



An Examination of Communities of Practice in a Disadvantaged Context in South Africa: The Shared Experiences From Early Childhood Practitioners

Glynnis Daries¹ 

¹ School of Education, Sol Plaatje University, Kimberley, South Africa.

ABSTRACT

As early childhood rises on state agendas in low and middle-income countries, the concern for building a quality workforce continues to be a challenge due to many epistemic injustices. South Africa is in the process of professionalising its early years. It is thus timely and critical to examine issues of practitioner knowledge and context-responsiveness. This article thus used the notions of Funds of Knowledge and Community of Practice as an asset-based lens. The conceptual framework was used to understand how practitioners operate as a Community of Practice to inform their work in early childhood centres in a vulnerable context with three- and four-year-olds. A qualitative case study using semi-structured interviews with eight under-qualified practitioners informed the study. The findings suggested that practitioners use informal and personal sources of knowledge while working as Communities of Practice to navigate sustainable outcomes for young children. These illustrative sources function both as enablers and disablers for shaping inclusive and quality practices. Practitioners are able to use their knowledge to be responsive, but they also have unexamined assumptions which are in need of disruption. The article concluded with a call for a more bottom-up model of professionalism that speaks to context-responsiveness, intentionality development and fostering of an ethic of care.

Correspondence

Glynnis Daries

Email: glynnis.daries@spu.ac.za

Publication History

Received 25th August, 2023

Accepted 12th October, 2023

Published online:

20th January, 2024

Keywords: *Funds of Knowledge, Sustainability, Early Childhood Practitioners, South Africa, Disadvantaged Context, Professional Development*

INTRODUCTION

In South Africa, as elsewhere in the world, there is an increasing drive to value and support the development and learning of children in the early years. Studies have shown that the first 1,000 days of life (pregnancy, early childhood, and later childhood) are highly sensitive to environmental effects.¹ Research in South Africa shows that early childhood is the building block of health, human capacity, personal and social well-being. However, historically Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) are characterized by many challenges of marginalization, fragmentation, and attention to early childhood care and protection.

In South Africa, the provision of ECD during the 1940s was racialized, and black children received programs from non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These NGOs played a key role in the care and protection of children in the community and private ECD centres. These ECD centres are traditionally viewed as places where women “look after children” and “protect children from harm” while parents are at work. Important policy initiatives and legislation have changed the educational environment of young children with a

¹ Eric Atmore, “Early Childhood Development in South Africa—Progress since the End of Apartheid,” *International Journal of Early Years Education* 21, no. 2–3 (2013): 152–62; Hasina Ebrahim, “Tensions in Incorporating Global Childhood with Early Childhood Programs: The Case of South Africa,” *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood* 37, no. 3 (2012): 80–86.

more collaborative and interdisciplinary approach to the basic needs and holistic needs of children.² In South Africa, the Department of Education's White Paper 5 uses the umbrella term ECD to describe the holistic process by which children from birth to nine years of age grow and thrive.³ Early childhood development includes the Foundation Phase programme (7-9-year-old children); the Grade R programme (5-6-year-old children) and the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme (birth to four-year-old children). The focus of this article is on the ECCE programmes offered by practitioners in a disadvantaged context. For the purpose of this article, practitioners refer to underqualified women who work in early childhood centres in a disadvantaged context. The practitioners at these ECD centres are also referred to as teachers by the parents and children.

The field of ECD and ECCE is guided by many key policy initiatives and acts such as the White Paper 5; the Children's Act; the National Development Plan (NDP), the National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS), National Curriculum Framework for birth-to-four (NCF) and the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECDP).⁴ These policies and acts are crucial in addressing the effective implementation of the global agenda for sustainable development and quality ECD provisioning by 2030 in South Africa. However, persistent current and past barriers remain problematic due to systemic inequalities, opportunities for professional development and the low status of ECD practitioners. Many unqualified women work in the field of ECD. This raises concerns and debates about the knowledge and skills that practitioners need to promote the best early learning and development of young children. This article addresses the need to investigate the Communities of Practice (CoP) of practitioners and how they use their collective funds of knowledge when working with young children in the ECD centres. Understanding how practitioners construct and reconstruct their knowledge is key to understanding their professional development. For example, in previous research, a mix of practical knowledge,⁵ subject knowledge,⁶ intuitive knowledge,⁷ content knowledge,⁸ and funds of knowledge.⁹ This article thus examines the funds of knowledge and framing practices amongst a group of practitioners from a disadvantaged community and investigates how this becomes visible in the ECD centres.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Early childhood development is a critical focus area for societies looking for equity, redress and opportunities for a healthy and prosperous life. The offering of programmes for young children in ECCE concentrates on how children grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, morally and socially.¹⁰ However, research has consistently shown major challenges in practitioner knowledge, access to quality ECCE programmes, and supporting practitioner knowledge to provide early educational stimulation and equitable contextually appropriate practises with young children in South Africa. Research reveals increasing interest in teacher knowledge. The work of Lee Shulman reminds the reader of the complex and challenging process of teaching. Shulman puts it like this:

² H.B. Ebrahim, J. Seleti, and A. Dawes, "Learning Begins at Birth: Improving Access to Early Learning.," in *The South African Child Gauge*, ed. L. Berry et al. (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 2013), 66–71.

³ RSA DoBE (Republic of South Africa. Department of Education), *White Paper 5. ECD Policy* (Pretoria: Department of Education, 2001).

⁴ RSA DoBE & Unicef (Republic of South Africa. Department of Basic Education and Unicef), *The South African National Curriculum Framework. Birth to Four Years* (Pretoria: Department of Basic Education, 2015).

⁵ Xiangming Chen, Ge Wei, and Shuling Jiang, "The Ethical Dimension of Teacher Practical Knowledge: A Narrative Inquiry into Chinese Teachers' Thinking and Actions in Dilemmatic Spaces," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 49, no. 4 (2017): 518–41.

⁶ Helen Hedges and Joy Cullen, "Subject Knowledge in Early Childhood Curriculum and Pedagogy: Beliefs and Practices," *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* 6, no. 1 (2005): 66–79.

