FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE OF EARLY-CHILDHOOD TEACHERS IN A DISADVANTAGED CONTEXT

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by

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the under-researched field of Early Childhood Development teachers' Funds of Knowledge and their daily practice in a disadvantaged context in urban Free State, South Africa. A paradigmatic mix of interpretivist (social constructivism) and critical theory enabled a deeper understanding of teachers' Funds of Knowledge as contextually relevant practices in early-childhood centres for three-to-four year old children. A qualitative multi-case study approach with eight teachers in four early-childhood centres was used. Data was produced through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. The findings of the study show that the teachers were resourceful agents. They drew on a complex mix of capitals to make sense of their work and to shape appropriate practice for children in a disadvantaged context. The analysis of practice revealed that teachers' Funds of Knowledge was directed towards two key aims: namely, development of the Christian faith and school readiness. This led to prescriptions, high teacher control and low child engagement. The children, however, were not passive recipients of teachers' priorities. The findings show that the children were using their own Funds of Knowledge, mobilised through influential strategies, to assert their agency. This study amplifies the call for engagement with complexity of practice and the use of asset-based framings of teachers and children in professional development activities.

Keywords

Funds of Knowledge, disadvantaged context, early-childhood teachers, agency, faith development, school readiness

ABSTRAK

Die studie fokus op die veld van Vroeë Kinderontwikkeling en ondersoek spesifiek onderwysers se *Funds of knowledge* (Fondse van Kennis) en hulle daaglikse praktyk in ’n benadeelde konteks in stedelike Vrystaat, Suid-Afrika. Daar is nog weinig navorsing op hierdie gebied gedoen. ’n Paradigmatiese kombinasie van interpretivistiese (sosiale konstruktivisme) en kritiese teorie is aangewend om ’n dieper begrip te verkry van onderwysers se *Funds of knowledge* (Fondse van Kennis) as kontekstueel-relevante praktyk in voorskoolse sentra vir drie- tot vierjariges. ’n Kwalitatiewe multi-gevallestudie-benadering met agt onderwysers in vier voorskoolse sentra is gevolg. Data is deur middel van semigestruktureerde onderhoude en klaskamerwaarnemings gegenereer. Die bevindinge het getoon dat die onderwysers vindingryke agente is. Hulle put uit ’n komplekse mengsel van kapitaal ten einde betekenis aan hulle werk te heg en geskikte praktyk vir kinders in ’n benadeelde konteks te skep. Die ontleding van praktyk het onthul dat die onderwysers se *Funds of knowledge* (Fondse van Kennis) twee sleuteloogmerke het, naamlik die ontwikkeling van die Christelike geloof en skoolgereedheid. Dit het hier gelei tot voorskriftelikheid, ’n hoë vlak van onderwyserbeheer en ’n lae vlak van betrokkenheid onder die kinders. Die kinders was egter nie passiewe ontvangers van die onderwysers se prioriteite nie. Die bevindinge het getoon dat die kinders hulle eie *Funds of knowledge* (Fondse van Kennis) gebruik wat in invloedryke strategieë tot uiting kom om sodoende hulle agentskap te laat geld. Hierdie studie beklemtoon die oproep tot betrokkenheid met die kompleksiteit van praktyk, asook tot die beskouing van onderwysers en kinders binne bate-gebaseerde raamwerke in professionele ontwikkelingsaktiwiteite.

Sleutelwoorde

Funds of knowledge (Fondse van Kennis), benadeelde konteks, voorskoolse onderwysers, agentskap, geloofsontwikkeling, skoolgereedheid

DEDICATION

To, my first teachers, Francis, my mother, and my late father, Derrick van Rooyen. Thank you for your love and relentless support during this journey. Mummy you have been my inspiration and driving force behind my studies. I am eternally grateful for your role in my life and the strong values you instilled in me.

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work which is submitted here is the result of my own independent investigation and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. I further declare that the work was submitted for the first time at this university/faculty towards the Doctor of Philosophy degree and it has never been submitted to any other university/faculty for the purpose of obtaining a degree. The faces of people in these pictures are blocked in order to follow ethical protocol and data used in this thesis have been used with permission from the participants in this study.

I hereby cede copyright of this study in favour of the University of the Free State.

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Glynnis Elizabeth Sarah Daries DATE

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Professor Hasina Ebrahim DATE

PUBLICATIONS IN PEER REVIEWED JOURNALS

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CONFERENCE PRESENTATION

2015 October, 27-30. South African Education Research Association (SAERA) International conference. *Exploring early childhood practitioner's Funds of Knowledge of pedagogy in four disadvantaged centres. Cape Town.*

2014 December, 3-5. Presented part of my findings from my PhD studies at the *Knowledge Building Conference of UNICEF*, Pretoria.

2014 February, 4-7. South African Association for Research in Early Childhood (SARAECE) International Conference. *Knowledge and practice of practitioners' teaching in disadvantaged centres*, Port Elizabeth.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACE:	Advanced Certificate in Education
B Ed:	Bachelor of Education degree
CCW:	Community Cultural Wealth
CFS:	Child-Friendly Schools

CRT:	Critical Race Theory
CoP:	Communities of Practice
DoBE:	Department of Basic Education
DoE:	Department of Education
DoH:	Department of Health
DoHET:	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoSD:	Department of Social Development
ECCE:	Early-Childhood Care and Education
ECE:	Early-Childhood Education
ECD:	Early-Childhood Development
ELDA's:	Early-Learning Development Areas
EU:	European Union
FoK:	Funds of Knowledge
FP:	Foundation Phase
FS:	Free State
FSDoE:	Free State Department of Education
GHS:	General Household Survey
GPLNS:	Gauteng Province Literacy and Numeracy Strategy
HIV:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HIV/AIDS:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
NCF:	National Curriculum Framework
NGO's	Non-Government Organisations
NIMSS:	National Injury Mortality Surveillance System
NIP:	National Integrated Plan
NPO:	Non-profit Organisation
NQF:	National Qualification Framework
PCK:	Pedagogical Content Knowledge
RTO's:	Resource and Training Organisations

RSA:	Republic of South Africa
SA:	South Africa
SAERA:	South African Education Research Association
SARAECE:	South African Research Association for Early Childhood Education
UNCRC:	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund
UNISA:	University of South Africa
WP5:	White Paper 5
ZPD:	Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER 1

Setting the scene for a study on early-childhood teachers' Funds of Knowledge and practice

1.1 Introduction

"Our children are our greatest treasure. They are our future. Those who abuse them tear at the fabric of our society and weaken our nation."

Nelson Mandela, 21 September 1998

The words of the late Nelson Mandela (1998), the first democratically elected president of South Africa (SA), sent three clear messages about children in a society (Mandela, 1998). Children must be highly valued in society. As future citizenry, they hold the key to a prosperous society. Neglecting children's well-being contributes to the destruction of a society. The interconnected messages are particularly stark if one considers the human atrocities associated with an apartheid past.

Early-childhood development (ECD) is a critical arena of focus for a society seeking equity, redress and access to opportunities for a healthy and prosperous life. ECD in SA is described as "an umbrella term, which applies to the processes by which children from birth-to-nine years grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, morally and socially" (Republic of South Africa, Department of Education [RSA DoE], 2001:5). Since the advent of democracy there has been substantive focus on the two cohorts of ECD; namely, schooling and pre-schooling. In the first decade of democracy the focus fell on universalising Grade R and developing appropriate curricula for the Foundation Phase (FP) children of five-to-nine years. In the second and third democracy, there has been greater emphasis on the age group, birth-to-four, in terms of integrated systems, programming, service provision models, teacher education and curriculum. In light of

this, the study argues for a three-case justification: the rights of young children, social justice and economic investment into ECD. These three cases provide insight into strides made on macro and micro levels regarding quality ECD provisioning for the disadvantaged context.

The disadvantaged context, especially for the birth-to-four year age group, continues to challenge different arenas of early-childhood care, development and learning (Atmore, 2013). Part of the concern is how to build protective factors to curb the risk that young children face when they grow up in poverty-stricken environments. One of the lines of interventions for breaking the cycles of poverty in early-childhood is the availability of centre-based provision. Although this is inadequate to meet the dire needs of children in disadvantaged contexts, where available they have the potential to turn-around poor children's lives. At a minimalist level they offer protection and respite from the harsh realities that children confront in the home environment and in the broader neighbourhood space. The teachers in the early-childhood centres might be in the best position to offer such protection and guidance. These individuals (largely women) see themselves as teachers despite their qualification status. Throughout this thesis, the term teachers is used in order to be respectful to how these individuals have positioned themselves. Additionally, they act in *loco parentis* and are significant resources to unlock greater futures for children growing up under vulnerable circumstances.

Taking into account the negative influence a disadvantaged context has on young children's lives, centre-based provision as a protective space and the role of teachers in shaping new realities for young children, this study focused on the Funds of Knowledge (FoK) of teachers and children. The main aim was to establish the sources of teachers' FoK that provided understanding to shape practice with three- and- four year old children in centre-based provision in a disadvantaged context. A study of this nature counters the deficit perspective of ECD teachers and what they do with and for children in order to address their needs (Comber & Kamler, 2004; Garcia & Guerra, 2004). It provides the first insights into how ECD teachers use what is at their disposal to create an appropriate early-care and education environment in the context of

vulnerabilities. The experiential and emerging professional insights are informed by the framings of faith development and school readiness. The tight controls this affords leads to complexities characterised by the wielding of power for legitimacy. This is not only the work of the teachers but also comes through the mobilisation of children's FoK. The children in the study show that they are active agents whose capabilities need to be engaged with.

The perspectives of teachers' work in a disadvantaged context as noted in this study, raises several questions in terms of how context shapes practice and what is deemed appropriate. In so doing, this study contributes to (among other things) the emerging South African Teacher Education Framework for the birth-to-four year age group and professional development initiatives for the broader field. This study makes sense in the broader context of unpacking the justifications for ECD.

1.2 Three justifications for early-childhood development

This study began in the eighteenth year of democracy (2012), hence it was a good time to reflect on the extent to which SA is mapping the future of its young children. The three-case justification reveals the political will and commitment to 'levelling the playing field', for young children and especially at-risk and disadvantaged children (Siraj - Blatchford, 2009:4). Pursuant to the World Declaration on Education for All, adopted in Jomtien, early education was validated as an essential right for all children. Different countries were urged to ensure that young children receive quality basic education (RSA DoE, 2005). The sustainability of quality early-childhood education is also driven by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). SA was amongst the 155 countries that committed to this first global goal of expanding on and providing comprehensive early-childhood care and education (UNICEF, 2010).

SA's commitment to quality ECD is evident in The National Programme of Action for children. This is rooted in three commonly referred to justifications for ECD. Each of the

justifications, namely, rights of children, social justice and economic investments points in the direction of taking a pro-child approach to change societal outcomes (Siraj-Blatchford & Woodhead, 2009). The justifications are foundational to this study which seeks to be part of the solution to provide an alternate reality for children growing up in vulnerable circumstances. Therefore the figure below provides a visual illustration on the three justifications which will be discussed.

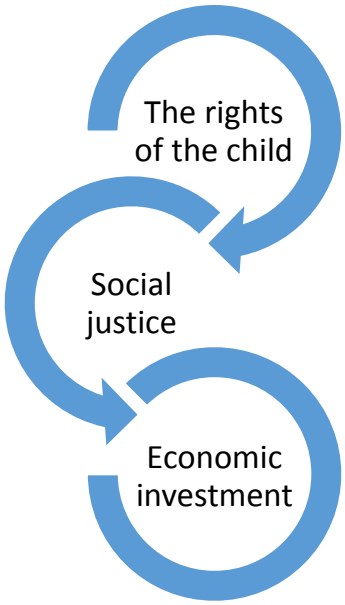


Figure 1.1 Three justifications for early-childhood development (developed from Siraj-Blatchford & Woodhead, 2009)

In light of the above I argue for a focus on teachers' FoK and practice in a disadvantaged context contributes to the importance of addressing children's rights, seeking justice and developing human capital in a holistic way including the economic and other priorities for a functional citizenry.

1.2.1 The rights of the child

"Respecting every child's right to care, development and education is the foundation on which early-childhood policy and services" must be built (Woodhead, 2009:2). This is

acknowledged through one of the most significant global policies for children's rights, namely, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989). This policy calls on all governments in all countries, for all children to be respected and recognised as persons. Respecting children's rights is the strongest foundation for policy. By doing this we acknowledge children as social actors, competent, entitled to quality education and wide-ranging services in their best interests. Woodhead (2009:2) is convinced that 'securing' such rights with and on behalf of young children is the responsibility of different stakeholders such as their families, caregivers, teachers, communities and governments.

Several attempts have been made by the South African Government regarding children's rights. Firstly, we have the Constitution of SA, Chapter 2, which is our Bill of Rights (Republic of SA, 1996). In this chapter, Act 28 (1) refers specifically to children and their rights to basic nutrition, shelter, health and education. Furthermore, Act 29 (1) refers to the right of all people to basic education (Republic of SA, 1996). Providing ECD of good quality is one way of guaranteeing the rights of young children, especially those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged (Meier, 2014; Bennett, 2007 & Vally, 2005). In addition to the above, the right to ECD is strengthened through the Children's Act, No.38 of 2005 and its many amendments. These different acts concentrate on care and protection of young children starting with the birth-to-four year age group. In the Children's Act, an explanation is given as to how the different parts of the Act impacts on the ECD workforce and the services provided to children from birth-to-four years (Berry, Jamieson & James, 2011; Biersteker, 2008). This Act not only guides teachers but also provides the legal framework around respecting and promoting the rights of young children.

In addition to the above, by 'care' the Act means giving guidance to children and securing their education. In SA, the Children's Act is an example of the foundation for children's rights, recognising that children are social actors, that they should be cared for and receive quality education and all-inclusive services in their best interests. In this study, a serious threat to the aforesaid is that many teachers are under-

qualified and therefore find it challenging to ensure children's right to quality education. Even though the regulatory policy amplifies the need to pay attention to children's rights, teachers find this challenging because of the multiple deprivations that exist in a disadvantaged context.

Twenty two years after the first democratic elections (2016), countless children in SA are still negatively affected by a range of social and economic inequalities which forms a hurdle to quality Early Childhood Education (ECE) and ECD provision (Atmore, 2013:153; Ebrahim, Killian & Rule, 2010; Biersteker, 2008). This results in negative consequences on early-learning and development because of a lack of enrichment. In addition to this, "stress and trauma experienced in the home together with the lack of quality government services to offer compensation for developmental deficits" contributed to such children being further disadvantaged (Ebrahim, Seleti & Dawes, 2013:69). Through a focus on the teachers' FoK, this study unveils the challenges and the extent to which a disadvantaged context impacts on the basic rights of young children especially their well-being and their learning.

Shonkoff and Garner (2012) warns against such challenges in children's environment and the possible negative impact of it. They alert us to how the absence of a supportive caregiver impacts negatively on children's ability to cope with stress. Shonkoff and Garner argue that in families with multiple problems 'tolerable stress' becomes 'toxic stress' (ibid, 2012:232). The children in this study were at risk of having the protective factors eroded in the context of poverty, unemployment, violence and abuse. This is not unusual in SA. In many disadvantaged contexts, poverty and unemployment affect children both directly and indirectly. Statistics SA (2010) General Households Survey (GHS) indicated that thirty six per cent (36%) of children reside in households where no adults are employed. However, in the issuing of child support grants, the South African Government has tried to alleviate the burden of poverty in many disadvantaged communities. Statistics SA (2012 & 2013) GHS data revealed that a

total of 15, 4 million South Africans receive child support grants of which 3,2 million (20,9%) are children below five years.

Whilst the above is the reality, it does not mean that the monies are used for children's well-being. The financial resources are redistributed to meet household needs. This means that the child support grant will not be specifically used for the intended purpose. This being the case, it is important to examine its effect on children. First of all, exposure to hardship and persistent poverty during the first year of life has an unfavourable effect on cognitive functioning (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012:233). This may result in children in later school years repeating grades, requiring special education and may consequently drop out of school. Social development might be affected because children living in poverty are extremely vulnerable, discriminated against and isolated (Atmore, van Niekerk & Ashley-Cooper, 2012:123). Furthermore, high levels of poverty and unemployment are connected to poor health and well-being and causes family stress and frustration (ibid, 2012:123).

Hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity poses significant challenges. They contribute towards stunting growth in young children. The aforesaid might cause direct and irreversible challenges for young children regarding slow or impaired cognitive and motor development (Atmore, 2013:153). In terms of learning in centres, malnutrition and hunger have a profound effect on a child's ability to concentrate (Atmore, 2013; Atmore *et al*., 2012). Children who are hungry will find it difficult to concentrate and they will therefore not have the same readiness for learning nor listening to their teachers (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012:232). The early-childhood centres act as a protective factor because in all the centres children receive one or two cooked meals per day.

Another threat to children's well-being and right to safety is the different types of violence that are associated with South African communities. Violence is "prevalent in our country and SA has been described as having the highest incidence of violence-related injury in the world among countries where this is measured" (UNICEF, 2012:42). The National Injury Mortality Surveillance System (NIMSS) data show that nearly a third

(32%) of all deaths were because of violence - and violence against children is very common. The occurrence of violence also tends to be more rampant in poorer communities (UNICEF, 2012:42). Particular kinds of violence against children can have a lasting lifetime damaging effect. Research evidence suggests, that abusers are more likely than non-abusers to have experienced some form of abuse as children or to have witnessed violence, particularly violence directed at their mothers in domestic situations (ibid, 2012). Furthermore, this study found that children are caught up in a web of ills associated with violence (Statistics SA, 2013; UNICEF, 2012).

With the aforesaid highlighted, teachers face a more complex task than simply teaching. They have to function as nurturers who create opportunities for breaking the cycles of poverty and its concomitant ills. If teachers are residents and work in the areas they teach in, there is a better chance of being responsive to children's basic rights of care and education. Teachers are then familiar with struggles children experience in terms of food, shelter, love and protection. The research of Konstantoni (2013) has shown how teachers can have a practical approach to children's rights in early-childhood centres. For instance, teachers can adopt particular professional behaviours to tune into the lives of young children growing up in vulnerable circumstances. Researchers add that respecting the rights of children in early-childhood settings can be done through the teachers listening to, observing and caring for children (Konstantoni, 2013; Pascal & Bertram, 2009; Noddings, 2007). In addition, when teachers are this connected to children, then they plan to afford children the opportunity to grow, learn and thrive as active participants in their learning. This allows teachers to become sensitive to children's needs and to be agents for social justice in early-childhood centres.

1.2.2 Social justice agenda

In the light of the history of inequality and poor services for young children from before 1994 in SA (pre-democracy), ECD has become one of the arenas for social justice. At the heart of social justice is equality. "For many disadvantaged children, the quality of

ECD has a significant and long-term influence on their educational performance and life chances" (Silva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj- Blatchford & Taggart, 2004: 2). Any levelling of the playing field must therefore take into consideration the opportunities of quality early-learning experiences on offer, the impact of poverty, poor health, and other adversities as described in the previous section (Silva *et al*., 2004:2). These "disadvantages are beyond the control of the individual child and social justice therefore demands that adequate provisions should be made on a micro and macro systems level" (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009:4). For example, the empirical analyses of the final report found significant differences between children who attended and children who did not attend early-childhood centres (Silva *et al*., 2004:2). These researchers found an improvement in children's holistic development when attending early-childhood centres. However, the children with no such experience (the 'home group') had "poorer cognitive attainment, sociability and concentration when they started formal school" (ibid, 2004:2).

To date too little research has been done in South African early-childhood centres regarding the kind of educational stimulation teachers provide and its benefits. A large body of research focused on the quality of centre-based ECD provisioning, the learning environment and the funding models which benefited certain groups of children (Atmore, 2013; Fourie, 2013; Biersteker, 2012). For instance, research showing the historical developments of ECD in SA (Ebrahim, 2010, 2012) echoes the idea that ECD is a space of inequity and contestations based on privilege; especially white privilege. Ebrahim (2010) notes how unequal childhoods unfolded as the main project in the apartheid era. The engineering of childhoods was based on race and the conversion of the indigenous people to Christianity and gaining support for a European worldview. Early-education for black African children was based on 'compensatory education' (Ebrahim, 2010: 4) and imported ECD curricula. Furthermore, the broader discriminatory policies based on race affected the resourcing of centre-based provision.

Different types of early-learning centre arrangements for young children like day-care centres, crèches, play groups, and nursery schools existed but at a minimal level as most children resided within families and communities. Custodial care was afforded

to black children who had limited centre-based provision and formal early-childhood education was associated with white privilege (ibid, 2010:4-5). During the 1980s changes in the broader South African education system brought about changes in the early-childhood education sector which was still manned by Non- Governmental Organisations (NGOs), especially for black children. The focus then fell on offering school-readiness to bridge the gap between the home and school, and poor achievement of black children. As noted by Ebrahim (2010, 2012), this response was riddled with inequities. Whilst white children had exposure to full early-learning provisioning for children from three-to-five years, the other race groups had to contend with limited readiness programmes in the year before formal schooling.

The turn to democracy in 1994 created opportunities for greater attention to be paid to ECD. There has been a flurry of policies which focused on addressing past inequalities and social justice concerns. For example, the National Integrated Plan 2005-2010 (NIP) for the age group birth-to-four, was released by the Republic of South Africa, Department of Basic Education (RSA DoBE, 2005). An inter-sectoral approach to the needs of children from birth-to-four years was established and the need to pay attention to vulnerable children was highlighted. The NIP defined vulnerable groups as "orphaned children, children affected and infected by Human Immunodefiency Virus (HIV), children from dysfunctional families and children from poor households and communities" (RSA DoBE, 2005:10). With the introduction and roll- out of the NIP, recognition for high-quality ECD programmes as a right for all children and more specifically, children birth-to-four years, became a priority. The NIP has a stronger focus on the holistic development of young children and their access to a range of services and programmes to enable such development. Currently the National Integrated ECD policy is providing guidance on an 'essential package' basis for all children, especially poor and vulnerable children (RSA, 2015).

Despite the attempt of all the promising policies, ECD continues to face challenges related to social justice. Biersteker (2012:52) argues that access to quality programmes continues to perpetuate inequalities. Whilst the advantaged peers forge

ahead, poor and vulnerable children struggle to secure services and programmes to address multiple deprivations. Biersteker (2012:52) puts it succinctly:

> *For the youngest children, great inequalities in access to quality ECD programmes still prevail and there are concerns that not enough is being done to maximise the potential of this sensitive period of childhood. Supporting early development through services and programmes for young children and their families is one of the most promising approaches to alleviating poverty and achieving social and economic equity.*

One of the complexities affecting services and programmes is the lack of a coordinated approach between and within different tiers of government. The Department of Social Development (RSA DoSD), Department of Health (RSA DoH) and RSA DoBE will play a key role in the holistic development of young children. Hence the National Integrated ECD Policy address the need for an inter-sectoral approach to ECD services. (Republic of SA, 2015). This policy, supports a social justice agenda by focusing on "universal availability of and equitable access to an essential package of quality ECD services" (ibid, 2015:10). The implications of this essential package focus strongly on a multi-sectoral framework of ECD services to benefit young children as well as an inclusive approach by addressing the needs of young children with disabilities, early-identification of their disabilities, access to resources and adequate facilities. Furthermore, a focus on curbing and preventing risk factors through good health care, food and nutrition support, safe and affordable ECD stimulation, early-learning support and play and recreational facilities is addressed in this policy (Republic of SA, 2015).

The 2015, National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for birth-to-four year old children can also be viewed as a tool promoting a social justice agenda. The main aim with the NCF, includes promoting children's rights with regard to survival, development, participation and protection (RSA DoBE & UNICEF, 2015). The survival and protection aspects are comprehensively addressed under the Early-learning Development

Areas (ELDAs) on well-being. Optimal development is cross-cutting in all learning areas. Furthermore, child participation is accepted as a key principle that affords children the right to have their views and opinions heard and to be part of decision-making in keeping with their age and maturity (ibid, 2015). As an equaliser in the ECE field, the NCF has the potential to better the quality and care levels, and fulfil or achieve the educational outcomes if the implementation is given adequate attention. The third and final case argues for the economic investment in the ECD sector.

1.2.3 Economic investment in early-childhood

A country's economic investment into the development of its human capital depends on the percentage of the national state budget allocated to education. Economic investment into quality education of its youngest citizens is important because of the link between "return on investment" a child makes to society as an adult starts in the first few years of life (Rolnick & Grunewald, 2003:1). From when children are born until about five years of age, they undergo numerous changes and rapid growth. If this period of life includes support for "growth in cognition, language, motor skills, adaptive skills and social-emotional functioning, the child is more likely to succeed in school and later contribute to the economic growth of society" (ibid, 2003:1). However, if young children do not get the necessary support, they are more likely to leave school early and depend on welfare from government (Rolnick & Grunewald, 2003:2). A country's position in the global economy depends on the competencies of its people and these are formed early in life (UNICEF, 2005). Economic arguments for investing in ECD include a potential increase in productivity over a lifetime, as well as a better standard of living when the child becomes an adult. This is possible if investment into human capital starts at an early age.

One way of reaching the aforementioned is exposing children to ECD provision which results in cost savings in remedial education, health care and rehabilitation services (ibid, 2005). On the flipside, the result of under investment into children's overall well-being may result in "malnourishment, stunted growth, early death and impaired

motor abilities, poor language, cognitive, social, and emotional development" (Atmore, 2013; Heckman & Raut, 2013; Heckman, 2011 & Barnett, 2009). The investment into quality early educational stimulation to benefit the economic growth and stability of a country is further highlighted by Heckman. Heckman, an economist, is of the opinion that early intervention that remediates the effects of disadvantaged contexts might reverse harm done to young children and thus enhance a high economic return (Heckman, 2011). His research "shows that the rate of economic return on pedagogic interventions as an investment during the earliest years of a child's life is more significant than in later years" (ibid, 2011:40).

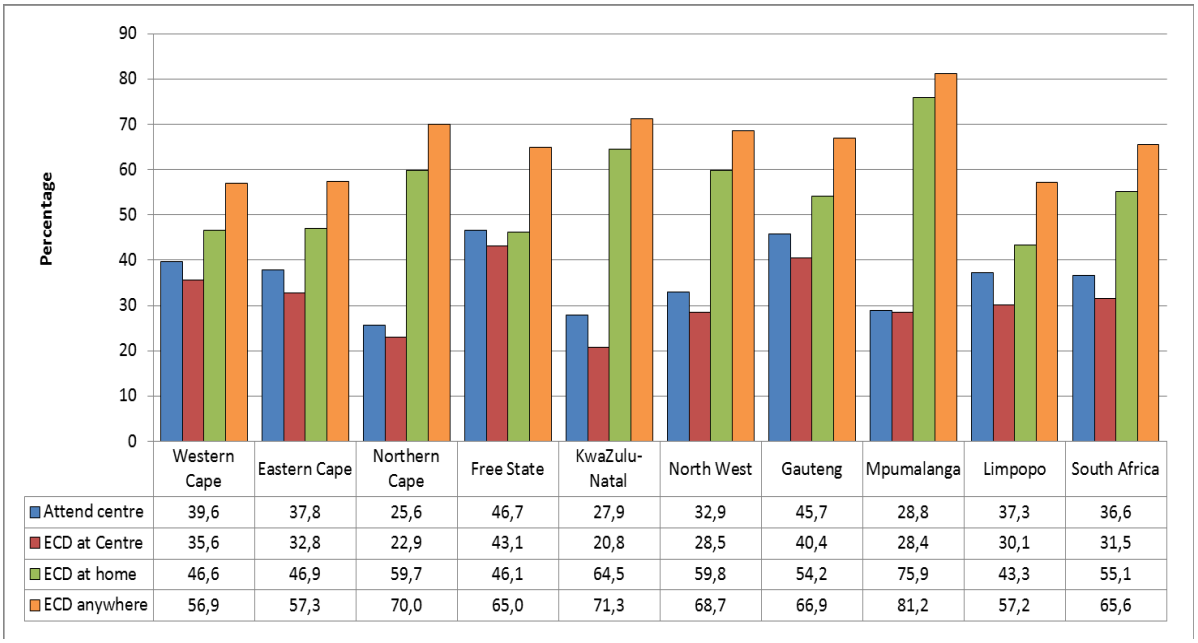
In SA, investment into very young children is stated in the vision of the White Paper 5 (WP5). This policy recognises that children raised in poverty are most vulnerable to poor school adjustment (RSA DoE, 2001). Therefore, the economics principles and arguments in the WP5 point out that economic growth and stability depends on the capabilities of SA people and such capabilities should be nurtured early in life (ibid, 2001:8). Therefore the " South African Government has made significant strides in order for young children to gain access to ECD through a reception year programme endorsed by the WP5" (ibid, 2001:10). This however, was not always the case for young children in SA because economic investment into the education of young children was apportioned according to different races with black children receiving the poorest services.

Reflecting on the case of social justice, Ebrahim brings the reader's attention to how the educational funding was structured to promote inequalities (see 1.2.2). The education of young children had a clear distinction between nursery schools for white children and crèches for black children. Nursery schools with a strong educational purpose were better resourced with trained teachers with full governmental support, while crèches were regarded as institutions for providing custodial care to black children (Ebrahim, 2010). Furthermore, the National Party government in the pre-democracy era invested in white children. Subsidies for the education of black children were almost non-existent. In 1989, for example, the finances for education was according to racial

lines with R1 spend on black learners compared to R4 spend on white learners (Atmore, 2013:155). Today, however, in SA we see a new funding model from government. One stable source of income, especially in the case of ECD centres in disadvantaged contexts is from government where there isn't a reliable income from parent fees. Subsidies are offered from the supply side and goes directly to the ECD centres.

In 2012, Free State (FS) and Gauteng had the highest percentage of children aged birth-to- four years of age attending ECD programmes with forty seven per cent (47%) and forty six per cent (46%) respectively. Better investment through access to different types of ECD stimulation for children below five years is revealed through the GHS (Statistics SA, 2013). The statistics is noteworthy for this study. Children spend a few hours a day in educational settings.

Table 1.1 Attendance of young children at ECD centres across provinces during 2012.



	Western Cape	Eastern Cape	Northern Cape	Free State	KwaZulu-Natal	North West	Gauteng	Mpumalanga	Limpopo	South Africa
Attend centre	39,6	37,8	25,6	46,7	27,9	32,9	45,7	28,8	37,3	36,6
ECD at Centre	35,6	32,8	22,9	43,1	20,8	28,5	40,4	28,4	30,1	31,5
ECD at home	46,6	46,9	59,7	46,1	64,5	59,8	54,2	75,9	43,3	55,1
ECD anywhere	56,9	57,3	70,0	65,0	71,3	68,7	66,9	81,2	57,2	65,6

Source: Statistics SA (2013). Pretoria: Statistics SA.

According to Statistics SA, “approximately thirty seven percent (37%) of South African children aged birth-to-four years attended ECD centres and the highest attendance of forty six percent (46,7%) was reported in FS” (Statistics SA, 2013). However, ECD activities were not provided at all these facilities because in the FS 46,7% of children attended a centre but “only 43,1% of children in this province attended centres where ECD activities were provided” (ibid, 2013). Atmore (2013:153) contends that reaching young children “with the intention of providing state support for ECD programmes is a very important educational priority”.

However, it can be argued that the impact of ECD interventions is more significant for disadvantaged contexts because poor and illiterate families become aware of the importance of education and ECD programmes (Fourie, 2013, 2014). This is driven by the knowledge that high–quality ECD provisioning is essential for large economic returns (Heckman & Raut, 2013; Heckman, 2011). With this in mind, the question arises: what economic investment means for the teachers working in these centres? In this study I argue that the field of ECD is crucial for a country’s economic prosperity and stability. However, little has been done regarding investment into the professional development of the workforce in this sector.

