activist Dr Yogan Pillay "Children should not only survive, but thrive" (Stoltz, 2021)

The unknown factor is how this will affect mental health in years to come. If our youth's experience with trauma, stress and anxiety, particularly in the early years, is left untreated, it is projected by Mental Health publications to become the next pandemic itself.

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Research Reporting:

Health and Hygiene Practices for Toddlers in Early Childhood Care and Education Centres in an Underprivileged Area

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The problem:

Health and a sense of good hygiene are crucial objectives of Well-being Early Learning Developmental Area (ELDA) as a primary focus of the South African National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for children from birth to four years (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2015). It is against this background that health and hygiene activities are incorporated in the NCF document to support babies', toddlers', and young children's well-being in the Early Childhood Care and Education learning environment. At a time when the whole world faces an unprecedented disaster due to COVID-19, there is a pronounced focus on proper hygiene for young children to ensure their health and protection against the virus (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020; World Health Organization & United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2020).

In the early years of children's development, teaching influences their future behaviours through demonstrations, modelling, and reinforcement. It is for this reason that teaching tools and play resources need to be available to young children so that they can see, touch, and learn as they play to learn. However, education centres for underprivileged children are persistently burdened by a lack of play resources and appropriate infrastructure to facilitate optimal learning and development (Kirsten, 2017).

The aim:

To explore the planning and execution of health- and hygiene-related activities for toddlers in Early

Childhood Care and Education centres in an underprivileged area.

What was done:
- A qualitative case study approach was adopted.
- The study was conducted in Umbumbulu, which is a rural area in KwaZulu-Natal Province in South Africa.
- Three participants were purposively selected on the strength of their experiences and knowledge of teaching toddlers in three Early Childhood Care and Education centres in an underprivileged area. These participants were also deemed knowledgeable about the requirement of the National Curriculum Framework for appropriate educational practices that will facilitate the development of babies, toddlers, and young children.
- Data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The participating teachers voluntarily elucidated the methodologies and associated activities that they employed for the development of toddlers and young children, with specific focus on these children's health and hygiene. The participants' lesson plans were also perused to triangulate the interview data with the extensive literature review information and theoretical framework.
- The social constructivism theory underpinned data collection and analysis. This theory purports that meaning making and learning among very young children are facilitated through exposure to various objects in the environment while it also emphasises that learning occurs in collaboration with others (Gredler, 1997).

What was found:
The findings of the study confirmed that health and hygiene activities in the three ECCE centres in this underprivileged environment occurred in accordance with National Curriculum Framework requirements such as hand washing, talks, demonstrations, songs, stories, and role-play activities that stimulated the interest of these toddlers and young children (Ebrahim and Irvine, 2012; Department of Basic Education, 2015). Routine activities included washing of hands before eating and after using the toilet. Although challenges were experienced such as limited play resources and a lack of basic infrastructure such as water-on-tap to instil elementary health and hygiene habits, the study revealed teachers' creative capabilities as they collaborated to devise innovative strategies such as 'tippy taps' to provide running water for hand-washing activities. When sharing towels was highlighted as a probable source for contamination, they reverted to a natural individual hand-drying technique to protect the toddlers from contracting this infectious disease. Hand-washing activities were extended to include hand washing after play or sneezing and coughing. These activities were introduced creatively through songs and play with themes that focused on limiting the spread of COVID-19. The teachers' creativity knew no bounds as they developed their own innovative songs and rhymes so that the toddlers learned as they played.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy:
In line with the National Curriculum Framework, the findings revealed encouraging creativity and the recognition and utilization of available natural resources that supported young children's prior learning and encouraged child/learner-centred learning opportunities for babies, toddlers, and young children.

Such activities should utilise natural, cost-effective resources such as bottles, tins and others to overcome the challenges experienced due to limited play resources in ECCE centres in underprivileged communities.

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Promising Practice:

Partnership Takes National Integrated ECD Policy into Practice: Lessons from Leave No Young Child Behind (LNYCB) Nkomazi District, Mpumalanga By Linda Biersteker

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The problem:

The goal of South Africa's 2015 National Integrated ECD Policy is for a comprehensive quality ECD programme to be available and accessible to all infants, young children and their caregivers by 2030. This aligns with the targets for Sustainable Development Goal 4. Effective delivery of the different components depends on coordination between different departments, the municipality, and relationships with families, community and the non-governmental organisation sector. However, coordination has been difficult to operationalise especially at local level due to different departmental priorities, human resource capacity challenges and budget constraints.

The aim:

The Leave No Young Child Behind project set out to build and strengthen the multi-sector collaborative partnerships needed to deliver services and make a change for young children, to demonstrate effective delivery of the NIECDP at local level and to share learnings about the enablers of collaborative partnership.

What was done:

A mixed methods approach was used for the evaluation including focus groups, interviews, review of administrative data and a pre and post quality audit of ECD programmes.
* The action research project took place in the poverty targeted wards 16 and 19 Nkomazi, Mpumalanga. The project was initiated in 2015 and this evaluation took place in 2019.

- In 2019 72 participants were interviewed including officials from health, social development, education, COGTA, municipality, donors and local business, parents and practitioners. There was a focus group interview with the Provincial Steering Team and the community level Technical Task Team and 35 individual interviews. In addition, a pre and post quality assessment of 34 ECD playgroups and centres was undertaken, using an observational tool informed by the ECERS-R, Children's Act norms and standards and National Curriculum Framework for 0 – 4 years.

The pilot was preceded by a community needs assessment and stakeholder mobilization process in which it was agreed to focus on ECD services including: Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition, Parental Support, Early Learning, Child Protection, Infrastructure and services coordination.   The intervention involved:

a. Development of an MoU and establishing a provincial Steering Committee of the DO MORE Foundation (DMF) and representatives of the provincial departments of social development, health and education. A business plan and M&E framework was developed.

b. Monthly meetings of a district level technical committee including district officials and NGOs to report on developments. The meetings were coordinated by DMF staff.

c. On the ground management, coordination and stakeholder mobilization in support of departmental programmes by LIMA a community development intermediary operating under DMF's supervision

d. Other stakeholders and donors drawn in to support capacity building, strategy and resourcing

What was found:
The needs analysis, stakeholder mobilisation and agreement on the particular areas of ECD service to be focused on, produced an enabling climate for the pilot. Interviews indicated that the partnership facilitated information sharing, a better understanding of NIECDP, role clarification and was able to leverage additional human/financial resources through private sector partnerships and the engagement of the community works programme. Duplication was reduced. The common plan and M&E framework held partners accountable and the MoU with departments mandated this. The joint private sector and social development leadership facilitated the process. The backbone role played by the DMF ECD coordinator in convening the meetings and sharing information and the on the ground role of LIMA were identified as significant enablers of the process.

Initial trust building was a challenge as were the different operational requirements of civil society and government departments, but strong communication, planning based on needs identified by participating departments and the benefits leveraged for the area's young children by the partnership resolved these. Achieving municipal buy-in has remained a slow process and a challenge.

Respondents reported that access to quality ECD programmes and services in the targeted wards had increased as a result of the collaborative intervention and this was also shown in improved scores in the pre and post quality audit of ECD centres and playgroups, especially for the learning programme.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy:
The intervention confirms the efficiency and value of coordinated service delivery. It also provides significant pointers as to the level and type of engagement needed to enable effective and sustainable

integration. Key to this was a strong and respected backbone entity to drive and sustain the coordination, the allocation of time and resources for coordination mandated in this case by the departmental MoU, engagement of multisectoral partners and leveraging of expertise and resources to delivery on the common plan. The role of monitoring and evaluation data to inform planning and implementation was also highlighted. This pilot has demonstrated the value of coordination and integration for implementation of the NIECD policy and the oversight and resourcing needed for a coordinated process.

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Promising Practice:

A Stronger and More Unified Sector through WhatsApp

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The problem:

Owing to the advent of a pandemic, Africa A+ Schools needed to find alternative ways of building relations and continuing learning between site visits during lockdown. Making use of WhatsApp and what we termed 'Info-bytes', proved to be a productive and useful strategy. COVID-19 brought with it challenges in terms of conducting face- to-face field trips owing to restrictions on inter-provincial travel, social distancing and schools being hesitant to receive people from outside their community. This meant that A+ facilitators who had just initiated the first of a five-year training programme when the pandemic started, were unable to build on the work done in the field. The Leadership Program was considered paramount in terms of continuing training, as the Principals of the ECD Centres are viewed as the driving force behind the work on the ground and 'vital agents of system change' (Fullan,2007). It was imperative that a strategy be found to enable regular contact and ways of continuing the process of shifting mind-sets. In any training that is done incrementally with relatively low numbers of contact sessions, there is a danger of losing contact and learning slowing down. Although there were risks to introducing an online style of learning, the earlier baseline study had demonstrated some potential for using a combination of smartphones and WhatsApp.

The aim:

The aim of the introduction of a WhatsApp approach to facilitation was multi-faceted. Firstly, to build strong relationships between the A+ facilitators and project recipients. To further build relations between

the ECD teachers across the sampled centres. Vygotsky (1962; 1978) suggests that people learn best when working collaboratively and sharing learning within the Zone of Proximal Development. In this case the A+ facilitators were the more capable others who were guiding the participants using a semiotic tool (Vygotsky, 1967), namely WhatsApp, to facilitate learning.

At a more pedagogical level, we wanted to build knowledge and pedagogic skills whilst starting the process of shifting mind-sets. The baseline study had revealed a disturbing level of apathy and disempowerment between the teachers. By working collaboratively within the ZPD and drawing from existing knowledge, the A+ facilitators would be able to build teacher agency and develop communities of practice (Wenger, 1998).

Another aspect that was considered, was to build the technological skills of the facilitators allowing them to submit reports timeously and guiding them in how to interact with the schools under their care. The majority of the participants were not yet familiar with using technology in alternative ways. In addition, they needed support in how to use emotional intelligence to create environments of learning that would support constructive feedback (Goleman, 1999).

The intention was to maintain a continuous level of learning between contact sessions. It is possible to add a final aspect, in that the project of implementation included raising the teacher's awareness of using technology in order that they could be more efficient in a 4th Industrial Revolution classroom (Schwab, 2018). It was hoped that by initiating WhatsApp learning, the participants would build their confidence in using an app they were already familiar with and from this there would be a heightened consciousness around the role of technology in the current ECD landscape.

What was done:
The study took place in the Eastern Cape in the Kouga district and arose after a baseline needs analysis had been conducted in 2019. This allowed Africa A+ Schools to determine the areas of priority when implementing their programme.

There were 10 trainee facilitators and 14 school leaders participating during lockdown. The 10 trainee facilitators were supported via WhatsApp on a weekly basis whilst the 14 school leaders received support once a month. Once contact time was re-established, online training of the 10 local facilitators remained on a bi-weekly basis as well as once a month contact time with 13 of the 14 school leaders, continued (one ECD Centre closed towards end of lock down)

A mixed methods approach was used (Creswell, 2013). This included qualitative comments from semi-structured interviews from participants taken during the resumption of face-to-face sessions and quantitative data which tracked how many participants engaged in the process.

The intervention which was determined by means of a baseline study conducted in 2019, consisted of the following: Each participant was given data on a weekly and later bi-weekly basis and contacted by

either of the project facilitators. Contact was a telephonic conversation where the A+ facilitator would check-in on the participant and then provide individual support. For example, what and how to ask questions to guide reflection on a task such as critical analysis of a learning activity. The online support practice consisted of 3 components: 1) Online support of local facilitators; 2) Online support of ECD Centres and 3) Info-byte posted bi-monthly which entailed posting a picture or a series of pictures illustrating how to do a particular pedagogical technique. The participants were challenged to try out a particular activity and then share their results with the group.

Findings:

Facilitating a task with the local facilitators first, developed their insight and understanding in how to ask questions and how to guide their school leaders to reflect upon given tasks. Posting reflections on tasks on WhatsApp gave the project facilitators a clue to the participants' grasp and knowledge of concepts the tasks offered and allowed for project facilitators' further planning according to insights gained. This practice cemented a firm relationship between project facilitators and project participants. The participants valued the support during COVID-19. To quote one participant "You could've easily just left us because of COVID-19 but you didn't" To quote one local facilitator "Before we were like islands, we were too scared to ask each other questions, we knew nothing of each other" The WhatsApp communication allowed for support and networking during a time that the sector experienced much neglect. New mediums of information could be introduced and inexpensively shared, such as podcasts from national radio programs. Each online session was followed by an implementation timeframe. The feedback on the implementation identified challenges, changes the participants wanted to see happen at their ECD centres, their roles as leaders in the community and areas where knowledge of ECD needed expansion. Local facilitators also started using WhatsApp to assist in logistics of onsite workshop planning.

Principals were disheartened by the non-attendance of learners and loss of income brought about by the pandemic. Three ECD centres considered closing but remained open because of the support and encouragement they received from continual online and onsite support.

The challenges experienced mostly were language barriers. Two out of the 10 local facilitators needed translation of the podcasts used. Two of the 14 participants did not have access to a smartphone and 3 needed help with translating the workshop material. Poor network connection often experienced with MTN networks and bad weather. The Project Facilitators were concerned that data affordability would be a challenge for the participants. The quantity of feedback received on posts was very important to participants. They were not happy if there were no responses to their postings. The project facilitators made sure to post supporting feedback on every posting, not only to support participants, but to demonstrate to local facilitators how to offer support on WhatsApp platforms in the above-mentioned environment.

We attempted to address the language barrier and no access to smartphones through two participants sharing a smartphone using the phone's loudspeaker (COVID-19 regulations upheld). Translation of and

access to content took place successfully this way, a local facilitator would follow up with participants if the practice seemed unsatisfactory such as happened with 2 of the 14 principals. The network connection challenges were surmounted through, either contacting at a later stage or using the voice note feature on WhatsApp and dividing groups into smaller groups. The 10 local facilitators and Principals received R29 for each WhatsApp session to attend the online training and for the facilitators to implement afterwards with the participants they were supporting. Random and sporadic non-attendance was followed up with voice notes, a phone call or a visit from either project or local facilitators.