⁷ Helen Askell-Williams and Michael J Lawson, "Teachers' Knowledge and Confidence for Promoting Positive Mental Health in Primary School Communities," *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education* 41, no. 2 (2013): 126–43.

⁸ Deborah Loewenberg Ball, Mark Hoover Thames, and Geoffrey Phelps, "Content Knowledge for Teaching: What Makes It Special?," *Journal of Teacher Education* 59, no. 5 (2008): 389–407.

⁹ Glynnis Daries and Hasina Ebrahim, "Funds of Knowledge and Agentic Strategies of Three-and Four-Year-Old Children in South Africa," *South African Journal of Education* 41, no. 3 (2021): 1–9; Misty Adoniou, "Teacher Knowledge: A Complex Tapestry," *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education* 43, no. 2 (2015): 99–116; Helen Hedges, "Sophia's Funds of Knowledge: Theoretical and Pedagogical Insights, Possibilities and Dilemmas," *International Journal of Early Years Education* 23, no. 1 (2015): 83–96; Judy Marquez Kiyama, "Family Lessons and Funds of Knowledge: College-Going Paths in Mexican American Families," *Journal of Latinos and Education* 10, no. 1 (2011): 23–42; Amita Gupta, "Early Experiences and Personal Funds of Knowledge and Beliefs of Immigrant and Minority Teacher Candidates Dialog with Theories of Child Development in a Teacher Education Classroom," *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education* 27, no. 1 (2006): 3–18; Norma González et al., "Bridging Funds of Distributed Knowledge: Creating Zones of Practices in Mathematics," *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* 6, no. 1–2 (2001): 115–32.

¹⁰ Atmore, "Early Childhood Development in South Africa—Progress since the End of Apartheid."

Teaching is impossible. If we simply add together all that is expected of a typical teacher and take note of the circumstances in which those activities are to be carried out, the sum makes greater demands than any individual can possibly fulfil.

Gaining knowledge is not a static process but a social process in which practitioners funds of knowledge are shaped through contextually relevant experiences within their CoP. In South Africa, the Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) system,¹¹ gazetted in April 2007 as The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa, calls for teachers to increasingly assume responsibility for their professional learning.¹² It appeals for a break with the traditional “training” models of teacher professional learning.¹³ South Africa’s Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (ISPFTED) recommends that CoPs, known as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), be established in schools to promote professional learning among in-service teachers.¹⁴

The concept of a CoP as a learning community is attributed to Lave and Wenger.¹⁵ Community of Practice is based on social learning that occurs between individuals in social environments such as the work environment of an ECD centre.¹⁶ CoPs can be defined as groups of people with different perspectives and expertise who voluntarily, informally and collaboratively solve common problems and collectively reach objectives.¹⁷ A CoP within the ECD centres is, thus, a community of practitioners who address a common interest, problem, or goal, with the aim of improving their practice and professional learning, and ultimately the learning of their children.¹⁸

The 2015 National Curriculum Framework (NCF) document provides professional knowledge and guidelines for curriculum implementation for children between the ages of birth to four years.¹⁹ The NCF and UNICEF also raise issues about practitioner knowledge.²⁰ To implement the NCF, practitioners would have to access a variety of knowledge bases to effect responsive practice with and for children from birth to four. An analysis of the early-learning development areas and their aims and examples of practice raises questions about the types of knowledge that would be most appropriate for the variety of settings in which young children are cared for and educated. Therefore, the NCF, in collaboration with various stakeholders, has been developed to improve the curriculum knowledge of practitioners to improve the learning experience of young children.²¹ The NCF document has several outcomes aimed at quality ECD provisioning. Firstly, the aim is that the document will be used by training providers, practitioners, parents and other stakeholders to jointly improve children’s learning and development. Secondly, adults should work together to make NCF a meaningful and effective experience, paying attention to the high-quality experiences of babies, toddlers, and small children in various programs and environments, such as ECD centres, homes, neighbourhoods, and facilities for early-child care. Lastly, the inclusion of families as the primary educators of young children.

¹¹ Republic of South Africa; South African Council for Educators, *The CPTD Management System Handbook*. (Pretoria: South African Council of Educators, 2013).

¹² RSA DoE (Republic of South Africa. Department of Education Government Gazette), *The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa* (Pretoria: Department of Education, 2007).

¹³ Republic of South Africa; South African Council for Educators (SACE), *The CPTD Management System Handbook* (Pretoria: South African Council of Educators, 2013), 17.

¹⁴ Jennifer Feldman, “The Role of Professional Learning Communities to Support Teacher Development: A Social Practice Theory Perspective,” *South African Journal of Education* 40, no. 1 (2020): 1–8; Department of Basic Education (DBE), *The South African National Curriculum Framework for Children from Birth to Four* (Pretoria: Department of Basic Education, 2015); The Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, “Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa 2011–2025,” https://www.sace.org.za/assets/documents/uploads/sace_58701-2016-08-31-Integrated%20Strategic%20Plan.Pdf (DBE & DHET, 2011); Republic of South Africa; South African Council for Educators (SACE), *The CPTD Management System Handbook*.

¹⁵ J. Lave and E. Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹⁶ Alison Viskovic, “Becoming a Tertiary Teacher: Learning in Communities of Practice,” *Higher Education Research & Development* 25, no. 4 (2006): 323–39.

¹⁷ Million Chauraya and Karin Brodie, “Conversations in a Professional Learning Community: An Analysis of Teacher Learning Opportunities in Mathematics,” *Pythagoras* 39, no. 1 (2018): 1–9; Alejandro Barragán-Ocaña et al., “Communities of Practice: A Focus from Complex Systems,” *International Journal of General Systems* 41, no. 7 (2012): 741–55; Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*.

¹⁸ Alma Harris and Michelle Jones, “Professional Learning Communities and System Improvement,” *Improving Schools* 13, no. 2 (2010): 172–81; Godfrey Ejuu et al., “Community’s Knowledge, Attitude and Practices towards Inclusive Home Based Early Childhood Education in Uganda: Lessons for Scaling Deep,” *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 12, no. 1 (2022): 1117.