The human capital argument includes the development of a good workforce in the ECD field. Many international research papers (Lazzari, Picchio & Balduzzi, 2015; Boyd, 2013; Urban, 2008; Moss, 2006) provide evidence on the benefits of laying a solid ECD foundation with a well- educated and competent workforce. It can be argued that SA investment into the professionalisation of its workforce is important because these teachers play a crucial role in determining the quality of ECD service-delivery and changing children’s lives. Gomez, Kagan and Fox (2015) and Moss (2006) allude to the fact that without the professionalisation of the ECD field, teachers will only be seen as substitutes for mothers, caregivers and technicians. Professionalisation is important for two reasons. Firstly, it will increase female labour market participation in SA (Ortlipp, Arthur & Woodrow, 2011; Urban, 2008). Secondly, Lazzari *et al*., (2015:275) postulate

that professionalisation in the ECD field is one way of sustaining good relationships between teachers and parents, maintaining a balance between care and education, and ensuring suitable learning environments with a focus on learning through play.

The above should start with the transformation of the ECD field as proposed by Ebrahim (2010). In SA, the teachers who work with the birth-to-four year age group have very few opportunities for professional growth and career-pathing. Heckman (2011) cautions that an underdeveloped human potential burdens a country's economy and can result in a workforce that is underperforming rather than exploiting its full potential, and this has far-reaching implications for the nation. The aforementioned statement is significant because the GHS reveals that twenty three per cent (23%) of adults working with young children had no training at all and only twelve per cent (12%) had a RSA DoBE recognised qualification (Statistics SA, 2013). Furthermore, Berry, Dawes and Biersteker (2013) report that a total of 13,742 ECD teachers have undergone training between 2009 and 2012 but the teachers in this group only received a two-week long training session.

To date, training was mostly offered by NGOs. In the absence of accredited training and qualifications through government, these NGOs and Resource and Training Organisations (RTOs) took the responsibility for teacher- training up to the level of being the equivalent of National Qualifications Framework (NQF) levels 1 to 4. However, the accreditation of the training courses of the service providers was questionable. In 2007 only seventy-eight of the one hundred and fifty-six service providers have received accreditation for the ECD courses level 1-4 (Berry *et al*., 2013; RSA DoBE, 2007). Priorities and possibilities for teacher-development are seen through the principles and structure of the NQF and the minimum requirements for teacher-education qualifications (RSA DoHET, 2011). Through the structure of the NQF, teachers could improve their qualifications. However, these teacher-training policies are not directed at teachers in early-childhood centres. It can be argued that working with no qualification sets them

up for failure to achieve and improve learner outcomes coupled with poor recognition of the work they do with young children in society.

Over the past decade, ECD teacher-training is available through a few higher education institutions. The University of South Africa (UNISA), is the largest provider of ECD training through distance education. Other universities offer courses such as the Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree or the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) but these focus mostly on the FP which starts with Grade R. University training and qualification opportunities for teachers below Grade R is still problematic in SA. The National Integrated ECD policy proposed seven different categories of ECD workers under the national ECD human resources section (Republic of SA, 2015:74). The category suitable for this study is the teachers in early-childhood centres. According to this National Integrated ECD policy, thirty per cent (30%) of the RSA DoSD ECD per child subsidy is for staff costs but teachers from all seven categories are still under-developed.

Recent developments regarding the professionalisation of the early-childhood workforce as well as career-pathing possibilities are under discussion. One of the positive developments regarding a qualification trajectory for the ECD field is the policy on minimum requirements programmes leading to quality in higher education for education and other professionals (RSA DoHET, 2016). Through this policy the workforce can get higher education qualifications which is changing the face of the birth-to-four year old age group teacher education. This brings the latter into the university sector and offers a career path right up to doctoral level. This policy development is a collaboration between the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training, Umalusi, RSA DoHET, RSA DoE, NGOs, UNICEF and university staff. The purpose of this policy is to set out a framework for different qualification types, the knowledge mix and the programmes leading to initial-professional and post-professional qualifications in the ECD field.

The above is a positive step in the right direction towards professional development in the field of early-childhood education (Gomez *et al*., 2015; Boyd, 2013; Ortlipp *et al*., 2011). This is a significant move because the full implementation of the NCF will require qualified and professional staff. Ebrahim *et al*., (2013) and Atmore (2013) and Boyd (2013) confirm that quality early education is subject to teacher qualifications and the ability of teachers to design and deliver effective learning experiences. Early-childhood teachers in SA need to be qualified, trained and skilled in order to achieve the vision and outcomes of the NCF. The new policy is very complex and requires the conditions-of-service to be developed concurrently. If this is not forthcoming, then it will have dire consequences.

1.2.4 Summary of the three justifications

The three justifications presented show the foundational concerns which have both macro and micro level implications. For this study, the justifications make it clear that ECD is a critical space of intervention, especially in a disadvantaged context. Young children have rights and as such must receive their entitlements. The social justice agenda calls for equity for those who experience multiple disadvantages of geographical location and poor socio-economic conditions. This is particularly important in a society which has a history of white privilege. ECD is thus considered to be an equaliser that can break the cycle of disadvantage. The investments that are made in children and the ECD workforce are critical to move toward high quality provision. This study brings to the fore an asset-based approach through a focus on FoK and how it is mobilised when working with children in centre-based environments in a disadvantaged context. Working with the strengths of ECD teachers and the children they care for and educate, provides a better starting point for professional development, than focusing on the deficits that should be targeted for correction.

1.3 A personal justification for this study

This study is not divorced from my personal trajectory in education. It is coloured by my experiences as a child, student, teacher and a researcher into early-childhood education. I believe it is important for the reader to connect with my history because where I was born and grew up, my school experiences, my Christian upbringing and my career choice form an integral part of this study. While completing this doctoral (PhD) study, I constantly reflected on growing up in a very small town where the possibilities or opportunities for young children of colour were very few or none, under the apartheid government. I started formal school at the age of seven. At the age of ten I was interested in learning to play the piano. My love for the piano was inspired by my grandfather. My grandfather was a pastor and he played the piano in church. He died when I was still very young and therefore he could not teach me how to play the piano. However, my parents tried to find another route at a school in the neighbouring town where children could take music lessons as an extra-mural activity. They went to the school and enquired about application forms for myself but the school principal made it clear that it was a school only for white children. This was my first experience of being marginalised and denied access based on the colour of my skin.

After my matric year I completed a four-year teacher's diploma at a college for coloured students, called Perseverance College of Education. My approach to teaching and learning was influenced by my own schooling experiences of rote-learning, young children sitting still and obeying the teacher's instructions without questioning or providing an input on the learning content received in class. I taught six to seven year old children and found great satisfaction in opening up windows of opportunity through my teaching techniques. Upon reflection, I realised that my teaching was directed by the policies from the RSA DoE. My classroom practice comprised of direct teaching techniques, group work, chanting from children, getting children to sit still and listening to me and getting them through to the next grade. 'One size fits all' was a very common practice and a classroom management tool for forty-three children. Completing the material and the curriculum was the driving force behind what I did

and how I did it with the children. During deeper engagement with children and using the dynamics of the teaching and learning context, I realised that a 'one size fits all' approach does not work. My journey as a reflective teacher started with the realisation that using various techniques when teaching young children from diverse contexts is more appropriate. This was however, in contradiction to what the head of my department and the inspectors from the RSA DoE expected, regarding sticking to and completing the grade requirements irrespective of the children's individual needs.

During my first year as a junior lecturer, I've realised that training pre-service teachers according to the policy imperatives, viewing children as the same, is still a priority. Critical discussions took place between the early-childhood lecturers regarding our role as teacher educators, our assumptions and beliefs about teaching and learning, and how to better prepare our pre-service teachers for a diverse learner population in the 21st century. The result of this critical discussion and reflection is published in the South African Journal of Childhood Education, titled: *Teacher educators' conceptions of teaching and learning in the early years* **(**Ebrahim, Martin, Koen, Daries, Olivier, & van Zyl, 2015)**.** Understanding the complex nature of being a teacher was critical to incorporate innovative ideas in the development of the new BEd programme, which was implemented at the beginning of February 2015. The aim of the new modules is for pre-service teachers to gain professional Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) and knowledge of children (Shulman, 1986) during their four-year training.

My first involvement in a research project was with the Republic of South Africa, Free State Department of Education (RSA FSDoE), and Leuven University in Belgium during 2010. The first part of this project involved our FP pre-service teachers who had to test an observation schedule in the early-childhood centres that focused on children's well-being and involvement. We published an article in the South African Journal of Childhood Education, titled: *Levels of well-being and involvement of young child in centre-based provision in the Free State in South Africa (*Declercq, Ebrahim, Martin, Daries, Olivier, Koen, van Zyl, Ramabenyane, Lesupi & Sebeko, 2011). Two researchers from the Leuven University and two officials from the RSA FSDoE

developed a curriculum for children in the birth-to-four year age group. Teachers at pre-selected ECD centres received a two-week training and implemented this FS birth-to-four curriculum (RSA FSDoE, n.d.). As a researcher I became interested in finding out about the knowledge they gained from this training, and how they will use it in practice. I wanted to find out about the FoK of under-qualified teachers in early-childhood centres because SA literature specific to this topic does not address this. My assumptions and beliefs were that you need professional knowledge to teach young children otherwise nothing good will come from your teaching. These questions, my beliefs and assumptions inspired me to undertake this study regarding teachers' FoK and daily practice with the FS birth-to-four curriculum setting the context for the study.

1.4 Gaps in the South African ECD research and contributions of this study

In SA there is a gap in research especially in teachers' professional development and teacher education that focuses on the assets of teachers in different contexts and especially in a disadvantaged context. The default research position is that the disadvantaged context is a space that needs to be developed through interventions from outside. In schooling, evaluations of poor performing schools have led to interventions such as the Gauteng Province Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (RSA DoBE, 2008). The teachers are perceived as being in deficit and are given scripted lessons which they have to follow. Teachers in the disadvantaged contexts complain about being behind teaching schedules as they cannot be responsive to the needs of children but rather to the needs of scripted outcomes. This is problematic in terms of the justifications for early-childhood education as discussed earlier on. There is a need for studies which position teachers as agents who have great potential or valuable assets that can be mobilised to shape child-centred educational outcomes in positive ways.

In the South African context little is known about ECD teachers' knowledge and more specifically their FoK and practice. This study makes a contribution to bridge the gap in literature about the FoK that ECD teachers hold in a disadvantaged context. In so doing,

it focuses on what knowledge and skills are operationalised to make early-childhood care and education work for children in a disadvantaged context. Furthermore, this study makes a modest contribution to early-childhood research by showing how a shift from “fixing” teachers to valuing them as worthwhile agents is possible through the lens of FoK, capitals (social, linguistic, navigational, resistance, aspirational and familia capital) and agency.

In addition to the above, little is known about the knowledge mix that functions as assets to help the teachers to shape practice with children. This study privileges the idea of ‘total knowledge’ which underlies the teachers’ actions (Verloop, Van Driel & Meijer, 2001:441). Previous international research suggests that teachers turn their life experiences into personal knowledge while working with young children in early-childhood centres (Court, Merav & Ornan, 2009:210-212). This study offers insight into the multiple knowledge frames which allow under-qualified teachers to navigate the practice space, while proposing these as important starting points for future investment in teacher-development and the professionalisation of the field of ECD.

Consequently, in SA we need a deeper understanding of the framing of ideas that find expression in practice in a disadvantaged context. This study uses the ideas of Vygotsky (1978) and Rogoff (2003) and Rogoff, Mistry, Göncü & Mosier (1993) as a lens to understand the teacher’s daily practice in early-childhood centres. Vygotsky (1978) views the process of teaching as not only dependent on the individual, but also as a social process. One way of reaching this is through the process of scaffolding. Vygotsky (1978) is of the opinion that a novice learns under the guidance of others who support their progress through the adjustment of task difficulty. Through scaffolding techniques the aim is to help the child to reach an ‘optimal’ level of development (van Kuyk, 2011:134).

In this study, the focus on school-readiness is on one framing idea, but the study interrogates what happens when it is combined with another dominant framing idea distilled from religion. Taken together, this study gives a fresh perspective on how

these dominant framings of school-readiness and Christianity are brought to life in practice in these early-childhood centres. National research shows emerging empirical evidence of children through the academic discipline of the sociology of childhood. For instance, research by Excell and Linington (2008) propose teaching for democracy in Grade R. While, Ebrahim (2011) uses the lens of sociology of childhood to argue for respecting children as agents in early-childhood education. In addition to this, research by Shaik and Ebrahim (2015) draws attention to the importance of children's participation and child agency in Grade R classes. The authors foreground different ways children show their agency through their participation in teacher-led activities but this often eludes teachers whose focus is on getting children ready for school. Martin (2015), in a study on literacy as social practice in early-childhood centres argues that whilst children are in highly regulated environments, they are not passive recipients to literacy practices. This study extends the body of literature on the agentic view of the child who actively makes sense of the learning environment from a middle class- and a disadvantaged context. In addition to this, my study contributes to literature on how teachers acknowledge and dismiss young children's FoK in early-childhood centres. This thrust amplifies the need to work with images of children as social actors in ECE.

1.5 Research aim, objectives and research questions

Bearing in mind that SA is a rapidly transforming society and that the greatest challenge in ECD comes from developing appropriate interventions for children in a disadvantaged context. This study focuses on teachers FoK which is inclusive of an examination of children's FoK in order to foreground and counter the dominant deficit model of dealing with disadvantage.

Considering the above, the main aim of this study was to explore both ECD teachers and children's FoK through a focus on knowledge and practice in a disadvantaged context.

The objectives of the study was to establish the nature of FoK through:

- examining of sources that inform teachers' FoK;
- establishing teachers' FoK in practice;
- exploring children's FoK and the influential strategies used to mobilise their agency; and
- tabling issues that are important to consider for a contextually responsive teacher education.

Consequently, the main research question for this study was framed as follows:

What does ECD teachers and three-to-four year old children's FoK suggest about their knowledge and practice in early-childhood centres in a disadvantaged context?

The following sub-questions function as organisers and are explored in the different chapters:

- What theoretical framings offer explanations for understanding teachers and children's FoK?
- What are the sources of ECD teachers' FoK in a disadvantaged context?
- What does the support for children's learning suggest about teachers' FoK in teacher- guided practices?
- Which strategies do children use in order to show their agency and thereby their FoK in a disadvantaged context?
- What are the implications of the study for teacher education in the early years?

1.6 Research design and methodology

The aim of this section is to outline the methodological decisions taken in structuring a research plan to reveal and interpret the FoK and daily practice of ECD teachers and children. This thesis used a qualitative multiple case study design which offered an effective way of collecting rich data on how individuals view and understand the world and construct meaning from their experiences and other sources in the early-childhood centres (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a). Multiple case study design assisted me to find out how participants in the same centres articulated their FoK and through it helped me to gain insight into similarities and differences within and across the centres. The aforesaid provide more depth and analytical benefits when having more than one case to investigate. Case study research involves the study of a bounded system (Yin, 2012 & 2014; Merriam, 2009 & Creswell, 2014). This is a bounded case study because all the teachers are in the field of ECD; they received a two-week training on the FS birth-to-four curriculum (RSA FSDoE, n.d.), and they are under-qualified and work in a disadvantaged context.

The above reasons were also used as the criteria for the sample selection. In this study I started with purposive sampling but had to resort to snowball sampling to select the participants. Purposive sampling is used when the research make a “judgement” for the most suitable group of participants to answer the research questions (Maree & Pietersen, 2016: 198; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011:156; Strydom & Delport, 2011:392). Purposive sampling proved to be problematic because some of the centres closed down and some teachers were reluctant to participate because of language barriers. I had to resort to snowball sampling. The teachers at the first centre I visited informed me about other centres and possible participants in the area. Through the involvement of the four centres the purpose was to get snapshots of understanding on teachers’ and children’s FoK and their practice.

I conducted one semi-structured interview with each teacher at the centre. The semi-structured approach was chosen because I wanted flexibility during the interview

process through open-ended questions, probing and asking for further clarification when necessary (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b:92). Through semi-structured interviews I could follow up on interesting avenues that emerged in the conversation as the participants were able to give a fuller response in their own words. A questionnaire where the researcher requires information or data via a number of fixed questions was therefore not a viable option (Henning, van Rensburg & Smit, 2004:38). I however, had a set of loosely framed questions. During the interview process I was guided by the schedule rather than directed by it (Mukherji & Albon, 2010 & Greef, 2011). Questions focused on selected themes which explored the sources of teachers' FoK regarding child development, their cultural and contextual knowledge, knowledge around official documents and the curriculum implementation.

The quality and relevance of data from the semi-structured interviews were strengthened further through classroom observation of indoor and outdoor activities. Classroom observations took place in the different centres involving the three year old and four year old age groups. The naturalistic or narrative observations are descriptive in nature and include written observations that report on what was observed from 26th of February to the 17th of October 2014, at the centres. I acted as an 'observer as participants' in each class (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b: 91). Through this I could firstly look for patterns of behaviour in and across the centres. Secondly, it helped me to understand and make sense of social dynamics but still remain uninvolved as the researcher in order not to influence the dynamics of the context (ibid, 2016b:91). The interaction of the teacher with the children was video-recorded, in order to find evidence of knowledge in action. Research with very young children is a complex and 'messy' endeavour (Mukherji & Albon, 2010:36). The data production regarding the enactment of young children's FoK and agency in these centres was done through the observation of the indoor and outdoor activities. I observed and made notes on the child as an individual as well as small groups of children's engagement during teacher-directed as well as child-initiated learning opportunities.

I used different methods in the qualitative research to ensure that the data that I reported is valid. “Validity and reliability are concerns that can be approached through careful attention to a study’s conceptualisation. This starts with the way data is collected, categorised and interpreted, and the way findings are presented” (Merriam, 2009:210, & Yin, 2003:13). This study was conducted in a manner that the participants were accurately identified using in-depth description showing the complexities of variables (Cohen *et al*., 2011). Multiple ways of data collection, and the analysis according to themes and sub-themes assisted in answering the research questions.

In this study I used the data analysis as proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). The first step in the process was to collect, display, draw conclusions and verify the data through various visual formats that present the information systematically. The next step involved using field notes from classroom observation, where I attached codes and grouped them under themes and then drew conclusions from it (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This was done manually and was thus time-consuming and daunting.

University ethical procedures were adhered to. I applied for written consent from the RSA FSDoE, the manager/head at the centre, and the teachers and the parents of the children. Participants had to give informed consent before data collection could commence. I explained the data production process and asked for voluntary participation from the teachers. The participants needed to know that their “privacy and sensitivity will be protected; what was going to happen with the recordings and the information given during the research process was explained and strict confidentiality was assured” (Henning *et al*., 2004:73). In this study the parent consent became a means to also continuously negotiate ‘assent’ with young children during the observations (Dockett & Perry, 2011:233). Getting assent from children was an ongoing time-consuming process and I had to be sensitive to moments of ‘dissent’. Young children showing their dissent through their verbal and non-verbal response, their levels of involvement and being unhappy with my presence. I was mindful of any discomfort of the children and teachers

and respected their wish not to participate further. Results from my thesis will be presented to all the stakeholders who took part in the research.

1.7 Value of the research

My study makes a modest contribution to how the FoK of under-qualified ECD teachers and three-and-four year old children is operationalised in a disadvantaged context. This is valuable in the context of there being a lack of research in this area and the overuse of the deficit perspective when dealing with teachers in a disadvantaged context and young children in ECD. The study is thus valuable in informing qualifications development and professional development activities for birth-to-four in SA.

1.8 Chapter layout

The introductory chapter sets the context of this thesis. Firstly, I argue for three cases under children's rights, social justice and economic investment as crucial to understanding ECD in SA. Secondly, I introduce myself because my experiences as a child, a student and a lecturer relate to my study. This was followed by a discussion on the historical landscape of education provisioning in SA. This starts with a brief general orientation and moves to a more specific focus for the educational provisioning of birth-to-four years in ECD. This historical perspective alerts the reader to the education, policy development and implementation, teacher training and qualification context in SA with specific reference to the ECD field. The complexity and challenges around teaching in a disadvantaged context forms the backdrop to the rationale for the study. I then presented the gaps in research and aspects pertinent to the investigation of teachers' and children's FoK in a disadvantaged context.

Chapter two aligns the study to different theoretical perspectives. Firstly, the FoK approach, is used to show how the deficit perspective of teachers' knowledge and practice is counterproductive to a focus on their assets. The notion of capitals

complements the focus on the FoK. Specifically, I look at the social, aspirational, linguistic, familial resistance and social capital. In order to make sense of practice I draw on the concept of scaffolding as noted by Vygotsky (1978) as well as the concept of the guided participation as noted by Rogoff (2003). In order to understand children's agency I draw on the sociology of childhood.

Chapter three outlines the methodological decisions taken when doing research with early-childhood teachers and children. I locate the study within a multiple qualitative case study research approach in order to get a deeper understanding of the teachers' and children's FoK and how it impacts on the daily interaction at four early-childhood centres. I describe the contextual situation of the centres and community and how it influences the learning dynamics. I discuss the advantages and limitations of data production through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, video-recordings, field notes and being an observer-as-participant. I end this chapter by explaining the validity and reliability as well as the choices made to ensure ethical soundness of this study.

Chapters four to six are aligned to the main research question and the research objectives of the thesis. **Chapter four** is the first findings chapter. This chapter answered the following research question: ***what are the sources of ECD teachers FoK in a disadvantaged context?*** Findings show how teachers socially constructed the sources of knowledge base by drawing on the 8Cs, namely, childhood memories, the context of the community, children's social circumstances, caring, Christian faith-based knowledge, communities of practice ('CoP'), content knowledge and centre-based practices are discussed. **Chapter five**, the second findings' chapter, answered the following question: ***what does the support for children's learning suggest about teacher's FoK in teacher-guided practices?*** The findings show that different scaffolding techniques are used. The traditional teacher-guided practices focussed on getting young children ready for school while building the Christian religious faith in

children. A glimpse of the status of child participation in this context is provided. **Chapter six**, is the last findings chapter. This chapter answered the following research question: ***which strategies do children use in order to show their agency and thereby their FoK in a disadvantaged context?*** The findings show that three broad strategies were used to shed light on the FoK that the children mobilised in their context.

Chapter **seven** is the final chapter and provides a synthesis of the first three chapters. The significance of the three findings chapters are explained. The implications of the study are discussed.

CHAPTER 2

Paradigms and theories

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the key theoretical ideas that informed the study. Due to the complexity of this study, it was difficult to draw on one theory to offer an explanation of the knowledge and practice of teachers and children in the early-childhood centres. This study therefore uses an eclectic mix of theories that are drawn from two paradigms; namely, interpretivist (social constructivism) and the critical paradigm. Both these lenses were necessary to address both subjective meaning-making and issues of power.

The personal knowledge, beliefs, experiences and emerging professional dispositions are valued in this study. In order to counter the deficit perspective of analysing teachers' and children's work, this study used the concept of FoK and its approach to highlight assets and strengths emanating from a disadvantaged context. The "dark" side of FoK is also engaged with in order to be more realistic of the circumstances that were shaping the lives of children and their teachers at the centres. The notion of capitals as defined by Yosso (2005) was helpful in this study as it provides specific dimensions that helped to create sensitivity to FoK that served as sources of knowledge. In order to understand the practices of teachers, the work of Vygotsky (1978) proved useful. For example, in this study the concept of scaffolding is understood through explanations of instructional techniques that show the concept operating on a continuum. This allowed for greater understanding of how a rule-based and high-control environment afforded certain FoK to feature whilst others were masked. This chapter also provides the theoretical concepts through which children and their capabilities are understood. Therefore, the sociology of

childhood is used to present the agency of children as an asset to be engaged with in relation to their interaction with adults in their socio-cultural environment. The spanning of two paradigms, and the mixing of theories illustrate the importance of accepting social reality as having intricacies that need to be unpacked.

2.2 Paradigmatic lenses

This study draws on two paradigms – interpretive and critical. Firstly, the constructivist view of knowledge, which is favoured in interpretivism, postulates that reality is not objectively determined but socially constructed. Social reality is seen as a product of how social, historical, political and economic factors intersect to influence what teachers in the early-childhood centres do. In social constructivism knowledge as an objective entity is denaturalised and repositioned as something that it acquired and informed by cultural back- grounds, beliefs, experiences and professional dispositions (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a:51 & Lombard, 2016:9). This shows that the gaining of knowledge is not a static process. As individuals grow, there is more to experience as exposure to reality is expanded. Knowledge then becomes complex and multi-layered in nature.

The social constructivist paradigm draws attention to the fact that early-childhood teachers' FoK is informed by multiple realities rather than single explanations of phenomena. The meanings that the teachers assign to their realities are influenced by time and place (Riegler, 2012). It is therefore necessary for researchers to gain an emic perspective. Mack (2010:5) asserts that an emic stance is crucial because it allows for "understanding, explaining and demystifying social reality through the eyes of different participants". Nieuwenhuis (2016a:61) comments that the ontology reflects a person's beliefs about the nature of the social world and what can be known about it. The ontological assumptions of what reality is and what can be known about it is through understanding ECD teachers' construction of meaning, the interactions amongst teachers in their social contexts and interpreting their subjective experiences. These ideas were

important to make sense of the sources of knowledge and practices that were evident for ECE.

The critical paradigm views social reality as a continuous process and suggests that discourses created in ever-changing arenas of social power shape and re-shape our social reality and how we study it. With critical theory the belief is that research is conducted for "the emancipation of individuals and groups in an egalitarian society" (Mack, 2010:6). Working in a critical paradigm allows for a more sensitive reading of the status quo and the inequities that characterises it. In this study this deeper dimension was important to consider as teachers in a disadvantaged context and especially in ECD contest the normative expectations of teachers. This study concentrates not only on giving an explanation of the status quo but also shedding light on where the power of their FoK lie and where the possibilities for educational change and transformation are positioned in the field of ECD. It lays bare the same discourse and practices which has systemic links. In "analysing them…the oppressive nature of the system can be revealed" (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a: 63).

In summary, the interpretive lens helped to gain insight into the multiple realities of the ECD teachers' FoK which are drawn from contextually-bound informal and formal knowledge. Constructivism enabled me to understand the socially constructed nature of teachers' knowledge. As such, I was able to make sense of *how* and *what* teachers did in the classroom. However, I was also interested in getting a deeper insight into their daily practice in order to understand the effects of what and how they did what they did, on children and themselves. Hence, the critical paradigm assisted me in understanding *why* under-qualified teachers do what they do in the four centres. In the next section I take a closer look at teacher knowledge.

2.3 Teacher knowledge and the deficit perspective

Teaching is a complex and challenging process. Shulman puts it like this:

> *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 (Shulman 1986:4).*

Shulman rightfully points out that teachers have to meet a variety of expectations and these demands are overwhelming. Some of these expectations are related to teacher knowledge. Teachers have to ground themselves in types of knowledges to be effective in executing their duties. A number of researchers have reported on the types of formal and informal knowledges that teachers should have (Hedges & Cullen, 2005; Horppu & Ikonen-Varila, 2004; Verloop *et al*, 2001; Parajes, 1992 & Shulman, 1986). On the issue of formal knowledge, Shulman (1986:4) proposed seven different categories of the teacher knowledge:

> *knowledge of content, knowledge of pedagogy, knowledge of curriculum, knowledge of learners and learning, knowledge of contexts of schooling, pedagogical content knowledge, and knowledge of educational philosophies, goals and objectives.*

Apart from personal, formal and informal knowledge the teachers' practice is influenced by their PCK. Shulman (1986:9) is of the opinion that PCK is a special combination of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding. Pedagogic Content Knowledge represents a combination of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how curriculum issues or topics are structured, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners. In addition to the aforesaid, the influence of PCK in the early-childhood centres is a valuable regarding young children, knowing the context and showing insight into the social circumstances of children.

A considerable amount of literature has been published on personal and/or informal knowledge. For instance, Tamir (1991) expressed professional knowledge as the knowledge one need to be successful in a certain profession, such as teaching young

children. With regard to personal- and informal knowledge, Parajes (1992) contends that personal- and informal knowledge of people are highly 'colored' by individual experiences, personal history and personal variables and this personal knowledge serves as a filter for interpreting new information. Personal knowledge capture the interpretation of teachers as knowledgeable and knowing people (Connelly, Cladinin & He, 1997). Wood and Bennett (2000:637) agree with the previous authors by viewing teacher knowledge as part of their memories, experiences, skills and their personal bank of information. In early-childhood, a teacher's personal practical knowledge around caring for young children is also an indication of their knowledge base. A key aspect of early-childhood teachers' "personal practical knowledge about caregiving may include, knowledge of teacher-child relationships, the physical and emotional caregiving and adequate response to children's expressions of distress" (Horppu & Ikonen-Varila, 2004:231). However, these authors downplayed the significance of formal knowledge when working with young children.

Hedges and Cullen (2005) advocate the fundamental importance of a more formal knowledge that early-childhood teachers should possess. These authors support the need for subject knowledge in early-childhood education settings. Their qualitative findings revealed that knowledge of the subject, knowledge of pedagogy and philosophy, knowledge of learners and knowledge of the context as important (ibid, 2005:70). The research of Gorski (2009) extends the focus on teachers' informal knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, subject content knowledge and professional knowledge. Gorski (2009) place emphasis on teachers' knowledge about the social issues and teaching in a multicultural context. The aforesaid in turn influences the teacher's techniques when teaching, how they deliver the curriculum and plan for a conducive learning environment.

The discussion above raises key questions on the type of knowledge that is relevant for the caring and education of young children in the context of growing professionalism and the complex realities that characterises young children's lives in situations of vulnerability. In light of the above synopsis of teachers' formal and informal knowledge, this study proposes an epistemological lens of FoK when working with under-qualified ECD teachers. Funds of Knowledge (FoK) celebrates the competence of what people bring to

their places of work rather than a focus on what is not. It specifically draws on a strengths-based perspective of teachers in a disadvantaged context.

2.4 Funds of Knowledge (FoK)

This study values the FoK approach to make meaning of the knowledge base that the teachers used to inform their practice. This approach also provided sensitivity to children's capabilities. All teachers in the study had limited training and were under-qualified. Traditionally, these teachers would have been viewed from a deficit perspective (Comber & Kamler, 2004; Garcia & Guerra, 2004). Their inadequacies in relation to practice standards for early-childhood teacher-education would have pointed out gaps that would have been areas for professional development. Where this is the case, it means that the personal, informal knowledge and prior knowledge that the teachers use to make early care and education workable in context is devalued and deliberately excluded.

The FoK approach values teachers as agents. It also has a social justice framing which focuses on empowering and enriching practice through what teachers know and can do. Nieuwenhuis (2016a) and Henning *et al*., (2004) talk about multifaceted lenses. When this is operationalised in context then a more holistic perspective emerges of what teachers know and can do to influence care and education outcomes. Wolf (1966) who originally coined the term FoK, showed how peasants manipulated resources and knowledge at their disposal to make ends meet in the household economy. This research on the peasants' FoK is revealed in terms of what they know, their competence and the assets in their families. This is relevant for this study which makes the FoK of teachers and children visible through showing the socially constructed nature of their life, knowledge and skills.