Significance of the study:

The use of WhatsApp was promising in that the participants enjoyed and welcomed the contact and learning and very few challenges in navigating the app were experienced. The WhatsApp groups that were created gave agency to participants in sharing their implementation of ideas and learning, confidence to ask questions and suggest ideas. A shift from a no voice to a more unified voice in the sector is evident. This is imperative for the advocacy of the sector's rights and mission. Participants felt that they are part of a greater community that will support them through the inevitable challenges that the pandemic has surfaced.

Easy access to a wider variety of information sources, podcasts, info-bytes, YouTube videos and the pedagogical content that the project facilitators posted, were some of the advantages that using WhatsApp presented. Small group conversations via the app made communication possible during non-face-to-face time. This type of engagement moved the participants from a place of competing with one another to one of collaboration. In terms of the 4th Industrial Revolution, the participants have grown in confidence and are beginning to realise that being part of a semi-rural and peri-urban community does not mean that technology is inaccessible. The implications for the sector are therefore considerable. Making use of an existing resource is generally a good starting point. In this case that resource was the fact that the participant had access to WhatsApp and were already familiar with it. Building on existing knowledge and working collaboratively as suggested by Vygotsky (1978) as effective ways of learning, enabled a shift in mind-set to occur. It could therefore be argued that whilst the pandemic has had many negative consequences it has brought forth a more conscious engagement with technology and with that, the ability to improve the quality of teaching and learning in this project. It should be noted that we are by no means suggesting that WhatsApp can replace the value of face to face engagement, but it does have a role to play in extending learning between contact sessions. In this way it represents promising practice.

For more information, visit: www.africaaplus.org.za

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Promising Practice:
Addressing Linguistic Inequities in Grade R

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The problem:

Context: While the South African Language in Education Policy (LiEP) articulates the need to maintain the learner's first language or mother tongue, particularly in the early years of schooling (DoE, 1997), two decades have passed, and still linguistic inequities exist in Grade R. From birth, infants are introduced to their mother tongue and then many children are expected to abruptly switch to a 'foreign' language in Grade R in schools where the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) is different to their mother tongue. This poses a challenge to the child to adjust and the teacher to accommodate a diverse array of cultures and linguistics in the same context. Schools that accommodate children of different languages are bound to experience difficulties in communicating and understanding for both the teacher and child (Shayne, 2020). While teachers grow tired and face personal challenges (Du Plessis & Louw, 2008), and consider less stressful professions, children are confused and may commonly grow to dislike school.

Problem: Linguistics embodies identity and power (Saneka & De Witt, 2019), and imposing a 'foreign' or additional (i.e. non-mother tongue) language on children deprives them of their cultural identities. Learning a foreign language is difficult and children commonly do not have the same linguistic competencies (Shayne, 2020). My experience as a primary school teacher allowed me to understand the implications of imposing a 'foreign' language on children, particularly in the early years. Often 5-year-olds would wander around the school if their transport left them. Since they did not understand English, they could not respond meaningfully to me and it became difficult to assist them. The children would

speak in their mother tongue and cry, out of fear and confusion.

Causes of the problem: The LoLT in Grade R in some schools may be different to the child's first language or mother tongue. The state is obligated to ensure children learn in the language of their choice (DBE, 2010). However, the Grade R context is not geared to accommodate 11 languages nor respect the linguistic diversity of all Grade R children. Although policies (DBE, 2011; 2014; DoE, 2001) enforce teachers' responsibility to respond to the individual needs of children, teachers' inability to speak all official languages poses a barrier.

The aim:

The aim of this literature review is to highlight some promising practices to inspire thoughtful action and change to address the challenges associated with linguistic inequities in Grade R.

What was found:

Addressing linguistic inequities in Grade R: A brief review of the literature suggests how linguistic diversity can be addressed in Grade R. Martinez (2018) posits that teachers relate better to children's needs when they draw up a language profile and learn about their cultures and stick to consistent routines to help children know what to do and when. Magruder, Hayslip, Espinosa, and Matera (2013) emphasize that weaving cultures with learning activities such as singing rhymes in all languages, colour coding language areas, and including cultural attire and artifacts from each child's background in the imaginative play and art area helps to establish responsive learning spaces. A study by Saneka and De Witt (2019) noted that by being observant of hand gestures and facial expressions, teachers could establish the way a child was feeling without having to communicate verbally. Other forms of effective expression included speaking to persona dolls, drawing to show their preferences, communicating in their preferred language during play activities, and a combination of the Vygotskian socio-cultural theory in practice helped to influence children's interactions and created a more conducive learning environment (Saneka & De Witt, 2019). Teachers in the United States of America make use of pictures and objects to facilitate understanding (Coulombe & Márquez, 2020). Pairing English and non-English speaking children to buddy-teach as they spoke and played during play-based activities encouraged involvement and communication, and gave rise to inclusive play opportunities (Okal, 2014; Sambo, 2018).

Recommendations:

Teachers should use gestures, pictures, and objects to enable communication with children. To bridge the linguistic gap of Grade R children, the DBE should introduce language experts into schools. The DBE should employ assistant teachers to serve as interpreters to cover the official languages and rotate them among Grade R classes. Provide electronic learning devices to children containing basic instructions, nouns, and verbs (with pictures) in English and in the other 10 official languages which the teacher can set to English and select the learner's mother tongue to encourage the linguistic acquisition, individually or in groups. This will also benefit the teacher to cope better.

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Sub-theme Two:
Initial and Continuing
Professional Development

Research Reporting:

Grade R Teacher Voices from a Changing Landscape

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The problem:

In the context of increased advocacy for the provision of quality learning opportunities in the Early Childhood (ECD) sector, and amidst positive increases in enrolment for Grade R nationally, this study looked at the positioning of those working in Grade R, as they experience both policy related shifts and the physical move from ECD to the formal schooling sector. Specifically, insights were offered regarding the Grade R teacher's own voices as they navigated a changing landscape of practice and negotiated the mixed identity messages offered by policy and manifest in schooling practices. These voices emerged from the narrative expression of their identities in interviews. Despite acknowledgement that the ECD sector needs to be professionalized (Feza, 2014) and that Grade R teachers are "the centerpiece of educational change" (Clasquin-Johnson, 2016, p.3), this sector continues to face challenges. Teachers face job vulnerability, inconsistent remuneration, confusion regarding their roles and responsibilities, and lack of relevant and specialised training. This has resulted in a low retention rate of qualified and experienced teachers in this grade.

The aim:

The aim of this study was to share the voices of teachers in relation to their navigation of the policy and contextual changes in their field of ECD. The data emerged from exploring Grade R teacher institutional identity through a series of interviews conducted with 19 Grade R teachers participating in a Professional Development (PD) program (Long, 2021), and analysis of Grade R teacher institutional

identity as prescribed in select policy documents. The study also sought to address the research gap of an under-representation of identity research in early childhood teacher education in the South African context.

How the topic was researched:

The study was guided by a sociocultural perspective and drew on three key sociocultural theorists whose work provided complementary perspectives on teacher identity. Sfard and Prusak's (2005) operationalisation of identity as narratives was used to define the unit of analysis for the study (i.e. identities as stories). Gee's (2000) definition and conceptualization of institutional identity was supplemented with Wenger-Trayner, Fenton-O'Creevy, Hutchinson, Kubiak, & Wenger-Trayner's (2015) notion of identity as journeying across landscapes of practice. This complementary framing allowed for focused and detailed analysis of policy documents and Grade R teacher identity stories. The methodological approach of the study involved a qualitative approach, drawing on grounded theory analytical techniques to closely examine policy documents and teacher generated data gathered through interviews and questionnaires.

What was found:

Findings from the policy analysis pointed to mixed messages moving across a spectrum of descriptors from the not yet qualified 'mothers' and 'caregivers' to qualified 'specialised' educators. These descriptors have implications for the differentiated roles and responsibilities (institutional identity) of Grade R teachers. The findings from teacher identity narratives highlighted tension in the navigation of the policy promoted institutional identities. Teacher narratives pointed to vastly contrasting experiences of teachers with specialised and qualified institutional teacher identities to those with not yet qualified institutional identities. For the former, there were high levels of confidence in their job security and in terms of recognition received from others. For the latter, however, there was vulnerability in terms of the stability of their jobs and remuneration as well as low levels of recognition from others.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy:

The findings of the study have implications for both policy and practice, and highlight the need to create and disseminate a coherent and consistent policy message for Grade R teachers. The coherent and consistent policy message should take the form of: providing accessible and affordable further education opportunities for the un/underqualified teachers, and provide professional development opportunities which acknowledge and enhance the specialised nature of Grade R. Grade R specific policies should be reviewed for consistency in messaging and these must be shared across the sectors and to all stakeholders; and appropriate remuneration and job security needs to be offered to those working in Grade R.

Reference to full publication:

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Research Reporting:

Supporting Home-based Daycare to Stimulate the Holistic Development of Children from Birth to Two Years

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The problem:

The first 1000 days of life, entails the period between conception and two years of age. This period is crucially important in a child's development, yet a significant number of children in South Africa receive daily care outside their home environment at home-based daycare centres. The caregivers at these home-based daycare centres not only lack the skills and resources to provide quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) but also need information about the policies that inform quality daycare (Biersteker, 2010). When the care, input and support do not promote child development during this critical period, it is very difficult and expensive to support children to catch up later.

The aim:

The research project aimed to support caregivers at home-based daycare centres to stimulate the holistic development of children from birth to two years.

How the topic was researched:

A participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) design (Wood, 2020) was used to generate qualitative data. Observations and informative discussions under three processes outlined in Ghaye's et al. (2008) reflective learning theory were used. These processes were as follows: the appreciative gaze; the reframed lived experience and moving forward into the goal. The study took place over 3 months in a rural community. There were four participants, namely: two lecturers from a higher educational

institute and two caregivers working at the daycare centre. The two caregivers expressed their need to learn more about the stimulation of the holistic development of children in their care.

What was found:

We followed Ghaye's et al. (2008) reflective-learning theory to analyse data and three themes, linked to the processes, emerged:

Theme One: Collaboration to determine goals and initiate change

Process 1 – View their lived experience with an appreciative gaze (Ghaye's et al., 2008)

- Collaboratively transformed the home-based care context into a stimulating environment.
- Collaboratively focused on the efforts to improve the home-based centre.
- Identified the children's strengths as talents to stimulate their holistic development.
- The motivation of all participants to "turn direction" and initiate change.

Theme two: Change in thoughts and actions

Process 2 - Reframe their lived experience with an open mind and reflective approach (Ghaye's et al., 2008)

- Collaboratively identified what is already known, and sought new insight through positive productive thinking.
- Implementation of identified actions to improve the holistic development of the children at the daycare centres.
- Collaborative critical reflection on implemented changes to ensure improved actions and future positive productive thinking.

Theme three: Future vision and sustainability

Process 3 - Move forward into the goal (Ghaye's et al., 2008)

- The participants appreciated their current context and situation and reframed their lived experiences.
- The response of the participants aligned with moving forward into the goal of process 3. The three processes gave the practitioners the ability to bounce back from a difficult situation, develop their agency in dealing with uncertainties that accompanied new ventures, crises, or critique and exhibit resilience.
- The two lecturers also moved forward with their goal since the community-based research (CBR) allowed them to reflect on their understanding of the research context that can be employed in teaching and learning.

What do the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy:

It is imperative for caregivers and home-based daycare centres to have knowledge and skills to respond to the holistic development of children from birth to two years. Such knowledge and skills will enable the children to reach age-appropriate milestones and prevent learning barriers. The circumstances at rural daycare facilities, similar to the context in which this research study was conducted, are alarming (Madiba, Chelule, & Mokgatle, 2019; Ledwaba et al., 2019). Children in rural areas are deprived of

stimulating activities to ensure their individual developmental potential. They tend to fall behind and the learning and development gap tends to widen more (Walker et al., 2019). The unfilled promise of "a child's best interest are of paramount importance in every matter" (Department of Education, 2001, p. 17) constitutes a serious challenge of dependency, exclusion and ill-health in society (Department of Social Development, 2014). For this reason, ECD services have been called "a powerful equaliser" (Irwin, Siddiqi & Hertzman, 2007).

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Research Reporting:

Early Childhood Care and Education Practitioner's Perceptions of their Professional Identity in Selected Early Childhood Development Facilities in Cape Town, South Africa By Eltena Dirks-Rethman

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The introduction:

Notwithstanding the South African government's effort and emphasis placed on increasing the focus on professionalising the ECCE profession and considering the critical role of the ECCE practitioner (UNICEF, 2017) equally critical it is that highly trained ECCE practitioners are established with a much clearer path of certainty of their professional identity. ECCE practitioner needs more than just formal training – they require a mind shift and clearer sense of ownership with regards to their perceptions and status concerning their professional identity.

Causes of the problem:

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) practitioners working with young children in the birth to four age group have been labelled as child minders despite the advanced level of education that such practitioners have acquired. These erroneous perceptions influence the ways in which these ECCE practitioners' professional identities are constructed and in turn influences the way that they practice in teaching and care.

The aim:

The aim of the study is to explore the perceptions ECCE practitioners, working in marginalised ECCE centres in the Western Cape, have of their professional identities and how these perceptions influence

and shape their views as professionals and their approaches to teaching and care.

How the topic was researched:
- The study took place in Capricorn, Western Cape, South Africa
- There were 4 participants who were chosen because they:
  » Had at least five years of ECCE teaching experience
  » Had access to professional ECCE practitioner development programmes
  » Previously participated in some professional development programme
  » Had, at least, a qualified level of education, which is a minimum level 4/5 ECCE practitioner qualificationor a National Diploma in ECD
  » Understood the community sub-culture and how they fit into the respective community as a professional
- Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and a journaling process.

What was found:
The findings of the study found that that ECCE practitioners" professional identities were shaped by their lived experiences and practices as they engaged with the ECCE context, parents, peers, children and the community. Importantly, parents perceived ECCE practitioners as just playing with, caring for and feeding children and with little recognition of them as real and professional ECCE practitioners engaging in meaningful teaching of young children. As such, the study found that some of the parents did not regard the ECCE practitioners as professionals. ECCE practitioners experienced a greater sense of professional self within the internal ECCE context as opposed to how they experienced a professional self in the external context, which highlighted that professional identities were stronger in the microsystem and there was a stronger interconnectedness between the peers in the internal context.