¹⁹ RSA DoBE & Unicef (Republic of South Africa. Department of Basic Education and Unicef), *The South African National Curriculum Framework. Birth to Four Years*.

²⁰ RSA DoBE & Unicef, *The South African National Curriculum Framework. Birth to Four Years*.

²¹ RSA DoBE & Unicef, *The South African National Curriculum Framework. Birth to Four Years*.

The roles and responsibilities of practitioners are multiple. The NCF is flexible in nature and facilitates the autonomy of the teachers within their CoP. The CoP in these ECD settings speaks to the principles of the social constructivist paradigm. The social constructivist paradigm draws attention to the fact that early-childhood practitioners' funds of knowledge are informed by multiple realities rather than single explanations of phenomena.²² Vygotsky contends that practitioners should provide suitable learning environments which will allow for instruction that helps children to develop continuously.²³ Vygotsky gave voice to the importance of the child's socio-cultural milieu to provide a more holistic understanding of the child's growth and development.²⁴ Therefore, the sociocultural theory gives an account of how human mental processes are linked to cultural, historical and instructional settings.

Social reality is seen as a continuous process, indicating that discourse created in a changing social power field can shape and redefine the social reality of men and how they experience it. In addition to the aforementioned, with critical theory, the belief is that research is conducted for "the emancipation of individuals and groups in an egalitarian society."²⁵ Working in a critical paradigm allows for a more sensitive reading of the status quo and the inequities that characterises it. This research concentrates not only on giving an explanation of the status quo but also on shedding light on where the power of the practitioners' funds of knowledge lies and where the possibilities for educational change and transformation are positioned.

Funds of Knowledge celebrate the competence of people in their workplaces, not the focus on what is not. It is particularly based on the strengths-based perspectives of practitioners in a disadvantaged context. González *et al.*, state that Funds of Knowledge are based on informal, every day, diverse knowledge and experiences found amongst families, practitioners, children and community members.²⁶ The following excerpt links competency to experiences:

*Funds of Knowledge is "based on a simple premise that people are competent and have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge."*²⁷

People's Funds of Knowledge to people's potential, strengths and competence; a specified type of intuitive culturally rooted knowledge, teacher's personal and professional knowledge and how this is used during curriculum decision-making in early-childhood centres.²⁸ The concept of Funds of Knowledge is used to assist in understanding the multiple realities that feed into the different sources that inform practitioners' knowledge.

METHODOLOGY

Due to the emphasis on the subjective meaning-making of practitioners, a qualitative design was deemed most appropriate. The qualitative research design assisted in an incisive understanding of the Funds of Knowledge of practitioners as influenced by the real-world context of the early-childhood centres, because it made the practitioners' world 'more visible'.²⁹ The meanings that practitioners attach to their experiences are often hidden from direct observation, are not acknowledged as valuable, and/or are taken for granted. This research used a case study design to be sensitive to the practitioners' Funds of Knowledge which they gain while being part of a CoP in their ECD community. These sources of knowledge are valuable but often ignored because of the deficit lens through which these practitioners are seen in society. This case study extracts evidence from the work of eight underqualified practitioners who had a wealth of knowledge in their personal and informal domains.

Qualitative research is of value when the researcher seeks to get descriptive information by interpreting the participant's feelings, experiences and actions in human terms rather than statistical presentations.³⁰ It was important to find out how the practitioners articulated their Funds of Knowledge in a CoP and through it helped

²² A. Riegler, *Constructivism. Paradigms in Theory Constructions*. (Brussels : Springer Press, 2012).

²³ L S Vygotsky and M Cole, *Mind in Society: Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), https://books.google.com.gh/books?id=RxjjUefze_oC.

²⁴ Vygotsky and Cole, *Mind in Society: Development of Higher Psychological Processes*.

²⁵ Lindsay Mack, "The Philosophical Underpinnings of Educational Research" (Polyglossia, 2010), 6.

²⁶ González et al., "Bridging Funds of Distributed Knowledge: Creating Zones of Practices in Mathematics."

²⁷ González et al., "Bridging Funds of Distributed Knowledge: Creating Zones of Practices in Mathematics," 115.

²⁸ Helen Hedges, "Teachers' Funds of Knowledge: A Challenge to Evidence-Based Practice," *Teachers and Teaching* 18, no. 1 (2012): 7–24, 18.

²⁹ Robert K Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods (Applied Social Research Methods)* (Sage publications Thousand Oaks, CA, 2014), 4.

³⁰ M. Terre-Blanche, K. Kelly, and K. Durrheim, "Why Qualitative Research?," in *Research in Practice: Applied Methods for the Social Sciences*, ed. M. Terre-Blanche, K. Durrheim, and D. Painter (Cape Town: UCT Press., 2010), 272-285, 272.

the researcher to gain insight into similarities and differences within and across the two centres as a bounded system.³¹

The research study used purposive sampling to make a “judgment” on the most appropriate group of participants to answer the questions of this research.³² This article reports on the data from the semi-structured interviews which were conducted with the practitioners at each centre. The data collection method allowed for flexibility during the interview process through open questions, investigation, and additional clarifications when necessary.³³ In addition to the above, the semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to follow up on interesting avenues emerging from conversations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the three themes for the article namely: caring for children through responsive practices, CoP Funds of Knowledge and content knowledge from training on the NCF, will be discussed.

Caring for children through responsive practices

This section serves as a catalyst for encouraging the agency of teachers through a focus on their knowledge to develop responsive practice which includes protective factors to prevent risky child development and learning in the context of the disadvantaged. As noted previously, teachers’ Funds of Knowledge regarding the context and how the social circumstances created vulnerabilities could be read as assets for building responsive ECCE as an intervention.

The findings in this section are organised according to the teachers’ approach to caring for children. In the centres, teachers embarked on an individual as well as a collective approach to caring for the children. They used their Funds of Knowledge in order to position themselves as nurturers, keen observers and problem-solvers in the centres. It could be argued that the sources of teachers’ Funds of Knowledge appear to place them in a better position to create protective factors for young children in their care. The teachers worked hard with other community members to provide a conducive environment for the children. To illustrate, T2 spoke about opening up opportunities to see life differently and through observing good role models with whom they could identify.