Furthermore, research which highlight the FoK of people started with a focus on families and a shift to research on children's and teachers' FoK (Hedges, 2015; Hedges 2012; Hedges, Cullen & Jordan, 2011; Kiyama, 2011; Gupta, 2006; Valencia & Black, 2002; Gonzalez, Andrade, Civil & Moll, 2001 & Riojas-Cortez, 2001). Research on FoK evolved further with a group of university researchers in Tucson during the late 1980s and early

1990s. This group of sociocultural researchers namely Gonzalez, Greenberg, Moll and Velez-Ibanez's ground breaking work brought FoK to the discipline of education. In literature there are a number of commonalties in how FoK is viewed. First and foremost, González *et al*., (2001) state that FoK is based on informal, every day, diverse knowledge and experiences found amongst families, teachers, children and community members. The following excerpt links competency to experiences:

> *FoK is "based on a simple premise that people are competent and have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge" (González et al., 2001:115).*

In current international debates, Amaro-Jiménez and Semington (2011) linked FoK to people's potential, strengths and competence. Hedges (2012) referred to FoK as a specified type of intuitive knowledge or culturally rooted knowledge which people possessed. In linking knowledge emanating from life experiences, the authors show the importance of identifying what people possess, rather than what is not in place according to formal guidelines and frameworks. The culturally rooted knowledge found in communities, families and teachers needs to be acknowledged and valued for the contribution it makes to human development and in the case of this study child development in the context of ECCE (Hedges, 2015; Hedges, 2012 & Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt & Moll, 2011). Consequently, this study argues for the acknowledgement of South African ECD teachers' FoK so as to identify the contextually-rooted knowledge of teachers and children.

Initial international literature reported a shift to teachers' FoK as a response to how teachers could engage with children's family-based FoK and how it could be linked to classroom practices (Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 1992). This research calls on teachers to use the knowledge children have regarding cooking, farming, crop planting and caring for siblings to improve teachers' FoK on planning for teaching and learning which can authentically connect to children's FoK (ibid, 1992). In addition to this, the

research of Monzó and Rueda (2003) with Mexican teachers, showed the significance of the teachers language knowledge and how the children in the classroom could connect with these teachers because of them sharing the same mother tongue. This FoK was critical to the classroom practice, as it was a resource to assist the children's transition from home language to the medium of instruction (ibid, 2003:73). With regard to this study, the value of teachers' FoK of different languages is portrayed as a resource in daily centre-based practices. The knowledge mix of teachers are also strongly linked to the teacher's daily decisions regarding teaching and learning.

Hedges (2012) revealed the importance of teacher's personal and professional knowledge and how this is used during curriculum decision-making in early-childhood centres. The findings reveal that teachers are shaped by this knowledge mix because the unstructured, informal nature of early-education means that the teachers are key curriculum decision-makers who employ a range of knowledge and understandings when working with children below five years of age (ibid, 2012:18). Two significant findings revealed the importance of the teacher knowledge mix. Firstly, teachers' FoK should include understanding of early-childhood philosophy, theories of how young children learn and pedagogy applicable for young children. Secondly, teachers need insightful knowledge about individual children, their families and their communities to draw on when interacting with young children (Hedges, 2012:19). The last point addresses the importance of a broader understanding of ECD teachers' FoK.

In this study the teachers shared their FoK and also provided insights into how they used it to negotiate own empowerment (Rodriguez, 2013 & Hogg, 2011). They shared the *what* and the *how* of their FoK and in so doing shed light on possible rationales for their knowledge and practice. The acknowledgement of personal, informal and emerging professional knowledge was informing their practice. Rodriguez (2013:94) raises an important issue to consider: he problematises "how and whether, the degree to which a FoK approach results in pedagogical practices that create the conditions for redefined power relationships" that support, in turn, defined forms of agency within schools. The

author (ibid, 2013:94) cautions that an understanding of power in educational settings is key in developing an analysis of FoK. He further notes that power and agency exist not only in the ability to act with purpose on one's behalf, but also in the acts themselves. Ideally the FoK approach and practice seek to nurture and create proactive an emancipatory pedagogy that arouse agency among teachers. An analysis of power and agency requires that we take into account the type of power relations that emanate from prescribed expectations and through interactions, for example adults and children. Rodriguez (2013:94) reminds the reader that it is difficult to remove such elements of dominance within education when schools and communities continue to reflect persistent power inequalities that relate to the economic, political, and social history and context of society at micro and macro levels. On a micro level the action of caring for children in early-childhood centres might contribute to imbalances in relationships between adults and children. This results in the power that adults have and how it marginalises children's agency (Ylitapio-Mäntylä, 2013: 263).

Both caring and power feel and look different from the viewpoints of those providing and receiving. Someone is the carer and someone is the cared-for in educational relations and this is not an equal relationship. A caring relationship thus includes power, which encircles everything and extends to everywhere and all relations (ibid, 2013). "Children and teachers are subjected to the complex, multiple, and shifting relations of power in the centres and at the same time, they take up the positions of subjects in and through those converging features". For example, toughness and gentleness can exist in an educational situation at the same time when a teacher tries to teach a child. A teacher might be tough or caring depending on the situation and how this impacts on relationships at a micro level (Ylitapio-Mäntylä, 2013:264).

Zipin(2009) brings out the notion that the teachers at the micro level are also empowered by what he refers to as their "dark" FoK. He notes that it is important to problematise the FoK approach in light of the existence of community knowledge and epistemologies that may develop through processes that are troubling and/or impacting negatively on the well-

being of young children, their families and their teachers (2009:317). The work of Zipin therefore argues for an expansion of the FoK framework to include the notion of 'dark' FoK (ibid, 2009:317). "Dark" FoK arises from the adversity that children and families experience in exceedingly difficult circumstances and conditions in their homes and communities (Zipin, Sellar & Hattam, 2012 & Zipin, 2009). This "dark" FoK empowers teachers because it speaks to the many challenges that teachers know of and experience on a daily basis.

In what follows, Zipin (2009) calls for a need to redistribute such knowledge to bring about social change. There is a need to include the 'life world' knowledge of the 'less' powerful (Zipin *et al*., 2012 & Zipin, 2009). This is done by creating awareness of the use-value of FoK and how it challenges the selective and dominant power of exchange-value knowledge, which reflects and reproduces capitalist principles and power structures. According to Zipin (2009), there is a need to challenge social reproduction processes. For early-education this means that FoK can be drawn from lived experiences to build curriculum and this needs to be re-contextualising for daily teaching and learning. The main value of the FoK approach is that it allows for a focus on assets of teachers and children whose knowledge construction and mobilisation would have been ignored.

The literature on FoK are subject to at least three limitations. To start with, research on FoK has focussed strongly on adults and their social worlds as the primary unit of analysis (Gupta, 2006; Monzó & Rueda, 2003). Secondly, the most important concern is the narrow focus on addressing power relations in educational settings when studying FoK. Thirdly, arguments rely too heavily on qualitative analysis of the FoK of families and teachers (González *et al*., 2001). Lastly, the existing accounts partly resolve the contradictions between adults' FoK and that of young children and how the multiple assets are related to a variety of outcomes for children (Hedges, 2012; Rios-Aguilar *et al*., 2011).

This study addresses some of the limitations. The unit of analysis in this study are teachers and children. Teachers are positioned as agents who actively extract knowledge that is informative for practice using multiple sources including those from 'dark' FoK. Sensitivity to children's FoK in a disadvantaged context is brought to the fore through positioning them as social actors with prior knowledge and capabilities and thereby addressing the power relations that exist between teachers and children in these centres. The power relations between the researcher and the researched is addressed as a methodological issue. With regard to the research approach this study affirms the qualitative approach as it affords a close focused account of the subjective lives of teachers and children. This is what matters in gaining a contextual understanding of early-childhood teachers' FoK and practice in a disadvantaged context.

2.5 Dimensions of capital

In this study it was necessary to deepen the idea of FoK within different strands referred to as capitals especially in relation to the sources of knowledge that the teachers drew on to shape their practice. The work of Yosso (2005) saw the need to push the concept of "capital" further since 2005. In this study the concept of capital is defined as various forms of 'wealth' or 'resources' that teachers and children of marginalised groups bring to the fore. People have various capitals which allow them to build confidence and to flourish in different aspects of their lives (ibid, 2005). Yosso further notes that people use social, aspirational, linguistic, familial, navigational and resistance capitals to forge ahead in their lives. In this study, the notion of capital serves as a resource that empowers teachers in a disadvantaged context.

The idea of capitals as resources works well with the FoK approach and the Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework. All these perspectives are important to provide a counter-hegemonic response to persistent forms of cultural deficit thinking (Yosso, 2005). Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) is derived from and informed by the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT). Yosso (2005) defines CRT in education as a theoretical and

analytical framework. This framework poses a challenge to the manner in which race and racism influence educational structures and discourses. Critical Race Theory (CRT) raises the need for a social justice agenda which propels the liberatory potential of educational settings. This recognises the contradictory nature of education, wherein educational settings often overpower and marginalise while they sustain the potential to liberate and empower. In educational discourses, CRT negates the dominant power of white privilege while authenticating the multiple realities of people of colour. The aim of this is to reveal the counter-storytelling of marginalised people. By reframing and relocating the educational "failure" of marginalised people to more explicitly implicate the practices and processes of schooling and other social institutions shaped by a variety of oppressive biases, CCW seems to push further into the realm of resistance to cultural deficit thinking. This study looks at what teachers and children have and can do, and in doing it resists the normative treatment of these grouping as having knowledge and practice of less worth. This is especially the case when middle class values become normative and thus unfair comparisons are made.

Yosso (2005) who critiques the notion of cultural capital as highlighted by Bourdieu, can be read in this light. Bourdieu (1986) argued that the knowledge of the upper and middle classes is considered as capital that is valuable in a hierarchical society. If one is not born into a family whose knowledge is already deemed valuable, one could then not access the knowledges of the middle and upper classes. This then hampers the potential for social mobility through both early-childhood and formal schooling. Bourdieu's theoretical insights about how a hierarchical society reproduces itself has often been interpreted as a way to explain why the academic and social outcomes of people of colour are significantly lower than the outcomes of Whites. The assumption follows that people of colour 'lack' the social and cultural capital required for social mobility (Bourdieu, 1986). Yosso's (2005) notion of different capitals expands the idea of resources and it can be applied to people of all classes.

Yosso (2005) presents linguistic capital as a resource. This capital presents the intellectual and social skills people gather through communication in one or more languages. Linguistic capital echoes the notion that teachers arrive at their early-childhood centres with different languages and ways of communicating. This includes the teachers engaging with storytelling traditions that may include "recounting oral histories, parables, stories and proverbs" (Yosso, 2005:78). In the study three of the teachers were proficient in more than three indigenous languages. They regularly switched between languages and used their language proficiency as their linguistic capital for communication and building knowledge and skills.

In situations where children attend English classes and come from multilingual backgrounds, research shows that teachers will accommodate children's home language by switching between two or more languages. As an example, Reyes (2008:210) reports that teachers resort to bilingual teaching which "involves using the native language for clarification purposes, such as simple translation or using a preview-review approach where the teacher presents the lesson in English but reviews with the learners in their mother tongue"(ibid, 2008:210). In the study the teachers "often found that such approaches go a long way for their learners struggling to grasp a concept in English". This may happen many times because of one key but complex and decontextualised word (ibid, 2008:210). In addition to this, teachers accommodate children in different ways in class such as 'code switching' because the teacher switches between one or more African languages and English which is the medium of instruction (Vandeyar, 2010:925). The purpose with this is to assist children in understanding the instruction and/or the content being taught. Another strategy to assist in language acquisition is through bilingual teaching.

Being proficient in different languages is an important capital in the SA context of having eleven official languages. In SA researchers have highlighted the benefits and challenges of mother tongue instruction. For instance, Phatudi and Moletsane (2013: 158) point out, that in a country such as SA, English is perceived as the 'instrument of upward economic

mobility' and a gateway to better education. Amongst the many reasons for this is that parents see and experience English as the language of power as English gives global competitiveness to their children and they therefore choose not to register their children in schools where the home language is taught (ibid, 2013:160). The authors highlight different benefits of mother tongue instruction in their research with teachers. The authors maintain that concepts learned in the first language can easily be transferred to learning a second language if the first language is well established from the early years (Phatudi & Moletsane, 2013: 160). In addition to this, children express themselves more fluently, name objects both concrete and abstract, better cognitive development and have the ability to transfer mother tongue skills to the learning of other languages (ibid, 2013:161).

According to Yosso (2005) another resource to consider is that of social capital. This is seen as groups of people networking as human resource in schools and/or communities. These networks of people provide both serviceable and emotional support to steer through educational institutions such as the early-learning centres. People have applied their social capital to "attain education, legal justice, employment and health care" (Yosso, 2005:79). Empirical studies in SA primary schools show how teachers access social capital amongst the teachers in their schools to improve children's circumstances (Modipane & Themane, 2014:6). Teachers' social capital as a resource in SA for curriculum improvement in Life Orientation directly and indirectly benefitted the children through the establishment of Child-Friendly Schools (CFS). The study showed how the teachers shared their social capital through participation in an intervention curriculum programme that was infused with CFS principles. The research of Modipane and Themane (2014:6) revealed that innovative use of social capital amongst the teachers in these primary schools resulted in better outcomes for children which included access to social grants, assisting abused learners and changing the physical environment for disabled children at these schools.

Research on 'professional learning communities' in SA schools is derived from the work of Wenger (2000) on "CoP" and highlights teachers' social capital. Steyn (2015) comment that through professional learning communities' the emphasis is on the learning that takes

place amongst individuals in particular context such as schools and early-learning centres. The author describes it as the situation where learning continually takes place amongst teachers because of the engagement and sharing of their collective knowledge and skills which is used to promote children's learning. This collective knowledge and skills are used amongst teachers to improve and navigate better possibilities for children.

The third capital proposed by Yosso is navigational capital. This capital refers to how individuals use their skills and knowledge of manoeuvring through social institutions. According to the CCW framework, this "historically infers the ability to manoeuvre through institutions not created with Communities of Colour in mind" (Yosso, 2005:80). In addition, resilience has been "recognized as a set of inner resources, social competencies and cultural strategies that permit individuals to not only survive, recover, or even thrive after stressful events, but also to draw from the experience to enhance subsequent functioning" (ibid, 2005:80). People's agency is acknowledged through these capitals- specifically navigational capital. Consequently, people will have the ability to function within institutional constraints and still connect to social networks that allow for navigation of places and spaces including the school. Gupta's (2006) research is quite interesting in terms of understanding navigational capital. The author used interviews as a main source of data gathering. The study revealed how teachers' experiences of being a parent acted as a filter through which they could access their existing capitals of child development. Gupta (2006) used the lens of FoK to consider ways to make this navigational capital of teachers as parents explicit and to find connections between informal and formal knowledge. In short, the study acknowledged the "rich repertoires" of informal, practical as well as formal knowledge that the teachers had access to (Gupta, 2006: 4). The study allowed "space to explore and discuss the constructs of child development theory within a wider range of cultures that were more familiar to the teachers. This shows that the FoK held by the teachers went "beyond the confines of educational practices within which the formal theories are usually discussed" (ibid, 2006: 6).

Moreover, aspirational capital plays an important role and shows how people have hopes and dreams for their own futures as well as the future of their children. This capital helped

to reveal the resilience of teachers who work in a disadvantaged context and who in the face of difficulties and barriers still made investments in the children. Empirical evidence shows how early-childhood teachers' aspirational capital emanates from memories and personal experiences. This was evident through the research of Hedges (2012) who provided empirical evidence which supported the argument that teaching practice cannot be based directly on research evidence. The evidence should be filtered through teachers' experiences and memories. The findings revealed that an extensive array of knowledge emerged, revealing the intricacies of teacher decision-making utilised in their interests-based curriculum interactions. Teachers often relied on capital and resources gained from their personal experiences and memories (ibid, 2012). Memories are enablers to give ideas for practice with young children but it can also perpetuate negative and limiting practices if teachers have not interrogated assumptions and practices they recall.

The second last capital, familial capital, refers to "those cultural knowledges nurtured among families that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition" (Yosso, 2005:79). This form of capital "engages with the commitment to community well-being and expands the concept of family to include a more broader understanding of kinship" (ibid, 2005:79). "From these kinship ties, we learn the importance of maintaining a healthy connection to our community and its resources. The kin also model lessons of caring, coping and providing which inform our emotional, moral, educational and occupational consciousness. This consciousness can be fostered within and between families, as well as through sports, school, religious gatherings and other social community settings" (ibid, 2005:79). In this study the visibility of familial capital is complicated by the socio-economic circumstances.

The last resource is resistance capital. This refers to how people use oppositional behaviours to challenge institutional inequality. This is historically grounded in the legacy of resistance to subordination exhibited by Communities of Colour. Yosso (2005: 80) states that "maintaining and passing on the multiple dimensions of community cultural

wealth is also part of the knowledge base of resistance capital". In this study the resistance capital can be viewed as what the teachers and children bring to the fore to contest the stereotypes that normally characterises their groupings and circumstances – teachers feature as agents who bring resources to the fore and so do the children. In this way they disable narrow images promoted in the deficit model.

2.6 Theoretical perspective from Vygotsky

In what follows, the lens of Vygotsky regarding the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), scaffolding is used to provide insight in the contextually based practices of ECD teachers in centre-based provisioning.

2.6.1 Vygotsky and child development in context

As noted in the discussion on FoK, this study used ideas from a constructivist paradigm and specifically social constructivism. In order to get a better understanding of the nature of the teacher's daily practice, this study draw on Vygotsky's (1978) ideas related to the ZPD, scaffolding and how context is valued in child development and learning. For Vygotsky, ideas are supportive of the proverb 'it takes a village to raise a child'. Sociocultural theory gives an account of how human mental processes are linked to cultural, historical and instructional settings. 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 (ibid, 1978).

This means that action is mediated and is not separate from the social context in which it occurs. By "cultural", Vygotsky meant the "socially structured ways in which society organises the many tasks the growing child encounters and the tools, which may be mental (which means internal or psychological) or physical (which means external or material), that the young child is provided with to master those tasks" (ibid, 1978). By "historical", Vygotsky (1978) meant "how humans have mastered and used the environment" – and continue to do so. The concept 'historical' is closely linked to the concept 'cultural' and we need to consider (as part of history) the cultural tools such as writing and mathematics and music, which have been developed by humans; and ways

in which they expand our power to analyse the present, make sense of the past and predict the future.

For this study, the cultural-historical context was important to consider. The sites in the study were in a historically disadvantaged context. What was available in terms of opportunities for children to learn at the time of the study was shaped by systemic backlogs of that were influenced by racial provisioning in the apartheid era. The material conditions were impacting on what children were exposed to and also who they were exposed to. This is important if one considers Vygotsky's (1978) view that the individual's higher mental functioning is embedded in social life.

For Vygotsky the child's development appears on two levels; the social as well as the psychological level. Learning takes place on a social level because children and adults interact with each other and the child interacts with objects in the environment (Vygotsky, 1978). His interest in children and their interactions with people in their social environment stimulated important concepts such as scaffolding and ZPD, which are relevant to educational studies (ibid, 1978). Both the concepts were important in this study and are explained in more detail.

2.6.2 Scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

The concept of scaffolding proposes a social approach to learning between individuals. Vygotsky (1978) noted scaffolding as a process when a novice learns under the guidance of others who support their progress through 'adjustment of task difficulty' and provision of expertise in the joint solution-finding. The social constructivist paradigm, presents the child's construction of knowledge as a result of social interaction, understanding and interpretation (Adams, 2006). Scaffolding is then a vehicle through which learning can be constructed by children and even co-constructed by the teachers and the children in early-learning centres.

In this study, the concept of scaffolding was used to understand the different techniques that the teachers used to help young children to learn. It was possible to think of

scaffolding as a continuum of practices to that the teachers used. All teaching techniques have the purpose to move the children beyond their current ZPD. “One crucial feature of learning, is that it creates a ZPD, that is to say, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers” (Vygotsky, 1978:86). Teaching in the ZPD provides a ‘scaffold’ to nurture learning and growth and the importance of ensuring that the scaffolding keeps learners in their ZPD (ibid, 1978). The ZPD as a concept is based on the development levels of humans and the impact that other people, such as the teachers in early-childhood centres have on the development of young children. Vygotsky (1978: 86) describes the ZPD as:

> *The distance between actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.*

The influence of the ZPD for young children’s development can be “described in terms of two levels, an actual developmental level and a level of potential development” (Many, Dewberry, Taylor & Coady, 2009:149). These levels distinguish between what children can do with support and on their own. The child’s actual developmental level is indicative of what they can do independently and the level of potential development reflects what a child can do with support or assistance” (Many *et al*., 2009:149). This is the space where learning occurs. In addition to the aforesaid, the ZPD takes “account of not only the cycles and maturation processes that have already been completed but also those processes that are currently in a state of formation, that are just beginning to mature and develop” (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, the ZPD assists teachers in realising the young child’s developmental state on how far development has taken place and which aspects need further development and maturation (ibid, 1978).

The concept of scaffolding has also been extended to include certain processes such as monitoring, improving and when to let go of scaffolding. The work of Mirahmadi and Alavi

(2016) and Rogoff (2003) shed more light on this aspect. For example, Mirahmadi and Alavi (2016:44) point out that “scaffolding implies the expert’s active stance towards continual revisions of the scaffolding in response to the emerging capabilities of the learner, and a learner’s error or limited capabilities can be a signal for the adult to upgrade the scaffolding”. Another explanation links scaffolding to an instructional structure (Turuk, 2008). This means the teacher not only models the chosen learning task but also increasingly moves the responsibility of the task to children to complete. The teacher will therefore dismantle the scaffolding when the children begin to take on more responsibility. This is a signal that the child has benefited and can complete the task independently. The teacher therefore plays an important role in monitoring children’s progress, giving more responsibility to the child and leaving the child to work independently. For the children to reach such independence, instructional scaffolding methods should be appropriate developmentally, culturally and linguistically.

2.6.3 Instruction and scaffolding

Good instruction is necessary for optimal development. It should “awaken and bring to life an entire set of functions, which are in the stage of maturation and lie in the ZPD” (Vygotsky, 1978). One of the more significant claims made by Vygotsky, is that it is at this point, that “instruction can play an extremely important role in development and that good scaffolding must always be aimed not so much at the developed but the developing functions” (ibid, 1978). Scaffolding is highly dependent on teachers’ understanding of scaffolded instruction and ability to position themselves as critical thinkers. This was evident in a study on children’s second language acquisition. Many *et al*., (2009) conducted a study which focused on three pre-service teachers and their evolving conceptions of scaffolding as well as their progress to use scaffolded instruction. The findings of Many *et al*., (2009:168) revealed that the pre-service teachers’ decision-making processes are closely linked to their conceptions of scaffolding. These pre-service teachers’ evolving conceptions of scaffolding included the use of children’s prior knowledge and their individual learning needs when teaching a new language to them.

Wass, Harland and Mercer (2011) explored the children's view of what it means to be critical thinkers and how this can be scaffolded in the ZPD. Their findings revealed that the problem-solving exercises aimed primarily at testing theory and knowledge (Wass *et al*., 2011: 320). Peer interaction was highly valued during the learning process and validated factual knowledge. Further findings revealed the importance of teacher talk and conversations were critical to scaffolding and getting the most out of the children's ZPD.

In addition to the aforesaid on instructional scaffolding, tools or strategies for scaffolding can include a variety of traditional teaching techniques to help children learn and develop. Estany and Martínez (2014); Chang and Sun (2009) and Many *et al*., (2009) described a wide range of features of instructional scaffolding. Through these instructional scaffolding focus on supporting children's learning are emphasised. Sherin, Reiser and Edelson (2004) add that scaffolds are also tools which support learners in attaining a higher level of understanding, one which would be impossible if children worked on their own. Teachers help children to move to the next level of the ZPD through the above scaffolding techniques. The sections that follow set out to determine the value of different scaffolding techniques and what it means for child participation.

To start with, telling or direct instruction can be seen as scaffolded instruction where children's participation as constructors and co-constructors of knowledge is minimal. Nonetheless, this is a valuable traditional method which focuses on a person receiving instruction on how to do something in a specific way. Direct instruction is a systematic educational strategy where the teacher, for a short time might guide children's learning through an organised step-by-step lesson (Hicks, Rivera & Wood, 2015; Rymarz, 2013; MacNaughton & Williams, 2004:201). This is normally a one-way communication that allows very little opportunity for children's participation. Thao and Boyd (2014:185) show how "traditional practices of direct instruction are favoured by early-childhood teachers over more appropriate teaching practices such as play-based or constructivist approaches". The authors argue that this happens because teachers do not have confidence in implementing alternate approaches. Teaching by telling and instructing is

necessary but problematic when over-used. Children's learning experiences focus too heavily on mastery and the "acquisition of memorised knowledge rather than the development of analytical, problem-solving and communication skills" (ibid, 2014:185). As indicated by Thao and Boyd (2014:185), it's about describing something through providing some verbal explanation and this is usually from someone with information or knowledge (the expert) who passes that information on to someone (the novice) who does not have it. Children take a stance as the teacher as an expert actively transmits the required knowledge and skills. Scaffolding happens but in a minimalist way for active learning.

In addition to the aforesaid, demonstrations can serve as good vehicles to promote learning. The aim of demonstrations, is for the expert to show the novice how something is done, how material is used or how to use specific tools or to accomplish a specific task (MacNaughton & Williams, 2004). For this to be achieved, Vygotsky (1978) firstly contends that teachers should provide suitable learning environments which will allow for instruction that helps children to develop continuously. Secondly, instruction and development are two interrelated and very complex processes. Thirdly, Vygotsky argues that the child can operate "only within certain limits that are strictly fixed by the state of the child's development and intellectual possibilities" (ibid, 1978:87). Bearing this in mind teachers need to set up demonstrations which afford opportunities to be interactive. Whilst the teacher demonstrates, the children have opportunities to position themselves as observational learners. They can be encouraged to share their meaning-making and make predictions when demonstrations are in progress. Providing children with cues and asking questions during scaffolding are ways of helping children to continuously move ahead in their development.

Van Kuyk (2011) is in agreement with the above, and extends the arguments of Vygotsky on how scaffolding increases children's development. He contends that using questions and cues are two of the best means of helping children to learn and to bring them to a higher level of development and performance (ibid, 2011: 139). As an anchor, the teacher has to be skilful in using questions to promote children's learning (MacNaughton &

Williams, 2004:145). Questions are also scaffolding tools that teachers can use to quickly assess children's understanding of learning content and to modify their response accordingly (Bailey, Denham & Curby, 2013; Jonsson & Williams 2013).

Vygotsky (1978) placed great emphasis on the role of language. He believed that children learn within the interactions they have with adults, based in part on the language that adults provide. Although it can be argued that all language is important for children's development, questions are special in that "they are functionally different from other features of language because questions push children to think and formulate their own thoughts about content in order to generate an appropriate response" (Bailey *et al*., 2013:267). The use of language in the form of questioning also allows teachers and children to become co-constructors of knowledge.

MacNaughton and Williams (2004:213) place great emphasis on the place and value of co-construction during the learning and teaching process. Importantly, co-construction is when teachers and children work as partners in forming meaning while building knowledge together. Meaning-making of the content between teachers and children is a key value in co-construction. This can be researched through the teachers creating a learning environment where children are encouraged to talk, express themselves, and share knowledge by talking with others children as they explore teaching and learning material (MacNaughton & Williams, 2004:213). This calls for children to be active in the scaffolding instruction of co-construction. Chapter five focuses on teachers' knowledge mobilisation through practice. Whilst they spoke about a number of sources they drew on to shape their practice, the analysis of teachers' practices revealed that the aims of Christian faith development and school readiness dictated the type of techniques that were used to scaffold learning. This contributed to the immediate acknowledgement of children's agency and FoK which comes to the fore as they actively participate, make meaning and negotiate the learning space.

2.7 Children's agency and Funds of Knowledge

The concept of agency has been defined as the "capacity of individuals to influence and steer their lives" (Caiman & Lundegård, 2014:437). Agency is also viewed as a flexible, an open-ended process constantly negotiated amongst individuals. It could be argued that agency is something that young children achieve (do) while interacting with others as opposed to something they possess (ibid, 2014:454). This brings to the fore the idea of a 'child-centered society' which gives 'the child and the interests of the child' an important position in practice and policy (Prout & James, 1990:2; Mashford-Scott & Church, 2011). Within the sociology of childhood, childhood is understood as a social construction which links to a child's rights and a social justice agenda for young children (see Chapters 1 and 6). To strengthen this position, Corsaro (2005) maintains that from the moment children enter this world they act on it and these actions impact on the people in their life world. Therefore, this academic discipline takes a critical stance on how children are viewed by adults and society.

Ideas from biology and developmental psychology present young children as the opposites of adults and as 'not-yet' (Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014:120). This happens because adulthood is used as the golden standard to measure what young children know and are capable of. Their physical immaturity and capabilities for rational thought are used as arguments to deny them rights as social actors. Children are then cast as becomings or adults-in-the-making without paying attention to children as beings who have capabilities that need to be recognised and engaged with. The sociology of childhood thus draws attention to the power differentials which cast young children in deficit terms when compared to adults.

The above makes sense if one shifts the attention of childhood as not just a phase of human development but rather as a structural space where individual children actively shape and are shaped by their childhoods (James & James, 2004; Mayall, 2002; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). Children position themselves as powerful agents even under tight adult control (Shaik & Ebrahim 2015; Caiman & Lundegård, 2014; Ebrahim, 2011). When

teachers emphasise rules and procedures they limit children's agency and participatory rights (Bae, 2009). Consequently, the quality of young children's creativity and autonomy is limited by power relations and social order which impede their natural development (Lekkai, 2016:37). This works against striving for children's rights in early-childhood settings.

The position of the "United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is aligned to a view of children not as objects to be formed, but as human subjects with their own intentions, interests, relational needs and capacities" (Hedges, 2015: 84 & Bae, 2010:205). Whilst this is the legal case, an in-depth qualitative study in two early-childhood centres with three-to-six year olds showed the challenging and intricate nature of children's right to participate in centre-based practices (Bae, 2010:206). Children's rights to participate are threatened when it is reduced to formal routines emphasising individual-choice activities (ibid, 2010:206). This is in opposition to children showing freedom of expression and participation in everyday activities such as singing, drawing or playing.

Children's capabilities grow out of the context in which they are brought up in. It therefore makes sense to speak of children's FoK which is exhibited through their thoughts and actions in specific contexts. González *et al*., (2001) together with Rios-Aguila *et al*., (2011) argue that the shift in focus to children's FoK is necessary in order to pay attention to the assets they bring to the learning environment. These researchers' note that for teachers to enhance children's learning they should draw from the experiences and prior background knowledge children come with. Knowledge that children have accumulated in their homes with their parents, guardians, siblings, peers and community members is valuable. This can give teachers a better insight in understanding the ways in which children's FoK and experiences can be practically and authentically connected to classroom curriculum (Hogg, 2011: 667). This is significant because of the key features of the FoK framework which allows for recognition of the unique experiences and knowledge children possess. It creates opportunities for relevant connections to

classroom instruction. This is also typical of a Vygotskian perspective which requires a connection between prior knowledge and new knowledge.

The research of Riojas-Cortez (2001) links twelve five-year old Mexican American children's socio-dramatic play episodes to the FoK they gained at home. The findings show how during socio-dramatic play, children engage with their cultural FoK from home and use it as a resource during their play activities. The children revealed what they know and are capable of through their cultural practices, values and beliefs. The children's FoK revealed their values and beliefs on how to interact with adults, helping in the house, cooking food and how to behave when eating at the table. A FoK approach to early-learning was found to be important when reflecting on children's interest, and teacher's engagement with this interest (Hedges, Cullen & Jordan, 2011). The study also noted that deeper engagement of the teachers with the families and the community in multiple ways can lead to better understanding of the nature of young children's interest. A FoK approach enables teachers to positively engage with and recognise the richness of children's lives, their families and cultures. Furthermore, it recognises children's interest, their explorations and knowledge-building in more meaningful and authentic ways.