This interconnectedness relates to how the ECCE practitioners' identities were not shaped individually but were also shaped by the dialectical relationship they held with their peers which is an important contributor to development in a Vygotskian, Wenger and a Bronfenbrenner perspective. The support received from their peers, sharing of ideas and knowledge paved the way for the ECCE practitioners to learn and support one another, which also shaped their professional identities. The study also found that experiences with contextual realities such as gang violence, shootings and parent perceptions shaped ECCE practitioners' professional identities. A Vygotskian perspective argues on the importance of individuals as humans who shape and are shaped by their living conditions. It could be argued that whilst these acts of violence might have shaped the ECCE practitioners' identity in a negative way, the ECCE practitioners showed a high level of resilience and bravery and attempted to keeping the activities functional at the ECCE centre and only halting their activities by protestors and gangsters when instructed to do so. This had to be done in order to protect themselves and the children.

A notable finding in this study showed how the ECCE practitioners saw themselves as learning with and from the children and parents. In learning with and from the children, the ECCE practitioners showed how they were not confined to authoritative ways of being where only the practitioners hold all the

power and are dismissive of learning from children. The ECCE practitioners valued children as active beings and agents who can teach adults and thus the ECCE practitioners showed a willingness of co-constructing knowledge with the children when, for example, a new language had to be learnt.

Respecting the children's cultural backgrounds, the ECCE practitioners created the space for parents to share their cultural practices with them and this was highly respected and valued by the ECCE practitioner.

Whilst the study showed that the ECCE practitioners felt like they did not belong to any formal community of practice, the community of practice that developed in the ECCE context, although not realised by the ECCE practitioners, was a strong force which helped strengthen their teaching and learning with one another. The findings above highlight that professional identities are not constructed solely by the individual but are constructed and possibly re-constructed through the lived experiences and practices with other individuals within a social context. Professional identity is therefore socially constituted and relational to the experiences and practices as was indicated in this study. These findings have important implications for strengthening professional identities in ECCE.

What the findings mean for the new directions in ECCE practice and/policy:
This study draws attention to the urgent need to address more than the professionalization but also the professional identity of ECCE practitioners as part of their development as outlined in the National Integrated Policy and the Human Resource Strategy (Department of Labour, 2020). Whilst there has been important policy moves to professionalise the sector, the findings of this study calls for how policy and research needs to include the voices and contributions of ECCE practitioners especially those working in high risks, marginalised communities.

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Promising Practice:
Certificate in Early Childhood Development (ECD)

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The problem:

The present government, as reflected in the White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education (2001; SONA, 2019, 2020) has emphatically impressed the importance of the education of young children by pointing out that the care and development of young children must be the foundation of social relations and the starting point of human resource development strategies from community to national levels. The government acknowledges the importance of Early Childhood Development (ECD) as an essential cornerstone for later and life-long learning.

The problem under study arises from a problem identified in the field and the emergence of numerous preschool institutions in communities. Many young children now spend part of their days in preschool institutions. Even those children who have child minders at home, like grandparents, are taken to preschools. Some of these preschools are privately owned and some are state-aided. Some have formal infrastructure put in place to cater for early childhood care and education (ECCE) activities and purposes, wherein you will find buildings set specifically for preschool purposes; some in churches, some in garages, or any available building or set up. The preschool years are a period of great growth and development changes. The author observed that the education offered at these centres is varied because some of the owners started the work out of interest, with no knowledge or formal training, some were and are trained by unregulated and illegal institutions.

Poverty and unemployment are the key cause of this problem. The lack of quality and formal educational training which include theory and the practical components of ECCE, also add to the problem. Due to poverty and unemployment, access to regulated and formal ECCE training programmes for these ECCE practitioners are a critical stumbling block.

The aim:

The aim of this certificate programme will be to develop trained practitioners and caregivers in ECCE. The programme aims to provide theoretical, philosophical, historical, and practical learning experiences. A key characteristic of a student completing the programme will be acquiring legitimate knowledge and professional abilities to provide the care and education of infants, toddlers, and young children in early childhood settings.

What was done:

The programme is taking place in the University of Venda under the University of Venda Centre for Continuing Education (UCCE), Limpopo Province, South Africa. Since being flighted, many people have showed interest in the programme and as such a waiting list exists for this programme. There has been three (3) groups thus far that have successfully completed the programme, each with 100 participants. Currently, Group four (4) is busy with their Teaching Practice in the field, whilst Groups 5 and 6 are in their first semester.

The Programme Consists of the Following: A One-year certificate was designed, and the mode of delivery is contact sessions. The programme structure is divided into two parts; Semester 1 and Semester 2. Semester 1 consists of six (6) modules with 64 credits. Semester 2 consist of six (6) modules with 56 credits. The total number of credits for the programme is 120. During their second semester students are required to do teaching practice at their respective crèches and ECCE centres.

What was found:

The training helps to equip Early Childhood practitioners and caregivers with theoretical and practical knowledge to stimulate early learning and development. Given that ECCE is traditionally female dominated, we have found quite an uptake of males interested in the programme.

A key challenge experienced on this programme is that we have many applicants who were interested in the programme but who were not practitioners in the ECCE field, such as incumbents working in other industries without flexible times during weekdays. These incumbents hailed from industries such as the hospitality, retail, and even micro enterprises. We attempted to address the availability issue by offering the lectures during weekends and holidays with each group over a weekend/holiday limited to 100 students split up in 50 participants per class to ensure quality in delivery and quality facilitator/ student ratio.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/ or policy:

The programme and how it is delivered, and the diverse demographics of the participants mean

legitimising ECCE education and creating access to those interested in becoming ECCE practitioners. Everyone benefits when there are more legitimate ECCE practitioners in communities. The notion that ECCE practitioners are only those enrolled fulltime at an institution of higher learning could not be further from the truth and as such the policy needs to cater for creating initiatives and platforms (digital and virtual) that can make accessing legitimate and formal ECCE education easier.

For future study, much more research and training is needed in the form of continuous professional development. Workshops need to be conducted timeously. A diploma in ECCE is necessary to keep practitioners and caregivers updated. Research must be conducted on how to support practitioners and caregivers especially in rural areas. ECCE is a business; we need to help the practitioners and caregivers who are in diverse settings, such as in their garages and churches, to teach children well so as to lay a strong foundation. Ongoing professional development can lead to higher quality ECCE services and outcomes.

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Promising Practice:

Stepping up from the PIECCE Project, The Birth of a New Collaboration for a Capacity Building, Access and Support Programme

By Rebecca Wakeford

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The problem:

The ECD ecosystem is guided by the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (2015). Chapter 10 of the policy clearly provides for the responsibility of human resources development of ECD practitioners in sufficient numbers and with sufficient skills to implement the policy. There is no comprehensive or inclusive strategy in KZN nor nationally to meet the human resource gaps identified. To address resource gaps and professionalize the ECD workforce, ECD Practitioners with Further Education and Training Certificate ECD Level 4, need support to progress through the National Qualifications Framework, guided by the Policy on Minimum Requirements Leading to Qualifications in Higher Education for Early Childhood Development Educators (Department of Higher Education and Training 2017). Non-traditional, non-academic, working students will need to gain access to, and be retained in qualifications that are distance and e-learning based. The problem also required harmonization of learning pathways between RTO's, the traditional providers for the FETC ECD Level 4 and HEIs, for higher education qualifications.

The aim

The Sivulithuba Programme aims: to develop autonomous, independent, reflective, critical and creative ECCE students and teachers, who can engage in distance and online learning, to further their qualifications, strengthen, expand and enhance the quality of the ECD workforce; to build a collaborative partnership between RTO's and HEI's; to gather evidence and research on the KZN ECD workforce

development in context; to develop a curriculum framework and a delivery methodology that supports capacity building for e-learning readiness and competencies using contextual ECD knowledge, in order for students to be supported in accessing the Diploma in ECCE at NQF Level 6.

What was done

The collaborative partnership between UNISA initially (and currently North West University), Training and Resources in Early Education (TREE) and Midlands Community College has officially been named Sivulithuba, meaning "creating opportunities". Significant engagements have taken place between Sivulithuba and stakeholders within the ECD sector. Research undertaken by the partnership, provided a baseline from which to address ECD training needs across the province. In summary the research found that the ECD sector has experienced rapid changes due to the COVID 19-pandemic, new policies and the function shift from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Basic Education. Therefore, the gaps in human resource development need to be addressed in order to ensure universal coverage of ECD services before formal schooling. There is a shortfall of 110 000 centre and non-centre based practitioners and current ECD practitioners that are underqualified or unqualified, who all need training. An accessible, articulated, professional learning pathway allowing horizontal and vertical movement needs to be realized for the ECD sector workforce, to encourage practitioners to stay within the ECCE space (Birth – 4 years), from RTO's to HEI's qualifications. A skilled workforce of critical thinking professionals is required to work within complexities and mixed ECD delivery models, with continuous professional development, mentoring and coaching support. ECD Practitioners who are better equipped for online and academic studies can move the sector from a certificate led sector to a diploma led sector. RPL options for admission requirements, should be rigorously negotiated with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

A curriculum is being developed around a blended approach to learning; distance, online and face to face, all taking place on a digital learning platform. The framework has been designed to develop e-learning readiness with specific competencies integrated throughout the ECCE knowledge areas. The course content is designed for development of intentional teachers, who are critical thinkers, reflective and contextually responsive for better child outcomes. The curriculum content, makes use of South African open educational resources, which are contextually relevant, in order to build capacity around ECCE knowledge areas; The Essential Package, The First 1000 Days, The National Curriculum Framework (Children Birth to Four Years), Play-Based Learning, Inclusion and Being and Becoming a Professional. Modules covering E-Learning Readiness and The Thinking Teacher are supported throughout the knowledge areas, with the development of integrated competencies. These competencies have been aligned to the competencies for a changing world, envisaged as part of the skills required for the 21st century. Competencies include: e-Learning Competencies – ICT and digital information; academic literacies – reading for meaning, numeracy; skills, attitudes and competencies for lifelong learning – including critical thinking, creativity and collaboration; reflection, learning skills, citizenship, self-knowledge and self-regulation.

What was found

RTO's and HEIs can collaborate well. Students who have completed their qualification FETC Level 4 want to continue on a learning pathway. Despite policy, RPL remains at the discretion of the HEI's and a pilot programme is needed to provide an evidence based approach to supporting access for Level 4's.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy

KZN has opportunities for workforce development and integration of this into the provincial human resource strategy, because the outputs of the pilot programme will provide an important contribution to the skills development sector. The students who successfully complete this course will have shown capacity for the development of 21st century skills, foundational literacies and competencies, as well as character qualities, which will cement the professionalization of the sector and the development of a thinking workforce. The changes can open up additional possibilities for developing the capacity of underqualified or unqualified ECD Practitioners. We can use the evidence to support the advocacy of the programme in the process of RPL, as well as to strengthen opportunities for training across a remote and diverse landscape that is the KZN ECD sector. Beyond this, the opportunity to scale up a programme of this nature by providing further opportunities for partnership and collaboration is wide ranging.

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Promising Practice:

ECD Practitioners' Views and Experiences of Being Mentored and Taught How to Make and Use Handmade Resources as Constructivist Tools to Promote Children's Holistic Development By Julie Hay

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The problem:

The Early Childhood Development (ECD) sector in South Africa has been profoundly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, causing many of the existing cracks in the system to be highlighted and, according to Atmore, Ashley-Cooper, & van Niekerk (2021), this sector is under severe threat.

Despite the National Development Plan 2013 and the Medium-Term Strategic Framework 2014 – 2019 (2009) identifying ECD as a priority, Ashley-Cooper (2021: 27) believes that the South African government's failure to reduce inequality and transform ECD for all its youngest citizens has resulted in a pervasive, long-term "silent tragedy". To boost this sector and to achieve its commitment to inclusive, rights-based, and sustainable development, Martin (2021) says that the country needs to prioritise and invest in quality ECD, which Shonkoff (2010) has identified as the most cost-effective way to reduce inequality, and to increase citizens' economic and social capital.

Despite government efforts to register ECD centres, including the work done in 2020 by the Nelson Mandela Foundation through the Vangasali program, numerous community-based centres are still not registered or regulated, according to Statistics South Africa (2018). De Witt and Lessing (2017) agreed that a lack of resources is often a problem in implementing a constructivist approach to learning. Thus many of the over 5,9 million children from birth to four do not have access to quality Early Childhood

Care and Education (ECCE) centres, with well-trained staff and stimulation programmes at a time when Navarro-Cruz & Luschei (2018) have identified that their brains are developing the foundations upon which further learning is built. As a result, many vulnerable children in South Africa will be less likely to escape the poverty trap.

King (2021: 11) states that approximately 100 ECD Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) have, for the past 40 years, been the major providers of ECD training in South Africa. She mentions the instrumental role these NPOs have played, both in addressing the issue of scale, and for widening access to quality ECCE for young children, especially in poor and vulnerable communities, which Biersteker, Dawes, Hendricks and Tredoux (2016) have identified as more likely to receive poorer-quality programs.

One of these NPOs, Singakwenza, recognised that many practitioners in community sites were unable to access formal training, regular guidance and age-appropriate learning materials due to financial limitations, and sought to address these problems at the most grassroots centres.

The aim:
Singakwenza believes that focusing on the education of the practitioners, and improving their ability to implement their learning through regular mentoring support, will have the biggest impact on the learning outcomes of young children. It therefore uses its donor funding to provide a two-year mentorship training model to prepare un- and under-qualified practitioners in informal crèches in KwaZulu-Natal to implement a high-quality, contextually appropriate stimulation programme in their practice. Singakwenza staff are trainers and mentors; and visit practitioners at their own sites on a weekly basis to teach, encourage, facilitate, and model effective practices and positive interaction with young children. They follow a skills-based program, helping the practitioners to understand why each child needs to develop different skills during the preschool years, and how each activity gives new opportunities for holistic development. The availability of numerous resources to provide a wide variety of learning experiences is very important but often costly, so Singakwenza teaches practitioners how to make and maintain educational resources using free, locally available household packaging. Singakwenza strongly believes that the cost of a toy does not increase its educational value. They have been operating for the past 11 years and are currently working with 80 practitioners in 22 crèches.