“Last week we had Lukas and Mark here at our centre. They are famous singers from the area. Their young sister is also here at this centre. We work closely with other community members to show a better world for the kids” (T2/I1).

Teachers shared their personal knowledge in practical ways and this enabled them to think and perform in appropriate ways.³⁴ They were able to use their personal knowledge from motherhood to create a natural extension of caring for children in the centres. The teachers recognised that the children needed them to be patient and to be nurturers in order to prevent further harm to the children. T8 recognised the need for patience and love:

“I think that the children need us to be patient because many times one can get very impatient. I see sometimes when I speak too loud to them they just get confused and then they just do the wrong things. Ms. X will always say to talk slowly, explain, and show the child the object. She always goes out of her way to show us how to work with these young children. Now I also try to be patient and explain to them with material that they see. I also realise that I should work slower with them and I should be patient and give them love. Because when I come during the morning then the children give me a hug and if I don’t do it then it can hurt the child” (T8/I1).

³¹ Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods (Applied Social Research Methods)*; R. K. Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research*, 3rd ed. (New York: Sage, 2012); S.B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research. A Guide to Design and Implementation. Revised and Expanded from Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009); John W Creswell, *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research* (SAGE publications, 2014).

³² K. Maree and J. Pietersen, “ Sampling ,” in *First Steps in Research*, ed. K. Maree, 2nd ed. (Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers, 2016), 198; L. Cohen, L. Manion, and K. Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*, 7th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 156; H. Strydom and C.S.L. Delpont, “Sampling and Pilot Study in Qualitative Research ,” in *Research at Grass Roots. For the Social Sciences and Human Service Professions*, ed. A.S. De Vos et al., 4th ed. (Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers, 2011), 390–96, 392.

³³ J. Nieuwenhuis, “Qualitative Research Designs and Data Gathering Techniques,” in *First Steps in Research* , ed. K. Maree, 2nd ed. (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 2016), 92.

³⁴ Angela Anning, “Knowing Who I Am and What I Know: Developing New Versions of Professional Knowledge in Integrated Service Settings,” in *Paper Presented at the British Educational Research Association’s Annual Conference* (Leeds: University of Leeds, 2001).

Their Funds of Knowledge were strengthened through the advancement of caring relationships between the teachers and the children. Noddings is of the opinion that the essential core of “caring” is about learning to love and nurture each other.³⁵ Promoting caring between the children, the parents and the teachers is a positive starting point in early-childhood centres, especially in a disadvantaged centre.³⁶ In this research, this proved to be important because young children who are protected by supportive relationships with parents and other adults, learn how to handle everyday challenges.

In this research caring through responsive practice included looking after children’s nutritional needs. This was a priority because the teachers had knowledge and experiences about hunger and food security in families and communities. It is clear in the literature that when children “lack certain nutrients or suffer from general malnourishment, they do not have the same readiness for learning as their healthy, adequately nourished counterparts.”³⁷ Inadequate nutrition affects the children’s concentration levels and general well-being. In schooling in SA, free meals are provided for poor children through the Primary Nutrition Programme. The centres were using subsidies and parent fees to provide meals for the children. Teachers were aware that the meals at the centres might be the only meal that some of the children would receive for the day. The excerpts below deepen understanding of the meals provided by teachers and other community members at the centres:

“We make sure that the children eat two meals. Porridge and lunch because then we know they ate here in case they don’t get a meal at home. They can’t learn on an empty stomach. They will also not listen if they just hear grrrr grrr [Makes sounds and rubs her stomach]... in their stomachs because they are hungry” (T7/I1).

“They also cook at the centre and then all the children get food but they also bring their own bread for the 9 o’clock tea time and at 11 o’clock they get their bowl of cook food at the centre” (T2/I1).

“Ms Feli, owns a veggie and fruit market in this community. She knows the... home circumstances of these kids. She really loves our children because once a week she will bring veggies and fruit not only to our ECD centre but also to the centre down the road. She has a big heart” (T4/I1)

It can be seen that the teachers’ context-bound knowledge of children’s realities made them (teachers) more responsive to the plight of the children. The community also plays a valuable role in their CoP because their care is most effective through hands-on, practical ways. Knowledge-in-action was evident through their being prominent role models, being patient and cooking food for children. Noddings posits that such hands-on caring eases the transition from home to centres and creates opportunities for giving a “second home”.³⁸

Building a Community of Practice Funds of Knowledge

The practitioners gained formal and informal knowledge about teaching young children from each other. This is indicative of the working of CoP.³⁹ In this type of networking, people or members interact with each other and with the world. Members in this CoP are normally in a set relationship over time. These communities develop around a common interest that matters such as the early educational stimulation of children.⁴⁰ In this research, the more experienced teachers guided newly appointed teachers towards an understanding of what it is to teach young children, the planning of lessons and developing teaching and learning material. The practitioners in this research enjoyed a collegial relationship. Despite the hardships of living and teaching in a disadvantaged context they looked forward to going to work. The excerpts below illustrate this:

“The people were very welcoming and the teacher that you saw at the bottom really helped me a lot when I started at the centre and worked with the four-year-old children” (T1/I1).

³⁵ Nel Noddings, “What Does It Mean to Educate the Whole Child?,” *Educational Leadership* 63, no. 1 (2005): 8; Nel Noddings, “Teaching Themes of Care,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 76 (1995): 675.

³⁶ Kevin James Swick, “Insights on Caring for Early Childhood Professionals and Families,” *Early Childhood Education Journal* 35 (2007): 97–102.

³⁷ Atmore, “Early Childhood Development in South Africa—Progress since the End of Apartheid,” 153.

³⁸ Noddings, “Teaching Themes of Care.”

³⁹ Etienne Wenger, “Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems,” *Organization* 7, no. 2 (2000): 225–46.