The image of the child as an active agent in context is foundational to a FoK approach. Ebrahim (2011) in a study on children as agents in early-childhood in SA, showed how three-to-four year olds used different influential strategies to act intentionally and in skilful ways to assert autonomy and contribute to life at their centres. This study challenged the prevailing idea that young children are only adults-in-the-making who need to be changed and moulded according to the goals of educational settings such as early-childhood centres. The findings revealed how normalising activities by teachers in the centres cast children in a deficit perspective and the agency of children eludes the teachers (Ebrahim, 2011).

Another South African study that foregrounded the agency perspective of children in Grade R also highlighted the capabilities of children (Shaik & Ebrahim, 2015). This study sought to investigate the nature of child participation at entry level to basic schooling. The

findings show different forms of agency through active participation of children which is sometimes subverted in teacher-centred spaces for learning. The teachers' concern with tight controls and producing children with narrow preschool skills create blind spots to children's powerful agentic behaviour.

2.8 Agency of young children through guided participation

Different researchers extended the work of Vygotsky. For example, Rogoff *et al*., (1993) and Rogoff (2003) build on this notion of 'scaffolding'. These authors propose that through 'guided participation' and 'side-by-side participation' children learn socio-culturally relevant practices (ibid, 2003). Rogoff's work on guided participation views children as active members who not only learn through observation, but also through participating in daily activities alongside adults, teachers, family members or as part of the wider community.

Rogoff developed the notion of guided participation where the view of children learning through participation was highlighted. Both the impact of culture and of social interaction on learning and development was key to learning (Rogoff, 2003). For Rogoff, the "processes and systems of involvement between people which includes not only face-to-face interaction but also side-by-side participation is important" (ibid, 2003). Guided participation is thus viewed as an interpersonal process in which people manage their own and others' roles (Dunphy, 2012 & Rogoff, 2003). Through this focus Rogoff brings out children's agency in homes, schools and communities. She places greater emphasis on "the role of children as active agents and communicators in their own learning and development than scaffolding" (ibid, 2003). Rogoff's view is in line with the sociology of childhood which casts children as active members of their peer culture as well as in the adult world (James & James, 2004)

Rogoff's research concerns the work of active agents in active learning. The children learn with and from others while participating or by observing activities. They are accorded opportunities in different activities with family members, with peers at home and at places of learning and with their teachers. Rogoff *et al*., (1993) describe how "humans learn by observing and listening in on others as they collaborate in shared tasks, in flexible and

complementary roles". Observing the activities of people, is a way for children to learn and this is neither incidental nor passive (Rogoff *et al*.,1993). Language as a cultural tool plays a vital role in leading the learning process and both important for "information sharing and questioning to explore ideas" (Vygotsky, 1978). From engagement in "social and cultural activities, learning is eventually internalised by children, and represented and re-created as opportunities arise to do so. The above enables us to understand that participating with other people in a social context leads to sociocultural activity" (Rogoff *et al*., 1993).

Young children through active learning experiences are able to make new meaning, and in so doing they assume roles and increasing responsibility with increasing skills. This offers new ways for teachers to think about and describe children's learning. Rogoff's main argument is that "children take part in the activities of their families and community, engaging with other children and with adults in routine and tacit as well as explicit collaboration and in the process of participation become prepared for later participation in related events" (Rogoff, 2003). Her view is that "many situations in which people engage are not directly instructional" (ibid, 2003). This is relevant in early-childhood education because learning may simply occur through observation, listening and side-by-side participation with the teacher or with their peers.

Hence it is possible to speak about "intent participation, which is a powerful form of learning" (Rogoff, 2003:10). This became evident as young children participated in the daily activities of a rural farm. De Lange, Olivier, Geldenhuys and Mitchell (2012) investigated the experiences of sixteen FP children growing up and attending school on a fruit farm in the Western Cape, SA. The data collection tools focused on children's drawings of family life on the commercial fruit farm. The drawings was then triangulated to the narratives of the children regarding their drawings. Amongst the findings children showed strong commitment to doing their part in the family such as fetching water from the dam, collecting fire wood and cooking alongside their mothers on open fires. A study by Mejı´a-Arauz, Rogoff, Dexter and Najafi (2007) showed the cultural difference in the

way children participated while folding Origami figures. Ninety three children between the ages of six to ten from Mexican and European descent took part in the study. Findings showed differences regarding verbal and non-verbal participation. Non-verbal conversation in the study referred to “extended exchange of information through non-verbal reference to ongoing events as well as through gestures and other conventionalised non-verbal means” (Mejı´a-Arauz *et al*., 2007:1003). Non-verbal observation and group collaboration around the activity was “more common amongst the Mexican children while the shared engagement among the ensembles of European children seemed often to involve chat” (ibid, 2007:1007). Their findings also showed that these differences in “non-verbal conversation would be consistent with earlier research findings that non-verbal communication may be more emphasised in some communities of indigenous origin than in middle class European American communities” (ibid, 2007:1010).

The above links to the importance of interrogating frames of reference when working with young children especially in poor communities. The focus on guided participation can be linked to the earlier research of Rogoff *et al*., (1993) on individual, group and community transformation. These authors first and foremost, “stresses guidance, not only in the sense of explicit instruction but also in the sense of development in specific directions that are based on the models of human activity provided by previous generations” (ibid, 1993). Moreover, “it stresses participation in the sense of shared endeavours, not just the focused interaction on which research on communication often centres but also the side-by-side or distal arrangements of activity without co-presence, in which children and their social partners participate while developing their own contributions to, and extensions of, cultural practices” (ibid, 1993).

Therefore, the notion of guided participation extends “Vygotsky’s notion of the ‘ZPD’, in which individual development is regarded as occurring during joint problem solving with people who are more skilled but refers to the process and system of involvement of individuals with others, as they communicate and engage in shared endeavours” (Vygotsky, 1978: 86). Rogoff (2003) extends this notion by indicating that through guided

participation “children’s involvement in structured and diverse relationships and activities with a variety of other people and cultures” are heightened.

2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the theoretical ideas that were used in the study. I argued that since social reality is complex, it needs a mix of ideas that affords more comprehensive explanations. For this study it was thus necessary to use the interpretive (social constructivist) and critical paradigms to address issues of subjective meaning-making and power issues. Both the teachers and the children in this study were not objects or people to be viewed in a deficit perspective. The grounding idea of FoK provided a more affirming view of the two key actor groups in this study. Both the children and the teachers are agents whose knowledge and practice are contextually embedded. The notion of capital helps to understand the variety of sources of knowledge that informs teachers’ practices in a disadvantaged context. In keeping with the sensitivity to multiplicity, the scaffolding of instruction is viewed as a continuum of techniques to advance learning and development. This way of viewing practice helps to make better sense of what happens when rule-governed aims are mobilised in practice. In using the agency perspective of children, the possibilities for practice began to come to the fore.

The next chapter focuses on the methodological choice made with regard to a multiple qualitative case study design at four early-childhood centres in a disadvantaged context.

CHAPTER 3

Researching early-childhood teachers' and children's FoK in a disadvantaged context

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology and provides justification for the choices that were made. Due to the heavy focus on the subjective meaning-making of both the teachers and the children in this study, a qualitative study was deemed most appropriate. Purposive sampling was used to select four early-childhood centres and eight teachers. Semi-structured interviews and observations of both teachers and children were used to produce the data. Both data production techniques were suitable to access participants' FoK and related practices.

The semi-structured interviews were designed to make sense of teachers' informal, experiential and emerging professional knowledge. Observations were used to observe the daily practices of teachers and young children's agentic actions. Data was analysed through identifying themes that were relevant to answering the research questions. The processes of researching teachers and children are also explored in this chapter.

3.2 A qualitative approach

The paradigmatic lens described in Chapter two informed the research approach. Both the interpretive and critical paradigms pointed to the need to adopt a research approach which valued subjectivity and created sensitivity to power and its effects. Hence a qualitative research approach was adopted. The qualitative approach helped get a deeper understanding of the FoK of teachers and the children as influenced by the 'real-world' context of the early-childhood centres (Yin, 2014:4). Qualitative research allows for a

certain type of immersion. As situated activity qualitative research locates the observer in the 'real-context' (Creswell, 2014:37) and "makes the world of early-childhood teachers more visible" (Hatch, 2002:147). Furthermore, qualitative research is of value when the researcher seeks to get descriptive information through interpreting the participant's feelings, experiences and actions in human terms rather than statistical presentations (Terre Blance, Kelly & Durrheim, 2010: 272). A qualitative research design enabled me to gather data about the participant's complex social realities and thereby demystify the assumptions around the work of ECD teachers in a disadvantaged context. Understanding what is 'real' for ECD teachers and children (ontology) and gaining insight of their subjective experiences was done by carefully listening and observing (epistemology) them.

In order to get an in-depth understanding of the teachers' and children's FoK and how it was used, this study was conducted in the natural environment of the early-childhood centres as opposed to an experimental environment of a laboratory. In so doing, the richness and complexity (which is part of a disadvantaged context) could be observed and understood. Qualitative data with the emphasis on people's 'lived experience', are profoundly suitable to tracing the meanings individuals attach to the daily events and processes of their lives. For this study the lived experience was important to tap into in order to unpack the FoK of both the teachers and the children through case study research.

3.3 A case study design

A case, as described by Yin (2014: 16) is a "phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context". He notes that the case study approach to research which is premised on the constructivist paradigm recognises the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning, but doesn't reject outright some notion of objectivity (ibid, 2014). This means that both subjectivity and objectivity are implied in the cases that are studied. The participants are actively involved in the meaning-making process and it is possible to distil their views and practices in a way that makes sense to understand a phenomenon in context.

Other authors state that case studies can establish cause and effect (Cohen *et al*., 2011:289). It allows for the observation of the effects in real-world contexts. There is also recognition that the context is dynamic and "a powerful determinant of both causes and effects" and this requires an in-depth understanding to do justice to the case (ibid, 2011:289). In addition to this, Yin (2014) makes a connection between case study and context when he states that a case study method would be used because the researcher wanted to uncover the realities of the contextual conditions. Also, the impact of the contextual realities on a specific context is significant in a case study methodology. The focus on both context and realities are considered to be highly pertinent to this study.

On the issue of how many should be considered as a case, Nieuwenhuis (2016a:82) together with Mukherji and Albon (2010:83) contends that a "multiple or a collective case" study as opposed to a single case allows for comparisons, identifying of patterns and common features in and between cases. With multiple or collective case study, data is produced as whole entities, which are forthcoming from the participants in a much freer, natural and less controlled environment. Yin (2014:4) illustrates that through this process a number of in-depth cases are studied as 'a means to an end' because the focus is to find out as much as possible about the context and the phenomenon.

This study included four early-childhood centres. Each centre was viewed as a case to understand the teachers' and the children's FoK and their practices in their natural setting. However, the study of each case was not adequate to make sense of patterns and commonalities and to understand FoK as operating in a bounded system. Hence, the multiple cases are brought together to inform the workings of a bounded system. This system draws it content from the work of eight under-qualified teachers working in four early-childhood centres in a disadvantaged context, and the children they cared for and educated. These teachers had a wealth of knowledge of an informal nature and were all trained over two weeks with the implementation of the FS birth-to-four curriculum (RSA FSDoE, n.d.). Their stock of knowledge shaped ideas on context, conditions and understandings of ways of knowing and doing. The strength of this research lies in the understanding of similar cases, which contributes to the expansion of theory regarding under-qualified early-childhood teachers' FoK. The children also had valuable knowledge

which operationalised as influential strategies in this study. Through this multiple case study approach, opportunities for triangulation of data might strengthen the findings and conclusions regarding the phenomenon across the four centres.

Case study research, however, is not without limitations. This approach is criticised for its lack of generalisability. The data obtained and the findings are only applicable to that specific case (Yin, 2014:4; Mukherji & Albon, 2010:83). When one is seeking in-depth understanding generalisability is not an issue. Furthermore, case study research is concerned with 'analytical' rather than the traditional 'statistical' generalisation (Cohen *at al.,* 2011:294). This study was more concerned with understanding FoK and its application in a disadvantaged context. This required investigation into the multiple realities that teachers and children had to contend with in order to shape childhood and be shaped by its priorities.

3.4 The context of the study - Henky

This study took place in urban Free State in Bloemfontein. The geographical area for the study is characterised by urban disadvantage. Throughout the study, this context is referred to as Henky. At the time of the study many households in Henky were affected by poverty and unemployment. This had a direct effect on how early-childhood was constructed and implemented for young children. Children lived in multi-problem families where their developmental potential was at risk. Unstimulating social environments caused by poverty, violence, unemployment and abuse also limited the opportunities for optimal growth and early-learning. The children came from homes where parents were divorced and homes were female-headed. During my visits I noticed how the staff at the centres really worked hard to ensure that children's basic needs were met. All the centres in this study prepared lunch for the children. At Bambi and Disney Kids Centres the children were also provided with breakfast. For some children in the study this was the only secure meal for the day. The teachers in the study were aware of this and paid careful attention to this routine.

In summary, the context of Henky was an environment of risk and required responses from teachers that went beyond the call of paying attention to the academic side of the

children. The physical, health, social and emotional well-being of the children needed to be addressed and the centres had to be responsive to the vulnerabilities that children experienced. The next section focuses on the sampling of the four different centres and the participants.

3.5 Sampling procedure

I started with purposive sampling and then resorted to snowball sampling. Purposive sampling is used when the researcher has a specific group of participants in mind. Hence, purposive sampling allows the researcher to make a "judgement" and select criteria to identify the most appropriate participants (Maree & Pietersen, 2016:198; Cohen *et al*., 2011:156; Strydom & Delport, 2011:392). I selected teachers who completed the two-week training on the FS birth-to-four curriculum (RSA FSDoE, n.d.). The participants and the centres had to be from an urban disadvantaged context. The teachers also had to have some experience of working with children between three and four years. In order to identify the teachers, I requested a list from the RSA FSDoE.

I experienced different challenges with the selected centres from the RSA FSDoE. Many of the centres closed down, participants were asked for voluntary participation and many were reluctant to participate. I had to resort to snowball sampling (Maree & Pietersen, 2016:198). The teachers at the first centre helped me to locate other centres and possible participants in the area. This helped me to select the teachers close to my work place so that I could do the study without having to stress about travel and funding for other related aspects. The language of learning and teaching also influenced my choice of the centres. My mother tongue is Afrikaans and I also speak English. The centres I chose also had these languages as the language of learning and teaching. Some of the teachers, however, were not comfortable to speak in English or Afrikaans as their mother tongue was Sesotho. Due to financial constraints I could not employ a professional translator. I used other teachers who were competent in the Sesotho language to help me make sense of the responses. This was both difficult and challenging. The following

sub sections continue with an explanation regarding the choice of the centre, the teachers and the children in this study.

3.5.1 Choosing the centres for the study

Four centres were included in the study. Two of the centres were privately owned. The centres are referred to as Special Children Centre and Giggles Centre in the study. Two centres were community-based and are referred to as Disney Kids Centre and Bambi Children Centre in the study. The private centres were costly for the caregivers but they were making sacrifices to send their children to the centres. Black African parents were attracted to the fact that their children could learn English at an early age. The community-based sites received subsidies but the parents still had to pay a small fee. This was difficult for most parents. In what follows, I discuss the specific aspects of each centre.

The Special Children's Centre was privately owned and did its best to attract parents to keep its business viable. It catered for children as young as six months and up to six years. The centre's name together with drawings of popular cartoon characters were visible on the outside of the building. The entrance had a welcoming space for children, parents and other visitors. It was decorated with the photographs of social activities which involved the children. Story books and Disney characters are painted on the walls of the passage leading to the classes. The manager's office, the kitchen, the bathrooms and a few classes for the youngest children were on the ground floor. The classes for the four year old children and two Grade R classes were on the first floor. The building had very small rooms which became inadequate when all the furniture and resources were laid out. Against the walls were different charts, 100 counting blocks, numbers, shapes with the names, days of the week, months of the year, alphabets , seasons of the year, daily programme and some examples of the children's work. Although the centre had these resources some facilities were in dire need of repair.

The staff were concerned about the safety of the children. The gates remained closed once the children entered in the morning. The outdoor play area had jungle gyms, swings, slides and playing areas constructed with painted tyres. There is no grass in the outdoor area. It was very sandy and dusty. There were a few trees for children to climb on. A

makeshift shade cloth was used to protect the children from hot and rainy weather. The centre offered a half-day programme at the time of the study. Learning time commenced at 08:00 and ended at 13:00. The activities of the day started with the staff gathering in the manager's office. Each teacher had opportunity to read from the Bible and say a short prayer. Everyone would then go to the playground and wait for the children to line up in formal rows. The school fee was R500 per month, excluding the traveling cost of R400.

The second privately owned centre was Giggles and it caters for children from two years to six years. The classes were a little more spacious than the previous privately- owned centre. There was also a carpet area in each class. Although there was space, the teachers did not exploit this for the development of learning centres. Various posters were hanging against the wall. There were some library books but they were in need of repair. Two teachers at this centre worked with children in the three-to-four year old age group. One was an Afrikaans medium class and the other an English medium class. The centre offered a half-day programme and learning time commenced at 08:00 and ended at 13:00.

The outdoor space has different types of material for the children to use such as tyres, a sandpit and a jungle gym. There was no grass for the children to play on and most of the outdoor apparatus was in unshaded areas. In the morning the teachers arrived early and waited for all the children to gather in one classroom. This procedure was followed to ensure that the children were under adult supervision and were safe on arrival taking into account the vulnerabilities facing children in the area. The parents paid R500 per month, and an aftercare service was available at an extra cost.

The third centre was the Disney Kids Centre which was a community-based site. This centre catered for children from two to six years old. The manager rented an old church hall in which the learning activities took place. The centre offered a half day programme which commenced at 08:00 and concluded at 13:00. The children from the different age groups gathered on the carpeted area of the church hall on arrival. The morning ring began with all the children singing, saying rhymes, listening to a Bible story and chanting

Bible verses. While all of this was in progress, breakfast (porridge) was prepared for the children.

The inside of the hall was divided into different classes. There were no posters or learning material in this hall. The small outdoor play area had a jungle gym, a sand pit, and a few tyres. There was no grass and the area was sandy and dusty on windy days. There were some trees providing shade. The centre received a subsidy from the RSA DoSD for all the children at the centre. However, this was inadequate thus parents also paid an additional R130 per month if the child received a child support grant from the government. The parents who received a salary of less than R1500 per month had to pay R150. Parents with a salary of R1500 and higher, paid R180 per month. Most parents struggled to meet their financial obligations.

Bambi Children's Centre, was the fourth centre and the second community-based centre in Henky. At the time of the study, the centre had seven orphans attending. The only orphanage in Henky was a walking distance from the centre. Children from six months of age were admitted at the centre. The centre offered a half-day programme which was between 08:00 and 13:00. The teacher planned welcoming activities for arrival time. Most of the children received a child social grant which was R230 (in 2014) per month. Each parent paid R200 to the centre. This supplemented the RSA DoSD subsidies to the centre.

A summary of the information of the centres appears below.

Table 3.1 Information on centres in the study

Name of centre	**Type of centre (private/ community)**	**Age of children catered for**	**Operating hours**	**Parent fees and Government subsidies from the RSA DoSD**
Special Children Centre	Privately owned centre	Children between six	8:00 am to 13:00pm	R500 per month. No subsidy from RSA DoSD

		months and six years old		
Giggles Centre	Privately owned centre	Children between the age of two years and six years old	8:00 to 13:00	R500 per month No subsidy from RSA DoSD
Disney Kids Centre	Community-based centre	Children between the age of two years and six years old	8:00 am to 13:00pm	Fees ranged according to the income of the parents. From R130-R180 per month. Centre received a subsidy from the RSA DoSD
Bambi Children Centre	Community-based centre	Children from six months to six years		R200 per month. Centre received subsidy from the RSA DoSD

3.5.2 The details of the teachers at the centres

Eight teachers were involved in the study. They are referred to as Teachers One to Eight (T1-T8). Three of the eight teachers completed their matric but did not complete any other qualifications thereafter. Three teachers were proficient in more than two African languages. This is significant because the community and the children attending these centres were from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The other five teachers only spoke Afrikaans and English, as seen in the table below:

Table 3.2 Teacher information

	Age	**Race**	**Gender**	**Language proficiency**	**Education and Training**	**Years of teaching experience**	**Number of children in the class**
T1	25	Coloured	Female	English and Afrikaans	Grade 10	5	26
T2	21	Coloured	Female	English and Afrikaans	Grade 11	3	24
T3	27	Black African	Female	Sesotho, Setswana, English and Afrikaans	Grade 10	6	24
T4	37	Coloured	Female	English and Afrikaans	Grade 12	5	28
T5	39	Coloured	Female	English and Afrikaans	Grade 12	11	25
T6	56	Black African	Female	Sesotho, English and Afrikaans	Grade 9	20	24
T7	39	Coloured	Female	Sesotho, Setswana, English and Afrikaans	Grade 10	18	30
T8	53	Coloured	Female	Afrikaans and English	Grade 12	12	33

In addition to the above information, the teachers shared their narratives about their school experiences and what led them to choose employment at an early-childhood

centre. Firstly, five teachers discontinued their tenure at their respective schools because of unplanned pregnancies. T1 explained that after leaving school she stayed for two years at home to take care of her son. She had to seek employment in order to provide for her son. She experienced day care as a place where children were taken care of without an early stimulation component. The second teacher at this centre attended a crèche as a young child and had the following to say: "*It was in Henky at the NG church. I attended crèche there but there wasn't lots of children. It was a place where you slept and the people looked after you. It was a Sesotho crèche. But the people who were teaching there had a little bit of Afrikaans. I learned some Sesotho words" (T2/I1).*

T3 attended school in the coloured community where she learnt Afrikaans. She stayed with her grandmother as a young child because her mother was employed as a domestic worker in another town. This was a key practice during the apartheid era. Black African women served as domestic workers for whites. T3 did not attend a crèche. When she was young she explained how a community member took care of children staying in her street: *"We did not attend a crèche but we stayed with Ouma Koekie that stayed in our street. She took care of us and gave us soup on a Tuesday and on Thursday" (T3/I1).* T3 indicated during the interview how she learnt Afrikaans from the white children where her grandmother worked as a domestic worker: "*My 'ouma' worked for white people and their children always had toys which we could play with. I didn't know Afrikaans and those children taught me a bit of Afrikaans" (T3/I1).*

T4 and T5 were participants who matriculated from high school but they did not enrol for any other qualifications. T4 worked at a clothing store. She could not recall any experiences of attending a crèche and she never thought that she would work in one. "*I never thought that I will one day work at a crèche or with children. You always say that one is enough and that you don't want to work with many children. But I really like working with them and I don't see myself doing something else. They are always happy to see you. If you dress in something then they will say you look pretty. Children are always honest and true" (T4/I1).* T5 started working at Disney Kids Centre from 2007. Working with children was a passion for her: "*The biggest reason why I am working here is because I love children, I want to take care of them and make sure that they learn" (T5/I1).*

T6 was fifty-six years old and married with children. She had the following to say: "*I first started working at another crèche as a cleaning lady for R500. And when I worked as a cleaning lady, the teachers always went away for workshops then they would leave me with the children. They wrote down that which I should do with the children during the day" (T6/I1).* T7 started working at the crèche from a young age, but as a cook. The manager recognised her potential and invited her to join the staff. T8 was a fifty-three year old woman who worked for twelve years at this centre. She taught the Afrikaans-speaking children at her centre.

3.5.3 The children in the study

The children were diverse in terms of race, home language, gender and cultural backgrounds. The majority of the children were learning in a language that was different to their mother tongue. The languages of teaching and learning at the centres were English and Afrikaans. The African languages such as Sesotho were excluded and for many of the children an African language was the mother tongue. The teachers at the centres were unable to speak African languages and communicated with the children using either English or Afrikaans. This did affect the responsiveness of the children. Human Immunodefiency Virus and Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/Aids) was also affecting the community. There was a visible orphan population. The table below provides more information of the children in the different centres.

Table 3.3 Children information

	Number of boys and girls	**Race groups**	**Number of children per class**	**Languages used by the children**
T1	12 girls and 14 boys	16 Black African and 10 coloured	26	Sesotho, English and Afrikaans
T2	13 girls and 11 boys	10 Black African and 14 coloured	24	Sesotho, English and Afrikaans

T3	12 girls and 12 boys	18 Black African and 6 coloured	24	Sesotho, English and Afrikaans
T4	13 girls and 15 boys	8 Black African and 20 coloured	28	Afrikaans
T5	10 girls and 15 boys	4 Black African and 21 coloured	25	Afrikaans
T6	14 girls and 10 boys	14 Black African and 10 coloured	24	Sesotho, Setswana, English and Afrikaans
T7	14 girls and 16 boys	18 Black African and 12 coloured	30	Sesotho, English and Afrikaans
T8	16 girls and 17 boys	6 Black African and 27 coloured	33	Afrikaans

The process of doing this research with young children consisted of video recordings and observations of the activities of individual children and in small groups in the natural environment of the centres. Research has a tendency to be 'messy' (Mukherji & Albon, 2010:36). While observing very young children I had to think carefully about the ethical issues of my topic. This is particularly true and complex when the research involves young children. In this study I had to be especially mindful of the fact that the children in the study were vulnerable in terms of age and also in terms of their socio-economic circumstances.

When conducting research with young children, it is critical to respect their right to participate in the research process. For example, the UNCRC (UNICEF, 1989), specifically Articles 12 and 13, urge adults to listen to the ideas of children and afford them opportunities to be contributors to their development. Adults have to take note of

and listen to what children have to say about what should happen and how it should happen. In this way they contribute to aspects that affect their lives. However, “it would seem that the vulnerability and ‘otherness’ associated with being younger, less experienced, and physically smaller can result in a view of young children as an object of research as opposed to a subject” (Mukherji & Albon, 2010:36).

The changing concept of childhood is creating new conversations about research with children. In Chapter two it was noted that the sociology of childhood accentuates childhood as a distinct and important phase where the construction of human experiences has value in its own right (Ebrahim & Muthukrishna, 2005:80; James & James, 2004; Prout & James, 1990). Children are positioned as social actors who actively make their childhood. However, this has not always been the case. Traditionally children have been viewed as passive beings with research being conducted *on* children usually in decontextualised settings (Dockett & Perry, 2011). The lenses from biology and developmental psychology have traditionally portrayed children as the ‘other’ to the adult (Prout & James, 1990). Children have been viewed as *too small*, *over literal, immature* and *egocentric* (Ebrahim & Muthukrishna, 2005: 80). This led to the belief that they were ‘less able’ than adults to make sense of their lifeworld (Mukjerji & Albon, 2010:49). For research, this meant that children were objectified and permission to use them in research excluded their assent.

In this study, however, young children are viewed as capable being whose lives are complex and messy. Parental consent is still required but is not the only tier of permission needed for children involvement in research. In this study parental consent was requested as children were both directly and indirectly involved in the study. This was facilitated through the matrons at the centre. This study also respected the need to gain assent from the children (Dockett & Perry, 2011: 233; Cocks, 2006:257). Negotiating assent with young children is ‘an ongoing process’ which requires teachers and me as the researcher to be ‘vigilant’ to the responses of the child (Cocks, 2006:257). It is time-consuming and necessitates a great deal of effort from me. Furthermore, assent is also visible through

the relationship of adults with the children, trust-building and the children's comfort-level with the researcher's presence.

I experienced some challenges in working with these young children. One of challenges came from the teachers. It was difficult to convince the teachers who acted as gatekeepers that children are capable of giving the researcher the necessary assent to conduct research. The teachers worked in a rule-governed system that was highly prescriptive. The children were positioned as 'not knowing' rather than knowledgeable subjects. I took the opportunity to provide an alternative view of children through my focus on their agency. I provided explanations of how I could ascertain the children's level of comfort with research activities. This included alerting them to both the verbal and non-verbal aspects of children's responses. I spoke about being sensitive to a child's body language, their levels of enthusiasm and involvement including their verbal expression of how they interpreted research activities. This approach did contribute to developing a non-threatening relationship with the teachers as custodians of the children at these centres. Some teachers were helpful in providing explanations to the children about my presence and the activities for the day.

During research activities I had to work in a sensitive manner with the children. For example, I moved closer to children once I had some indication of their reactions to proximity. I listened to the children and responded as best I could bearing in mind that I was a guest at the centre. Some children did get more attached to me than others. There was also the challenge of dissent from the children. Dockett and Perry (2011:233) contend that children like adults have the right to withdraw at any time from the research and they referred to the withdrawal as 'dissent'. This definition shows respect to young children's abilities to indicate signs of interest and engagement as well as their right to dissent (ibid, 2011:233). It is therefore important for me to know the children and their context well enough to be able to respond appropriately to these signs (Dockett & Perry, 2011: 233). In the study I noted dissent as the following:

- Covering of the face with their hands;

- Avoided me and having no interest in my presence;
- Covering written work with their bodies in a way that hides it;
- Looking away and turning their backs towards me;
- Running away or moving to another area; and
- Avoiding eye contact (although I was aware that in some children's culture this was natural when communicating).

Where the dissenting behaviour was evident, I did not confront the children or question their actions. Being positioned in an agency paradigm of children I was able to position them as beings who had the right to claim privacy. I relied on the knowledge and guidance of the teachers to make sense of the children's action in context.

One of the aspects that I really had to deal with patiently was the contradiction of the view of children I held and the mainstream practice that was evident in the centres. Taking into account the faith development and school readiness aims of the centres, I found that the children were sitting down for long periods of time, listening to instructions instead of being engaged in exploration through play. There was power wielded over the children but this did not mean that the children were passive in the learning process. I was able to pick up the nuances of their behaviour as agents in teacher-guided set-ups. This motivated me to look at the FoK of the children more intently to make sense of the influential strategies they used to assert themselves and partly claim the early-childhood centres as their space. The following section guided my data production through individual semi-structured interviews with the eight teachers.

3.6 Researching Funds of Knowledge through semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used as one way of investigating FoK. Terre Blanche *et al*., (2010:297) contend "that conducting an interview is a more natural form of interacting with people". In qualitative research literature there are explanations of different kinds of interviews; namely, structured, semi-structured and in-depth interviews. Cohen *et al*., (2011:412) state that interviews are seen as structured because the researcher is 'in charge' of leading the interview and the recording takes place at a set time and date. Both

semi-structured and in-depth interviews are participant-friendly as they allow for plentiful room to let participants shape aspects of the data-gathering process. Whilst this is the case, the skill of the researcher is of utmost importance to steer the research in particular directions.

There are many advantages of using semi-structured interviews as compared to a structured interview or a survey. To start with, semi-structured interviews facilitate special kinds of conversations that help to explore teachers' knowledge and experiences and the interpretations thereof (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b:93; Cohen *et al*., 2011:412; Greef, 2011:348). Furthermore, the participants express such knowledge and experiences in their own words. The researcher tries to capture the world of the participant without prescribing a structure such as in the case of a questionnaire. The latter is restrictive as the answer and explanations of the participants are controlled through a number of fixed questions (Henning *et al*., 2004:38). In semi-structured interviews the structure is loose enough to allow leeway to bring in the unexpected aspects. Probing and redirecting also becomes easier.