The aim of this study is to explore the Singakwenza-trained practitioners' views and experiences of being mentored and taught how to make and use handmade resources as constructivist tools to promote children's holistic development.

What was done:
• A qualitative approach is being used.
• The study is taking place in KwaZulu-Natal.
• There are 10 participants.

The intervention consists of the following:

This qualitative interpretivist case study will include aspects of the Mmogo and Ubuntu methodologies, using multiple data-collection methods (interviews, observations, practitioner reflections, focus groups, model making) to collect data from ten practitioners. These practitioners will be purposively sampled from under-resourced crèches in KwaZulu-Natal where Singakwenza has been working, to gain insight into their experiences of making, applying, and maintaining these resources in their practice.

Thematic inductive data-analysis will be applied to identify the participants' multiple realities regarding their training; and the results of the study will be communicated in a master's dissertation and disseminated further by means of publications and conference presentations.

What was found:

As this study is still in progress, its findings have not yet been concluded but the Singakwenza-trained practitioners' views and experiences may contribute to knowledge about the use and types of handmade resources that can be used as tools to promote children's active learning and holistic development; and how practitioners can be prepared and supported to make, use, and maintain these locally made resources, especially in, but not restricted to, resource-poor communities.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy

The study may contribute to ECCE training practice (offered by Non Profit Organisations, Community Based Organisations and Higher Education Institutions) on how a mentorship model can be used to prepare and support ECCE practitioners to implement a contextually appropriate quality stimulation program, including using educational resources made from locally available materials in their own contexts.

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Sub-theme Three:
Transformative Pedagogy

Research Reporting:

Practitioner Perceptions of Play as a Pedagogy for Children's Mathematical Development

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The problem:

The study explored practitioner perceptions of play as a pedagogy for mathematical development in rural Early Childhood Development centres of Oliver Reginald Tambo in Eastern Cape Province. Children's ability to think and express themselves mathematically are regarded as one of the most important components in a child's academic achievement as well as their potential for future professional careers. Furthermore, play is recognized as a fundamental right for young children in South African Legislation since it is seen to be integral to children's learning, development, and well-being. DBE (2015) in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) regards play as the cornerstone of all learning, including mathematics, for young children. The NCF explains how babies, toddlers, and young children learn while playing, as well as instructions and activities for parents to ensure that children learn via play.

Wood (2013) argues that play is almost limitless in its potential to enhance learning, however, the practitioner and his or her interpretation of the curriculum play a big role in realizing that potential. Although much has been written on the role of play in learning and teaching, less has been said about practitioners' perspectives on play as pedagogy for mathematics development, particularly in rural areas. Hence, in the National Early Learning Standards (2009), the emphasis is placed on programmes that are play-based with different types and forms of play. Further, policies in South Africa regard play as an important technique for learning especially in ECD. However, there are no guidelines as to how practitioners should be teaching mathematics using play as a pedagogy for learning.

The aim:

The aim of the study was to explore practitioner perceptions of play as a pedagogy for children's mathematical development.

How the topic was researched:

The study used qualitative research approach and was situated in an interpretivist paradigm. Multiple case study design was adopted in which the researcher collected multiple views of the participants concerning the phenomenon of the study (Creswell, 2018). Five (05) practitioners from the ECD centres of OR Tambo Inland District were purposefully selected as information rich participants. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Additionally, during data collection, the researcher respected the autonomy of the ECD centres involved, the authority of the departments, as well as the authority of the centre managers of the respective ECD centres. The study used face-to-face interviews and an interview guide was used. Furthermore, probes were made for participants to provide further information.

What was found:

Young children develop and learn about their world (e.g., people, nature, objects) by interacting with others, manipulating, and examining objects with their five senses (Tadesse, 2016). However, the study's findings reveal that, due to a lack of space and resources, the OR Tambo District practitioners experience difficulty in constructing indoor and outdoor play areas. The results showed that practitioners at OR Tambo Inland District ECD centres saw outdoor play as a way of finding time of doing their own things while children played aimlessly. Mofokeng (2018) affirms that professional early childhood practitioners, who are aware of and comprehend developmental theories of play, are better prepared to use play as a context for instruction and assessment. Nonetheless, the findings of the study revealed that infusing play in mathematics teaching was a huge problem for the OR Tambo Inland District practitioners. The environments in which the ECDs were located or operated from were not up to standard and there was little space for the creation of both indoor and outdoor learning environments. However, to ensure effective learning at ECD centres, there needs to be a suitable indoor and outdoor learning environments and training of practitioners on how to assist children utilise these environments (Labuschagne, 2015). In addition, the lack of sufficient outdoor and indoor learning areas at the centres had a detrimental effect on mathematics learning. Moreover, practitioners lack knowledge of play theories and planning procedures were teacher-directed. As a result, practitioners used traditional methods of teaching mathematics, leaving them unsure of what they were doing.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE and/or policy:

The National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (2015) states that the Government of the Republic of South Africa has prioritised ECD within its National Development Plan 2030: Our Future – make it work. Therefore, practitioners, according to the DBE (2015), make judgments based on a specialized body of knowledge, continue to learn throughout their careers, and are committed to providing high-quality services to children. Nevertheless, study's findings show that practitioners in the centres of OR Tambo Inland District lacked sufficient training in early mathematics content and

pedagogy, which is a necessity for developing mathematics in children to achieve the NDP 2030's goals. Additionally, the findings of the study showed that there was a need for intense intervention by the Department of Education, striking collaboration with other sister departments and NGOs, on improving the quality of children's mathematics learning especially in OR Tambo Inland District. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher is of the opinion that the Department of Education should intervene by using properly qualified practitioners in the content and pedagogy of early mathematics to cater for the NDP 2030 in terms of quality and stability for the current society. Further research on early mathematics knowledge of play and play theories practitioners should possess in developing mathematics is suggested to equip practitioners with relevant knowledge and understanding of little children.

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Research Reporting:

Practitioners' Perceptions and Understanding of the Approaches Underpinning Curriculum and Pedagogy in an Early Childhood Classroom

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The problem:

The gazetting of the National Curriculum Framework (0-4 years) in December 2015 gave rise to questions about intended learning outcomes, the child profile, the development of executive functioning and approaches that could guide the implementation of the framework most effectively. In effort to start answering this from a Quality Council perspective, this study aimed at providing answers to teaching and learning approaches that best could assist in the implementation of the NCF.

The aim:

The aims of this study was to understand the perceptions, experiences and influence of the environment on the early learning practice of practitioners and managers of centres implementing Waldorf, Montessori, Reggio Emilia and 'Ordinary' approaches. This was intended to provide pointers to assist with effective implementation of the NCF.

How the topic was researched:
- An empirical multi-case design was used.
- The study took place in 16 ECD centres in rural and urban locations in Limpopo, Eastern Cape, Gauteng and Western Cape, in South Africa.
- There were 29 practitioners and 17 principals implementing the different approaches chosen

purposively to provide a spread across the provinces.

- Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with practitioners and principals at the centres and classroom observations.
- Qualitative and quantitative content analysis was conducted as it allowed for comparison of staff qualifications and professional support and development; curriculum understanding and content; child and teacher's role and learning goals; special needs; teaching and learning practices; parent and community collaboration; and contextual challenges.

What was found:

Staff experience, qualifications and professional development: All ECD principals and most practitioners in the sample had an ECD qualification. Opportunities for external mentoring and professional development were strong for Waldorf, Montessori and Reggio Emilia schools but education related support for 'ordinary' schools was limited.

Practitioner understanding of the approach that informs their practice:
- Familiarity with the NCF and NELDS was limited across all the curricula and there had been little training in this regard.
- Few principals articulated a clear policy regarding the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) and English instruction was most common.
- 'Ordinary' staff were less able to articulate the philosophy underlying their approach than the other approaches, suggesting that training and support does not focus on underpinning ECD theory and assisting them to develop a position.
- While all participants talked about learning through play, there appeared to be little understanding of the play continuum.

Practitioner perceptions of their role and that of the child: different approaches prioritise different roles for teacher and child based on their understandings of how children learn, but 'ordinary' practitioners were unspecific about their role or desired outcomes. Individualized learning informed by structured assessment was less often referred to in ordinary schools which also lacked specialist support to assist children with special needs.

Practitioner understandings of school readiness: All practitioners identified that children need holistic development for school with different capabilities emphasised according to the approach in use.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy:

The findings highlight the strengths and gaps of the different approaches in the light of current South African ECD related policies and best practice evidence base. Although this was a small sample, findings resonate with other local research and have implications for ECCE teacher training and highlights priority areas for continuing professional development. Learnings with implications for policy implementation include the need to put in place:

- the continuous quality improvement and support system envisaged in the NIECD Policy;

- a standard NCF formative assessment package;
- a review of language of learning and teaching and production of practice guidelines;
- strengthening of training curricula and other provisions to support special needs/barriers to learning.

Reference to full publication:

Umalusi: Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education. (2021). Practitioners' Perceptions and Understanding of the Approaches Underpinning Curriculum and Pedagogy in an Early Childhood Classroom. Retrieved from: https://www.umalusi.org.za/documents/research-reports/

Research Reporting:

Mind the Gaps: Professional Perspectives of Technology-based Teaching and Learning in the Foundation Phase

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The problem:

As technology today is pervasive, this study seeks to examine how technological changes influence Foundation Phase learners, specifically the impact of technology on teaching and learning. Education in South Africa has to continually evolve to meet the goals and requirements of the Department of Education, and the specific learning outcomes in this century. Unlike previous generations, today's youth have all sorts of knowledge available at their fingertips as a result of ubiquitous technology. Because of this global technology boom, young children are now born into a 'wired' or 'connected' world comprising of the Internet, social media (such as Facebook and Twitter), instant messaging (such as WhatsApp) and digital equipment which is always available (Codrington & Grant-Marshall, 2011, p.86). It was thus important to examine the effect of these technological innovations on learning, in this case from the bird's eye perspective of provincial district officials in the Gauteng Department of Education.

The aim:

This aim of this study was to establish professional perspectives of technology-based teaching and learning (TBTL) in the Foundation Phase from the vantage point of two district officials from the Gauteng Department of Education.

How the topic was researched:

- Data were collected through qualitative case study methods such as interviews, opinion pieces and field notes from district officials servicing Foundation Phase schools, which were examined through the theoretical lens of the Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge model (Koehler & Mishra, 2008).
- The study took place in Gauteng with participants from the Gauteng Department of Education
- There were two participants who were chosen because these specialists in education were able to supply valuable information as they service a substantial number of Foundation Phase classes. They therefore could detail their experiences as well as provide an official view regarding Technology-based Teaching and Learning in the Foundation Phase, specifically the aspects that influenced young children's learning and their respective teacher's teaching.

What was found:

The findings of the study showed that in the arena of technology, and from the official viewpoint regarding TBTL in the Foundation Phase, disparities exist between those that have and use technology versus those that do not have and/or do not use technology. Moreover, the fractured nature of TBTL in the Foundation Phase was highlighted. Although some evidence of digital resources in the Foundation Phase was given, to what extent they are used and how they are used to achieve desirable educational outcomes still need to be further interrogated.

The strengths and weaknesses of TBTL were reviewed in the literature and came to the fore in empirical study so that a comprehensive overview could be achieved before looking at the situation of TBTL in South Africa. Regarding the barriers and limitations to TBTL, the findings concur with extant literature noting the fact that people learn, live and function with technology (Kruger, 2014) which is not the case in the South African school system. This is also the situation regarding the potential of TBTL, as the findings show that policy and practice are varied and fragmented, and the majority of teaching and learning in the South African Foundation Phase still takes place in the old traditional manner. Furthermore, delineating the parameters of 'TPACK', which involves the interrelation between technological and pedagogical content knowledge, is unsuitable in the South Africa context with findings in the literature, as there is little or no TBTL taking place in the majority of schools. Little to no TBTL is taking place because of the 'generational gap' between teachers and learners; disparities between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' in access to technology; the lack of integration between technological, pedagogical and content knowledge; and a lack of communication between the stakeholders who deal with teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase.

In the few cases where there is technology in certain schools, it forms a discord with either teaching or learning. Discipline disparity has resulted from a lack of training opportunities in TBTL for teachers, learners and other relevant Foundation Phase stakeholders. Communication is also seen as a barrier to TBTL in the Foundation Phase because various educational departments, institutions and individuals work in their respective silos for TBTL initiatives and do not collaborate in the sharing and exchanging of technology knowledge and ideas.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy:

As a result of the findings, the following recommendations are made to ensure successful TBTL in the Foundation Phase in the future:

Firstly, government should ensure a technology infrastructure in the Foundation Phase. Secondly, the Department of Basic Education should formulate a specific policy framework for TBTL in the Foundation Phase. Thirdly, teachers should be taught the necessary skills to enable them to learn about, use and embrace technology. Fourthly, Foundation Phase teachers need to incorporate technology into their teaching and learning preparation programmes so that they can change the way they teach and implement TBTL. In addition, the professional development of teachers must be attended to in this technological 21st century to upgrade their skills. Lastly, Foundation Phase learners need to be given access to the most appropriate content, and much of this content should be formed and supported by technology.

Reference to full publication:

Hannaway, D. (2019). Mind the gaps: Professional perspectives of technology-based teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase. South African Journal of Childhood Education, 9(1), a674. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v9i1.674

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Promising Practice:

iZinto: The Pedagogical Potential of Discarded Materials

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The problem:

Early Childhood Development (ECD) practitioners often lack access to quality learning resources, particularly in rural communities. There are multiple factors that contribute to the state of learning environments in these settings, but they generally all fall under the umbrella of the vast socio-economic disadvantages felt from the legacy of apartheid (Atmore, van Niekerk & Ashley-Cooper, 2012). Given these resource constraints, many ECD centres tend to rely on a combination of government support, support from external donors and agencies and local NPOs to provide them with basic learning materials. The donated materials mainly consist of traditional educational games, puzzles and LEGO blocks and some basic creative supplies. Whilst all these materials are very much appreciated they often require an adult to scaffold the learning and they do not lend themselves to open-ended play. A lack of engaging and creative educational resources means that young children in these ECD centres are often under-stimulated and left with little educational enrichment.