⁴⁰ Lizzie Cotton, “‘It’s Just More in the Real World Really’: How Can a Local Project Support Early Years Practitioners from Different Settings in Working and Learning Together?,” *Early Years* 33, no. 1 (2013): 18–32; Ivar Bråten and Leila E Ferguson, “Beliefs about Sources of Knowledge Predict Motivation for Learning in Teacher Education,” *Teaching and Teacher Education* 50 (2015): 13–23; Ejuu et al., “Community’s Knowledge, Attitude and Practices towards Inclusive Home Based Early Childhood Education in Uganda: Lessons for Scaling Deep.”

“Everyone that works here stands together and we love working with each other. If we have something to complete then we will all do it and that is positive. You also look forward to coming to work” (T8/I2).

The fieldwork revealed that the collaboration among the practitioners was assisting in building their emerging professional knowledge. Informal learning in CoP is often not recognised as learning within organisations. It is normally regarded as being “part of the job”.⁴¹ However, it is noteworthy that findings show that learning in this way proved to be valuable in gaining new knowledge and practical skills.

The practitioners were gaining new knowledge in a social environment such as the ECD setting. Their new Funds of Knowledge were jointly constructed regarding aspects of practice which included planning for teaching and learning. Therefore, the teachers noted that the exposure to their CoP was positive in helping them gain additional Funds of Knowledge. T5, for instance, noted how she improved her practical skills in using concrete teaching aids as noted in this excerpt:

“The principal of the local primary school adopted this centre. He said that our kids do well when they are in grade R. Now he brings material for us like charts, crayons, printing paper, paint, newspaper and lots of other things to us.”(T5/I1)

T2 also echoed the same sentiments of appreciation towards the principal of the primary school as seen in the excerpt:

“Mr. Cat is really very strict at his school. Children learn a lot at their school and it is good that they are interested in our centre. He told us that it would be good if the grade R teachers at his school could help us. We like it because we know that we can learn from them, and they will also see how we work with young children at the centre. They will see the material we make for the children to play with, and then we can also learn from what they do.” (T2/I1)

The members of such CoP have a sense of joint interest and identity because they are normally organised around some specific area of knowledge or activity.⁴² Based on the discussion, it was suggested that collaboration encouraged social learning in order to develop emerging formal knowledge and gain practical skills on the ground. Working with and learning in these CoPs not only stimulated engagement with colleagues in the centre but also with other people outside the centres. Interesting findings reveal how teachers used their social knowledge to connect with individuals to support the needs of the children. The teachers were able to secure sponsorships for the children. This shows that teachers’ knowledge of the community allowed them to extend beyond academic needs and to provide for children’s basic human needs. Children were provided with fruit, toys and clothing from local businesses and community members as noted below:

“We also have other people and businesses that support us and bring things for the children. Mrs. Felli, a white lady brings stuff for the children. She brings toys, clothes and also lots of fruit for the children to eat.”(T5/I2).

“Teacher Hanna gave lots of clothes last year to the centre. We also have a brown suitcase full of clothes for the children and we give it when we see that some of them need clothes and then they take it home. The Catholic church from the city also brings clothes, juice and fruit for the children” (T7/I2).

The findings in this section show how practitioners were accessing their formal, practical knowledge and social capital⁴³ from peer and community resources while functioning as a CoP.

Content Knowledge gained from Training

The following section continues with the knowledge practitioners gained during training and how they have used it to improve centre-based practices. It was evident in the study that the teachers were appreciative of the fact that they were now being recognised by the government as a group that needed training. The teachers saw

⁴¹ David Boud and Heather Middleton, “Learning from Others at Work: Communities of Practice and Informal Learning,” *Journal of Workplace Learning* 15, no. 5 (2003): 194–202.

⁴² Chauraya and Brodie, “Conversations in a Professional Learning Community: An Analysis of Teacher Learning Opportunities in Mathematics”; Boud and Middleton, “Learning from Others at Work: Communities of Practice and Informal Learning”; Wenger, “Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems.”

⁴³ Tara J Yosso*, “Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth,” *Race Ethnicity and Education* 8, no. 1 (2005): 69–91.

the training on the NCF as a move in the right direction for their development. The training created insights into different types of knowledge for practice with young children. Previous researchers argue for the importance of formal knowledge which can be precisely and formally articulated and shared in public space.⁴⁴ Teachers spoke about how the training enhanced their formal knowledge of a curriculum for young children. T7 noted that ... *“the teachers learned about the NCF and what it is about. We learned about the content that children should know before Grade R” (T7/I1).*

Engaging with and understanding the curriculum helped the teacher to gain new knowledge. Teachers have “professional knowledge which may be constantly subject to change and modification through influences such as experience, policy and curriculum directives, and training courses.”⁴⁵ Findings revealed insight into the teachers’ emerging professional knowledge as they spoke of the domains of child development, creating a suitable learning environment and planning for age-appropriate learning activities. This resulted in a change in their ways of working with children after they were exposed to “alternatives to transmission teaching which characterised their own schooling experiences.”⁴⁶ For example, different learning stations were created in the class as a significant change for developmentally appropriate practice with young children. The following was said by T2 and T5:

“In the training, we learned about the different corners like the fantasy corner, the play doll corner, the book and block corner. We have to set up books where children can read but also a play corner with toys and blocks” (T2/I2).

“In the training, I heard about the holistic well-being of children. It was clear that we need to work with young children to help them develop their fine motor skills, gross motor skills, language development and that they should count and write numbers 1-10” (T5/I1).

Although teachers gained official content knowledge to improve practices with young children, they used their navigational knowledge to make alternative arrangements when faced with the challenge of small classroom spaces in their centres. T1 made the following comment:

“The indoor space is too small for my children but teacher Jo let me work in her class if I want to do painting, cutting and pasting. I can then pack out my tables and chairs in her class for that time. She also helps me with the activities because we need to watch the kids so that they don’t put the red paint brush in the yellow paint... (laughing)... yes this happens but then children see now how the paint mix and they see a new colour” (T1/I2).