The aim of a semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix 2) is highly appropriate when one wants to understand "*what* people say about their feelings, experiences and thoughts; it also helps to engage with the interview data at a deeper level" (ibid, 2004:52). Through the semi-structured interview process the researcher should aim to understand what teachers say, why they say it and what it means to them. As a novice researcher these ideas appealed to me. Semi-structured interviews allowed a degree of experimentation that was necessary to understand participants' views. It also helped to create a relaxed atmosphere for what could have been quite daunting for teachers who lacked qualifications and are traditionally viewed from deficit perspectives.

The timing of the interviews is important. I had to personally look at my own schedule to undertake research activities at a convenient time. I had a heavy teaching load and had to determine the best time both for me and for the teachers. The table below shows the time frames of the interviews.

Table 3.4 Interview dates with teachers at the different centres

Interview dates	**Teacher**	**Centre**
26th and 27th of February 2014	T1	Special Children Centre
3rd and 4th April 2014	T2	
22nd and 23rd of May 2014	T3	
3rd and 4th July 2014	T4	Disney Kids Centre
14th and 15th August 2014	T5	
4th and 5th September 2014	T6	Bambi Centre
18th and 19th September 2014	T7	Giggles Centre
25th and 26th September 2014	T8	

As suggested by the teachers, the interviews took place from 13:00, after children were dismissed or had rest time with another teacher available for supervision. During the semi-structured interviews I was aware of the participants' comfort levels, fatigue and kept the interview to an hour, although sometimes it did go beyond this. The following themes were loosely used in the semi-structured interviews:

- Childhood experience;
- Training and curriculum;
- Child development and learning;
- Creating of a learning environment;
- Planning, teaching and assessing; and
- Parental involvement.

The semi-structured interviews began with a short explanation of the purpose of the research, and opening questions focused on getting to know the participant in a non-threatening way. In order to do this I focused on the following:

- Biographical details of the teacher – (which included teachers telling me a little about themselves);
- Background of early school years;
- Family background;
- Knowledge of the centre where they taught; and
- Knowledge of the context in which young children grow up.

Open-ended questions were mostly used. I tried to keep to the same theme and related questions to gain some degree of standardisation with all participants (Mukherji & Albon, 2010:123). Whilst this was the case, I was flexible enough to enable teachers' FoK and the meanings that they attach to it to come through. Probes were used as encouragement, to fill in details and gain clarification (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b:93). Follow-up questions were the standard ones which included why something was done or undertaken, what teachers considered as important and how they brought this in. The participants also had the freedom to ask questions and give elaborations that were not asked for.

3.7 Observations of daily practices in early-childhood centres

The most intensive data collection for this study was through observation which focused on practices of teachers. Mukherji and Albon (2010:107) are of the opinion that when observation is undertaken for exploratory purposes then that which will be explored is not specified in advance because the researcher is "guided by the overall aim of the research and the interesting things that can be seen". I spent time in these natural settings with the intention of observing how the daily programme unfolded with links to behaviours associated with them. Cohen *et al.*, (2011:456) comment that the use of this immediate awareness through the observation method "has the potential to yield more valid or authentic data than would otherwise have been the case with mediated or inferential methods".

Through classroom observation, I was able to understand how the early-childhood teachers' FoK played out in their practices in greater depth. I conducted classroom observation of teachers' daily routines and their approaches to teaching young children after the individual interviews. I approached it in this way so that I could link teacher talk to the *what* and *how* of doing things in a disadvantaged context. The classroom observations were planned and managed around my research questions that were sensitive to the centre's learning programme, social events and priorities. The observations focused on the daily programme which included indoor, routine- and outdoor activities from the 28th of February 2014 until the 20th October 2014 as seen in the table below:

Table 3.2 Observation dates and duration at the centres

Centre	**Observation Dates**	**Total number of observations**
Special Children centre.	28th February- 6th June 2014	6 days x 3 teachers = 18 observations
Disney Kids Centre	11th July – 29th August 2014	6 days x 2 teachers =12 observations
Bambi Centre	12th – 19th September 2014	6 days x 1 teacher =6 observations
Giggles Centre	26th September – 17th October 2014	6 days x 2 teachers = 12 observations

I observed very structured learning activities inside and outside using the posture of "observer as participant" (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b: 91). This meant that I focused mainly on the role of observer in order to discover patterns of behaviour and to understand assumptions and values that were implicated. I could make sense of observable social dynamics whilst "remaining uninvolved and not exerting influence on the dynamics of the learning environment" (ibid, 2016b:91). I observed and recorded activities that were

teacher-directed, child-initiated and those that were conducted indoors and outdoors. Being an observer as participant can be a particular time-consuming way of collecting data (Creswell 2014:189; Cohen *et al*., 2011:456; Terre Blanche *et al*., 2010:308) but this gave me the time to gather 'live' data from the naturally occurring social situations. Merriam (2009:119) suggests that this way of gathering data is somewhat 'schizophrenic'. I agree with this comment. I had to be mindful of my main purpose in order to be alert to the events happening in class with sufficient objectivity. This was important to produce credible data.

At some point, I also used an observation tool. Observation is more than being a 'passive spectator' (Terre Blanche *et al*., 2010:308) as it entails actively seeking out answers to questions. The questions in the table generally guided my observation of the daily programme at each centre:

Table 3.3 Observation schedule of teacher directed and child-initiated activities

Arrival time Greeting, register, birthday chart and weather chart What else is happening during arrival time?	Where does the teacher assemble? Where do the children assemble? What does the teacher and children do? What is the nature of interaction between the teacher and the child, and between the children? Which teacher-directed and child-initiated activities are taking place?
Routine activities, Snack time, lunch, toilet routine	What is happening during these activities?
Teacher-directed learning activities	What is planned for the children? How is it structured? Does it happen indoors or outdoors?

	What kinds of interactions take place? What kinds of teaching and learning materials are used during these activities? Who is dominant and why?
Child-initiated activities	What resources are available for the children? What do children do in child-initiated activities? What do children say during child-initiated activities? What strategies do they use to assert themselves? What happens when they work individually and collectively? How does gender dynamics play out in the activities of the children? Which types of power struggle occur between the children and between the child and the teacher? How are issues of power handled?
Story time	How often does story time take place? During which part of the day is story time? What kind of stories are read or told to the children? What type of interactions takes place?

Having a schedule to take note of specific ways in which teachers scaffolded children's learning, interacted with them and how children were allowed to engage or not engage in

activities, was significant. On the days that I did not videotape the activities, I wrote field notes. This gave me the chance to observe, reflect on and then write a detailed account of everyday teacher-child interactions without having concerns about operating the video recorder. The teachers were aware of the purpose of the research during the visit (Mukherji & Albon, 2010:107). It was difficult to be a complete observer of the children because they saw me as the "friendly aunt" in the class. Many of them showed me their activities when they completed them or came to me to request for help. So whilst I intended to take a detached position, the children positioned me in different ways and I had to respond.

The video recordings were used to capture the daily learning and teaching activities. I used the video recordings to supplement the data from the semi-structured interviews. My intention was to get a detailed view of the early-childhood classroom routines and to ascertain how teachers used their FoK in moments of practice. Data such as facial expressions, positive and negative body language and nonverbal communications are often missed when taking notes and can therefore be visible through video recordings. The video recordings could be viewed several times and enabled me to look at non-verbal cues such as facial expressions of the children and the teachers. These video recordings provided snapshots of what the teachers were doing and provided details on the contextualised face-to-face social behaviour (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b; Hatch, 2002:126). I was also faced with a few challenges when doing the video recording.

One of the biggest challenges was the lack of funding to hire an additional person to do the recordings. This would have freed me up to engage more effectively with the research activities. On the other hand, having two people with the little ones would have raised ethical issues. I was also mindful of intruding even more on the teachers and the children by having another 'stranger' in their classroom space. The video recorder can be an intrusive device. I therefore tried to place it in a fixed position out of the way of the teacher and the children. This contributed to another drawback- the noise level during different moments of practice made it difficult to hear what teachers and children were saying. Secondly, at times the image was blocked because of some of the children moving in front of the camera lens when it was fixed to the tripod (Cohen *et al*., 2011:470). Thirdly,

I had to be aware of how the teachers and children might behave differently in front of a camera (Mukherji & Albon, 2010:114). Occasionally, I moved it around to capture body language, facial expressions and the interactions. This also allowed for a panoramic view of the class activities. Only snapshots of practice were analysed.

3.8 Data analysis

This was approached through an adaptation of Miles' and Huberman's (1994) and Yin (2014) methodology for making sense of the evidence produced. They are of the view that data production and initial analysis should happen simultaneously while being in the field because the researcher has the time to collect new data to fill in the gaps. This way of analysing is helpful because I can move back and forth between reflecting on and thinking about current data and how to generate more and often better data. It makes "analysis an ongoing, lively enterprise that contributes to the energising process of fieldwork" (Miles & Huberman, 1994:50).

The above view of data analysis was helpful in my study. The process helped me in deciding on what to follow up on and how to probe further. Terre Blanche *et al*., (2010:321) note that starting early with the transcribing of data is helpful especially to look for "thick descriptions, through a thorough description of the characteristics, processes, transactions, and contexts".

The data production and analysis are categorised into three steps: data reduction, data displaying and drawing conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994:11). First and foremost, "data reduction, refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions" (ibid, 1994:11). This process is not detached from data analysis but forms part of it because analytical decisions are made about which chunks of data to pull out and to code. This includes looking at patterns which best describes the information or chunks of data that tells the emerging story – in the case of this study this was related to the teachers and children's FoK. Secondly, "data display is an organized, compressed assembly of information that facilitates conclusion-drawing and action" (ibid, 1994:11). The preferred way of displaying the data is in tables (see tables 3.1 to 3.4) which are all designed to

synthesise information in an organised manner which is easily accessible and understood. Justified and informed conclusions can be drawn by the analysist and decisions can be taken on the next step of analysis which might be useful. These are all analytical activities which are done as the data is displayed (Miles & Huberman, 1994:11). The last step involves, "conclusion-drawing and verification because from the commencement of data collection, the qualitative researcher is searching for meaning, is noting regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, causal flows, and propositions" (ibid, 1994:11). The competent researcher holds these conclusions lightly, maintaining openness and skepticism, but the conclusions are still there.

The above process can be difficult and tedious work but can also be "messy", cumbersome and labour-intensive (Creswell, 2014:195). However, the advantage of doing your own transcribing is that you will "be able to add context, non-verbal information, and bracketed notations from notes and memory as the interview was typed up" (ibid, 2014:195). As mentioned earlier, the process of transcribing, coding and analysing data is an intense but systematic and unremitting search for meaning. The codes for teachers one to eight were *T1-T8*, the codes for semi structured interviews were *I1* or *I2* and the code of the centre-based observation were *O.* It is "a way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to the research community" (Creswell, 2014:195; Cohen *et al.,* 2011:538). This is done by breaking the data down in categories, themes, codes and building it up again in novel ways by elaborating and interpreting the data. For example, the raw data linked to the semi structured interviews revealed eight broad themes. One of which were their earliest memories of their crèche and school experiences. These teachers relied on their childhood memories of the games and cultural activities they were exposed to and creatively used it as part of outdoor activities with the young children in their care.

In this study I read and re-read the transcripts and made notes of the observations, bearing in mind the research questions. I constantly had to move back and forth through the data from the classroom observations, semi-structured interviews and the visual material of the recordings to create units of meaning. The units of meaning were clustered together if they showed linkages. Patterns in the linked data were identified for sub-

themes and theme development. The themes were then clustered into a narrative that best answered the research questions. Three chapters were created to discuss the findings. The chapters are as follows: Chapter four: Teachers' FoK in a disadvantaged context. Chapter five: Supporting children's learning in a disadvantaged context. The final findings appear in Chapter six: Agentic strategies of young children in a disadvantaged context.

3.9 Validity, reliability and trustworthiness in qualitative research

Validity is relevant in both quantitative and qualitative research. Early "versions of validity were based on the view that it was essentially a demonstration that a particular instrument in fact measures what it purports to measure, or that an account accurately represents 'those features that it is intended to describe, explain or theorise" (Cohen *et al*., 2011:179; Merriam, 2009:210). Recently validity has taken many forms. As an example, Cohen *et al*., (2011:179) suggest that in qualitative data validity "might be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the extent of triangulation and the objectivity of the researcher".

In qualitative data we accept that bias is inherent in respecting the subjectivity of the participants. Validity, then, "should be seen as a matter of degree rather than as an absolute state" (Cohen *et al*., 2011:181). Validity in qualitative research has several principles which this study adheres to. The natural environment of the early-childhood centres is the primary source of data. This study also gives credence to showing the workings of the study to help understand the data production. Challenges in the research process are also explained to show the "messiness" of working with certain groupings and in particular contexts.

In this study multiple research methods were used to help with the process of data triangulation and to gain a comprehensive understanding of the teachers and children's FoK. In the three findings chapters of this study the ttriangulation attempt to "explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it more than from one standpoint and is a good way of demonstrating concurrent validity in qualitative research" (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b:123; Cohen *et al*., 2011:195). The use of the semi-structured

interviews, lengthy observations and taking field notes assisted in the process of linking what teachers said to what they perform daily. This makes comparing and cross-checking possible which can assist with the reliability of the research.

Reliability is applicable in qualitative research and is synonymous with “dependability, consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and over groups of participants” (Cohen *et al*., 2011:199). For “research to be reliable it must demonstrate that if it were to be carried out on a similar group of respondents in a similar context, then similar results would be found” (ibid, 2011:199). I have provided the necessary details of the study and attempted to be comprehensive so as to guide future researchers in researching this topic. I also raised issues of messiness, complexity, and flexibility so that researchers are sensitive to the importance of being contextually responsive in the way they conduct research with teachers and children in disadvantaged contexts.

Trustworthiness in qualitative research design can be seen through four aspects proposed by researchers such as Guba from 1981. A focus on credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability is key to qualitative research and data analysis. Credibility of findings in relation to the reality of the context and participants can be achieved through using research methods and design which fits my research questions and is aligned with my theoretical underpinnings (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c:123). Through this thesis I provide a full picture of the context and the complexity of this research context which may allow any reader to determine if the research is transferable to another context. The use of different research methods allowed for data triangulation in this research process which is important to reduce the bias and interest of the researcher. This assist in the process of confirmability being neutral and constantly reflecting on my position as a researcher.

3.10 Reflections of doing research with the teachers and children

Throughout the study, I learnt that my subjectivity as a researcher was interwoven with my role in the research process; choosing research sites, the ways in which I gained access and the types of relationships that I developed with the teachers and children. The researcher does bring biases to research activities. I was aware of my assumptions,

my position in society, and my beliefs about teaching impacted on the choices I made in this study.

One of the critical issues I had to deal with was the power relations. The participants saw me as the more knowledgeable person who was from the university. This can be problematic as participants can withhold information because they do not want to be exposed as being "ignorant" or they could feel that I already knew about the issue by virtue of being in teacher-training. To circumvent this, I explained that I was learning from them as they were the experts in the care and education of children in their centres. Some teachers in the study knew me as a teaching practice supervisor. The role change had to be communicated in a non-threatening manner.

The notion of power is visible during an interview because "the interviewer generates the questions and the interviewee answers; the interviewee is under scrutiny whilst the interviewer is not" (Cohen *et al*., 2011:205). This unequal relationship, however, was somewhat overcome by asking open-ended questions, the using of probes and giving the teachers the opportunity to add more ideas and positioning them as people who could also question.

Being sensitive about encroaching on the space of the teachers is important (Cohen *et al.*, 2011: 471; Hatch, 2002:128). Early-childhood centres are not naturally research sites. As early-childhood researchers we take precautions not to be intrusive but this naturally happens. In the study I was willing to learn from the teachers and to work in partnership with them where necessary. They were invaluable in helping me strike good relationships with the children and in understanding the context amongst other things.

3.11 Ethical considerations

Ethics in research includes "the balance between the demands placed on the researcher in pursuit of truth, and the participants' rights and values potentially threatened by the

research" (Cresswell, 2014:92-93; Cohen *et al*., 2011:75). The ethical issues with children were discussed in section 3.5.3 in this chapter.

Getting informed consent from different stakeholders is one of the important ethical considerations. The Ethics Committee of the University of Free State and specifically the Faculty of Education granted me clearance to conduct the study and an ethical clearance number, was allocated . I then applied for permission to do the research from the RSA DoBE. I delivered a letter to the RSA FSDoBE (Appendix 1A), in which I explained the purpose of the study, the context where the data collection will take place, the unit of analysis and the duration of the data collection.

A key part of ethical procedures is the receipt of informed consent. Participants were fully informed regarding the purpose of the study, the research process and the research activities. The participants needed to be assured of confidentiality and right to withdraw without disadvantage (Henning *et al*., 2004:73). I visited all four centres on the 14th and 15th of February 2014 to explain the reason for the study to the managers and the teachers. It was challenging to gain the trust of two of the teachers at one of the centres. The first teacher cancelled the classroom observation sessions. I sensed that she was feeling nervous to perform in front of a lecturer from the university. The second teacher was under the impression that I was there to evaluate and criticise their teaching practices. I had to ensure that both teachers were reassured and put at ease. As noted previously, I explained to them that I was there to learn as I had no prior knowledge or personal experience of working with very young children. I explained to the teachers that I taught primary school children and did not have any practical experience of teaching three and four year olds. They (the teachers) were to serve as my sources of knowledge and information. This put them at ease.

The manager at one of the centres was eager for me to do the research as she felt that it was a *good way to check up on my staff and to keep them on their toes.* I explained to her that I was there to learn from the teachers and to investigate their knowledge and skills in teaching young children and their practice. The managers of the centres handed out letters of consent to the parent community and the teachers (see Appendix 1B-1D).

They were given time to read the contents. My intention was for the teachers to know the purpose of the research and not to feel pressurised by giving immediate consent. All the teachers signed the letters and agreed to be part of the research with the understanding of their participation being voluntary and confidential.

Using visual elicitation has integral ethical difficulties. In gaining permission and informed consent, “the researcher has to assure the various role-players that the classroom observations would not ‘interrupt’ the normal schedule of school activities” (Ruto-Korir & Lubbe-De Beer, 2012). Whilst, I did not overtly interrupt the normal activities at the centres, I “acknowledge that my presence may have “interrupted the psychological space of the participants, especially because of the use of the video camera” (ibid, 2012).

Protection of identity is one of the ethical aspects to attend to. In this study the participants’ names and the names of their centres have been replaced with pseudonyms. The names of the teachers were changed to T1 to T8 and the children were only referred to as “Boy” and “Girl”. The centres are referred to as Special Children Centre, Disney Kids Centre, Bambi Centre and Giggles Centre.

3.12 Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the FoK of teachers and children in a disadvantaged context to make sense of their knowledge and practice. Both the interpretive (social constructivist) and critical paradigms informed the choice of the research approach. The qualitative research approach with a multiple case study design was chosen to explore lived experiences, subjective meaning-making and issues of power. The eight teachers and the children were positioned as social actors and this informed certain choices in the study. All of the centres were in a disadvantaged context in terms of the socio-economic conditions, geographical location and vulnerabilities that comes with poverty and its resultant ills. Semi-structured interviews were suitable to gather data on how the sources of knowledge that the teachers brought to the fore to help shape their practice. The observations assisted in producing data on practice of both the children and the teachers. This chapter shows that working with children in research creates the need to engage with children to know who they are, what their capabilities are and how they should be

approached for different research activities. The data was analysed using several techniques including reading and re-reading transcripts, identifying units of meaning, clustering and developing patterns and themes.

The next chapter is the first findings chapter. This chapter reports on the complex nature of teachers' FoK which they use as their capitals and resources in a disadvantaged context.

CHAPTER 4

Teachers' Funds of Knowledge in a disadvantaged context

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this first findings chapter is to answer the research question; namely, ***What are the sources of ECD teachers' FoK in a disadvantaged context?*** Through the use of data from semi-structured interviews I show how ECD teachers utilised multiple sources of their FoK to make the centres functional despite many challenges. Throughout this research study I position teachers as active agents who construct and reconstruct their knowledge in sites for children at the margins in early-learning centres (UNICEF, 2010). In keeping with the FoK conceptions of teachers, they are also viewed as resourceful, knowledgeable and competent people (González *et al*., 2001). The different dimensions of their informal, practical, personal knowledge and emerging professional knowledge serve as assets to make early-childhood centres operational.

Numerous studies (Bailey, 2010; Hedges & Cullen, 2005) focus on teachers' formal and professional knowledge as more valuable and as a key indicator of quality provision. This chapter, however, shows that the source of the ECD teachers' FoK is multiple and must be taken into account for a more holistic understanding of teachers' knowledge and practice, especially in contexts of vulnerability. This strategy of approaching teachers' knowledge and practice is imperative considering the fragmentary roles teachers play in a disadvantaged context. They (teachers) are not only required to facilitate learning through the curriculum, but they are also required to position themselves as social workers, mothers, protectors and nurturers. I argue that these multi-faceted positionings require a knowledge-mix that goes beyond the concerns of supporting learning in a decontextualised way.

The theoretical ideas for this chapter were drawn from literature on FoK as an asset as proposed by Rios-Aguilar *et al*., (2011); González *et al*., (2001), the different capitals of Yosso (2005), "CoP" (Wenger, 2000) as well as "dark" FoK as noted by Zipin *et al*., (2012) and Zipin (2009). The latter is specifically related to the community context, children's social circumstances and streams of narrow practices evident in a disadvantaged context. The theoretical ideas used in this way enabled engagement with the different categories of knowledge such as informal and formal knowledge related to teachers' emerging professionalism.

4.2 The 8 Cs of the sources of teachers' Funds of Knowledge

The findings in this study led to an innovative way of addressing the sources of teachers' FoK. Specifically, the deductive analysis of the data from semi-structured interviews revealed that the sources of teachers' FoK could be addressed through focusing on the eight (8) Cs. These 8 Cs which are critical areas of focus to make sense of teachers' FoK are noted as follows: childhood memories, context of the community, children's social circumstances, caring, Christian faith-based knowing, "CoP", content knowledge and centre-based practices. Figure 4.1 below presents a diagrammatic sketch of the 8 Cs. In what follows, each of the dimensions is briefly explained.

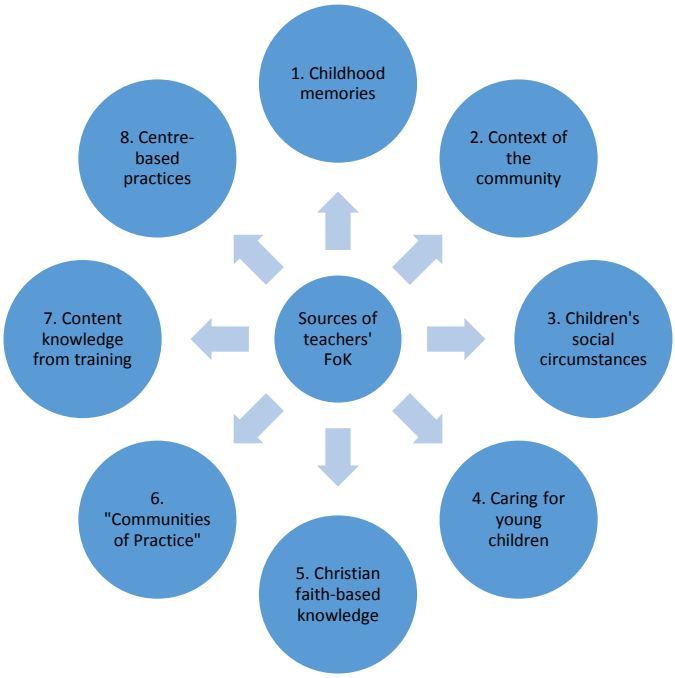


Figure 4.1: 8 Cs of teachers' FoK

This diagram served as an important tool to help unpack the sources of teachers' FoK in a disadvantaged context. The first three Cs provide insight into past and current circumstances that warrant specific action. The fourth C notes this action as the practice of caring in a context of vulnerability. The fifth C shows how teachers were relying on their Christian faith as an important framework to guide their work with young children. Due to limited training, the sixth C focuses on how teachers depended on colleagues to build and rebuild their social capital through a community of practice. The final two Cs highlight teachers' FoK to support centre-based practices through content knowledge gained mostly for school readiness within a two-week training session. The thematic discussions that follow deepened understanding of the sources of teachers' knowledge through a focus on the eight Cs.

4.2.1 Childhood memories

It is important to tap into teachers' personal knowledge by way of childhood memories. Van Hook (2002) is of the opinion that asking questions about childhood memories is relevant because it encourages people to self-reflect using their personal knowledge.

Furthermore, Happo, Maatta and Uusiautti (2012) posited that teachers' early personal experiences are important because they strongly influence their development as teachers. Memories from their earliest days of teaching help to understand their attitude towards teaching (Ylitapio-Mäntylä, 2013). Reflecting on teachers' early-childhood memories and their attitude towards teaching, seemed to be helpful in making meaning of their work with young children.

In this study the teachers used their early-childhood memories as a filter for interpreting age-appropriate activities for young children (Parajes, 1992). It can be argued that early memories distort and romanticise events; however, it can also be helpful in locating key ideas from a time perspective and may highlight the reason for teachers' knowledge and actions (Van Hook, 2002). In this study it was evident that teachers were drawing their content of play from childhood experiences. T3 saw the importance of offering play activities through games that she participated in during her childhood days. Hopscotch became the choice of her game based on her prior knowledge and experience.

> *"I let them play the games I played as a child. What I did as a child like hopscotch. For me it is important to teach them how to play hopscotch for their gross motor development. I make a play corner and I watch how they play" (T3/I1).*

In the excerpt above, the FoK from T3's childhood memories served as a resource to support her in selecting appropriate activities for her children. Interestingly, to note, is that teachers not only used their memories of childhood games but also other cultural activities to inform actions with the children in their care. This is possible as Ylitapio-Mäntylä (2013) argues that memories from childhood afford opportunities to make sense of alternative ways of knowing and can be helpful in understanding how teachers construct meaning out of the continuous moments of their lives. In the excerpt below, T4 replicates activities drawn out of her personal knowledge and own childhood experiences. These experiences are valued as being appropriate and authentic for the children in her care.

"Children must also play in the sand because all children love to play in the sand. And in the summer we open the sand pit so that they can mess with mud. This is what we have done as children. I can also remember the concerts which we had. I was dressed as a Zulu girl and my friends were dressed as witches. I danced on the stage and told the story of the Zulu girl. And at last year concert at the centre we also did that performance with our children" (T4/I1).

Thus far we have seen how the teachers' childhood nostalgic experiences come into play concerning the thoughts and actions with children. From this perspective it could be argued that childhood memories and aspirations serve as a repository of nostalgic knowledge that creates aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005). In this study there was evidence that aspirational capital was built through significant relationships in childhood. Dreams and hope for the future were nurtured in childhood despite the barriers that existed. T5 shows how the aspirational capital gained momentum in the play experiences with her older sister. The enactments of "playing school" enabled T5 to witness acts of teachers and created a desire within her to be a teacher.

"We just stayed at home and I often played with my sister. She was like our teacher when I was young because she went to school before me. And when she came home then we played school. We had a small shack at the back of the house. She loved to take the coal and then she will write my name and I will follow her and I enjoyed doing it. She was the teacher and I enjoyed it and that is why I also wanted to be a teacher. I couldn't wait for her to get home from school so that she could teach us" (T5/I1).

Reflecting on past experiences opens up an understanding of the processes explored in teaching. Aspirational capital is partly built from the opportunities that arise in environments that people occupy and it becomes a force that propels people forward. Becoming a teacher develops over time and it is grounded in different social, cultural and historical conditions (Timmerman, 2009). In addition to this viewpoint, the benefit in having good role-models as teachers is a way of attracting people to the profession

(Hutchings, Carrington, Francis, Skelton, Read & Hall, 2008). The environment that the teachers were growing up in, had a constellation of risks associated with vulnerability and yet they were able to distil threads of hope and cling to them in order to move forward. The excerpt below illustrates how T2 who grew up in vulnerable circumstances was able to position herself as a teacher and felt confident to be a role model.

> *"From when I was small I wanted to become a teacher. So when I and my friends were playing I always said that I want to be the teacher. I want to be a role model for children" (T2/I1).*

However, whilst there was evidence of childhood memories including experiences as being a positive force to build teachers' knowledge and motivation, there was also keen awareness that some practices which they were exposed to was not worthy of emulation and replication. Both T4 and T1 noted the harsh disciplinary measures they were subjected to through corporal punishment. Both excerpts reveal how adults responsible for the care of young children interpreted their roles in narrow and in ways that were demoralising for children:

> *"I know I went to a crèche and I was with a teacher that still has the crèche today. I don't know what she is doing today but I remember that she use to tie our hands with plastic bags and put cellotape over our mouths. She was very strict those days. Maybe it was her way of punishing us for doing something wrong" (T4/I1).*

> *"No I think that for me it was a day care. I didn't actually learn something. And I think they started to beat me so my mother took me out" (T1/I1)*.

Memories of negative practices are painful to recall but when they are brought to the fore they can be turned into resistance capital. This type of capital allows teachers in these centres to seek alternative ways of working with young children and to move towards better outcomes. In this study the teachers were able to use their memories to shift knowledge into practice by creating new possibilities for children that challenged narrow harmful practices (Yosso, 2005). For example, T1 used her FoK to inspire children by

adopting a positive attitude. This helped her to improve the situation for children under her care and she saw herself as an agent of change when she said ..."*But now I must make a difference in these children's lives" (T1/I1).* In the same vein T3 also want to effect change and recognised the key areas for intervention …"*If I want to make a difference then I should give children love and teach them about God and to obey God and their parents. You should hold them because you don't know from which home the children come" (T3/I1).*

It was clear in this study that the retrospective stance of drawing from childhood educational experiences was guiding present practices. This resulted in tensions regarding positive appropriate practices as opposed to negative classroom practices. All the teachers in the study were replicating the practices they were exposed to as children. This lives up to the powerful statement that, "teachers will teach like the way they were taught, unless taught differently". This is consistent with teachers who are under-qualified and/or underqualified because they will teach in the way in which they were taught unless taught differently (Van Driel, Beijaard & Verloop, 2001). What this means is that if teachers are not professionalised with high quality experiences then they will perpetuate narrow practices. This occurs because there has been no significant disruption of their ideas and experiential base.

The school-readiness focus was pervasive at all the centres in the study. Teachers were drawing on the early-childhood memories of this approach to reconstruct it for the children in their care without experiencing deconstruction of this approach due to limited training. Moss (2012) and Brown (2010) is critical of the school readiness focus in early-childhood centres as he explains that with a discourse of getting young children ready for school, the real danger might be in depriving them of their potential and competence as noted in the argument included the agency perspective of children. This can result in early-childhood as a period of retreat or loss and not necessarily a period of progress.

The excerpts below illustrate how pedagogy for school-readiness was accessed from early-childhood educational experiences. The teacher-centred approaches with play as a

form of respite, supports the idea that the teacher is the expert and the child a novice whose prior knowledge is ignored. In such negative practices children's meaning-making potentials are not accessed as assets to support learning. In this respect, the following excerpts are noteworthy:

> *"I teach like the teacher who taught me. Like if we do colouring. I believe you show a child. The children's eyes should be on me. They should listen to me. I will tell them that this is a blue thing and a red thing and they should look at what I do- their eyes should be focussed on what I show them. I should just say blue and red and I don't show it so it is better when they see something and when they feel it (the object). That is how the teacher at school X taught me and that is how I teach the children here" (T3/I1).*

> *"Most of the things I teach the children were how I was taught that time when I was young. Most of the things they were teaching us were how to communicate. She taught us most of the things we are doing here now. That time and now most of it is the same. We learned there how to write, to speak, pray, sing and to play with other children. The children have to complete all the worksheets in the class before they can go out to do outdoor activities. Sometimes the day is too short to do outdoor activities" (T2/I1).*

I argue that doing a study on the sources of teachers' knowledge and asking questions around their childhood memories is valuable because it provides some insights into why teachers do what they do. The source of their knowledge is important to tap into in order to make sense of what is enabling and what is disabling from a time perspective. Recalling memories and past experiences serves as a reflective exercise to locate the source of ideas and insights.