The aim:

An intervention was conducted with the aim to introduce a group of ECD practitioners to the potential and use of discarded materials (or what we call 'loose parts') in their learning and teaching practices. The intervention was piloted in early 2021 with 20 ECD practitioners working in Malungeni, a rural community in the Eastern Cape Province.

The intervention was facilitated by iZinto, working in partnership with Africa A Plus Schools. The latter is an NPO that enables teachers to provide children with quality early learning experiences no matter the context. The 'A Plus' stands for 'arts enriched' and uses the arts (drawing, painting, music, movement, drama, puppetry, clay, playdough) to create joyful learning experiences that nurture children's imagination, creativity and problem-solving skills while realizing the aims of the birth to 4 year National Curriculum Framework (NCF). iZinto, an emerging initiative, collects and curates discarded materials for creative repurposing in ECD centres and schools. Working in collaboration with practitioners through on-site dialogues and modelling, and interactive workshops, the work of iZinto is modelled on the work of the Remida Center in Reggio Emilia, Italy, that repurposes discarded items for creative use in schools and the community. It follows the work of Malaguzzi's "One Hundred Languages of Children" (Malaguzzi, 1996) along with Nicholson's 'Theory of Loose Parts' (Nicholson, 1972).

What was done:

In May 2021 a 4-day workshop was facilitated with the 20 ECD practitioners, followed by a series of on-site visits to their local ECD centres. The workshop focused on the potential of using loose, open-ended materials creatively in the classroom. These materials consisted of discarded, industrial materials (e.g. fabric cones, wooden floor boards, carpet samples, plastic piping cut-offs) and household recyclables (e.g. plastic bottle caps, cardboard espresso pods, plastic food trays, paper towel rolls).

During both the workshop and site visits, the ECD practitioners were able to explore how the use of loose materials could facilitate problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration and creativity with young children. They also reflected on how using this approach engages children in quality learning experiences that are aligned to the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) Grade R and the National Curriculum Framework for children birth to four years (NCF) curricula.

The iZinto and Africa A Plus facilitators were mindful of the importance of listening carefully to the voices of the workshop participants and worked with and alongside them as the workshop and site visits unfolded. The facilitators recorded the experiences of the 20 ECD practitioners using daily reflections sheets and facilitated a dialogue with the group at the end of each session. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants to use these shared reflections as part of an on-going action research project that is being facilitated by Africa A Plus and iZinto which will be published upon completion.

What was found:

In the reflective sessions, the ECD practitioners shared with the facilitators how surprised they were at their own creativity and how, in using found objects, they were able to express themselves and work collaboratively to create new learning opportunities for their children.

Some examples of the responses from the workshop participants were:
"I have learnt to give children opportunities to think."
"I learned to be creative, to make things on my own, like - to combine things that seem… to be nothing and make something."

"I will never look down at the resources like bottle tops; they are everywhere."

 "(I learnt) to involve the learners to do and solve the problems themselves."

Site visits to the ECD centres, revealed that many of the ECD practitioners used the styles of traditional teaching that they themselves experienced. For example, we viewed practitioners using rote learning such as having the children recite the days of the week or months. Children appeared to be given the same materials every day (such as Lego blocks), and colouring in of pre-drawn illustrations as the dominant art experience.

As part of the on-site intervention we modelled storytelling techniques using loose parts as well as showing how setting out materials in a creative way can stimulate children's curiosity that invites exploration and hands-on experiences. The learning that was taking place during these experiences (e.g. a child trying to balance a block) was also made explicit to the ECD practitioners to highlight how working with these materials can spark new forms of learning. As Daly and Beloglovsky (2020:22) note, play with loose materials "supports children's construction of conceptual knowledge as they manipulate and investigate the world around them".

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy:
Working with loose parts (open-ended materials) allows children to explore the "what if" questions by engaging in building and designing activities. By providing children with hands on experiences, they are able to develop problem-solving skills and exercise critical thinking. The open-ended qualities of loose parts allow children to recreate and represent their culture and home language in a variety of ways (Beloglovsky & Daly, 2018), and are thus culturally responsive. They encourage collaborative activities between children of different ages. The diverse quality of free and found objects, recyclables and overstock can be easily collected, curated and stored and then repurposed by ECD practitioners in a multitude of ways. A simple intervention like this can easily open up the possibilities of using loose parts so that they become part of everyday practice in ECD centres in our rural communities.

Loose parts also tick many boxes: they are freely accessible, support green and sustainable initiatives, and offer ECD practitioners a creative way of supporting 21st century skill-building and learning.

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Promising Practice:

'KnowHow' Early Learning and African Storybooks: Supporting Young Children to Transition to Grade One

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The problem:

Even when a pre-school year or years are universalised or made compulsory, there is a tendency for teachers at primary and pre-primary level to fall back on a style of teaching that promotes rote learning rather than understanding. There is often a disconnect between a pre-school year and Grade 1.

The aim:

To address this, the South African Institute for Distance Education (Saide) designed and developed the KnowHow Early Learning app for tablets and mobiles (funded by the Roger Federer Foundation). This is an offline, self-directed, multi-media, group-learning mobile course app. It can be downloaded from the iStore or GooglePlay store.

The aim is to build capacity of pre-primary practitioners and primary teachers, and to establish peer-to-peer learning habits to understand and apply key teaching methodologies. The focus of the course is not curriculum content or curriculum coverage for teaching young children, but rather exploring active and supportive methodologies, including play-based and inclusive pedagogies, to support the transition from pre-primary to Grade 1.

The main purpose of the course is to support pre-primary teachers to:
1. Offer children a quality early education that will result in a good start in Grade 1.

2. Build a team of teachers and parents/caregivers to support children in moving into Grade 1.
3. Monitor children's development towards school readiness and take relevant action.
4. Help teachers in the early grades to support children coming from pre-primary into Grade 1.

During the course practitioners and teachers will:

1. Review ideas about what school readiness means
2. Understand the importance of supporting every child in moving to Grade 1 and their role in doing that.
3. Understand their role in building a team of adults around the child.
4. Explore the importance of observation and how to do that in a supportive way
5. Demonstrate the importance of a play-based learning environment for pre-primary children
6. Think about alternative ways of supporting good behaviour in children
7. Work with children in meaningful ways in each of four developmental areas to support them in transitioning to Grade 1: Identity and belonging, Physical development, Communication and Creativity and exploration.

What was done:

Saide designed the course and the app, and developed materials, including an activity-based course guide, videos, audio glossaries in local languages, illustrations and storybooks for the KnowHow Early Learning app.[link] All the materials are released under a Creative Commons (CC) Attribution licence. Each ECD centre was given a tablet loaded with the course app and additional resources.

The course consists of 20 weekly units of 4 hours of study. The course is designed with built-in features to support teacher development in technology, time management, reading, note-taking, discussing and sharing, implementing, reflecting on and improving their practice. Teachers take joint responsibility for working through the course on a weekly basis, occasionally supported by an external facilitator.

What was found:

The programme was first implemented in Namibia in 2019 in 150 ECD centres linked to 54 primary schools. Particular challenges were articulated by the implementing partners:

1. The distances between ECD centres and primary schools, particularly in rural areas, may hamper the collaborative study groups.
2. Children are taught in home language until Grade 4. The recognised African languages in Namibia are Ju|'hoansi, Khoekhoegowab, Oshiwambo, Oshindonga, Otjiherero, Rukwangali, Rumanyo, Setswana, Silozi and Thimbukushu. ECD educators are competent in speaking these languages, but the levels of written literacy are not high. Also, although all these languages have orthographies, there are standardisation issues for the written forms of the language. In addition, the English language competence of the ECD educators is not high. Many ECD educators have not reached Grade 10 level.
3. The course has to provide some theory as well as practical methods.
4. The government does not provide reading materials for children in ECD centres, and there is a

severe shortage of local language early reading books. Regular exposure to reading aloud, and to storybooks themselves is a key component of supporting children's development as emergent readers.

To address these challenges we attempted the following:

1. The central pedagogical design principle is collaborative learning within and between clusters of pre-primary and primary teachers in community and public schools. The clustering model for collaboration brings together ECD practitioners from more than once centre in fortnightly learning group meetings. The model is slightly different in each implementing country. Each site was given its own tablet and each teacher received a printed study guide so they could study at home when they didn't have the tablet. This facilitated local and self- and site-based study in between learning group meetings.

2. Course materials are produced in English, with many graphics and few words. On the tablets, audio explanations of key words and phrases are provided in the local language of the area. This facilitates better comprehension because the ECD educators move between the English print material, and the local language audio. It also empowers them to use the local languages in the study groups

3. The activity-based, multi-media and collaborative design of the course enables teachers to engage with theory and practice in a range of ways. Teachers were able to view a video or listen to an audio and discuss it, complete formative and summative assessment activities, and plan practical activities together. The collection of KnowHow app videos has become representative of the contexts in the Southern African countries in which KnowHow Early Learning is implemented. The course app is both familiar (some teachers in the videos could be from the same community) as well as universal (some teachers are obviously from somewhere else, but have similar challenges and applicable solutions).

4. Embedded in the app are 20 storybooks taken from the African Storybook initiative ([https://www.africanstorybook.org)](https://www.africanstorybook.org). This is a Saide publishing initiative which makes thousands of stories available to young children in local African languages. The stories are all published under a Creative Commons licence. This means they are freely available for translation and adaptation, and are downloadable for reading and print. The storybooks are versioned into the main languages of the implementing countries. PDF versions of these storybooks are loaded onto the tablets for ECD educators and children to read offline. Teachers are guided through activities to use the tablets for small group reading of the storybooks with children.

Based on an informal review of the pilot, the course was adapted (and improved) for Zambia, South Africa, Malawi and Lesotho during 2019, 2020 and 2021.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy

These practices are promising for:

1. Providing access to supported, collaborative study opportunities for remote ECCE practitioners who do not have easy or cheap access to data and the internet;

2. Promoting collaboration between ECCE practitioners and primary teachers, and between teachers

and parents;

3. Building capacity amongst ECCE practitioners and primary teachers to explore innovative, play-based and inclusive pedagogies;

4. Providing access to storybooks in children's local languages to support emergent reading.

References:

To download the KnowHow Early Learning app go to iStore or GooglePlay Store

For additional stories and guides go to https://www.africanstorybook.org/

Sub-theme Four:
Parents, Families, Communities

Research Reporting:

Inceba Trust Implements Legacy Dad as Family Engagement Strategy: A Reflection

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The problem:

South Africa is plagued by the problem of ineffective fathers. Fathers are absent and uninvolved as evidenced by the disturbing 61.8% of children living with absent fathers (Hall & Sambu, 2017 and StatsSA, 2018a). This data is confirmed by the high proportion of birth certificates which did not contain information on fathers namely 61,7%." (StatsSA, 2018b, p. 12)

Although a significant percentage of non-resident fathers often see their children, an equally significant percentage of resident fathers are disengaged.

To further aggravate the situation for children, the presence of the father is often harmful. Nearly half (44.6%) of child homicides can be associated with child abuse and neglect.

Despite the grim conditions described above, the prospect of the first five years in a child's life is unpacked by progress in neuroscience and epigenetics. At the same time, there is the potential of a father's positive presence and involvement. Evidence from a systematic review of 18 studies indicated that father engagement positively affected the social, behavioural, psychological and cognitive outcomes of children (Sarkadi et al., 2008; Cabrera et al., 2007).

Inceba Trust has implemented the Legacy Dad programme developed by The World Needs A Father

(TWNAF) as part of their family engagement initiative in Early Childhood Development Centres in Drakenstein Municipality. TWNAF received a grant from the DG Murray Trust to evaluate the programme by exploring the experiences of the fathers who attended the programme as well as their wives/partners.

The aim:

The study aimed to explore the experiences of fathers on their involvement with pre-school children and their wives/partners after exposure to an intervention programme, Legacy Dad.

How the topic was researched:

- A qualitative approach was used.
- The study took place in three areas in the Western Cape, Khayelitsha, Mbekweni and Paarl East.
- 19 participants were chosen because they had children aged 3-5 years old in ECD Centres in the areas of research.
- Data was collected through online surveys completed by fathers who attended the Legacy Dad training as well as their partners. The fathers completed a pre-training assessment as well as a post-training assessment. The post-training assessment was completed one month after they attended the Legacy Dad training. The fathers' partners completed an online assessment one month after their partners completed the Legacy Dad training.

What was found:

- The data generated from both men and women confirmed that the Legacy Dad training increased the physical involvement activities of the father.
- The challenging circumstances of the fathers were confirmed by the demographics of the father participants.
- The pre-test confirmed the relatively low levels of physical involvement of fathers with their children.
- Data from the wives/partners of the fathers confirmed that there was an improved attachment to the father by the child.
- The women confirmed improved relationships with the fathers. However, the relatively low levels of engagement between father and mother is problematic. A substantial body of research supports the notion that when parents get along, both the quantity and quality of father involvement are higher. Fathers tend to be more involved in parenting when their partners are supportive and encouraging.

Research also shows that even when parents do not live together, their ability to cooperate and engage in positive co-parenting can have a strong influence on paternal involvement.

What do the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy:

This study draws attention to the need to involve and capacitate father involvement in ECD Centres and children's lives. Family engagement programmes should not only address the capacity and involvement of women caregivers but should also on men caregivers. Programmes like Legacy Dad can assist in this.

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Promising Practice:

More than you Expect Inside the Cover of a Wordless Book!

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The problem:

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many organisations that work in support of literacy to focus more strongly than ever on the role of parents and home-based care givers and primary educators. Given the learning losses reported in foundation phase at this time, any intervention that can strengthen emergent literacy in the ECCE years gives much needed hope for the future.

This article focuses particularly on the experiences of our community development practitioners in facilitating the book sharing workshops devised by the Mikhulu Trust.

The aim:

The aim of this research is to assess whether claims made by the Mikhulu trust about the advantages of their book-sharing process transferred into our Eastern Cape context and whether or not other advantages were perceived. The objectives of the Mikhulu Trust are to promote the sharing of wordless story books between care-givers and children. The process is termed "dialogic book-sharing". Research suggests that the implementation of the programme significantly accelerates language development (Vally et al. 2015). Emergent literacy skills are developed in the process. Furthermore, in the Mikhulu training it is suggested that through the process, relationships between child and 'parent' are enhanced.