The formal knowledge around curriculum assisted the teachers to utilise appropriate pedagogic content and structure of teaching young children. This “content knowledge contains the competence of knowing how to teach young children.”⁴⁷ Teaching young children meant considering their needs. The teachers spoke about how they grew in their understanding of taking the specific learning needs of children into account during training. The excerpts below show this understanding:

“We learned at the training that you should not hang your posters too high where the children can’t see it. The children must learn something from the posters on the walls. But the children’s work should also be hung against the wall and it should be clear so that they can see it” (T5/I2).

“Training at the workshop was very different from what I have done at the centre. At the training, we learned that everything should be in its place in the class and that you should write the names of the shapes big enough so that all the children can see them. You then have to hang it on the wall in the class” (T3/I2).

The teachers in the study showed emerging insights gained through a focus on general pedagogy and planning for age-appropriate learning activities. Previously they taught without lesson plans or simply modified the contents for Grade R in the national curriculum. The training helped teachers to learn various skills related to planning for active learning. The excerpts below illustrate how teachers were becoming knowledgeable about what a daily plan is, when to plan, how to plan and how to use a lesson plan, from their training:

⁴⁴ Hedges and Cullen, “Subject Knowledge in Early Childhood Curriculum and Pedagogy: Beliefs and Practices”; Anning, “Knowing Who I Am and What I Know: Developing New Versions of Professional Knowledge in Integrated Service Settings”; Lee S Shulman, “Those Who Understand: Knowledge Growth in Teaching,” *Educational Researcher* 15, no. 2 (1986): 4–14.

⁴⁵ Zoyah Kinkead-Clark, “The Role of Teacher Education in Supporting the Transformation of Early Childhood Education in Jamaica,” *Caribbean Educational Research Journal* 3, no. 2 (2015): 3–16.

⁴⁶ UNICEF., “Inequalities in the Fulfilment of Children’s Rights in South Africa: A Statistical Review,” October 2010.

⁴⁷ Iris Hoppo, Kaarina Määttä, and Satu Uusiautti, “How Do Early Childhood Education Teachers Perceive Their Expertise? A Qualitative Study of Child Care Providers in Lapland, Finland,” *Early Childhood Education Journal* 41 (2013): 273–81.

“I didn’t know how to set up a daily plan or how a daily plan should look. And she gave us an example on how to set up a daily plan. And I learned to do my planning the previous day” (T4/I2).
“I learned a lot through that course because after that I understood what I must do. I understand properly because about the four corners, working according to a daily plan and a year plan and how to develop a child” (T1/I2).

“We made a day programme at the training and learned more about it. Even the children here know the day programme. I learned to do the daily programme and how to teach the children activities according to this daily programme. I have to explain and I have to look at every child when I do the activities” (T6/I2).

In addition to the above, the NCF curriculum guidelines for birth to four-year-olds were instrumental in helping the teachers improve their knowledge of developmental domains. The practitioners made specific mention of the following ten domains: emotional health and self-esteem, gross and fine motor development, artistic expression, language, social competence, understanding the social- and physical world, logical, conceptual and mathematical thinking and self-management.

During the semi-structured interviews practitioners spoke about gaining insight into child development domains that were helpful in shaping appropriate practices. For example, after the training, T4 revised her knowledge of social development. She had the following to say: *“Many times a child plays alone then we would force the child not to play alone. But the child is okay to play alone and later the child will decide to play with the other children”.* (T4/I2).

T6 was able to differentiate between different types of physical motor development. She stated the following: *“I am glad that I went to the training because I didn’t know the difference between big motor and small motor movement and activities”.* (T6/I2).

T5 shared the learning experience: *“We learned that fine motor skills are the beads and threading laces and building puzzles in the class. Then we learned about big motor, the development of the muscles on the jungle gym and how the child should balance. We do this now at the centre. We take turns to use the outdoor equipment if the sun is not too hot.”* (T5/I2).

Furthermore, teachers’ formal knowledge for practice in mathematics and language development was increased through their participation in the training workshops. T4 noted the following: *“I learned about big and small, high and low, how you should do the mathematics and the language development of the child”* (T4/I2).

T2 added the following: *“After the training, I know about teaching numbers, the ABC, the days of the week, (and themes such as) fruits and vegetables”* (T2/I2).

The knowledge gained regarding the curriculum, the daily programme and learning activities for young children was helpful in navigating more effective practices with young children.

In summary, exposure to training brought the teachers’ attention to developmentally appropriate practices. For the first time, teachers were exposed to learning about a curriculum for the age group of children in their classes. Teachers gained official knowledge of the learning environment but they used their practical knowledge of implementing this in the centres with limited space and resources. The training gave the teachers new insight into planning according to a daily programme and considering the different developmental domains and the individual needs of the children in the centres. It was evident that these new Funds of Knowledge gained in their CoP assisted the practitioners in their daily work at the centres.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study fills a gap in research on the knowledge and practice of practitioners in disadvantaged communities in early childhood. In disadvantaged contexts, practitioners are usually aimed at professional development interventions from the point of view that they are in a deficit. This is because a particular form of knowledge and its associated practices are valued. This article proposes the teachers’ unique Funds of Knowledge as good starting points for their development. “Teaching is a challenging and complex activity that is premised upon the acquisition, integration and application of different types of knowledge.” Hence just the personal, intuitive knowledge is inadequate as an asset. Attention needs to be paid to teachers’ subject and content knowledge and how these influence daily teaching and learning activities in early-childhood centres in a disadvantaged context.⁴⁸ Teachers who are confident in their subject and content knowledge are more likely to support children’s optimal learning in different formal and informal activities.

⁴⁸ Hedges and Cullen, “Subject Knowledge in Early Childhood Curriculum and Pedagogy: Beliefs and Practices,” 66.

With regard to the complexity and professional development of teachers, this research has shown that practitioners in the disadvantaged context can negotiate complexity by creating different combinations to make early childhood education workable for the children in their care. The preparation of critically reflective teachers is imperative. This type of teacher preparation must take into account the knowledge and the translations thereof not only in the contexts of importance but also in the context of their CoP. This is essential for the disruption of narrow understandings and to open up new combinations to create contextually responsive knowledge and practice.