To conclude, through examinations described above there are opportunities to better understand the educational practices and typical pedagogical habits at early-childhood centres (Sandberg & Pramling-Samuelsson, 2005). Each of the childhood memories served as a stock of knowledge on how to be a teacher, how to replicate the past

childhood teaching experience in the present context, and which kind of activities are favoured. The past experiences are influential in providing the teachers with FoK and how to go about being a teacher in these centres. Teacher's reconstruction of personal and practical knowledge function as an asset to reaching the goals of early-learning in a disadvantaged context. Happo *et al*., (2012) affirms that their personal knowledge seems to be a strong link to their development as teachers working with young children. The evidence in this section supports this idea as it shows where the strengths lie and which areas are in need of deconstruction and reconstruction. Tapping into prior knowledge from their childhood memories is then a critical entry point to move forward in professional development. The next section continues with the teachers' FoK of the context of the community in which centres function.

4.2.2 Context of the community

In what follows, the second C continues with the theme of teachers' FoK regarding the context of the community. Verloop *et al*., (2001:441) speaks of "the total knowledge that a teacher has at his or her disposal at a particular moment which, underlies his or her actions". In these centres, this total knowledge of the teachers included knowledge of the community in which children were growing up in. All the teachers in the study came from the community in which they taught. They had the FoK about children and their lives in order to help them to navigate better possibilities for early-childhood education. In other words their navigational capital afforded them skills to traverse through institutions such as early-childhood centres in the community (Yosso, 2005). They knew how to deal with children and what they needed because they had the experiential knowledge of living in vulnerable communities.

It must also be noted that the FoK that the teachers displayed about the community and the vulnerabilities that children faced, fell within the category of "dark" FoK. The work of Zipin *et al*., (2012) and Zipin (2009) acknowledges the notion of "dark" FoK that speaks to the contemporary challenges that many marginalised people experience. He argues that the "dark" FoK becomes visible as arising from the adversity that children and

teachers experience under exceedingly difficult circumstances and conditions in their homes and communities. In what follows, I show how the "dark" FoK was articulated and sometimes engaged with.

For example, the excerpt below shows the value of having knowledge about children beyond the borders of early-childhood centres. T7 explains that knowledge of the community brings caring attitudes to the fore. Children experience a hostile environment and teachers have to position themselves as nurturers.

> *"You understand where these children come from. I know what goes on in our community, what's difficult for these children and this makes you look after them. Sometimes we are all they have. Just the teachers and we love them" (T7/l2).*

Teachers' FoK about children's lives in the community enables them to turn risk into protective factors and deal with vulnerabilities which children experience. The South African Children's Gauge reports on the multiple risk factors which might cause harm to young children (Berry *et al*., 2013). Risk factors causing vulnerabilities are noted as violence, malnutrition and substance abuse and how these contribute to stunting growth in young children. In addition to this, family and community violence are also known risk factors that negatively affect children's development. The report on *Violence against Children in SA*, describes the different contexts such the home, and in the community, where violence against children take place (UNICEF, 2012). Violence is widespread in South African communities; and violence against children in their homes, at the centres and in their communities is a worrying.

The teachers in the study described the immediate environment in which children were growing up as one of risk. The teachers identified vandalism and various types of abuses (e.g. drug, alcohol and child abuse) as part of risks children had to contend with. The teachers had to seek protection of the physical environment of the centres. Two teachers, namely, T5 and T1 had the following to say:

"The crime is high in this area and when we here then we keep the gates locked. Drugs and alcohol abuse is of the biggest problems and they broke in a few times here at the crèche" (T5/I2).

"...This area has changed because children get raped here and people misuse alcohol, especially young children. Yes a lot has changed since I came here. I've heard stories of where children have been physically abused in their homes" (T1/I2).

Connelly *et al*., (1997) suggest that teacher' knowledge is central to children's well-being and learning. The above excerpts illustrate that teachers were well aware of what children were experiencing and what their actions should be like. The teachers' intervention in the context of risk in the community is imperative as they have an obligation for building a healthy citizenry. The Lancet series notes that when young children are exposed to "violence" such as "insecure attachments, increased risk of behaviour problems, reduced levels of pro-social behaviour and increased aggressive behaviour, then adulthood is characterised by anti-social behaviour" (Walker, Wachs, Grantham-McGregor, Black, Nelson, Huffman, Baker-Henningham, Chang, Hamadani, Lozoff, Meeks-Gardner, Powel, Rahman & Richter, 2011:1). The negative effects experienced in the home environment are more likely to be increased when parents or the primary caregiver's mental health is disrupted. T2 explains the effects of the trauma caused by domestic violence and substance abuse in communities on children. The excerpt also reveals how children are caught up in a cycle of reproduction. They witness and are implicated in a variety of social problems. The models of life they experience are distorted and in need of disruption through intervention.

"It is the drugs in Henky and the drinking, smoking. Some of the small children in Henky also using drugs and they drink... And here we have child abuse and the children come and they tell you about how their daddy hit their mummy. The children experience bad things here like at that Long Island place they drink and do drugs. And the boyfriend hit the girlfriend. Sometimes you can see that a child is very aggressive. Then you ask yourself is the child also like

that at home or does the child see it by the father at home. It's like the child is going through trauma" (T2/I2).

Teachers were knowledgeable regarding, unemployment as the root cause of family problems in this context. The children in the study came from homes where primary caregivers were unemployed and this led to drug and alcohol abuse which further placed young children's development at risk. In SA, and particularly in this community of predominantly coloured and black people, the level of education is a challenge which feeds into the high unemployment rate. "Levels of education below matric were observed in larger proportions among unemployed black Africans and the coloured population" (Statistics SA, 2015: 12). "Compared to quarter four (4) of 2013, unemployed black Africans with less than a matric qualification increased by 1,3 percentage points in quarter four (4) of 2014. Seven out of ten coloured people had a qualification of less than matric and the figure remained unchanged compared to a year ago" (Statistics SA, 2015: 12). Low qualifications were linked to unemployment because the "number of unemployed people increased by 79 000, resulting in a 0,2 percentage point increase in the unemployment rate" (ibid, 2015:12). Teachers spoke regularly of high rates of unemployment in households, the impact of it and the articulations below show the "dark"' FoK that teachers had access to:

"The children experience bad things here. Here is not enough work for the parents of the children in this area that is why they drink so much and use drugs and abuse alcohol" (T2/I2).

"Work for parents is a problem here in Henky. Alcohol abuse by parents also plays a big role here" (T3/I2).

Many children received and were dependent on the Child Support Grant from the government. Latest statistics from the South African Early-Childhood Review of 2016, show that about "four million children under 6 years live in the poorest (40%) of households" (Republic of SA, 2016:8). The Child Support Grant is one way in which the government is fighting poverty and the effects of unemployment. Many families from disadvantaged backgrounds depend on the Child Support Grant of R330 per month as

the main source of income (ibid, 2016). With the introduction of the child support grants, the "number and percentage of young children living in poverty has decreased since 2003 when 4,9 million (79%) young children lived in poor households" (ibid, 2016:22).

Access to early-childhood education in SA is riddled with inequities. This is especially in the case where poor parents are asked to pay fees in the context of not having enough to meet their basic needs. It was evident, however, that the centres were sympathetic to the plight of parents. T4 spoke of how their centre structures the paying of fees to consider children who receive social grants. Parents on social grants paid lower fees. This teacher (T4) also spoke about the challenges that parents in the community experienced with regards to paying for young children's education:

> *"We get a subsidy for the children and the parents who gets the social grant for the children pays R130 per month and the other parents pay R180 per month. Many of the parents cannot afford to pay the school fees and we are the cheapest crèche in Henky. So what will happen to the child? Because the child will go to Grade R where the parent has to pay and then the child knows nothing compared to the child that has been here with us since 2 years old. These are the parents that will try their best to pay the R130" (T4/I2).*

In addition to the above challenges of the community, another aspect of teachers' "dark" FoK relates to the lack of recreational facilities for young children. The teachers noted with concern that the children were growing up in unstimulating environments that lacked recreational facilities. These facilities are particularly important, taking into account the harsh realities that children faced on a daily basis. They needed an alternative environment as a respite. Where recreational facilities were available they were vandalised as seen in the following excerpts:

> *"Here is actually no parks. It's all messed up" (T1/I2).*

> *"There is a library and a park but the things were stolen out of the park" (T3/I2).*

"In Henky there are libraries and schools and one stadium but that stadium is not safe because they do a lot of wrong things there in the stadium. There is only one play park in Henky but it is also not right because one day a car drove over a child and it is not safe" (T7/l2).

All the aforementioned realities in the community were creating vulnerable childhoods. The challenging and unsafe environments have negative consequences for young children's emotional and cognitive development (Grantham-McGregor, Cheung, Cueto, Glewwe, Richter & Strupp, 2007). This may result in long term effects like children repeating grades, developing special education needs in the later school years, or possibly dropping out of school (Ebrahim *et al*., 2013).

In summary, it is evident that the sources of knowledge regarding the context of the community contribute to teachers' authentic FoK. I argue that this kind of informal knowledge is an asset when working in a disadvantaged context. Verloop *et al*., (2001:441) posit that teachers' "total knowledge" includes the "dark" FoK associated with poverty, violence, substance abuse and unstable family homes. The teachers knew how poverty, unemployment and violence caused adults to act in ways in which harm was caused to young children. They were exposed to abuse and trauma. This "dark" FoK seemed to be used as a positive navigational capital by teachers because it gave them particular insight into the plight of young children and their families in Henky. The following section continues with a description of the knowledge on how children's social circumstances contributed to vulnerabilities in childhood.

4.2.3 Children's social circumstances cause toxic stress in their lives

In this study teachers showed authentic FoK when they further articulated their knowledge of how children's poor social circumstances were affecting their development and learning. This knowledge made teachers more sensitive to the needs of the children. The teachers in the study mentioned different barriers which affected young children's optimal development. These obstacles were multiple and intersecting. Young children's early-

learning experiences can be negatively affected by lack of enrichment, stress and trauma experienced in the home or community (Ebrahim *et al*., 2013).

Risk factors, described in the previous section were affecting the early development of young children. In the absence of supportive caregivers to buffer children against stress, "tolerable stress" becomes "toxic stress" for children (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012:238; Shonkoff, 2009:2). One of the problems with toxic stress is that "it increases the production of cortisol, a hormone that can disrupt the healthy development of the brain, affecting health, learning, and behaviour" (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012:238). In this study there were several indications that the children were likely to experience toxic stress. This was not only caused by the behaviour of adults but also by the behaviour of older siblings who normally bring children to the centres in the morning. T5 noted how older children were extended suppliers of drug lords. T3 and T8 noted how the behaviour of children could be linked to the toxic behaviours they experienced in the home environments. Some children were already at high risk as they were consuming alcohol and drugs as this was a normal occurrence in the home environment. In other words, the children in the centres were replicating the types of behaviours they were witnessing in the home environment. The following excerpts explain this:

> *"You get the parents that do not smoke or drink but then you get the child. He puts on his uniform and goes to school and he first buys drugs and takes it to school and give to the other children and then he becomes someone else" (T5/I2).*
>
> *"The children come and tell you if their parents fight. And you feel bad for the child. If the child is not obedient or does not listen then you kind of know which type of house the child comes from" (T3/I2).*
>
> *"Some of the small children in Henky also use drugs and they drink. And here is children abuse. Sometimes you can see that children see adults fight at home because they also just want to fight over toys or where to sit in the class" (T8/I2).*

From the above it was evident that children were exposed to poor role-models. Their observational learning was distorted by the poor role-models who were supposed to be agents of early socialisation in a positive sense. The "role of parent support in learning as a protective factor for children with aggressive-disruptive behaviour problems is crucial" (Abenavoli, Greenberg & Bierman, 2015:10). Recent developments in this field have shown that aggressive behaviour problems, delay "grasping academic knowledge and executive functioning are each linked empirically with low levels of parent educational attainment, single parenthood and exposure to stress associated with neighbourhood violence and family conflicts" (Abenavoli *et al*., 2015:10).

In the context of multiple adversities "parent support may be particularly important because they may serve as protective factors" (ibid, 2015:10). This in turn builds resistance (capital) and support for children at risk (Abenavoli *et al*., 2015:10). The primary caregivers in this study were acting out the stresses they experienced thus placing the children in their care at risk. Where this was the case, parents were not serving as protective factors but contributing to the risks children faced in their daily lives. Teachers spoke of how parents exposed their children to harmful practices and children were used to service adults' warped needs. T6 and T7 had first-hand experiences of the above as they lived in contexts where parents as questionable role-models were a serious concern. They had the following to say:

> *"Children smoke the same stuff as the parents. I stay in some ones yard in Henky. And the man sells drugs and dagga and his big children also does it, they have been trained to do that. They stand in the street and sell to school children and small children" (T6/I1).*

> *"Parents send the children to buy beer for them and they drink this in front of children. This is an everyday situation and soon you will see that the child also start to drink the same beer that they bought for their parents" (T7/I1).*

In closing, the teachers in these centres knew that the negative effects of violence, unemployment, poverty and abuse on young children could impact on relationship-building inside the centres. Parents featured as poor role-models for children because

they indulged in substance abuse and exposed children to domestic violence amongst other vulnerabilities. Teachers were knowledgeable about the shortcomings in the home environment and how this created risks for the children. They recognised signs of stress, aggression, withdrawal and learning problems. This “dark” FoK as part of the sources of the teachers’ knowledge served as a strength and asset when working with marginalised groups (Zipin *et al*., 2012; Zipin, 2009). In light of this “dark” FoK, teachers seemed to be intensely aware of creating responsive practices with young children. The next section, highlights responsive practices which were premised on nurturing relationships between the teachers and the children at the centres. Teachers acted individually and collectively as a protective factor through simple but effective ways of showing children that they cared.

4.2.4 Caring for children through responsive practice

This section serves as a catalyst for encouraging 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’ FoK regarding the context and how the social circumstances (see 4.2.3 and 4.2.4) created vulnerabilities could be read as assets for building responsive ECE as intervention.

The findings in this section are organised according to the teachers’ approach to caring for children. In the centres, teachers embark on an individual as well as collective approach to caring for the children. They used their FoK in order to position themselves as nurturers, keen observers and problem-solvers in the centres. It could be argued that the sources of teachers’ FoK appear to place them in a better position to create protective factors to curb the above risks (see 4.2.3 and 4.2.4). The children in this study were in need of alternate role-models. The teachers worked hard to provide this for them. To illustrate, T2 spoke about opening up opportunities to see life differently and through observing good role-models with whom they could identify with.

"I think if you keep them busy and give them positive things, a future to look at and to be a role model. Last week we had Lukas and Mark here at our school. They famous singers from Henky. Their young sister is also here at this centre" (T2/l1).

Teachers used their personal knowledge in practical ways and this enabled them to think and perform in appropriate ways (Anning, 2001). They were able to use their personal knowledge from motherhood to create a natural extension of caring for children in the centres. This asset is invaluable considering the lack of maternal attention the children were receiving in their context. The teachers recognised that the children needed them 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 my patience, because many times one can get very impatient. I see sometimes when I speak too loud to them then just get confused and then they just do wrong things. I also realise that I should work slower with them and I should be patient and to 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/l1).

The sources of the teachers' FoK were strengthened through the advancement of caring relationships between the teachers and the children. Noddings (2007 & 2005) is of the opinion that the essential core of "caring" is about learning to love and nurturing each other. Promoting caring between the children, the parents and the teachers is a positive starting point in early-childhood centres, especially in a disadvantaged centre (Swick, 2005; 2006 & 2007). In this study, 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. The children in this study were growing up in the context of HIV/AIDs. In female-headed households which is a significant family structure in SA, this meant that children became orphans at a very young age or were subjected to kin care

with extended family members (Statistics, 2012). T6 had the personal experience of being an orphan. Here empathetic knowledge of being an orphan and seeing the effects on young children motivated her to think about a responsive strategy:

> *"We have orphans here. I always feel sorry for the children who lost their mothers when they were still small. When I started here they were many in the class. I grew up like them and when I learned more then it became better for me. I saw that they always feel out of place with the other children. So I said to myself will be here to encourage them like I do for any other children here" (T6/I2).*

The above is illustrative of how supportive relationships can be built on action-orientated and context-bound knowledge (Van Driel *et al*., 2001). Studies (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012:238; Shonkoff, 2009:9) support the conclusion that to "provide supportive, responsive relationships as early in life as possible can prevent or reverse the damaging effects of toxic stress". At Disney Kids Centre teachers acted as a collective protective network for the children through simple signs of appreciating the children when they left the centre. This was the only centre which gave children gifts prior to them starting formal schooling. The centre was responsive to the needs of the children despite many of them being "in the red" in terms of financial obligation. The excerpt below shows how the children experienced an alternate reality based on the sensitivity of teachers:

> *"The last day when the children are here during November then we give each child a Christmas gift. Some months we close in the red but we survive because we love our children. Every grade R child also receives an extra gift. But this is for them when they go to grade 1. We give every child a new school bag and stationary so that they can start grade 1 well" (T5/I2).*

Teachers' quest to function as a protective network and to offer nurturance can be linked to the idea of familial capital (Yosso, 2005). Teachers at centres saw themselves as the mothers and carers of children at these centres. Besides the teaching staff, non-teaching

staff also contributed to building their familial capital through caring practices. They too relied on their practical knowledge and showed compassion and support for vulnerable children during the school week. T2 provides an explanation of how non-teaching staff took on the role of primary caregivers despite them having meagre resources. This brings the humanitarian response to the fore:

> *"Last year there was a girl who was staying in Bergman. The mother had cancer. Then the grandmother came here and said that the mother of the child is sick and she will keep the child out of the school because she can't leave the mother alone at home. So the child went to stay with aunty B, who works here. During the week the child stayed with aunty B and came to the centre and on Fridays the grandmother comes to fetch her and brings her back on a Monday so that she can come to school" (T2/I2).*

The sources of teachers' knowledge thus far show that there is a lot of emotional labour implicated in caring for children in a disadvantaged context. Goldstein (1999:354) comments that it is important to explore complex relationships and "a sense of seamless continuity that will ease the children's transitions from home to school and back again each day". What this means is that the children will get alternative ways of knowing and being which might have the potential to disrupt the vulnerabilities they experience. Through caring for the children in the centre the teachers showed their resistance knowledge as capital to make an alternative reality for the children in their care. In this way, it could be argued that the teachers learned more about who they were in their capacities as teachers and as nurturers.

In contexts of the disadvantaged, it is important for teachers to be keen observers. The articulations of the teachers in this study thus far show that they were knowledgeable about their context through their own experiences and through their observations. The teachers in early-childhood education are required to have different skills such as observation skills, looking for and reading signs such as sudden changes in behaviour in children (McCormick, Turbeville, Barnes & McClowry, 2014; Harwood, Klopper, Osanyin & Vanderlee, 2013; Ige, 2011). Both T2 and T5 were able to pick up behavioural changes

such as withdrawal, anger or anxiety that required careful observations. The teachers were able to use contrasts in behaviour in order to identify the behaviour for intervention. The excerpts below illustrate this:

> *"Like if you have a child that is very busy but now the child is just sitting there, not playing, then you know something is wrong because you know this child is usually very busy" (T2/I2).*

> *"At school you should know about the child for example when the child cries a lot or if the child is suddenly quiet then you should ask questions on why the child is so quiet. You have to try and find out what the problem is because the child is not like this and maybe you should take it further. If you can't solve the problem then you should go to the manager" (T5/I2).*

In keeping with the ideas of a family, the notion of familial capital, and positioning of the teachers as mothers and nurturers, it was not surprising that T8 called the early-childhood centre as the "*second home".* Taggart (2014) is of the opinion that in order to help reduce young children's trauma and anxiety, day-care settings should be as home-like as possible. In this study this meant providing an alternative to the risky home environment. For example, it was important to create settings that attempt to disrupt the home environment and reconstruct the child and mother relationship in a group-care setting.

In this study 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" (Atmore, 2013:153). 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 about the meals provided 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 [Make sound and rubs her stomach]… in their stomachs because they hungry" (T7/I2).*

> *"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/I2).*

In conclusion, teachers' context-bound knowledge of children's realities made them (teachers) more responsive to the plight of the children. In light of the previous two sections (see 4.2.3 and 4.2.4), it should be noted that their caring was most effective through hands-on, practical ways. Knowledge-in-action was evident through being prominent role-models, being patient, providing accommodation for needy children in their own homes and cooking food for children. Noddings (2007) and Goldstein (1999) reminds us that such hands-on caring eases the transition from home to centres and creates opportunities of giving a "*second home"*. This was a much needed approach to working with young children attending early-learning centres in this context. The teachers used their capitals and FoK to pay attention to the children's holistic well-being. The next section reveals the source of their FoK which has roots in their Christian faith.

4.2.5 Christian faith-based knowledge

In the fifth theme I show how the sources of teachers' knowledge are tied up with them being Christians coupled with the school adopting a Christian philosophical approach. All teachers in the study grew up as Christians and their faith-based approach featured strongly through their personal and informal FoK. In the Christian faith education is viewed

as shaping the individual as doers rather than mere talkers (Folwer & Dell, 2004:34). The aim through the Christian education is to learn how God is conceptualised and how this impacts on the core values, beliefs and meanings of teachers' personal lives and in their relationships with the children (Fowler & Dell, 2004:34). T7 explained her values and position in using the Christian-faith-based education as follows: …"*For me it is better to teach them about the Bible. This crèche is a Christian crèche. It is therefore compulsory for us teachers to start with the Bible" (T7/I2).* T5 emphasised the rationale for using a Christian-faith-based approach by saying: …*It is also good for the child to learn from an early age of God because the day that they are bigger then they will remember him" (T5/I2).* This was understandable taking into account that human development from a Christian perspective has objectives for humans to lead a life that is pleasing to God. This is tied to principles of Godliness including morals, values and actions that exhibit character-in-action (The Christian Philosophy of Education, 2015). It was evident in the study that the parents appreciated the Christian faith-approach and the way in which the teachers were facilitating lessons. Parents were witnessing the fruits of teachers' labour. T3 explained:

> *"Some parents will come back and give me a gift to say thank you for what I have done for their child. A parent came to me and said that they visit people and they wanted to pray but my child immediately started to pray. I feel that I play an important role in children's lives" (T3/I2).*

In addition to the above, T6 expressed personal FoK regarding gospel music and the value of it in her life and how it cascaded in her work with young children. She grew up in a musically-oriented family which was nurtured further in the school activities as revealed in the interview…"*At school I love to sing and I also love to sing with the children in my class. Christian music took me forward because I sang in the school choir. I started singing in a small choir group and later moved to a bigger group. My father taught us to sing and our family sang in the church choir" (T6/I2).* The singing of Christian songs, reading the Bible and memorising Bible verses were ways of inducting new teachers at the centres. T2 expressed how she gained her knowledge from older teachers and T7

expressed how she was inducted into teaching through observation which alerted her to how the teachings of the Christian faith were infused in practice:

> *"The other teachers here showed me how to teach the children, how to give class. For example you start with the daily programme. You say good morning to the children, you pray, let them sing songs like Jesus loves me or building up a temple. The children say Bible verses (T2/I2).*

> *"The principal told me to sit in the one of teacher's class for a week. I watched what she did. The teacher started by greeting the children and she said each child's name. Then when every child was in the class we prayed 'Our Father'. The teachers sang songs with the children but sometimes the children also sang alone. After the week of watching the other teacher I was given my own class to teach" (T7/I2).*

From the above it is clear that the manager and other teachers were key in guiding the development of pedagogy which integrated the Christian faith. This was done so that the teachers could use the Christian religion as well as other knowledge bases as FoK to guide their practice. The navigational capital as noted by Yosso (2005) was steered in particular directions for the teachers.

The main, aim of education at the centres was to develop the child in the image of God and for teachers to tailor their efforts to develop particular types of behaviours in children (De Beer & Jaarsma, 2000). It was clear in the study that in the context of multiple disadvantages, religion was a source of comfort and salvation. Teachers were committed to directing children to God-consciousness to direct their moral and spiritual behaviour (Folwer & Dell, 2004). They used a compassionate approach to do so. For example, T3 had the following to say:

> *"If I want to make a difference then I should give children love and teach them about God and to obey God and their parents. You should hold them because you don't know from which home the children come. They don't have to know a lot" (T3/I2).*

Since the teachers were very knowledgeable about the needs of the children in their care, they were able to look for opportunities to use a more integrated approach to faith-based and academic learning priorities. The teachers put their linguistic capital to good use. The home language of the children differed from the language of learning and teaching at the centres. The teachers had to be observant to the linguistic needs of the children. T7 spoke four African languages and realised the importance of language development. She used the Bible songs to encourage language development.

> "*Many times in the class we start with the singing of Bible songs. I will start to sing with them but when we sing again for the second time then I will leave them to sing alone. I can then see the ones who sings the song taught. This is important for their learning" (T7/I1).*

T3 was also well-placed to address the language needs of the children. She had multilingual FoK and was able to help children who lacked English proficiency to learn English through exposing them to not only Bible songs but also short Bible verses in English. She also had the following to say:

> *"I speak Afrikaans, SeSotho and Setswana. I have an English class. I help the children who don't understand English in the beginning. But by singing the songs at the centre and teaching the short Bible verses in English, children learn" (T3/I2).*

The teachers own linguistic capital was contributing to how they approached specific needs of the children (Amaro-Jiménez & Semingson, 2011). The development of children's language through interaction with adults and peers was supported in a Vygotskian sense (1986). Linguistic capital became an asset in these centres because of the teachers' competence in multiple languages and good communication skills. The use of gospel songs and learning the short verses of the Bible were playing important parts in enhancing children's vocabulary development especially for those who were not proficient in English. This was especially the case where teachers were sensitive to the linguistic needs of the children. Singing was combined with actions to help children learn the

meaning of words. Since teachers in the study were multilingual, code-switching was used to facilitate children's understandings.

In summary, the navigational path for children's learning was guided by the priorities of learning the Christian faith. Children's learning took place through the chanting of short Bible verses, singing of Bible songs and memorising of different prayers. The teachers used their Christian faith-based knowledge as a source of their FoK to guide activities on the daily programme and to assist new teachers in the centres. They also integrated the faith-based learning with priorities such as helping children to learn English. This was possible because of the FoK they had of both the Christian faith and the linguistic needs of children who were not proficient in English. The teachers' religious, emerging knowledge of early-childhood education practice and the linguistic capital both worked to assist children in their learning.

4.2.6 Communities of Practice

As mentioned previously, less experienced teachers in the study depended on more experienced teachers to assist them in understanding what to teach and how to teach. Professional knowledge highlights specific bodies of knowledge such as content and subject knowledge (Anning, 2001; Shulman, 1986). The teachers needed this knowledge and skills to function as early-childhood teachers. It must be remembered that the personal and professional are not separate but part of an integrated whole of teacher knowledge. The separation is merely for the purpose of discussion.

The teachers gained formal knowledge about teaching young children from each other. This is indicative of the working of "CoP" (Wenger, 2000). In this type of networking, people or members interact with each other and with the world. Members in these "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 (Cotton, 2013; Boud & Middleton, 2003; Wenger, 2000). In this study 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 building of the network can also be viewed as a key step in the

development of social capital as noted by Yosso (2005). The teachers in the study 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 I worked with the four year old children" (T1/I2).*

> *"Every one 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).*

In this study it was clear that the collaboration amongst the teachers was assisting to build their emerging professional knowledge. According to Boud and Middleton (2003), learning from others through mentoring is important. There has "been frequent suggestions that formal systematic learning is of more importance than informal learning" (ibid, 2003:195). Informal learning in "CoP" is often not recognised as learning within organisations. It is normally regarded as being "part of the job" (Boud & Middleton, 2003:195). However, it is noteworthy that findings show that learning in this way proved to be valuable in gaining new knowledge and practical skills. The excerpt below illustrates how the collaboration amongst teachers took place in order to plan activities and design resource materials. A teacher guide was used as the main source of reference and activities were adapted for different age groups:

> *"We work from a planning book that Teacher X brought for us. We use it to do our weekly planning and write it step by step for day 1 then day 2. We do the planning and the activities for my class, the four year old children. Then we make the activities a bit easier for the three year old children in the other teacher's class. We make our own apparatus and we made things like puzzles, matching cards, dominoes for the children" (T3/I2).*

Teachers were gaining new knowledge through side-by-side participation as well as guided participation with colleagues in the centres (Rogoff, 2003). Their new FoK were jointly constructed regarding particular aspects of practice which included planning for teaching and learning. Therefore, the teachers noted that the exposure to their "CoP" as positive in helping them gain additional FoK. T5, for instance, noted how she improved her practical skills of making concrete teaching aids as noted in this excerpt:

> *"Teacher J taught us how to make apparatus for our class. And we have many things in the class which the children can use. The space is small, but we have of everything. She also taught us to make the activities for the children. We make our own puzzles, matching cards and play dough for the children. The matching cards are a few pictures on the card and then we have made loose cards then the children sort and match these cards" (T5/I2).*

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 (Boud & Middleton, 2003; Wenger, 2000). From the discussion thus far it is suggested that the collaboration encouraged a type of social learning that was leading to the development of emerging formal knowledge and gaining practical skills on site. The teachers were making use of mentors and bench-marking ideas for effective practice. This was particularly important considering that teachers in the study were exposed to very limited training in the implementation of a curriculum for children from birth-to-four years. Some teachers were better than others in certain aspects. The teachers felt comfortable when they had a more knowledgeable peer (Vygotsky, 1978). T4 spoke about her reliance on another teacher who was more competent than her on assessment:

> *"What makes it difficult for me is that we didn't receive training on how to assess children, Teacher J does it. And when I see that a child has a problem then I will speak to Teacher J about it because I don't know how to handle it" (T4/I2).*

Working with and learning in these "CoP" 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 capital 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 from the city, a white lady brings stuff for the children. She brings toys, clothes and also lots of fruit for the children to eat. We handle all children the same, give them love and if we see that there is one of them that does not have bread then we will ask Jane (woman who works in the kitchen) to give more bread to the child" (T5/I2).*

> *"Teacher Hanna gave lots of clothes last year to the centre. We also have a brown suit case 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).*

In summation, the findings in this section show that teachers were accessing their formal knowledge and social capital (Yosso, 2005) from peer and community resources. The teachers' FoK regarding the context of the community and children's social circumstances meant that they could create responsive practices. Teachers formed "CoP"s as support and to expand on their prior knowledge of appropriate practice to benefit the holistic needs of young children. Taking part in side-by-side participation with more experienced teachers was important in building teachers' sources of their FoK and practical skills (Rogoff, 2003) in informal and formal learning communities. The next section reveal the sources of teacher's FoK from training and centre-based practices.

4.2.7 Content knowledge gained from training

The following two sections continue with the knowledge teachers 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 FS government as a group that needed training. The teachers saw the training as a move in the right direction for their development. The training created insights into different types of knowledges for practice with young children. Previous researchers (Hedges & Cullen, 2005; Anning, 2001; Shulman, 1986) argue for the importance of formal knowledge which can be precisely and formally articulated and shared in public space. Teachers spoke about how the training enhanced their formal knowledge of a curriculum for young children. T7 noted that … "*the teachers learned about the curriculum and what it is about*. *We learned about the content that children should know before Grade R" (T7/I2)*.