What was done:

A qualitative narrative analysis of an interventionist research approach was used.

The study took place in Makhanda in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. There were 3 facilitator-participants who are also the co-authors of this submission. Findings were coded from their narratives which were collected after 70 participants had completed the intervention. The intervention consisted of a series of blocks of 4 workshops carried out once a week with a maximum of 10 parents per workshop. Each workshop focused on a different set of book-sharing skills. Throughout the workshops, the parents' role as a supportive and encouraging partner in the book-sharing process is stressed. Parents are encouraged to follow the child's lead and interests, to encourage pointing and naming, to make links between the pictures in the book and real-life and to encourage empathy and identification with characters in the wordless books. Between workshops the parents are encouraged to establish a daily book-sharing routine of 5 to 15 minutes depending on the child's age and interest level.

What was found:

A particularly dominant theme that emerged from the facilitators' narratives was that of communication and relationship change. Our findings concur with the Mikhulu trust's assertion that the implementation of the programme has an impact on parents'/care-givers' communication and relationships beyond the actual book sharing process. The most surprising theme that emerged, however, was that of transferability of relationship and communication skills into broader domains of 'school work' and general household communication.

Facilitators noted the rapid development of communication between parent and child. For example, that children made more eye contact with parents in workshops 3 and 4. They recalled parents reporting that children were becoming more curious not only about the content of books but also about conversations and activities around the home.

Not only were children beginning to ask questions but they were also starting to offer opinions and commentary on adult conversations (a development that was not always well received by parents!)

An unexpected side effect was that some children had begun to engage parents on work being done at 'school' (ECD centres) and ask for help with 'homework' where previously there had been no such engagement. Facilitators speculated that children had made the connection between books and schoolwork and thus now viewed parents as potential players in the realm of school related activities. Relatedly, parents themselves, especially those who do not read, felt empowered by the process to become more engaged with what was happening at schools.

A number of stories revolved around parents finding alternatives to corporal punishment. Nolly mentioned reminding parents to give children assurances that 'I love you and that your mistakes are covered by that love".

Boni mentioned that it is helpful when parents understand that it's OK not to have all the answers, and that this trickles down to children who learn to understand that they aren't expected to know everything. Vati mentioned that one of the reasons for the positive impact of the shared stories on mother and child relationships is that it is perceived as being 'fun'.

An aspect of the Mikhulu programme that Boni felt might be contributing to improved relationships is that parents are encouraged to set a routine in that they are asked what time of day they could do book sharing every day. For parents who have formerly not had a routine in the home, the witness first-hand the security that routines provide children this was a profound change. Some parents reported that after a few days the child would approach them with the books asking for story time, or would remind parents that it's 'time to read', or wanting to do their 'homework' (ie read their Mikhulu books) when older siblings start their homework in the afternoons.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy:
Both the expected and unexpected outcomes of these workshops are promising in that they suggest how quickly parent child relationships can change with a light -touch intervention. Also encouraging was the evidence of a growing 'academic relationship' between children and parents which could have an impact not only on the child's experience at ECD centres but also on later schooling in general. Moreover, the potential for language and relationship development seems positive. While this project focusses specifically on the sharing of wordless books similar results might be expected with any intervention that required a routine and built-in specific parent-child dialogue techniques around any playful educational activity. Helping parents to feel able to engage in school related issues also has possible potential for improving results and drop-out rates in later years.

Overall this small project suggests that interventions that focus on building parent-child dialogic relationships may be worth investing time and money in. Our intervention was shorter that the traditional Mikhulu interventions with only 4 doses over a month. We were thus encouraged by the stories indicating relational shifts. Unsurprisingly, it was in families where daily routines were established that the greatest changes were reported. Further study is be needed, however, to assess fade away effects as well as the optimal dosage, duration and intensity of an intervention for significant effect size.

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Promising Practice:

Learning Experiences of Inner-City Early Childhood Development Managers who participated in an ECD Forum: A Social Work Perspective By Barbara McLean

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The problem:

In the inner-city of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal Province, there is the problem of 'mushrooming' informal and unregistered ECD centres unable to adhere to norms and standards. The location and physical environment of many of the centres in the inner city often contravene local government health and safety requirements and property owners and operators of centres disregard or do not meet the municipal by-laws for premises on which childcare facilities operate. Poverty experienced by many families, coupled with budgetary constraints within the ECD centres makes it difficult for managers to administer ECD services in compliance with acceptable standards. This compromises the safety and security of children. There are centres that operate privately by owners primarily 'for profit', whose main concern is often their own survival and not necessarily in the best interests of babies, toddlers and young children.

The aim:

In addressing these challenges, an inner-city ECD Forum was set up, with the aim to:

1. Promote awareness, understanding and joint decision making;
2. Become a platform for networking with various role-players, sharing resources and knowledge and participating in capacity building activities and interventions that focused on a wide range of ECD issues;
3. Challenge authorities and advocate for equitable access to quality ECD services for the most vulnerable children in the inner-city;

4. Promote children's rights;
5. Provide continuous personal and professional support and development for ECD practitioners.

What was done:
- A qualitative research study on the value of learning experiences through the ECD Forum.
- Seven ECD managers/owners/principals from seven ECD centres were the participants in the study.
- The intervention consisted of: an inclusive approach to membership whereby registered and unregistered ECD centres were welcome to quarterly meetings and other activities. Interventions included capacity building events, focus-group discussions, site visits, workshops, awareness-raising trainings and presentations by various key ECD stakeholders.

What was found:
The inner-city ECD Forum provided a comprehensive participatory adult learning experience with improvement of the operational management of the ECD centre through:
- Strong, supportive relationships through networking and engagement with various key ECD role-players (Plastrik & Taylor, 2006);
- Dialogue between themselves on the common challenges experienced in ECD centres;
- Critical reflective practice on factors compromising the well-being of children in the inner-city;
- Enrolling the support of stakeholders, including different government departments both locally and at provincial level (NIECDP, 2015).
- Participants valued the psycho-social support and being able to share accounts of what helped them to manage identified threats and challenges.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy:
An ECD Forum facilitates the practice of collective, inter-departmental and inter-sectoral service delivery from local government level up to provincial level. Through ongoing participatory dialogue, debate and stakeholder collaboration, an ECD Forum has the potential to disrupt professional and bureaucratic 'silos' and support service delivery on the ground while enhancing tolerance of diversity and social cohesion (HSRC, 2015). It is important that a participatory, strength-based and empowerment approach utilizes the existing skills and knowledge of ECD practitioners to transform their situations through formal and informal learning while developing capacities to align with norms and standards (Schenck, Nel & Louw, 2010). The developmental social work approach taken in this research study highlights the need for capacity building and leadership formation of ECD managers of ECD centres through their practical involvement in meeting concrete issues on the ground (McLean, 2019).

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Sub-theme Five:
Inclusivity and Inclusive Education

Research Reporting:

Implementing Inclusive Education Policy in Early Childhood Education and Care playrooms: Teachers and Centre Managers' perceptions By Jongiwe Tebekana

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The problem:

Special needs education, especially in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), is mostly neglected; most often learners are denied access. Learners with disabilities, especially in rural communities, experience great difficulty in accessing special needs education. Due to abject poverty and lack of financial resources most young learners, especially those from birth to four years, are often deprived of access to special needs schools in most communities. To ensure that all learners benefit from quality education and access, the Department of Education (DoE) developed the policy Education White Paper 6 (WP 6) - Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (DoE, 2001), to accommodate and give access to all learners with or without disabilities in schools (Engelbrecht, 2020). Although this policy argues for equal access, currently children with disabilities are either segregated from their counterparts, kept at home, or admitted to special schools. (Engelbrecht, 2020).

Several researchers argue that the implementation of the policy should start as early as from birth to four years age, with children in ECCE centres, since inclusivity has become a central issue in educational practices around the world (Katherine, 2019). For the Department of Basic Education (DBE), the implementation of the Inclusive Education Policy (IEP/WP6) in preschools is seen as a way of eliminating the unfair practices and accommodating all young children irrespective of their unique needs (DoE, 2001).

The aim:

The main aim of the study is to investigate how teachers and centre managers implement IEP/WP6 in their playrooms/ECCE centres in the OR Tambo Inland Education District EC Province.

How the topic was researched:

- A qualitative approach was used.
- The study took place in the playrooms/ECCE centres in the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa.
- Purposive sampling was used to select six participants who were working with young children at the ECCE centres (Creswell 2019).
- Data were collected through using observations, face-to-face group interviews and fieldnotes.
- The sample compromised of three centre managers and three ECCE teachers from the O.R. Tambo District. Six participants consented to participate in the study. There were two groups of interviews. A group of three centre managers were interviewed voluntarily in one centre. A group of three ECCE teachers were also interviewed in one centre.

What was found:

The findings of the study showed that:

- Most participants had minimal knowledge and understanding of the Education White Paper 6 Policy;
- There is a dire need to capacitate centre managers and teachers on the policy imperatives; and
- Centre managers and ECCE practitioners need ongoing support to implement and practice the principles of inclusivity.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy:

- For successful implementation of the Education White Paper 6, it is recommended that all ECCE practitioners receive appropriate training and development on the policy.
- On-going support and guidance in implementing the policy and the provision of proper resources for their centres and playrooms (financial, physical, and human resources) is crucial.

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Research Reporting:

Conceptualising Inclusion in Early Childhood Care and Education: A Participatory Action Learning and Action Research Study By Ashnie Mahadew
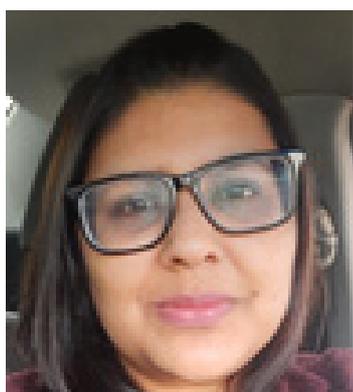
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The problem:

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) encompasses the care and education of children from birth to four, before the commencement of formal schooling (Ebrahim, Okwany & Barry, 2019; Harrison, 2020; Ring, Sullivan & Wall, 2020). Studies have emphasized that inclusion is an important aspect of a quality early learning programme (Aubert, Molina, Schuber & Vidu, 2017; Underwood, Valeo, & Wood, 2012) as it ensures the equal access, participation and achievement of all children irrespective of diverse identity markers. Indeed, inclusion in the early years sets the groundwork for a more just society where everyone is respected and valued irrespective of diversity. How teachers understand the concept of inclusion is vital, as this shapes pedagogical, social and physical changes to the early learning environment. Dominant ideologies abound, regarding the conceptualisation of inclusion and these need to be challenged. Research on inclusion in ECCE are extensive in the global north, but there is limited research on inclusion in South Africa and other developing countries.

The aim:

This study aimed to explore ECCE teachers' current conceptualisation of inclusion and address deficits in their understanding through collaborative learning using a participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) design.

How the topic was researched:

- A qualitative approach was used.
- Eight participants were purposefully selected according to who could best inform the research objectives and enhance an understanding of the phenomenon under study (Maree, 2016).
- Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, all interactions were carried out using a virtual platform. Participants, therefore, needed a smartphone and an internet connection to participate in the study.
- ECCE teachers and teacher trainers were invited to join and to contribute to this research project.
- Data was generated using photovoice and reflective journals.

What was found:

PALAR research occurs in iterative cycles (Wood, 2019; Zuber-Skerritt, 2018). Cycle one found that the participants' conceptualisation of inclusion needed to be challenged. Their understandings of inclusion centered on discourses of disability and special education needs resulting in a narrow view of inclusion. Secondly, this group regarded inclusion to be a product rather than a process and claimed that segregation had some advantages. The action-learning group also misconstrued inclusion for micro-exclusive practices of assimilation, integration and celebration. Cycle two was planned to address these misunderstandings. As part of the action-learning phase, the action-learning group researched, prepared and presented videos and photographs with captions to clarify key concepts relating to cycle one.

In cycle two, participants revisited dominant ideologies about inclusion and developed a critical awareness of overt and covert exclusionary practice. The group firstly looked at a broad meaning of inclusion focusing on all diversity not just disability or special education needs as suggested by Walton (2018). Secondly, in this cycle inclusion was also redefined as a process rather than a product which aligned with claims by Ainscow (2005). Participants discussed that the situation changed daily in their centres, and children were never the same from day to day. One participant explained inclusion as a continuous process of adjustment and learning, similar to the process of hand painting. Her photograph demonstrated the creation of a piece of children's artwork where the process rather than product was a source of enjoyment for children. Coherent with research by Cologon (2019) participants thirdly reconstructed the concept of segregation as a form of macro-exclusion that overtly stigmatises a person as 'inferior'. The group discussions clarified that due to segregation; 'regular' children may grow up without peers who experience marginalisation, which could result in a society that is intolerant of those groups of people considered as 'other'.