Early Childhood practitioners need to be encouraged to work in CoP within their centres and with community stakeholders. This is an alternative and practical pathway to help practitioners improve their knowledge to support sustainable practice with young children. The understanding of learning as a social activity informs the question of how learning has occurred in practitioners involved in early childhood education. It is also given that they are continually learning on an ongoing basis from everyday experiences with learners at early-childhood centres. Creating CoP is integral to this learning. This implies that teachers will have a shared language to discuss the strengths and weaknesses which inform their own practices in a disadvantaged context. This approach is different because teachers in different centers and at the same centers support each other in a sustainable way, as opposed to sporadic training options that are not properly monitored or supported by trainers.

CONCLUSION

This research comes at a time when rapid changes are being effected in ECCE, both on the international front and in SA. The South African sustainable development goal that focuses on quality provision in early childhood, points to the need to pay attention to the systems, infrastructure and the workforce. The focus on Funds of Knowledge within a CoP is important for teacher development. It empowers practitioners and validates the work they do by sharing their knowledge and Funds of knowledge with others. This gives the teachers the opportunity to see that their Funds of Knowledge are relevant to their real-life context and what works and what does not work in these similar contexts.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adoniou, Misty. "Teacher Knowledge: A Complex Tapestry." *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education* 43, no. 2 (2015): 99–116.
- Anning, Angela. "Knowing Who I Am and What I Know: Developing New Versions of Professional Knowledge in Integrated Service Settings." In *Paper Presented at the British Educational Research Association's Annual Conference*. Leeds: University of Leeds, 2001.
- Askill-Williams, Helen, and Michael J Lawson. "Teachers' Knowledge and Confidence for Promoting Positive Mental Health in Primary School Communities." *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education* 41, no. 2 (2013): 126–43.
- Atmore, Eric. "Early Childhood Development in South Africa—Progress since the End of Apartheid." *International Journal of Early Years Education* 21, no. 2–3 (2013): 152–62.
- Barragán-Ocaña, Alejandro, Álvaro Quijano-Solís, Guadalupe Vega-Díaz, and Benito Sánchez-Lara. "Communities of Practice: A Focus from Complex Systems." *International Journal of General Systems* 41, no. 7 (2012): 741–55.
- Boud, David, and Heather Middleton. "Learning from Others at Work: Communities of Practice and Informal Learning." *Journal of Workplace Learning* 15, no. 5 (2003): 194–202.
- Bråten, Ivar, and Leila E Ferguson. "Beliefs about Sources of Knowledge Predict Motivation for Learning in Teacher Education." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 50 (2015): 13–23.
- Chauraya, Million, and Karin Brodie. "Conversations in a Professional Learning Community: An Analysis of Teacher Learning Opportunities in Mathematics." *Pythagoras* 39, no. 1 (2018): 1–9.
- Chen, Xiangming, Ge Wei, and Shuling Jiang. "The Ethical Dimension of Teacher Practical Knowledge: A Narrative Inquiry into Chinese Teachers' Thinking and Actions in Dilemmatic Spaces." *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 49, no. 4 (2017): 518–41.
- Cohen, L., L. Manion, and K. Morrison. *Research Methods in Education*. 7th ed. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Cotton, Lizzie. "'It's Just More in the Real World Really': How Can a Local Project Support Early Years Practitioners from Different Settings in Working and Learning Together?" *Early Years* 33, no. 1 (2013): 18–32.
- Creswell, John W. *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research*. SAGE publications, 2014.
- Daries, Glynnis, and Hasina Ebrahim. "Funds of Knowledge and Agentic Strategies of Three- and Four-Year-

- Old Children in South Africa.” *South African Journal of Education* 41, no. 3 (2021): 1–9.
- Department of Basic Education (DBE). *The South African National Curriculum Framework for Children from Birth to Four*. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education, 2015.
- Ebrahim, H.B., J. Seleti, and A. Dawes. “Learning Begins at Birth: Improving Access to Early Learning. .” In *The South African Child Gauge*, edited by L. Berry, L. Biersteker, A. Dawes, L. Lake, and C. Smith, 66–71. Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 2013.
- Ebrahim, Hasina. “Tensions in Incorporating Global Childhood with Early Childhood Programs: The Case of South Africa.” *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood* 37, no. 3 (2012): 80–86.
- Ejuu, Godfrey, Victor Locoro, Miria Nandera, Martin Omoding, Lenard W Mafabi, George W Kutosi, and Irene Kharono. “Community’s Knowledge, Attitude and Practices towards Inclusive Home Based Early Childhood Education in Uganda: Lessons for Scaling Deep.” *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 12, no. 1 (2022): 1117.
- Feldman, Jennifer. “The Role of Professional Learning Communities to Support Teacher Development: A Social Practice Theory Perspective.” *South African Journal of Education* 40, no. 1 (2020): 1–8.
- González, Norma, Rosi Andrade, Marta Civil, and Luis Moll. “Bridging Funds of Distributed Knowledge: Creating Zones of Practices in Mathematics.” *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* 6, no. 1–2 (2001): 115–32.
- Gupta, Amita. “Early Experiences and Personal Funds of Knowledge and Beliefs of Immigrant and Minority Teacher Candidates Dialog with Theories of Child Development in a Teacher Education Classroom.” *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education* 27, no. 1 (2006): 3–18.
- Happo, Iris, Kaarina Määttä, and Satu Uusiautti. “How Do Early Childhood Education Teachers Perceive Their Expertise? A Qualitative Study of Child Care Providers in Lapland, Finland.” *Early Childhood Education Journal* 41 (2013): 273–81.
- Harris, Alma, and Michelle Jones. “Professional Learning Communities and System Improvement.” *Improving Schools* 13, no. 2 (2010): 172–81.
- Hedges, Helen. “Sophia’s Funds of Knowledge: Theoretical and Pedagogical Insights, Possibilities and Dilemmas.” *International Journal of Early Years Education* 23, no. 1 (2015): 83–96.
- . “Teachers’ Funds of Knowledge: A Challenge to Evidence-Based Practice.” *Teachers and Teaching* 18, no. 1 (2012): 7–24.
- Hedges, Helen, and Joy Cullen. “Subject Knowledge in Early Childhood Curriculum and Pedagogy: Beliefs and Practices.” *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* 6, no. 1 (2005): 66–79.
- Kinhead-Clark, Zoyah. “The Role of Teacher Education in Supporting the Transformation of Early Childhood Education in Jamaica.” *Caribbean Educational Research Journal* 3, no. 2 (2015): 3–16.
- Kiyama, Judy Marquez. “Family Lessons and Funds of Knowledge: College-Going Paths in Mexican American Families.” *Journal of Latinos and Education* 10, no. 1 (2011): 23–42.
- Lave, J., and E. Wenger. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Loewenberg Ball, Deborah, Mark Hoover Thames, and Geoffrey Phelps. “Content Knowledge for Teaching: What Makes It Special?” *Journal of Teacher Education* 59, no. 5 (2008): 389–407.
- Mack, Lindsay. “The Philosophical Underpinnings of Educational Research.” Polyglossia, 2010.
- Maree, K., and J. Pietersen. “ Sampling .” In *First Steps in Research*, edited by K. Maree, 2nd ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers, 2016.
- Merriam, S.B. *Qualitative Research. A Guide to Design and Implementation. Revised and Expanded from Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009.
- Nieuwenhuis, J. “Qualitative Research Designs and Data Gathering Techniques.” In *First Steps in Research*, edited by K. Maree, 2nd ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik, 2016.
- Noddings, Nel. “Teaching Themes of Care.” *Phi Delta Kappan* 76 (1995): 675.
- . “What Does It Mean to Educate the Whole Child?” *Educational Leadership* 63, no. 1 (2005): 8.
- Republic of South Africa; South African Council for Educators. *The CPTD Management System Handbook*. Pretoria: South African Council of Educators, 2013.
- Republic of South Africa; South African Council for Educators (SACE). *The CPTD Management System Handbook*. Pretoria: South African Council of Educators, 2013.
- Riegler, A. *Constructivism. Paradigms in Theory Constructions*. Brussels : Springer Press, 2012.
- RSA DoBE (Republic of South Africa. Department of Education). *White Paper 5. ECD Policy*. Pretoria: Department of Education, 2001.
- RSA DoBE & Unicef (Republic of South Africa. Department of Basic Education and Unicef). *The South*