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" (Wood & Bennett, 2000:636). 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" (UNICEF, 2010). 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:

> *"In the training we learned about the different corners like the fantasy corner, the play doll corner, 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)*.

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:

> *"The space of my class is too small because I have many children. I have 26 children and having the different corners in the class won't work. We do the setup of the different corners in a separate room and when we done then we pack away the things" (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" (Happo *et al*., 2012:488). Teaching young children meant considering their needs. The teachers spoke about how they grew in their understanding of taking 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 hanged against the wall and it should be clear so that they can see it" (T5/I2).*

> *"Training at the workshop was very different to what I have done at the centre. At the training we learned that everything should be on its place in the class and that you should write the names of the shapes big enough so that all the children can see it. 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:

"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 FS curriculum for birth-to-four year olds, was instrumental in helping the teachers to improve their knowledge of developmental domains. The FS birth-to-four curriculum (RSA FSDoE, n.d.) 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 teachers 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 is the beads and threading laces, 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" (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.

To conclude, 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 to consider the different developmental domains and the individual needs of the children in the centres. Although the training workshop on the FS curriculum was over two weeks, it was evident that this new source of knowledge gained assisted the teachers in their daily work at the centres.

4.2.8 Centre-based practice

Before I begin on a full discussion on FoK that supported centre-based practice, it is important to gain some insight into how some opportunities were created to develop FoK. Taking into account that teachers were working in an area that had high unemployment, they valued the work they had and were looking for opportunities to better themselves. FoK for ECD teachers was not always built-up from being a teacher or attending training. T6 and T7 noted that they went beyond their responsibilities as a cleaner and a cook. These two women accepted the opportunity to replace teachers when they went to workshops. T6 did this without any remuneration and worked purely because of enjoyment of working with young children. The excerpts below provide greater details:

"I first started working at a crèche as a cleaning lady for R500... and when I worked as a cleaning lady, the teachers always went away for workshops then they would leave me with the children [smiling]. They wrote down that which I should do with the children during the day. And that is how I started to give class. I only worked, I didn't get money for this but I enjoyed working with the children. I did this until one teacher left the crèche. So they took me in that class and hired another cleaning lady. I started to work first with the small children there" (T6/I1).

"When I start here at Edna Rita, I was working in the kitchen and sometimes Teacher Hanna ask me to supervise the children and to help her. So when the other lady left she asked me if I will take the junior class. I said no I am not fine but teacher Hanna said I will be fine because she sees how I look after the children and playing with the children. She said I will be fine for that job and that she will help me. So I got used to this work and I like the work. Sometimes I went to teacher Hanna and I asked her what I should do and then she helped me. When I was in the class with teacher Hanna I seen a lot of things. I see what she did and I also tried it in my class" (T7/I1).

In order to gain an idea of what the teachers taught and what their purpose for teaching young children was, they were asked to discuss the goals of ECCE. School readiness, referred to in an earlier section, was the key goal mentioned. Moss (2012:356) and Brown (2010:133) is of the opinion that the discourse of school readiness is problematic because a particular image of the child as re-producer of culture of knowledge, starting life with and from nothing is created. The child is seen as an empty vessel who should be filled with knowledge. This was a strong goal amongst the teachers which impacted in exhibiting limited and negative practices with young children. T1 knew that this goal meant that she had to *give off her best for them* (T1/I1). T2 however, did not personalise the goal. This could be attributed to how people in a disadvantaged context can internalise their ways of knowing as being worthless. She repeated what she was told at the training workshops: "*They told us what is important to teach because the child will go to the big*

school. They told us that we lay the foundation and the other teachers just build on it" (T2/I2).

The "pressure on teachers to teach academic skills could stimulate constructive practices that have the potential to increase all children's academic performance and especially for the economically disadvantaged" (Stipek, 2006:456). However, the "potential of doing more harm than good by promoting educational practices that undermine children's enthusiasm for learning can negatively affect their ultimate academic performance" (Moss, 2012:355). T2 stated the following: "*Our school is like a real school. We teach them to write, colouring, cut, the languages, how to play with each other, how to share and how to communicate with each other" (T2/I2).* T5 saw her work as being connected to what must happen in the "*big school"*. The excerpt below shows this:

> *"I think that it is very important that I can learn how the child should develop and how to get the child ready for "big school". And when they get to the "big school" then they will remember what they learnt here" (T5/I2).*

The aforesaid, caused tensions in appropriate practice at all the centres with young children. The over-emphasis on the development of school-ready skills comes at the cost of "attention to non-academic dimensions of development that are critical for success in life as well as in school" (Moss, 2012: 355). The author adds that these non-academic skills include "social competence, self-regulation, and physical and emotional well-being" (ibid, 2012:355). These negative consequences were evident in an arena of tight teacher control on a school-ready child which marginalised the agency of children by the teacher. The teachers were working with a prescriptive plan and mostly adhering to it. The following illustrates how the teachers saw their roles:

> *"I look to see who does not do the correct things. I look for example who is using the wrong crayon. For example yesterday we used the red and blue crayons. They had to colour a red fish but one of the boys used a green colour. I've asked him why he used that colour but he said to me that it is red" (T4/I1).*

"I am here to educate the children. I'm here to do everything. We start with myself, colour and shapes. We must teach them that. We do the four most important things. It is colour, paste, paint and cut. We work that in through the daily planning. Like in for instance today I do colour, cut at the same time and paste and all that stuff in a day" (T1/I1).

The teachers used heavy monitoring to keep children on track. This occurred when children did individual activities at their tables, during informal questioning and answering time because the teachers were looking for a functional fit between their intended purpose for the lesson and indicators for learning. The children's behaviour had to show the indicators that the teachers were looking for. Teachers (T1, T3 and T4) stated this as follows:

"I first show them the worksheet and show them what to do then afterwards I will write their names on the paper. The most important thing is to first show them what to do otherwise if I don't then they won't know what to do. So that's the most important thing to do to give them an example. I must do an example of the activity before they start. And if they work with a puzzle then I will sit next to the child to show which piece fits in there. I must work from examples so that they will follow me" (T1/I1).

"If the children can apply that which I taught them then it shows me that they have learned something. When I see that the child is doing exactly the same thing that I did and when they talking or playing and they do the same thing then I know that the child has learned" (T3/I1).

"I do a lot of repetition and revision with the children. But I also know that there is one or two children that do not know and they just shout out with the others. I also allow them to give me an answer one at a time so that I can see if they learning" (T4/I1).

The teachers used their FoK of child development to ensure that children had a balance in their learning experiences. “Curriculum knowledge directs teachers to utilise appropriate contents and structure of teaching young children” (Happo *et al*., 2012:488). “In addition to a subject to be taught, content knowledge contains the competence of knowing how to teach young children” (ibid, 2012:488). Teachers also knew that children should get opportunities to learn through playing with others. Children were given time to expend their energies and attend to their own concerns instead of being exposed to teacher-directed activities all the time:

> *“Sometimes I just leave them to play. I don’t want them to do too much school work because then they can get easily bored. I don’t plan the playing and I don’t give them anything to play with. They will just sit on the carpet in small groups and chat to each other” (T3/I1).*

Centre-based practices with young children were based on the teachers’ informal, personal and more formal content knowledge gained from training and from colleagues. This FoK was used in effective ways; however, because of their limited training and being under-qualified, this contributed to narrow educational practices in each centre. As noted previously, T2 expressed what she heard during the short training: …”*they told us that we lay the foundation and the other teachers just build on it” (T2/I2).* She interpreted this as getting children ready for “big school”. Centre-based practices reflected this knowledge of getting children ready for school by focusing on writing, colouring and cutting. Monitoring the progress of the children to see if they were “ready” for the “big school” was also evident of the sources of the teachers’ knowledge.

4.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter examined the early-childhood education teachers’ knowledge to answer the research question: ***What are the sources of ECD teachers’ FoK from a disadvantaged context?”*** This study shows that the sources of knowledge are varied and accessed through various means. The use of informal, personal, experiential, situational and emerging professional knowledges to inform practice with children features prominently to make a difference in the children’s lives. The eight Cs are noted

as childhood memories, context of the community, children's social circumstances, caring, Christian faith-based knowing, "CoP", content knowledge and centre-based practices. Findings revealed noteworthy tensions between the positive and the negative forces embedded within the eight Cs which revealed the sources of the teachers' FoK across the four centres. In the discussion of the eight Cs as themes, it was possible to make sense of teachers' frames of reference and their related actions to navigate the difficult space of supporting care and learning in a disadvantaged context. Tensions were prominent in four of the themes such as childhood memories, Christian faith-based knowledge, knowledge from the "CoP" and centre-based practices. They show the multiple and complex sources of the teachers' FoK and serve as an important tool to make visible teacher's FoK in a disadvantaged context.

In the next chapter, I focus on the different ways teachers' support children's learning during their daily practice in a disadvantaged context.

CHAPTER 5

Supporting children's learning in a disadvantaged context

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to answer the research question: ***"What does the support for children's learning suggest about teachers' FoK in teacher-guided practices?"*** Three themes are used to highlight teachers' FoK and how they use this in specific activity contexts with different pedagogic techniques to effect early learning.

The first theme shows how the building of the Christian faith takes place through teachers using their religious FoK and related cultural practices as a base in teaching-learning situations. The children get a sense of what to know and are able to do what young Christian children normally do. This ascribed identity development is complemented in the next theme which focuses on effecting school readiness and bringing in the "school child". Direct instruction sets boundaries for knowing and doing for academic learning. Both the themes show how the boundary setting happens through high teacher control. The third theme shows how child participation to affirm children's capabilities in an agentic sense is approached. In each of them the teachers' FoK becomes both an enabler and a disabler in the context of supporting children's learning. This brought tensions in their (teachers) daily practice with young children to the surface.

In operationalising a prescriptive learning environment teachers effect the controls necessary to provide grounding in a faith-based context in preparation for school learning. Both elements are problematic in the home environment. Teachers counter this by showing the children an alternative. However, this chapter shows that child participation from a capabilities and agentic perspective is very limited across the four early-childhood centres. The next chapter therefore highlights the social-actor perspective of children.

5.2 Building the Christian faith

The analysis of the daily programme showed that a significant part of the activities was dedicated to faith development. The observations revealed that the building of the faith was largely effected through explicit teaching. Teacher-directed activities were mediated through a pedagogy of transmission teaching which supported the need for transferring authoritative knowledge from expert to novice (Vygotsky, 1978). Yeung, Craven and Kaur (2014) contend that transmission pedagogy is still useful for early-education because it helps children gain new information which is not always accessible through exploration and discovery. The teachers in the study integrated the teachings of the Christian faith into the daily programme activities that required singing, praying, chanting Bible verses and reading Bible stories during the morning ring. These activities to a certain extent conscientised them with good moral values to bring them in line with the prescriptions of the faith.

The practices above can be understood not only in terms of teachers delivering authoritative knowledge in a way that was developmentally appropriate for the children, but also in a way that would lead to greater acceptance of the basic tenets of the Christian faith. The focus fell on building an ascribed identity of the children as Christian children. In this context the children were given the prescribed knowledge through the wisdom of their teachers. This did not require active participation of the children as knowledge-constructors or co-constructors. The teachers positioned themselves as expert transmitters of knowledge and values for identity-building of young Christian children. It could be argued that the teachers were focusing on outcomes and goals of a Christian education and this meant that less attention was paid to how the children were interpreting the messages they were receiving.

The role of the teachers in the study could also be understood in terms of offering compensatory education for salvation and for bridging the deficits in an environment of deprivation. Instilling the faith in the children can be understood as a lever to break the cycle of vulnerabilities the children were facing (see Chapter 4). The focus on the moral

and spiritual dimension was intended to make the children God-conscious and build their resilience in light of the adversities they faced.

Bearing the above in mind, the teachers were committed to passing on the "right" knowledge and skills to the children. They invoked religious images in dualistic ways where their adult status and authority were foregrounded. The children were positioned as adults-in-the-making and they had to comply with the conventional way of learning, namely, where teachers directed and children followed instructions. The excerpt shows how T3 uses the knowledge of the faith to get children to be compliant and ready for a specific type of learning experience. Contrasts from a moral dimension are used to urge children to choose the "good side".

> *"They learned by giving their attention to you. Children's eyes should be on me. They should listen carefully to me when I teach. I always said to them there are two lines. If you don't listen then they go to the bad line, to the devil and he would stand there with a big fork. If they listened then they will go to the good side" (T3/I2).*

This way of teaching was highly dependent on getting the body postures correct for the receiving of learning. The children were given instructions to comply with the bodily requirements to ensure that they gain the maximum out of their learning experience. This close-focused body protocols and rigidity positioned children in passive ways as doers and followers of the faith (Ebrahim, 2016; The Christian Philosophy of Education, 2015; De Beer & Jaarsma, 2000). The children's task was to listen, learn and develop their knowledge and skills in a safe space which created accessibility to the Christian faith. Obedience rather than children sharing their knowledge and ideas was valued. No deviations from the set goals for learning were entertained. This can be understood if one considers the fact that in organised worldviews like religion, faith is not necessarily an arena for creative expression (Ebrahim, 2016). The children had to learn the prescribed knowledge from the teacher and it was believed that this was the only way to make knowledge accessible. The children were regarded as "blank slates" who did not have the

maturity and capabilities of sharing anything of worth in the religious space (Riojas-Cortez, 2001:36).

Curbing resistance and maintaining the boundaries became an important area of focus for the teachers. After the prayer, the children were then exposed to a variety of verses from the Bible. These verses were short and intended to serve as important messages for children to regulate their behaviour. This type of disciplining could be understood in the context of stressed parents with multiple problems. The action of the adults in the lifeworld of the children was promoting messages that were anti-social and damaging to the children's development of self. The use of the Bible verses together with the simple explanations and examples given by the teachers could be viewed as messages aimed at promoting an alternative to the toxicity of human life that some children were experiencing (see Chapter 4). The excerpts below show verses related to caring, obedience and reliance on a higher being:

> *"Peter 5 verse 7… Give God all your anxieties because he cares for you".*
>
> *"Ephesian 6 verse 1… Children obey your parents because you are Christians. This is the right thing to do".*
>
> *"Psalm 12 verse 1… The Lord is your guardian" (T3/OB).*

When children were exposed to this type of learning they were required to sit still, put up their hands up if they wanted to say something, listen and be attentive. These postures could also be understood in terms of showing respect for the teacher, God as the creator and the content that was being revealed. Ebrahim (2016) notes that the building of ascribed identity through early socialisation practices means that adults will be using particular categories that are synergistic with the ideals of becoming members of a particular religion and in this case Christianity. Where this happens the children categorise themselves based on what is available to them in centres and what is made priority in their social world. Ebrahim (2016) argues that this type of religious orientation is about preserving the faith, encouraging pious behaviour, connecting emotionally to God and building self-discipline for meeting the demands of the religion. In the example below,

the children were learning about God and his creations. The children were made aware that they would have to get their bodies ready to receive certain kinds of learning that related to the divine. The excerpt below shows this.

> *T2: "Right fold your arms and sit still. I want to read you a Bible story".*
>
> *T2: "God made the world… who made the world?"*
>
> *Children: "God".*
>
> *T2: "God made the world and God made a nice place and added such beautiful things for me and you. Only God is wise enough and powerful to make the world. God is our creator and what a wonderful world God made for us. He added some flowers and birds for us. God added colours like red… [points at a picture] …can you see here is a red apple. He added yellow green, blue and orange" (T2/OB).*

T8 provided insights on the importance of specific actions in early-childhood that has implications for late childhood and adulthood. T2 also spoke about firming up children's faith by ensuring that they internalised the foundations of the faith to inform practice at a later stage in their lives.

> *"Reading Bible stories teaches important lessons to the children in the centre. They like to listen to stories and they remember it, even if they get older they will remember. Like the story of praying for your food and sharing the food that Jesus give them….yes, it is a good lesson" (T8/I2).*
>
> *"For me it is better to teach them about the Bible. This crèche is a Christian crèche. It is therefore compulsory for us teachers to start with the Bible. It is also good for the child to learn from an early age of God because the day that they are bigger then he will remember who taught him the Bible verses. We start every morning by saying, the 'Our Father', singing, saying Bible verses and reading Bible stories" (T2/I2).*

The singing of songs allowed for more active child participation. Vygotsky (1978) comments that singing as a cultural tool helps to develop language skills. This was important in terms of building skills for the mother-tongue and English as an additional language. Furthermore, children got the opportunity to participate in a very simple cultural activity (Rogoff, 2003). Through singing children completed daily routines like tidy-up-time and this developed their listening skills (MacNaughton & Williams, 2004). The excerpt below shows how singing was viewed as a medium to invite active learning through play and child participation both verbally and bodily through scaffolding:

> *"I have my planning because before I teach the children [teacher opens her planning book]…I first look at what I must do. This morning I taught them a Bible song. I have to act out characters in the song. I teach them the songs and I also teach them the activities related to the song for example my body. Clap, clap, clap your hands, shake shake your body… they sing it. They do the actions and that is how they learn. I sing it and do the actions first and then the child knows what to do, they follow me. I have to teach the children in a playful way because they are still small" (T6/I2).*

Singing was used mostly in the morning and it was linked to but not limited to Christian songs. The children in the study sometimes told the teacher what songs they wanted to sing. This was done by naming the song or by the children singing the opening lines of the song without instruction from the teacher. The teachers did not intervene bearing in mind that the activity was enjoyable and educational for the children (as indicated in the excerpt below):

> *"Children love to sing and make actions to the words of the song. I leave them to sing alone because they will start with the song like Jesus loves me. One of the girls will maybe start and the other children just follow. They go on to other songs like He gives me joy, joy, joy in my heart or if you happy and you know it clap your hands. They learn many new words" (T4/I2).*

Teachers were able to use an integrated approach to faith development. For example, T1 integrated mathematical concepts in a Bible story. In so doing, she was able to use stories

in a cross-curricular way to promote learning in both language and mathematics. The observational data below illustrates how a Bible story was used to teach the concepts of big and small:

[T1 tells the children that she is going to read a Bible story. She reminds the children to be quiet and listen as they were busy with the word of God. T1 reads the story of David and Goliath. T1 starts reading and she emphasises the point that two armies where fighting against each other and were getting ready for war].

T1: "Now war means they go out, all of the armies, all the men go out to fight each other". [She shows the picture].

T1 [reads]: "One morning a huge man came out of the Philistines'' camp and his name was Goliath. Here is Goliath [points to the picture] do you see this huge man? [teacher saying 'huge' louder].

T1: "Do you see here? He is huge like me".

[T1 calls one of the boys, Kgamo, to stand next to her. She demonstrates to the children. Teacher puts her hand on her head to place emphasis on huge]…and Kgamo is small" [teacher now puts her hand on the boy's head].

T1: "Can you see I am Goliath and Kgamo is David? Can you see David is a small man and Kgamo is a boy? Kgamo is David and I am Goliath. I am huge and Kgamo is small".

T1: "Goliath was 3 metres tall".

[Teacher demonstrates here by lifting up her hand above her head and stands on her toes to better demonstrate to children how high is three metres].

T1: "That is very tall, even taller than me. Goliath stood and shouted, 'choose your best man to fight me', and remember he is very tall. Say 'very tall' [and the children say after her] 'very tall'. I am tall and you guys are small".

[T1 Completes the story and throughout she stresses the point that she is tall (Goliath) and Kgamo (David) is small].

T1: "The small man was David."

Boy: "Yes, like Kgamo".

T1: "Yes, small like Kgamo. Kgamo is David and he is the small man who came and wants to fight me. Can you see how big I am? I have a sword, a dagger and spear. And Kgamo [pointing to the small boy] is this poor little man" (T1/VR).

Biblical stories were commonly used during the day. T6 focused on children's listening skills - always praising children when they gave correct answers. Through praising more child participation was stimulated and encouraged. MacNaughton and Williams, (2004:76) comment that teachers use "encouragement and praise as a way to support children's learning and their attempts at learning, and this helps children persevere with the task and to learn new skills or dispositions". T6 read from a children's Bible story book. She read the story of the birth of Jesus and focused on how well the children listened by asking questions as seen in the following video-recording:

T6: "Today I will tell you about the birth of Jesus. What are we going to talk about? The birth of Jesus. Listen now carefully teacher is going to read the story slowly and clearly. Everyone should listen [T6 reads]. It is evening in Bethlehem, the stars are shining. Everyone is sleeping they don't know that a blessed baby was born. The blessed baby was Jesus, He is God's son. Welcome to the world, baby Jesus. Jesus was born in a stable- the place where farm animals sleep. His mother laid him down the crib of the animals. Shhhhh! the animals have to be quiet while baby Jesus is sleeping. The angels sing a song about Jesus because they are excited that Jesus was born".

T6: "Where was Jesus born?"

Girl 1: "In a stable".

T6: "Good… Clap hands for her".

T6: "What was there that shows that Jesus was born?" [she points upwards].

Boy 1: "Stable".

T6: "No, he was born in the stable. It's up there" [points up again].

Girl 1: "The stars".

T6: "Stars. Clap hands for Jane. Jane you answered well. You listened".

[Children: Clap hands for Jane].

T6: "A stable is a place where the animals stay. It is where the animals sleep. A stable is also closed off so that the wild animals can't eat the sheep and the other animals. So it is the place where it sleeps and it is here that Jesus was born. Because his parents did not have a place to sleep. Or his mother could not give birth in another place. This was the only place that they had. Look now at the pictures [T6 points to different pictures in the book and asks more questions]. There is the crib and here are cows. Now one at a time come show me".

T6: "Who can show me where is the star that the wise men followed to get to Jesus?"

[Girl gets up and points to the star].

T6: "Good, clap hands for her".

[Children: Clap hands] (T6/VR).

In summary, there were significant activities that paved the way for building young children's knowledge and behaviour according to the Christian faith. This was accomplished through teacher-directed scaffolding methods with the focus of transmitting authoritative knowledge, building children's vocabulary and supporting their learning. Memorisation and chanting of Bible verses, in addition to singing Christian songs were used to build young children's Christian identity. Through scaffolding and guided

participation from adults and peers, the focus was passing on the right knowledge in these early-childhood centres. Thus supporting early-learning took on a transmissive approach. It was more about acknowledging children, viewing their development in particular ways and finding a functional fit between what was required for acquired identity-building in a religious context. This approach was geared to provide an alternative moral and spiritual early education for children who were growing up in risky environments. The next theme exposed the different scaffolding techniques teachers used to support children's learning during teacher-directed activities.

5.3 Effecting school readiness through direct instruction

Getting young children ready for formal school was another priority of the teachers. This could be understood in the common belief that education is a key driver that breaks the cycles of poverty. The pedagogical approach of direct instruction with high teacher-control, featured as a technique to effect school-readiness. The direct instruction approach values explicit teaching. MacNaughton and Williams (2004:202) are of the opinion that direct instruction is "when you tell a person something, you describe it or provide some verbal account of what is happening or should happen" and this is usually from someone with information or knowledge who passes that information onto someone who does not have it.

5.3.1 Use of direct instruction to support children's learning

During the morning sessions I observed the routine of chanting numbers, days of the week, months of the year and completing worksheets on language and mathematics activities. Both the administrative requirements and certain learning and teaching expectations placed emphasis on getting children ready for school. The choral repetitions and worksheets can be seen as the teachers' efforts to produce evidence of children's learning.

The centres in the study used a step-ladder curriculum. The FS birth-to-four curriculum moves from the simple to the complex, based on developmental ages and stages. This

was an important organiser for school readiness at all the centres in the study. T5 explained the work of the centre as a preparation for "big school". This can be understood in addition to the adoption of a Christian lifestyle.

> *"I think that it is very important that I can learn how the child should develop and how to get the child ready for "big school". And when they get to the "big school" then they will remember what they learned here" (T5/I2).*

Although parents were stressed by the problems they experienced in daily life, they did take some interest in their children's education. Some wanted to be provided with evidence of their children's learning. T7 noted how some parents were getting involved in their children's education.

> *"We have regular parent meetings at the centre. Some parents come to the classes and they look at the children's files. The parents want to see the pages that we put in the files to get evidence that their children are learning. Before the schools close then we also give a report card to show the progress of the child just like in formal school. The report card is on what the child learned in class, what they can do but also on things they need help with. This is signed by me and the manager (head)" (T7/I2)*.

The teachers were under surveillance by the parents and their managers to produce certain outcomes. The use of direct instruction can be understood as a way of ensuring that objectified prescriptive content was used to reach these outcomes. Direct instruction met the criteria for this kind of process. Yeung *et al*., (2014: 308) assert that direct instruction places teachers "at the centre of the learning environment". Transmitting and drilling information takes place through traditional methods, "in the form of isolated facts and skills to children" (ibid, 2014:308). This results in mostly the passive role of children and heightens dependence upon the teacher's knowledge and action.

Besides the parental expectations and the pressure from the managers, another reason for the pervasive use of direct instruction was the way in which the teachers were taught

(see previous chapter for details). Kruijer (2010) and Struyven, Dochy, Janssens (2010) argue that that teachers in disadvantaged contexts who had poor schooling are likely to fall back on practices they experienced in their schooling. These experiences dominate the teachers' images and concepts of what it means to be a "good" teacher.

Direct instruction enabled the teachers in the study to operationalise FoK from an adult status of authority, from emerging professional priorities and from the concern to use a pedagogic technique of presenting expectations to the children in unambiguous terms. In my observations it was common for teachers to be in front of the children when they were seated at their tables or during mat work. These postures were adopted to allow for a kind of discipline that supported the building of identity of the school child and it also complemented the obedience required in the Christian faith.

The teachers' FoK came to the fore when they explained how they used a step-by-step procedure to ensure that the children would produce the desired performance. The teachers were vigilant on task behaviour, deviations and resistances. The excerpts below illustrate the teacher's use of the image of the child as a blank slate and a follower in order to guide the learning process. In this context the children's prior knowledge did not matter. If the teacher was to access this, it would have created deviations from the outcome she wanted to achieve. Providing clear instructions coupled with real-life examples and being in close proximity to children ensured that learning strategies that favoured the impartation of intended knowledge, skills and values were enacted in synergistic ways.

> *"I first show them the worksheet and show them what to do and afterwards I will write their names on the paper. The most important thing is to first show them what to do otherwise if I don't then they won't know what to do. So that's the most important thing to do to give them an example. I must do an example of the activity before they start. And if they work with a puzzle then I will sit next to the*

child to show which piece fits in. I must work from examples so that they will follow me" (T1/I2).

"When I do something with the clay or when children get cutting work, I will show step-by-step what and how they have to do it. The children also learn more if they can copy from my examples"(T5/I2).

The excerpt above is illustrative of how teachers use their PCK of knowing the needs of children (not their competence), as well as the content knowledge to enable observational learning through teachers serving as models. Shulman (1986) defined PCK as the various methods teachers utilise to transform content and convey it to their children, resulting in children' understanding. The teachers showed commitment to effecting transformations in the children's understanding. Although the focus on children's competence was weak, Rymarz (2013) contends that the use of direct instruction is crucial in supporting children to develop their full cognitive potential. This way of supporting learning, however, is limiting and does not adequately value the strengths that children can bring to the learning process.

The focus on transmitting the correct knowledge to the children meant there were many missed opportunities for children to share their knowledge and insight in a key way. MacNaughton and Williams (2004) and Yeung *et al*., (2014) state that the blockage results from children being too passive which leads quickly to boredom and disinterest in listening to the teacher. The excerpt below shows how the FoK of teacher centredness through direct instruction is both enabling and disabling at the same time. The children gained insight into the theme of transport and this increased their English vocabulary through the teacher's skilful teaching-learning techniques. In the process, however, children's active participation and their FoK was marginalised as they are mostly required to repeat the officially sanctioned knowledge:

T1: "Transport. Who can tell me what transport is? What kinds of transport do we get?"

Boy 1: [Shouts] "Money".

T1: "No... Who can tell me something? What different transports do we get? We get transport in air [pointing to the aeroplane on the poster]… say air".

Children: "Air".

T1: "Transport on land" [pointing to the truck and bus on the poster].

Children: "Transport on land".

T1: "Transport on sea or water" [pointing to a ship on the poster].

Children: "Transport on sea or water".

T1: "Now transport is very important. Some of you come to crèche with teacher Thea's [the manager at centre] transport" [she walks to a window to show children the combi].

T1: "Mmmmm…like Kgamo comes with the taxi and that is transport".

Children: "Yes".

T1: "Who else is on Teacher Thea's taxi?"

Children: "Tsepi… Jabula… and Ohifilwe" [some turn their bodies and look for the three children. Some point at the children].

T1: "Now transport is very important because it takes us from one place to another. Transport in the air like an aeroplane" [pointing to the picture]… say aeroplane".

Children: "Aeroplane".

T1: "Can you see here is the aeroplane" [points the picture on the poster in front of the class].

Girl 1: "There is another aeroplane, teacher".

T1: "Be quiet I will show you. This is transport of air, here is the helicopter and a space shuttle. This thing goes into space and that's all transport of air".

T1: "Now we come to transport of land. Transport of land is like a bus [teacher points to the bus on the poster]. Here is a limousine [pointing to the picture]… say limousine".

Children: "Limousine".

T1: "A motor cycle … say motor cycle".

Children: "Motor cycle".

T1: "You know it as a motor bike".

Boy 2: "It is a bike".

T1: "…and a bicycle and that is all the transport of land".

Children: [Shout] "bicycle".

A few children: [Raise their hands and shout] …"bicycle".

T1: "Yes, and don't make a noise. Listen first you can talk later."

T1: "Now we come to transport of water. Remember we did air like an aeroplane we did land like a car or a bus or a bicycle and now we come to number three that's water. Transport of water is a ship. There is a ship can you see there" [Pressing with her finger on the picture].

Children: "Yes".

T1: "Or a submarine which goes under the water".

Children: "Yes".

T1: "Now transport is very important because mummy brings you to school with transport because it is very important you must be at school. We go to town with transport we go too far places. Transport take you from one place

to another. Remember when we go to the zoo or the museum then we go with the…"

Children: [Loud shout] "Bus".

T1: "We must remember transport is very important and without transport then you have to walk from this place to that place and it is far".

Children: "Yes". (T1/VR)

In this video-recording the children gained knowledge of the topic and English vocabulary. There is some value in approaching learning in this way. However, the mode of learning was problematic. Direct instruction as noted above was approached through using whole-class teaching in a normative way. This was not entirely based on the teacher's competence. The physical learning environment in the disadvantaged context created certain conditions for learning. Teachers used FoK of a practical nature in order to afford children learning opportunities. The physical constraints and teachers' perceptions on the specific pedagogies suitable for young children in the context of a Christian philosophy and school readiness intersected to provide whole-class teaching.

The whole-class teaching in rote-learning and repetition with little understanding and input from children. However, Nasrollahi-Mouziraji (2015:871) is of the opinion that there is still place for the use of repetition because "repetition of chunks of language provides the mind with something to work on irrespective of not being understood or used to communicate". Teachers focused on children's chanting the names of transport vehicles, numbers, shapes and letters of the alphabet using whole-class teaching modes. During this time teachers used concrete and semi-concrete resources although they were not always age-appropriate.