Fourthly in cycle two, the group explored covert micro-exclusion in the forms of assimilation, integration and celebration (Cologon, 2019). Assimilation occurs when a child has to adapt to a learning environment resulting in a loss of individual authenticity and diversity (Daniels, 2018). The group discussed how centres may sometimes discourage the use of mother tongue languages, certain cultural dress or hairstyles in order to 'fit-in' within a dominant culture. Using a photograph of a pot of stew, one participant explained how assimilation is similar to a melting pot where the various ingredients lose their individual flavours. Challenging this representation, inclusion was represented by a photograph of a salad bowl, where

the individual identity of each ingredient is preserved and valued. Teachers need to be aware of such assimilatory practice and recognise them as dehumanising and exclusionary. Micro-exclusion in another covert form was also explored when children had access to centres but could not fully participate or achieve. The group clarified that integration occurred when children with special education needs, were placed in the same setting as all other children without making adjustments to the setting to facilitate real inclusion. Integration therefore leans toward a deficit perspective where children's needs are connected to their 'disability' and not to their 'ability'. These deficit perspectives call for adjustments to be made to the child rather than the inflexible systems of educational settings. Participants described situations were children had access to centres but were unable to fully participate or achieve due to certain challenges. To describe integration, a participant used a pegboard with square pegs and round roles. She described integration as trying to forcefully fit square pegs (children with diverse needs) into round holes (inflexible educational settings). This resulted in damage to the pegs and the system. Inclusion on the other hand was represented by a shape sorter that accommodated a variety of different shapes. The shape sorter was compared to a flexible educational system that accommodated diverse groups of children. Celebratory discourses were further identified as micro-exclusion when certain cultures or groups were 'celebrated' once or twice a year (Reygan, Walton & Osman, 2018). These fun and positive discourses at centres seldom addressed 'negative' issues of power, privilege and discrimination towards minority groups who are often ignored for the rest of the year. One participant described how she taught a little boy diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in her group. She read stories and had discussions with the entire group on an ongoing basis that centred on ASD. Autism was not something she focused on once a year when it was Autism Awareness Day. Her experiences emphasised that teachers needed to be aware of these celebratory discourses often misconstrued as inclusion at centres. Findings in cycle two therefore resulted in the reconceptualisation of inclusion as a broad process requiring teachers to become conscientised regarding not just overt types of exclusion but covert forms that appear as inclusion in ECCE settings.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy:
The conceptualisation of inclusion presented in this study is a product of the unique contexts of the collaborative learning group. This research challenges dominant beliefs of what inclusion is. Using a PALAR design enabled the agency of a marginalised group of ECCE teachers and teacher trainers. Knowledge presented here would be cascaded to other ECCE centres in the form of a handbook on inclusion for the South African context. With a scarcity of research on inclusion in ECCE, this study may provide a point of departure for future research on inclusion in ECCE.

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Research Reporting:

Autism: Perspectives from Africa Volume 1

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The context:

Current teacher education programmes still focus primarily on the normative child. For example, the latest undergraduate Bachelor in Education programmes may only include a single module dedicated to inclusive education. Yet, a definitive feature of today's educational landscape is diversity. Teacher education programmes must therefore ensure that all teachers are better prepared to accommodate the needs, interests and abilities of children who are culturally, linguistically and developmentally diverse. Our educational policies on inclusive education compel us to educate all children, including those living with autism spectrum disorder. This is fundamental for advancing human rights and social justice.

The problem:

The majority of children with disabilities such as autism are out of school entirely. This exclusion originates in early childhood care and education and urgently needs to be addressed. In my initial teacher education, more than 25 years ago, autism was not included in the content of any of the modules. Neither was it included in my postgraduate programmes. Years later, as a parent practitioner, I found myself completely unprepared for the reality of raising an atypically developing child.

I therefore set out to address this problem with colleagues working in the field of inclusive education. Through our research and interaction with schools and teachers, we have learned that many teachers (mis)understand autism as severe brain injury. In addition, few teachers understand that autism is a

spectrum condition. Consequently, the overwhelming majority of children and adults living with autism are not receiving the support they require to thrive. Moreover, existing policies and programmes have reinforced segregated placement, which undermines social inclusion, acceptance and support.

Causes of the problem:

Autism spectrum disorder is currently framed as a disability, disease, disorder and deficit informed by the medical model of disability. This leads to stigma and discrimination as well as exclusion. Despite the policy rhetoric promoting inclusion in education and society, the increase in special schools for children with autism is currently reinforcing segregation.

The aim:

This article summarises a new book I put together with my colleagues working in the fields of Inclusive Education and Special Needs Education. This book represents our attempt to initiate a conversation about autism in Africa. How do we as Africans understand, define and frame autism? Is autism simply a disability? Alternatively, is it perhaps a natural form of human diversity? How should we as teacher educators prepare our students to teach children with autism in mainstream and special education settings?

This book is part of a much larger research project on Curriculum Adaptation for Learners with Autism, funded by the Women-in-Research Programme at the University of South Africa (2017-2020). It is the first scholarly book on autism in Africa.

How the topic was researched:

A range of approaches were employed including narratives, website analysis of special schools, policy analysis, case law analysis and qualitative methods. The study took place in various contexts across South Africa, other African countries and includes a contribution from South Africans living in Australia and includes both urban and rural contexts.

Note: the book consists of 13 chapters and each author followed his/her own approach.

What was found:

As scholars who contributed to this publication, we were compelled to acknowledge that we uncritically accept the DSM-V and its predecessors. We therefore call upon other African scholars to join us in considering what it means to have a disability in African society. Professor Jansen (2020) who wrote the foreword challenged readers to "see autism" differently in a post-pandemic world. We further urge policy makers, schools, teachers and other education stakeholders to consider alternative framing such as neurodiversity and differ-ability. We acknowledge that our contributions are geographically constrained, and we undertake to be more inclusive in future volumes. Nevertheless, this book constitutes a first step in the African study of autism. We have already begun planning Volume 2 and will seek contributions from across the African continent.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy:

As scholars, we acknowledge the pockets of excellence that exist related to education and therapeutic intervention for children and adults on the autism spectrum in both public and private settings. However, we are critical of the extensive policy borrowing that has characterised post-Colonial Africa. While we recognise the extensive international scholarship on autism, very limited research has been conducted in our developing country contexts. We believe that we need to put our heads together and develop our own context-specific interventions and pedagogies that will be appropriate, affordable and responsive to the needs of our children and adults living with autism.

Reference to full publication:

Clasquin-Johnson, M. G., Mahlo, F. D. & Clasquin-Johnson, M. (Eds.) (2020). Autism: Perspectives from Africa Volume 1. Pretoria: UNISA Press. ISBN 978-1-77615-069-4. E-book ISBN 978-1-77615-070-0

Promising Practice:
Every Child is Play-Abled
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The problem:

Disability has traditionally been intensely stigmatized in rural communities. Children with disabilities are regarded as 'bewitched' or as a result of the mother having an affair. Many disabled children are hidden from even close neighbours. Few attend a crèche or school or socialize.

Most parents have little knowledge or understanding of the condition. Attending a clinic can be difficult, as transport costs are high and transport is often unreliable. Rural clinics staff are often rude and dismissive. As such parents are hesitant to ask questions. Children are mostly presumed to have no potential, so receive no stimulation and are not encouraged to become independent.

The aim:

The aim of the "Every child is playabled" programme was to create an integrated ECD service for children with disabilities, destigmatise disabilities and support parents.

What was done:

The intervention made use of a mixed method approach, and was conducted in the Matimatolo and Mbuba villages, in the Umvoti Local Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. There were approximately 600 participants in total, of which there were 29 disabled children/families. The intervention consisted of the following:

- Community conversations to introduce the programme
- Children were identified and families were profiled
- ECD practitioners and parents were informed about disabilities and inclusion
- Transport was provided for children and parents to therapy sessions
- Trained facilitator visited homes and integrated play groups were held at Toy Libraries and community facilities
- Toys were delivered and lent to families
- Fortified porridge was served at sessions to improve nutrition

What was found:

The practices helped to:

- Destigmatize disabilities. Children with disabilities now routinely attend play sessions, are encouraged to feed themselves, play with toys, sit and move around the homestead.
- Parents understand the disability and the potential for improvement in the children.
- Children attend therapy sessions and show good progress.
- Parents have a support group and the community are supportive and understanding of the children
- Parents are joining play sessions, and borrow toys to continue the play between home visits.
- The children with disabilities are accepted by practitioners, children and parents at integrated play sessions.
- Public primary schools have accepted children with disabilities into their Grade R classes.

The challenges experienced:

- Acceptance of the programme was very slow. There was a lack of trust of the facilitator. Parents were embarrassed by the attention on their children with disabilities.

We attempted to address these challenges by having many formal and informal conversations about disabilities in the community, and by involving the Department of Health's rehabilitation team in parent meetings and home visits.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy:

This intervention has shown significant results and as such it is important for the ECCE sector to consider the following: ECD Practitioner training must include more information and practice with regard to children with disabilities. Children not able to attend a centre based ECD programme, must be catered for through mobile services. Families should have access to toys and resources to facilitate stimulation and play at home. Practitioners and therapists should build strong relationships with each other.

References to resources:

www.letcee.org

Sub-theme Six:
Leadership and Management

Research Reporting:

Essential Management Competencies of ECD Principals in South Africa

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The problem:

The National Integrated Early Childhood Development (ECD) Policy (RSA, 2015) calls for collaboration between sectors to deliver a comprehensive package of services to the children in the ECD sector. The policy set an ambitious time frame for all practitioners working in ECD services to have adequate knowledge, skills, infrastructure, and materials to support a comprehensive package of early learning services within an ECD centre by 2030 (RSA, 2015:51). However, research by Atmore (2019) revealed that the ECD sector has been lacking implementation of policy in ECD programmes for a while now. Without adequate leadership and sufficient management capacity, ECD policy documents and relevant legislation will remain merely words without action. ECD practitioner training has been a priority intervention focusing on education practices in the past, but limited attention has been given to ECD principals' management training, specifically to enhance their management competencies (Atmore, 2013; Govindasamy, 2010). ECD is currently a priority in social development (eNCA, 2019d), and political action became a driving force behind the development of the ECD sector (Fourie, 2018; Lo, Das & Horton, 2017; Zonji, 2018). The Department of Social Development took the governing role of the ECD sector, which is now in the the Department of Basic Education (DoBE). In this context there is a need for a transference of institutional knowledge from current social workers to the new DoBE monitoring team (Harrison, 2019; Kubheka, 2019). Managers from the DoBE will require an understanding of prior managerial processes and thus management competencies expected of ECD principals to manage ECD centres effectively and successfully. However, research regarding these essential competencies

of ECD principals at ECD centres is limited in the unique South African social development context (Biersteker et al., 2016; Lo, Das & Horton, 2017). In essence, no knowledge base exists on what the essential skills, functions, and tasks are that principals of ECD centres need to acquire to effectively manage these centres.

A clear transfer of knowledge is thus needed from one government department to another to cushion the migration of custodianship and to ensure that service delivery and compliance standards remain a priority. Further research is imperative to add to the academic knowledge base of the management of ECD centres. Applewhite, Kao and Pritzker (2017) emphasised this need for further research, specifically in the field of management competencies, at multiple levels of social service organisations.

The aim:
The aim of the study was to gain an understanding of the essential management competencies of ECD principals to manage ECD centres in South Africa effectively.

How the topic was researched:
- A qualitative approach was used.
- The study took place in South Africa.
- There were 30 participants (n=30) who were chosen though purposive sampling of which 14 were ECD principals managing ECD centres and 16 ECD managers working in the ECD sector in South Africa. While the lived experiences of ECD principals were gathered to achieve the aim of the study, social work managers in the ECD field were included in the population as they hold a supervisory and mentoring role to ECD principals.
- Data was collected through individual, telephonic, semi structured interviews with participants by the researcher, and a semi-structured interview schedule was constructed based on literature supported themes.

What was found:
The findings of the study showed that a learning organisation approach (LOA), is recommended for ECD centres, to support the idea that people can learn the necessary skills and knowledge to function in a managerial role.

This study presents empirical findings that showcase the essential management competencies of an ECD principal based on Engelbrecht's (2014) conceptual framework of management skills, functions, and tasks, which depicts the interaction and complexity of a management role in any given organisation This study found data that supported the importance of business planning, mentorship, financial and ECD principal management tasks, the quality of ECD principal management, principal management training programmes, and further policy developments targeting the promotion of ECD principals' professional development.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy:

It can be concluded that for the most part, ECD principals are struggling to integrate these skills, functions, and tasks and thus rely on instructions from their supervising social workers or ECD managers. The goal of competency oriented management hinges on the ability of an individual to independently practice and improve their skills to increase efficiency of their functions through the completion of management tasks.

As a result, a call needs to be made to social workers, community development workers, educators, and SSOs in the ECD sector to advocate for management support, particularly with a focus on financial literacy training and mentorship. The implementation of supportive learning processes for all managers and principals should become the norm for those working in a developmental manner with ECD centres. There is an urgent need for a transfer of skills from social workers to the DoBE monitoring team specifically regarding the essential principals' ECD competencies. Improved collaboration between departments and stakeholders would ensure sustainability and improved management practices in the ECD sector for an improved learning experience.

Key recommendations include incorporating a learning organisation approach to the support and training of ECD principals and the centres they manage, what the management competencies of ECD principals should be, and the optimal mechanisms needed to support the growth of this role in their organisations.

Reference to full publication:

Ronaasen, J., 2021. The Essential Management Competencies of ECD Principals in South Africa. Doctoral Dissertation [Stellenbosch University], SUN Media. Retrieved from: https://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/123647

Research Reporting:

Practitioners' Perceptions of Centre Heads' Leadership and Management Styles in Rural Early Childhood Development Centres By Shonisani Mulovhedzi

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The problem:

Context: The issue of leading and managing is crucial in Early Childhood Development (ECD) settings. The pedagogical leadership and management of centre heads is positively associated with practitioners' attitudes and practices to ensure quality (Douglas, 2019). Rodd (2020) concurs that leadership regardless of initial qualifications is increasingly seen as a critical role and responsibility of centre heads in meeting the diverse needs of practitioners, young children, families and local communities. This means that a positive work environment, a culture of learning and improvement, shared decision-making, and professional development should be fostered by centre leaders. Practitioners who are engaged in planning should ensure that they are responsible for the children's development, well-being, and learning. The organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2020) contends that practitioners who perceive more opportunities to participate in centre decisions tend to engage in collaborative professional practices and report higher levels of job satisfaction. The centre heads, therefore, should encourage their practitioners to participate in crucial decisions so that their centres can be recommended as an appropriate place to work and develop young children holistically. Harmony Early Learning Journey (2021) supports that good planning promotes the full spectrum of the young children's physical, social, emotional, cognitive, behavioural and personal development journeys during childhood. Leadership has a variety of alternate meanings. Douglass (2019) describes leadership as essentially focuses on influencing change, relations, and actions to reach a common purpose or objective for an organisation, while Ward (2020) define leadership as the ability to inspire a group of

individuals to work together toward a common goal. Similarly, Adejokun (2021) define leadership as an inclusive and the accountability of all who work in schools, settings and children's centres.