- African National Curriculum Framework. Birth to Four Years*. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education, 2015.
- RSA DoE (Republic of South Africa. Department of Education Government Gazette. *The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa*. Pretoria: Department of Education, 2007.
- Shulman, Lee S. “Those Who Understand: Knowledge Growth in Teaching.” *Educational Researcher* 15, no. 2 (1986): 4–14.
- Strydom, H., and C.S.L. Delpont. “Sampling and Pilot Study in Qualitative Research .” In *Research at Grass Roots. For the Social Sciences and Human Service Professions*, edited by A.S. De Vos, H. Strydom, C.B. Fouché, and C.S.L. Delpont, 4th ed., 390–96. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers, 2011.
- Swick, Kevin James. “Insights on Caring for Early Childhood Professionals and Families.” *Early Childhood Education Journal* 35 (2007): 97–102.
- Terre-Blanche, M., K. Kelly, and K. Durrheim. “Why Qualitative Research?” In *Research in Practice: Applied Methods for the Social Sciences*, edited by M. Terre- Blanche, K. Durrheim, and D. Painter, 272-285. Cape Town: UCT Press., 2010.
- The Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training. “Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa 2011–2025.” https://www.sace.org.za/assets/documents/uploads/sace_58701-2016-08-31-Integrated%20Strategic%20Plan.Pdf. DBE & DHET, 2011.
- UNICEF. “Inequalities in the Fulfilment of Children’s Rights in South Africa: A Statistical Review,” October 2010.
- Viskovic, Alison. “Becoming a Tertiary Teacher: Learning in Communities of Practice.” *Higher Education Research & Development* 25, no. 4 (2006): 323–39.
- Vygotsky, L S, and M Cole. *Mind in Society: Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978. https://books.google.com.gh/books?id=RxjjUefze_oC.
- Wenger, Etienne. “Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems.” *Organization* 7, no. 2 (2000): 225–46.
- Yin, R. K. *Applications of Case Study Research*. 3rd ed. New York: Sage, 2012.
- Yin, Robert K. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods (Applied Social Research Methods)*. Sage publications Thousand Oaks, CA, 2014.
- Yosso, Tara J. “Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth.” *Race Ethnicity and Education* 8, no. 1 (2005): 69–91.

ABOUT AUTHOR

Glynnis Daries (Ph.D.) is a senior lecturer in Foundation Phase Teaching at Sol Plaatje University. She is the acting Head of Department in Education Studies. In a career that spans over 14 years, she has played the role of a teacher, facilitator, manager, academic, researcher, mentor, and advocate for the early years. She completed her Ph.D. in early childhood care and education in January 2017 at the University of the Free State. Her Ph.D. focused on the ‘funds of knowledge’ of practitioners and young children at community and privately owned early years centres. The study contributed to a deeper understanding of the sources of knowledge and the daily practise of practitioners with very young children. She contributed to new thinking about the professionalism of early childhood practitioners. She is currently part of two inter-university research projects that focus on Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). The first project focusses on how teachers, principals, parents, university lecturers, and Department of Education subject advisors work successfully as a Community of Practise (CoP) to stimulate change for Foundation Phase learners and parents. The Family Maths project incorporates the use of mother tongue instruction and the manipulation of concrete Teaching and Learning aids to develop mathematical knowledge and skills in Foundation Phase. Parental involvement, homework support and, the use of concrete manipulatives is emphasised. The second research project in ECCE centres is designed around a Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) approach to family and community involvement. Different community stakeholders and participants come together and use hands-on activities to promote the perceptual development and emergent numeracy skills of young children in early childhood centres. The aim is to work with participants in ways which will sustain contextually relevant and age-appropriate early education amongst practitioners, children, and parents.