Problem: The attitude of the centre head demonstrates a type of management style and behaviours. Some practitioners have challenges in the way the centres' heads operate and manage the centres. Meier and Marais (2012) point out that some centres' heads employ autocratic management style, which are also known as delegative management style. In delegative management style, the Centre heads does not give work plans or targets to the subordinates. This means that practitioners do as they please and there is no proper or strictly defined hierarchy of power. There are no proper channels of communication. The Centre heads controls all the activities without any involvement of the practitioner. As a result, decisions will reflect the opinion and the personality of one person - the head of the ECD centre. Interactions and relationships between the centre head and ECD practitioners are a strong predictor of the children's learning, development, and well-being, therefore, the understandings of leadership and management operating in ECD settings become a challenge when centre heads are dictators.

Causes of the problem: There is confusion about the managing, leading roles and responsibilities of the ECD Centre heads as there is no segregation of duties. The environmental constraints of the ECD centre heads' roles are so powerful that they form specific attitudes towards the practitioners. Lack of relevant professional development training that makes these leaders not to share roles, such as teaching, attending of meetings, managing of finances and leading, at the same time. Practitioners are not happy in the way the centre leader are leading and managing as they are segregating them. Mampane (2021) observes that ECD centres require leaders who can motivate practitioners to achieve the centre's primary goals through high-quality teaching and learning. Some of the centre leaders are too emotional and treating them like the persons who does not have the leadership qualities/skills. Liu, Geng and Yao (2021) contend that unfair and unjust leadership behaviour stimulate dissatisfaction and ill feelings among staff members.

The aim:
The aim of the study was to explore practitioners' perception of centre heads' leadership and management styles in rural Early Childhood Development Centres.

How the topic was researched:
- A qualitative methods approach was used to collect data. As a result, the researcher was able to value the perception of practitioners of the Centre heads' leadership and management styles in rural Early Childhood Development Centres.
- The study took place in four rural ECD centres. Two centres were registered with the Department of Social Development and two were not registered.
- Eight participants were selected based on their experiences of more than five years working in the ECD centre. Participants were between the ages of 25 to 50 years. ECD centres that had more than one practitioner were selected. A non-probability sampling procedure was used to select eight

practitioners from four ECD centre in the Sibasa area. Non-probability sampling is when individuals are selected based on non-random criteria, and not every individual has a chance of being included and allowing the researcher to easily collect data (McCombes, 2019).

- Data was collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with practitioners who were working at the selected ECD centres. Participants were individually interviewed about centre heads' leadership and management styles in rural Early Childhood Development Centres. Before conducting the interviews, the researcher clearly explained and discussed the study's purpose with the participants. The questions were straightforward, neutral, and non-directive. The researcher ensured that she listened with intent and refrained from passing judgments. The non-verbal communication of the participants was noted as well. The interviews that were conducted in the Tshivenda language were recorded on an audiotape and the responses were translated into English.

What was found:

The findings from the interviews reveal that some centre heads provide little support and guidance to help practitioners cope with their workload. Participants 1 and 4 also indicated that their ECD centre heads do not acknowledge any training organised by the Department of Social Development and any other ECD training organisation as necessary for learning different types of leadership qualities. This is what they said, "Our centre leader always tells us, 'this is my centre, I am the initiator, no one can lead or have a say here'." The above statement demonstrates that centre leaders believe that leadership skills cannot be created or learned and that is the reason they are not upgrading themselves. Muse (2019) disagrees, maintaining that the whole point of framing leadership as a skill was to underline the fact that leaders do not have to be naturally born; skills can be learned and leadership can be developed. Some practitioners felt that if an ECD centre is run by a leader who lacks relevant qualifications or who do not want to acquire the relevant qualifications, this can cause major problems.

Additionally, participants reported that the centre heads manage the centre with the autocratic management styles. They retain all the power and authority and reserve the right to make all decisions. They dictate the procedures on how things are to be done. The rules and guidelines come from the leader and in a case where the subordinates do not know what to do, he or she must go back to the leader and ask for clarification. Subordinates do not use their own ideas and their understanding to complete the given task. There were no clear objectives given which impacts on their professionalism. Some participants indicated they were only given minimum opportunity to give input. Cherry (2020) who avers that autocratic leadership is a leadership style characterised by individual control over all decisions and little input from group members. Some participants complained that they were not respected as the centre leaders sometimes attend meetings and do not provide feedback on information learnt during the workshop. The greatest challenge for practitioners is often the lack of support and encouragement from their centre leaders. Their leadership behaviour makes it difficult to foster collegiality and promote idea sharing.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy:

This study draws attention to the urgent need to address and improve the quality of leadership and

management of ECD centres. Centre leaders need to be made aware that a leader can be made and that leadership requires a deliberate process of sharing leadership so that practitioners can take an active role in leadership. Leadership and management policy on how to guide the ECD leaders should be developed to enhance the skills of controlling, leading, organising and managing the ECD centres. Universities should also plan and develop ECD programmes that can be made available to ECD centre leaders and practitioners to improve their leadership skills and knowledge.

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Promising Practices:

ECD Policy Implementation: Addressing Leadership and Institutional Constraints

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The problem:

The National Development Plan (NDP) 2012, recognised the role early childhood development (ECD) plays in building human capabilities (NDP, 2012), both in the education sector and for the benefit of broader society. The NDP acknowledged that this period of a child's life has life-long consequences. The National Integrated Early Childhood Development (NIECD) policy was subsequently developed and was adopted by Cabinet in 2015. Both the NDP and the NIECD adopted a comprehensive definition of ECD which refers "to the period of human development from birth until the year before a child enters formal school" (NIECD, 2015).

The NDP noted that co-ordination weaknesses between different sectors and departments should be addressed. To address the challenges in ECD policy and implementation the NDP proposed that the ECD function should be moved from the Department of Social Development (DSD) to the Department of Basic Education (DBE). While the NDP raised the issue of co-ordination weaknesses, it did not identify the fundamental causes of the problems, which are issues related to political will, leadership, and management of ECD as a system. Moreover, there was insufficient technical capacity in the DSD to undertake planning and implementation.

The aim:

The aim of the policy analysis was to review progress on the NDP proposals regarding ECD and to

identify the constraints to implementation so that these constraints can be addressed.

What was done:

- A policy analysis of the NIECD using secondary data including an examination of policy documents, evaluation reports and reviews were undertaken to assess progress on proposals with regard to ECD as outlined in the NDP in 2012.

- The purpose of the NIECD was one, to provide a multi-sectoral framework across the three spheres of government; two to define a comprehensive ECD programme; three identify role players and their responsibilities; and four to establish a national integrated ECD leadership and coordinating structure. This policy analysis focused on examining the fourth aspect of the policy

- The policy analysis examined the progress of the NIECD policy and implementation process at the national government level in South Africa.

- The policy analysis examined the policy implementation process between the period of 2012 and 2021.

What was found:

The Diagnostic Review of early childhood development (Richter et al 2012) found that while many elements of the ECD system exists, the quality of services should be improved.

Additionally, the NDP Review (2020) found that there was some progress regarding the NDP proposals. The NIECD Policy was developed by the DSD through a consultative process and was evidence-based, and importantly it was adopted by Cabinet in 2015. The NIECD policy outlined a clear vision and principles. It provided a comprehensive definition of ECD and addressed issues of leadership, management, and coordination of the ECD system and spelt out the roles and functions of the different role players. It also outlined a comprehensive package of services. While an Implementation Plan was developed, there has been very little progress in terms of implementation of the plan.

The NDP Review (2020) noted that while there had been progress since 2012, progress has been slow in relation to the NDP proposals. The NDP Review identified poor leadership and ineffective co-ordination across the three key departments: Social Development, Health, and Basic Education. However, it noted that the function shift from DSD to DBE provides an opportunity for ECD system reform. Furthermore, it stated the importance of a well-functioning co-ordination structure with requisite capacity and technical expertise. The NDP Review raised an important issue about inequity in the current model of ECD centres for 3–4-year-olds, in that very poor children are largely excluded.

Findings from the NDP Review (2020) showed that some of the constraints to implementation was that poor leadership retards South Africa's progress in building a comprehensive ECD system. While the NIECD policy has outlined the co-ordination structures including the National Interdepartmental Committee and the Intersectoral Forum, these structures are not working optimally. These are largely consultative and discussion forums which lack strategic direction. Furthermore, the structure that should provide political and strategic direction, the Inter-Ministerial Committee, is currently not functional (L.

Matemba, personal communication, September 9, 2021).

Regarding promising practice, a mentorship and organisational development intervention by the Programme to Support Pro-poor Policy Development which aimed to strengthen institutional systems for ECD in the Eastern Cape Provincial government departments of Education, Health and Social Development reflects on the challenges and positive effects of the intervention. A case study by Haricharan, Sadan and Parenzee (2018) which documents this intervention shows that the intervention had positive effects management and leadership capability, building relationships to improve partnerships, and promoting use of data, information and knowledge. One of the lessons learnt from this intervention, is that while building technical skills is important, it is insufficient as the both the structural and systemic issues within the public service should also be addressed.

There has been some progress, as the Presidential Proclamation (President of the Republic of South Africa 2021:21) was signed on 27 June 2021 which formalised and initiated the function shift process that transfers the ECD function from DSD to DBE in April 2022. Hopefully, this will usher in a new era for children in South Africa.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy:
Given the slow progress with implementing the NDP proposals as well as the policy prescripts in the National Integrated ECD Policy, valuable time has been lost which could have been used to build a comprehensive ECD system.

There is a need for bold leadership from the Presidency, DBE as well as partners in civil society to drive reform across the ECD system. Now that the DBE has assumed the responsibility of the ECD function in April 2022, as the lead department it should strengthen the management and coordination of the ECD system at all levels. The DBE will of course focus on the main function that is being transferred, viz. centre based ECD, however, the DBE should ensure that it works towards building the ECD system.

The DBE should work with the Department of Health and should strategically use the limited resources both in terms human resources and funding to rollout a 'first 1000 days' (pregnancy period plus the first two years of a child's life) programme. This should be done by improving the quality of the maternal and child health services, rethinking, and improving the nutritional support provided to pregnant women and babies and to provide psychosocial support services to mothers and caregivers. This will have an impact on progress into the future.

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Promising Practice:

An Auto-ethnographic Study Exploring Middle Leaders' Strategic Leadership to Impact Children's Learning. Leadership, Management and Administration and the Impact on ECCE By Rebekah Gear

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The problem:

The context: In the U.K education system, leadership has become a major characteristic underpinning outstanding schools particularly in terms of raising the quality of ECCE. So, what lessons can we learn from theory and practice to ensure leaders make a difference to children's outcomes?

The problem: It is increasingly suggested and noted that leaders who are closer to the teaching and learning have the potential to make the greatest impact on the education of children. Notably, Leithwood, et al. (2020) place school leadership second to classroom teaching, when considering the influence on children's learning and development. This has been the catalyst that has since led to the growth of the development of middle leadership within U.K primary schools, a role whereby a classroom teacher undertakes an additional leadership responsibility, often that of a curriculum specialism. However, the role of a curriculum middle leader is full of contradiction and adversity, witnessed through lack of clarity of role and lack of power to make decisions.

Cause of the problem: Increasingly, hierarchical organisational structures of schools continue to limit middle leader's ability to make changes strategically. It is a role that remains often stuck in this 'middle layer', situated as more of an advisory role, which restricts both their authority and effectiveness that their counterpart senior leaders have. There are many causes of the problem, in summary these include:

balancing school budgets against other priorities to facilitate training; recognising the potential to grow and develop middle leaders and the time they have, when they continue to have significant classroom responsibilities. This problem is an increasingly global trend (Leithwood, et al. 2020).

The aim:

Despite many studies having previously explored the impact of senior leadership in how they improve school systems through their ability to be strategic, there is an absence within the discourse of how this translates into what constitutes as effective strategic middle leadership. The aim of this study was to provide evidence of different strategies, systems, or structures, which could potentially assist middle leaders become strategic. It was situated within the theory from Heifetz and Linsky's (2002) whose notion of leadership is depicted within the analogy of a 'dancefloor' and a 'balcony'. They argue that the 'balcony' is where senior leadership is situated, thus enabling them to act strategically, whereas middle leaders are mostly positioned on the dancefloor, due to their classroom teacher duties. This study critically observed in action whether it is possible for middle leaders to move fluidly between these positions.

What was done:

A qualitative, autoethnography, approach was used. The method deployed in this study was somewhat different to the conventional approach using an exploratory focus of a personal leadership journey and in support of this a reflective research journal was kept to record observations and reflections in action (Burdell and Swadener 1999). The principal researcher was the participating curriculum middle leader, and as this was a reflective case study, this method allowed her to critically analyse her personal leadership practices in action. In terms of ethical considerations, a co-researcher approach, in the form of a university lecturer who acted as a critical friend, was adopted, to ensure that the study avoided bias. The co-researcher approach was invaluable as it ensured the researchers acted as co-collaborators to triangulate data capture and analysis, working collaboratively as 'critical thinkers' (hooks 1994 p. 129)

What was found:

This study helped to edify an understanding of how important it is that middle leaderships deploy collective leadership styles and thus develop systems which support this in practice. In this study it formulated as a 'Teacher Research Group' resonating with South East Asian practices in the context of the math's curriculum (Boylan 2013). The 'Teacher Research Group' in this study was headed by the curriculum middle leader and principal researcher and became a platform that enabled her to move from the position of the 'dancefloor' to the 'balcony' (Heifetz and Linsky 2002). This was a consequence of how it provided her with both a holistic and strategic overview, looking onto her middle leadership curriculum area from the balcony whilst heading the 'Teacher Research Group' dialogues. However, she also kept a sharp awareness of the impact of these changes on the teaching and learning of children, from being situated again on the dancefloor, when moving fluidly to her role as classroom teacher. Despite these findings, it was questioned, by the second researcher and critical friend, whether, being situated on the balcony, as a middle leader, was the same experience as senior leaders, in terms of the power they have.

What the findings mean for new directions in ECCE practice and/or policy:

These practices are promising for ECCE, as it affirmed the potential of middle leadership in terms of not only their impact on the teaching and learning of children but their strategic leadership capacity. This impact, although often discrete, lies heavily on their innate ability to engage with their ECCE communities, particularly other teachers, in both supportive and innovative ways (Harris and Jones 2012), as this study explored through the deployment of the 'Teacher Research Group' (Boylan 2013). However, as noted, further research must be conducted in order to explore the experience of being strategic and whether it is equal between middle and senior leadership roles.

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