The teachers knew that the children needed a lot of repetition in order to learn the prayer and the sequence of the days of the week; however, they also allowed them to recite the days of the week without her help. Successful support for early-learning rests on teachers judging when children are ready to move to a higher level of their ZPD and competence

(Vygotsky, 1978; Sherin *et al*., 2004). Furthermore, teachers should be able to judge when children can complete a task without their support. The children will "gradually be able to achieve the goal or action with less and less support, a process that is typically called fading" (Sherin *et al*., 2004:388). This did happen after teachers felt confident that children were capable of being left on their own.

Mostly there was heavy monitoring of the children. As an example, during the making of the clay fruit at Bambi Centre, no creative input and meaning-making from children was permitted. This occurred when children were busy with individual activities at their tables and during informal questioning and answer time, because as noted earlier the teachers were looking for a functional fit between their intended purpose for the lesson and indicators for learning. The child's behaviour had to show the indicators that the teachers were looking for. T3 and T7 stated this during their interviews:

> *"If the children can apply that which I taught, then it shows me that they have learned something when I see that the child is doing exactly the same thing that I did. When they talking or playing and they do the same thing then I know that the child has learned" (T3/I2).*

> *"I do a lot of repetition and revision with the children. But I also know that there are one or two children that do not know and they just shout out with the others. I also allow them to give me an answer one at a time so that I can see if they learning" (T7/I2).*

The excerpt below illustrates how T5 carefully guided the children procedurally so that they would reach the intended goal.

> *T5: "We are going to make fruit with the clay. We will make an orange and remember an orange is round".*
> *[T5 goes to the children to assist them.]*
> *T5: "Roll small balls of clay and make the grapes".*
> *[T5 rolls the clay in her hands.]*

T5: "See how I am doing it then you do the same" (T5/VR).

Teachers relied on telling children, using direct instruction and demonstrating from an example how to complete an activity with the focus on supporting children's learning.

5.3.2 Use of demonstrations as a further example of direct instruction

The use of demonstrations as a teaching technique can improve "children's learning by showing children how to use materials and how to accomplish a particular task" by breaking the task into smaller sequential parts (MacNaughton & Williams 2004: 55). Demonstration and modelling techniques were also executed under strict surveillance couched in opportunities for observational learning. Rogoff's (2003) work of guided participation reminds us that children learn when they have the chance to actively participate and they have the ability to collaborate with others and to make new meaning. This method supported the teacher's need for regular repetition and rehearsal to help children to practise new skills (MacNaughton & Williams 2004:55). T4 used step-by-step processes to demonstrate how to complete a task.

The observational data below shows how the teacher alerts the children to the important information for the completion of the puzzle. She tried to involve the children by getting them to repeat and affirm important information for the completion of the puzzles. The children were not left to discover the knowledge for themselves which is regarded as a shortcoming for active learning. On the other hand, the teacher prevents frustration for those children who might give up due to feeling incompetent and lacking in the on-task behaviour and motivation to complete the puzzle. T4 placed two boxes and one plastic bag with a different number of puzzle pieces on three tables. She gave one group a box with 12 pieces, another group had 20 pieces and the last group had a plastic bag with an unknown number of puzzle pieces. The instruction was as follows:

T4:"Look at the picture on this box. Do you see the three red apples, a banana and the oranges that are in this bowl on the table?"

Children: "Yes, teacher"

T4: "Shani, put the puzzle pieces on the table".

[Shani puts the pieces on the table]

T4: "Now let us turn them so that you can see all the pictures. Look here [holding one puzzle piece in her hand so that the children can see] Do you see this is a piece of the puzzle? What colour is on here Thabo?"

Thabo: "Yellow, teacher"

T4: "Who can show me yellow on the box?"

[Two children point their fingers to the banana]

T4: "Yes, the yellow is on the banana and this is a piece of the banana. Now, see we found the piece of the banana for our puzzle. Now we look here [pointing again to the picture on the box]...what is this here?" [pointing to the apples in the picture].

Girl: "Apples."

T4: "Yes…. Thandi, it is the apples. And what is the colour of the apples, Thandi?"

Thandi: "Red"

T4: "Good Thandi. Now we look for the red apples on the puzzle pieces. Look at all the pieces of the puzzle. Which one is red…see here is one piece. Then we put next to the piece of the banana…like this"

[Teacher takes time and shows a group of children step-by-step how to fit the puzzle pieces together. The children who are sitting in other groups wait for their turn].

T4: "Can you find another piece, Thandi?" (T4/OB).

In addition to the above, demonstrations were also used as a scaffolding technique in teacher-directed numeracy activities. T1 had FoK on how children should demonstrate their learning. The common response was the use of worksheets across all four centres. Although this is a limiting way of finding evidence of learning, it nonetheless helped

teachers to ascertain the level of progress the children were making. Below is an excerpt that is indicative of this:

> *[T1 hangs a worksheet in front of the class next to the poster and she continues with a numeracy application with transport as the theme. She stands in front of the children and make sure that everyone can see the worksheet. T1 tells children that the worksheet is on air transport. She shows the picture to the children. Some parts of the picture are missing. The teacher signals that the missing parts are a join-the-dots activity. She joins the dots by making a line and slowly counts from 1 to 9 as she joins the dots. T1 continues from the first dot and makes lines to the next dot and slowly counts 1…2…3…4,5,6,7,8,9.]*
>
> *T1: "Can you see it makes the wing of the aeroplane. Now you must do the same on the paper I gave you".*
>
> *[T1 moves with her finger slowly from 1 to 9 and counts out loud with the children. She tells the children to do the same on their pages].*
>
> *T1: "Now you do it from 1, you go to 2 then to 3…4…5…6,7,8,9. Start now and you can choose any colour. Without a noise please. Work with a closed mouth". (T1/OB).*

Figure 5.1: Teacher-directed numeracy activity

In summary, many teaching and learning activities happened under strict teacher control with a focus on preparation for formal school. The *what (*content) and the *how* (method) of learning was scaffolded through the traditional techniques of telling, direct instruction and demonstrations in these centres. The way of supporting learning was complementary to the Christian faith. It is also understandable because teachers had to comply with expectations of some parents and managers by showing satisfactory progress of a school-ready child. Direct instruction as a popular method was driven by the teachers' FoK of being the adult with authority and the child the novice who should learn under the guidance of the adult (Vygotsky, 1978). However, the teachers also revealed moments in the teaching and learning situation where children were given opportunities to participate.

5.4 Scaffolding techniques inviting child participation

In this study, it could be argued that the children were actively engaged in their learning only in terms of what was deemed permissible by the teachers. Other types of child

participation were devalued. The curriculum and activities were outcomes-driven based on the priorities for faith development and school readiness. Child participation was largely in response to explicit teaching in teacher-guided activities. The evidence in the previous two themes Illustrate this.

The key feature of child participation from a rights-based perspective and from the academic discipline of the sociology of childhood (see Chapter 2 for more information), is the notion of the child as being a competent person with agency (Ebrahim, 2011; Bae, 2009, 2010; Markström & Halldén, 2009). This is dependent on age and maturity. Child participation could be understood in the context of scaffolding from a Vygotskyian perspective. However, Sherin *et al*., (2004: 389) also note that scaffolding allows for support to be "given by the more expert individual in one-on-one tutorial interactions" and to support children through adjustment of task difficulty. Many *et al*., (2009) and van Kuyk (2011) add that instructional scaffolding that provides specific support according to children's individual needs is valuable in moving children's learning from the known to the unknown.

However, for the above to happen successfully, Bae (2010: 306) contends that adults, firstly need to see the child as a participant in the teaching and learning process. Secondly, they need to "adopt a child-centred attitude, listen to young children and respect their dignity and their individual points of view" (ibid, 306). The excerpt below could also be read through Rogoff's view of scaffolding. She notes that scaffolding implies that the expert takes an active stance towards continual revisions of the scaffolding process. This is guided by the emerging capabilities of the children. The children's errors and limited capabilities serve as a signal for the adult to tailor his or her scaffolding according to the children's needs. This example show how child participation is implicated in instructional scaffolding. In the excerpt below we see an example of how child participation is implicated in instructional scaffolding. In this excerpt child participation is high as the teacher sets the learning environment and lets the children interpret the resources on their own terms. When she perceives there is something of value for school

readiness, she intervenes in a more authoritative way. Teacher awareness is thus high as noted below:

> *It is arrival time. T6 puts different toys such as building blocks, puzzles, shapes and a bucket on the carpet for the children to play with before she starts with the morning ring. The boys play with wooden blocks and pretend that they are cars and they make a garage with the other blocks. T6 goes to the children to see how they are playing with the toys and talks to some of them. She stopped at two girls playing with a bucket with holes. She watches them for a while as they attempt to put the correct shape in the holes. She then intervenes by taking one of the shapes from the girl. The teacher demonstrates to the two girls how to turn the shape over the opening until it falls in the bucket. After this brief demonstration she moves to her table (T6/OB).*

In the study, it was observed that teachers used verbal cues to motivate children to higher levels of performance and to higher levels of thinking (Van Kuyk, 2011). In addition, this approach also assisted in helping children learn new content (Bailey *et al*., 2013). Therefore, T6 helped the children to improve on their existing capabilities by showing interest and asking them about the shapes.

For child participation to be effective, teachers need to show interest in children, "have patience and creativity by adapting their expectations to young child's interests, and have levels of understanding and preferred ways of communicating" (Bae, 2010:307). For example, T3 integrated the children's lifeworld as they engaged in a dialogue about their personal experiences of what safety meant. Thereafter, we can see how the teacher gives the children support and, finally, how the teacher and the children are "co-participants in a mutual creation of meaning" around safety in the house (Emilson, 2007: 12; Emilson & Folkesson, 2006:220).

The findings in this study resonate with Emilson and Folkesson (2006:230) findings that show activities that have "weak classification and framing" allow for stronger child

participation and less strict teacher-control. In this study, the storytelling was part of a teacher-directed activity entrenched in the daily programme. It was used to scaffold the learning of important concepts while enhancing children's listening skills and knowledge about real-life contexts. An example of this was a story on safety in the home which was taught by T3. She focused on listening skills, enjoyment and showing pictures. T3 showed the pictures in the big book and had very informal conversations with the children. The children were free to give their inputs; they gave solutions to possible unsafe situations and took decisions regarding right and wrong behaviour of the child in the story. This aspect comes out strongly in the following:

> *[T3 explains that the story is about a baby, called Jake. Jake is exposed to different dangerous situations in the house. T3 was one of the teachers who often invited the children's input and their interpretation around safety in the house. She talks to the picture of how the baby gets hold of a key and tries to push it in the hole of a wall socket].*
>
> *T3: "Children, why do you think that baby Jake is doing something wrong and dangerous? What will happen to Jake?"*
>
> *Girl 1: "The baby will die".*
>
> *[T3 agrees with the girl with the shake of her head].*
>
> *T3: "What do the others think – is this a safe act?"*
>
> *Children [all shout out]: "No".*
>
> *[T3 continues to read about how Jake is playing with a plastic bag by putting it over his mouth and then his head].*
>
> *T3: "What do you think will happen?"*
>
> *Girl 2: "The baby will die if that plastic bag is over his head".*
>
> *Boy 1: "You can also die if you eat plastic".*

[The last few pages of the book is about how baby Jake finds a bottle containing grandmother's tablets which was in her handbag. The children show great unhappiness about this situation by pulling their faces]

Children: [Shout]…no, no, no!

Boy 2: "It is wrong and children can't drink tablets".

[However, some children come up with solutions on what should be done with the tablets in the home]

Girl 2: "Only old people drink tablets so grandmother should keep her tablets in a place where no child can reach it".

Girl 3: "Yes, but the mother of the baby should also put the tablets in…in a cupboard away from baby Jake".

Questioning was used as a technique to involve child-participation. The excerpt below related to T5 shows the use of the teacher's FoK of different questions which enabled children to participate and learn specific content and new vocabulary. Jonsson and Williams (2013:600) and Bailey *et al*. (2013:270) note that through asking different questions the teacher can find out what the children know and don't know. This helps the children to feel positive about what they know by learning that it is possible and sometimes easy to get it right. The excerpt below illustrates this:

[The class space of T5 is very small and during the play break she stacked the tables and chairs in the corner, and made space for children on the carpet. T5 did this because after the play break and washing of hands she invited children to the carpet area to listen to a story. She used a colourful picture which was in front of the class where everyone could see. She tells the story of Aunty Bets who went to Shoprite to buy fruit and vegetables for her children.]

T5: "Come sit children. You guys should listen but first look at this picture and tell me what you see on the picture".

[The children shout out the names of fruits and vegetables like pears, carrots, mealies, apples, bananas and grapes]

T5: "Now this woman that is standing here is Aunt Bets!"

T5: "Do you know the Green Mall?" [local mall in Henky].

Children: "Yes, teacher".

T5: "Who of you has been at the Green Mall? What can we buy there?"

Boy 1: "I went with my mother and she buys food at the Green Mall. My mum also bought me a toy car for my birthday at Shoprite".

T5: "Yes, we can buy food there, Dino".

Girl 1: "We go to the mall when we are not at school. My mother buys things for us at the Green Mall".

T5 [starts the story]: "...the fruit of the children is finished says Aunt Bets. I have to go now to Shoprite at the Green Mall to buy the fruit or they won't have any fruit. This morning when I got up I saw that the children's fruit is finished. Aunty Bets says I have to go now to the shop to buy fruit or my children won't have fruit for school. Who can tell me what is in Aunty Bets' hand?"

Children: [Loud shout] "Handbag".

T5: "Yes, a handbag - and what can we put in a handbag?"

Girl 2: "Money and sweets"

T5: "What can we do with the money?"

Girl 4: "We can buy stuff and put it in the handbag at the mall".

T5: "Yes we have money in the handbag. What stuff can we buy children? Which things can Aunt Bets buy at the mall?"

Girl 3: "We can buy apples, oranges and vegetables".

Boy 2:"…and bananas".

T5: "Yes children, a person needs money to buy things like fruit and vegetables. Aunt Bets went quickly to the shop to buy fruit for the children because they can't go to school without fruit. Fruits are healthy. Like mummy packs fruit for you every morning, Aunty Bets also packs in fruit for Saritjie and her brother. Aunty Bets says these are lovely apples. Who can tell me what is the colour of these apples?"

Children: "Red".

T5: "Aunty Bets says these will be very nice apples and I will take some of these apples for my children. Aunty Bets looked at the other lovely fruits and vegetables and says I will also buy mealies today. What is this?" [pointing to the pictures].

T5: "What are these?"

[Children are silent].

T5: "These are avocados. Children say 'avocado'…"

Children: "Avocado".

T5: "These are all fruit children. The avocado and the guavas are all fruit. Aunty Bets says I wonder which fruit should I buy for my children. Today I will buy my children fresh fruit. These are healthy apples and the carrots look so good. Tomorrow when my children get up then their lunchbox will have fruit in it. And Aunty Bets was really happy because she could get fresh fruit at the shop" (T5/VR).

Moving beyond closed questions afforded children better opportunities to show their agency and FoK. Ghirotto and Mazzoni (2013) and Theobald and Danby (2011) are of the opinion that through such agentic participation, children provide us with a window into

their worlds. Furthermore, the children present an alternative perspective to how they are viewed by the teachers. The opportunity to take this up however, is missed if teachers are still rooted in the conventional philosophies of children as 'empty vessels' or 'passive subjects' of social structures and processes. This is a shift that is necessary when working with a child-participation agenda.

Teacher seven (T7) used probing, verbal and non-verbal cues to lead the children to the answer and in that way opened possibilities for children to show their agency and capabilities. The teacher in the centres had FoK of children's limited English proficiency and concentrated on asking short, clear questions giving cues and expecting a short answer from the children. This was valuable if we consider that it contributed to some form of interaction to move children forward in their learning.

Vygotsky (1978) believed that children learn within the interactions they have with adults, based in part on the language that adults provided. The teacher helped the children to move to a higher level of their ZPD even though it was riddled with inequities from a linguistic access perspective. Vygotsky saw this ZPD as the "distance between actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance" (Vygotsky, 1978:86). The "ZPD defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation" when children get the support from adults or peers (ibid, 1978:86). There is some evidence of this in the following excerpt:

T7: "Today is …"

Children: [shouting out] "Wednesday".

[T7: Continues and talks about the weather. She walks closer to the door].

T7:...Let's look outside – is the sun shining?"

Boy 1: "It is cold outside".

T7: "Good, Thabi. Yes, it is cold. What else do you see?

Girl 1: "It is going to rain".

[T7: Focuses on the response given by Girl 1 and asks a follow-up question].

T7: "How do you know that it is going to rain?"

[Girl 1 looks at her hands and keeps quiet].

[T7 asks Girl 1 to come to the door].

T7 [to Girl 1]: "What do you see in the sky?"

[T7 points to the sky and then Girl 1 looks to where T7 is pointing]

T7: "It starts with a C… and it looks white"

T7: [After a few seconds] "They are clouds".

[T7 calls more children to look out of the door]

T7: "Look, there isn't a sun shining – it is cloudy".

Children: [shouting out] "Cloudy".

Boy 1: "Teacher, our dog died yesterday".

[T7 shows empathy and continues the lesson].

T7: "This is the picture of the clouds. Do you see it?"

Children: "Yes".

Boy 2: "It is cold and it will rain".

T7: "Yes, it will rain" (T7/OB).

Another way in which child participation was visible was through small-group activity. MacNaughton and Williams (2004:104) define, "grouping as a teaching technique, which involves taking decisions about how and when to bring children together to assist their learning". Here children have greater opportunities to share their ideas and opinions thus

displaying the evidence of learning. The teachers in the study valued group-work as a means of reaching children on a one-on-one basis. T4 had the following to say:

> *"I think it is easier for them to do something and to learn in a group than to do something one at a time. For them to see how a friend does something makes easier and also how you as the teacher will help them" (T4/I2).*

Figure 5.2.1: Small-group activity with teacher-guidance

In this study, small-group activities were structured strategically to reach specific teaching and learning goals, using specific teaching aids. Although these groupings were controlled by the teacher there were advantages for children. Where teachers set different learning resources for the children, it was possible for the instructional authority to be shifted from teachers to children's peers. The more capable peers could scaffold the learning of their friends. This was particularly important for children who did not have the language of learning and teaching promoted by the centres. The peers acted as scaffolds and bridged the language gap. The children then benefited from each other through a process of guided peer-learning. Rogoff explains this as "systems of involvement between people which include not only face-to-face interaction but also side-by-side joint

participation" (Rogoff, 2003). "Guided participation is thus an interpersonal process in which people manage their own and others' roles" (ibid, 2003). Young children "collaborate with others in order to make new meaning, and in doing so assume increasingly skilled roles and increasing responsibility" (ibid, 2003). This was evident in the small-group set-up given by T4 who used different toys to facilitate *"fun and enjoyable*" activities. She used her PCK on how children learn from other children during social interaction to structure informal small group-activities which also developed fine motor of young children as seen below:

Figure 5.2 1: Small-group activity without teacher-guidance

T4 gave the children clay and instructed them to make different things. All the children rolled it into a ball in the palm of their hands. One of the boys flattened it by pressing on it and broke off smaller pieces from it. Children used cookie cutters and played around with different ideas. At the second table the teacher told the children to take their own colouring books. She placed an ice-cream container with different crayons in the centre of the table. Children started with the colouring. She gave each child a magazine and instructed the children to

cut different pictures on winter clothes and to paste it on a white page (T4/OB).

Outdoor activities which formed part of the daily programme were structured as free-play opportunities for the children. These group activities encouraged participation from all children. Some of the teachers used their emerging FoK on developmentally appropriate outdoor activities to structure activities that developed children's gross motor skills, balancing and general coordination skills as seen in the excerpt:

The teacher focuses on racing and balancing activities with outdoor equipment. The first activity outside is where she lines up the children some distance from the jungle gym. The boys were on the one side and the girls on the other side. The children race to the steps, climb on and the slide down. As the two girls run then the other children cheer them on by calling out their names and encouraging them to go faster and complete the race. Next is where children lined up in front of the tyres which are planted halfway in the ground. The children step on the first tyre and then jump off and then step on the next tyre. All the children get a chance to do the activity. The teacher places bean bags on their heads and children stretch out their arms and walk in a straight line to improve their balancing (T3/OB).

The teacher divided the children in two groups and practised balancing with two different teaching aids. The children in the first group were told by T8 to stand in two lines. The first child started with the bean bag on her head while walking on the rope to help with balancing. They have to stretch out their arms as they walk on this rope. At the end of the rope they stopped, took the bean bag from their heads and then they threw it in a box to practise their eye-hand-coordination. The second activity is with the hoola hoops. T8 placed five hoola hoops in a row in front of the other group of children. She instructed the

children to jump in and out of the five hoola hoops. Through this activity T8 developed children's leg muscles (T8/OB).

In summary, involving children in their learning was an effective way of showing children that they were valued. Scaffolding techniques of questioning, story-reading and story-telling integrated with consistent encouragement proved to invite and sustain child participation at the centres. The message portrayed through such methods is that children are active and competent interpreters of their everyday worlds. In this study the scaffolding of children's learning from the more knowledgeable adult and peer in situations of small-group learning benefited children as they moved through different levels of development.

5.5 Conclusion

In the absence of a fully regulated system of early-childhood education and the full professionalisation of early-childhood teachers, the main finding in this chapter shows that teachers in the disadvantaged context are able to use certain sources of their FoK to support children's learning - especially children growing up in vulnerable circumstances. The focus on the teacher-directed practices used to support children's learning revealed that the Christian religious philosophy, together with related cultural practices, combined with the academic focus on school readiness for children in a compensatory sense were all used to make early-childhood education in a disadvantaged context possible.

The compensatory view of education came to the fore in the way in which the teachers positioned themselves as authorities who were building cultural capital of worth for children. The high teacher control, the prescriptive teaching and supportive techniques used to achieve this can be understood in providing an alternative socialisation space for children through early-education. Both the faith and the school-readiness approach were part of the foundations that the teachers were building on to help the children to break the cycles of disadvantage.

Whilst the approach used by the teachers can be criticised for being didactic, academic and limiting for truly active child participation, this study amplifies the need for early-education to be understood in context. The teachers were being “innovative” to educate children in the context of limited professional development and the difficulties of dealing with multiple disadvantages that characterises different geographical contexts in SA. Within this framework, teachers were somewhat creative in unlocking new futures for the children by supporting their learning in different ways which was inclusive of a moral spiritual dimension.

Whilst considering the above, it does not shift the attention away from the need for systematic and thoughtful professional development which is contextually responsive. The teachers show promising starting points which are by no means adequate for high quality early-childhood education needed by children growing up in vulnerable circumstances. Any professional development opportunities, must take into account who teachers are, where they are located and how their variety of locations (including ideological), impact on how they conceptualise early-education, early-learning and responsive pedagogies for effecting change in the lives of children, especially those that experience multiple deprivations.

The third and final findings chapter will focus on the agentic strategies of young children in these early-childhood centres. This is important to consider to show the capabilities of the children in context. Children are agentic and do influence, overturn and change the normative practices of teachers in a disadvantaged context.

CHAPTER 6

Agentic strategies of young children in a disadvantaged context

6.1 Introduction

The main aim of this chapter is to answer the research question: ***Which strategies do children use in order to show their agency and thereby their FoK in a disadvantaged context*?** The previous chapter presented insight into supporting children's learning through teacher-centredness which was consistent with faith development and school-readiness. This approach provided the framework and control teachers needed in order to create an alternative to the vulnerable context in which the children were growing up in. Whilst this is the case, Shaik and Ebrahim (2015) contend that when such approaches are used uncritically, then there is too much structure from teachers. As a result teachers are unable to recognise and capitalise on young children's agency.

In this chapter, I focus on the creative potential of the children. This deliberate stance is taken in order to open up fresh thinking on the agentic perspective of children in early-childhood education in a disadvantaged context. The latter is particularly important since the NCF for birth-to-four year olds uses the participatory rights of young children as the foundation for mapping early-learning experiences (RSA DoBE & UNICEF, 2015). The principle of inclusivity is also strong in the framework.

In examining the strategies, I provide a more nuanced understanding of the capabilities of young children to make early-childhood centres an agentic space as shapers of early-childhood and not just receivers of adults' actions and priorities. This is a significant focus for a disadvantaged context. As with the teachers, there might be cultural perceptions of children as being needy and deficient. The perception is highly likely in vulnerable

contexts. Observation in this study, however, revealed a more affirming image of children that warrants a greater focus on pedagogies that are friendlier to active child-participation.

6.2 Children and agency

Childhood is viewed as a space which is structured for children and by children (see Chapter 2 for more details). Hallström, Elvstrand and Hellberg (2015) and Markström and Halldén (2009: 113) are of the opinion that "individual children, who through their experiences and everyday activities, make childhood what it is". Children should not be seen as passive but as persons whose interest and needs matter in early-learning spaces. It is important to shape practice from children's standpoint and meanings as this comes to the fore through their agency (Mayall, 2002).

As discussed in Chapter two, the sociology of childhood views young children as social actors who can reflect, negotiate and participate in social interactions with peers and adults (James & James, 2004). This is still a marginalised perspective especially in early-childhood and more so in a disadvantaged context. For children to show us their knowledge and capabilities, they should be given the space to explore and learn, free from adult intrusion, control or direction. This would "enable children to exercise agency, self-regulation, ownership, and control, and to direct their own learning" (Wood, 2014:4). South African studies (Shaik & Ebrahim, 2015; Ebrahim, 2011) on child participation in early-childhood, show how normalising discourses by teachers downplay the agentic behaviour of young children during collective and individual activities. However, when children are observed in places where they have control, they do show competence that exceeds their performance in highly structured environments (Wood, 2014; Valentine, 2011, Ebrahim, 2011).

In what follows, the routines and timetables as part of the normalising organisers "determine what activity should be taking place and at what time" (Markström & Halldén, 2009:113). Accordingly, "being a member of a group and taking part in the organised activities can be seen as a restriction of, or an obstacle to, children's individuality"

(Markström & Halldén, 2009:113). Current evidence, however, suggests that children are not passive absorbers of information. Children resist teacher-control and thus show their agency. For example, they show agency through their choices, revealing their FoK, individual dispositions and willingness to disrupt the rules of the setting (Wood, 2014:5). Furthermore, even under highly teacher- regulated activities, active child-participation is possible, if opportunities arise (Shaik & Ebrahim, 2015).

This chapter shows how the children in the study complied but also resisted rules to create space and time for themselves. They used "alternative spaces", disrupted rules and established their own rules to suit their own purposes (Markström & Halldén, 2009:114; Alcock, 2007:282). In so doing, "children are able to remove themselves from the collective time, space and activities", and from the frame of structured normality (ibid, 2009:114). According to the research of Ebrahim (2011) and Markström and Halldén (2009), the daily practices of young children reveal how they develop strategies for agency in early-childhood centres. This provides "insight into the processes where individual children not only negotiate the social order but also construct the concrete institution, and consequently their own childhood" (Markström & Halldén, 2009:115). Hence, it is possible to speak of children as experts in their childhood. This perspective is important to consider to become knowledgeable of the FoK that children in a disadvantaged context hold.

My observations and video-recordings showed how children individually and in small groups asserted their presence in their social world through different strategies. The three strategies (Figure 6.1) involve interaction of children with the teacher and their peers. Children revealed their agency in the following ways: avoiding, ignoring and challenging adult control, peer and gendered negotiations and imitation of adults and their life world through play.

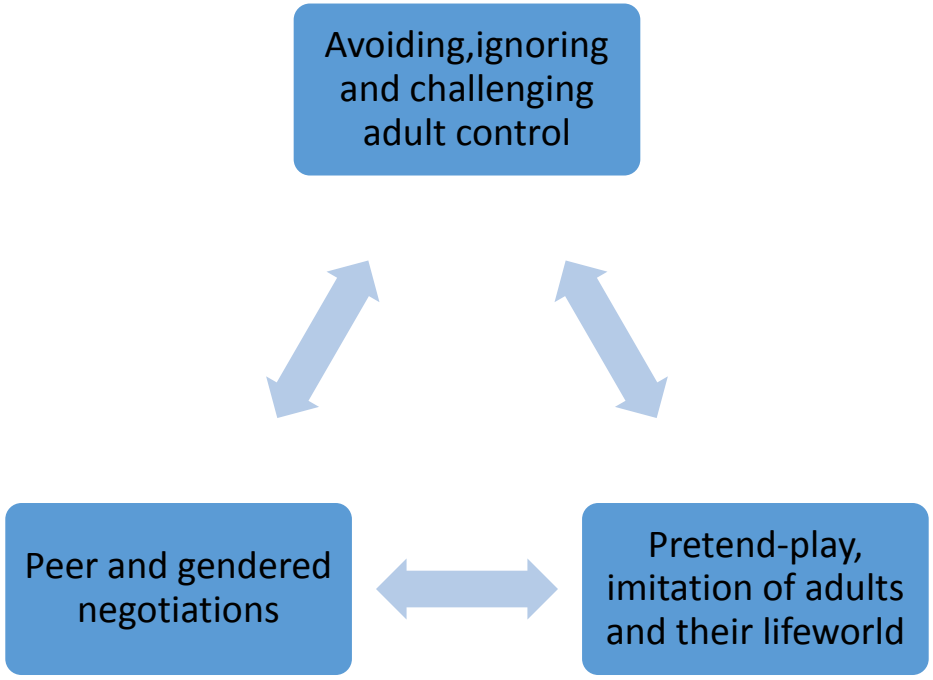


Figure 6.1: Strategies of young children to assert their agency.

6.2.1 Avoiding, ignoring and challenging adult control

The first theme is organised around the strategies of partial and total avoidance of teacher- control by individual and groups of children. One of the issues that emerged from this theme was that children challenged the teacher's authority by breaking rules. This was commonly observed as a way for children to make their concerns matter and to take decisions regarding how they interpreted activities. The children were not "social zombies" who passively complied with rules and regulations (Ebrahim, 2011: 123). This can pose a real threat to teacher-control and authority. Wood (2014) contends that child-participation and agency in the early years is a risky aspect for teachers. This is even more so for under-qualified teachers who use rules and procedures to shape early-education. "Teachers' ability and knowledge to understand children as agents and how this influences what they do in practice" is an obstacle in early-childhood centres in SA (Shaik & Ebrahim, 2015:1). The teachers feel confident when there is compliance. Highly regulated curriculum requirements also lock teachers into the delivery of outcomes in technical ways. As noted in the previous two chapters, in this study teacher- control must

be understood in terms of the problems children experience in the home environment and community as well as the framings of faith-development and school-readiness. The children witness violence, as well as drug and alcohol abuse. It was also observed that adult supervision was weak. The teachers provided an alternative from the home environment so that children could be disciplined for learning. They noted that children were also destructive. For example, the excerpt below shows a teacher's concern with how children were handling the resources of the centre - this was especially in the context of parents being poor and unable to replace the resources:

> *"The children played with different toys in the class but no one took them outside. Sometimes they broke things then the parent bought it again. If they broke one of the plastic chairs then a letter was written to the parent and we asked for a new chair" (T1/I1).*

In an attempt to make their own agenda matter, children partially ignored teachers' instructions by turning teacher-directed activities into child-initiated learning opportunities. Obedience to rules and regulations was part of the dominant culture that the children were used to. As they became familiar with the processes of learning available to them, they became knowledgeable about how to go against the grain to lessen adult control. Markström and Halldén (2009: 113) contend that this is possible as "children are active in playing at the border and acting as if the institution is their place".

This is illustrated in an outdoor developmental play period at Bambi Centre. The teacher split the class of children into two smaller groups. She gave the first group two bean bags and the other group hoola hoops. The mixed boys' and girls' group with the bean bags was instructed to walk. Two children with the bean bags on their heads and arms stretched out, and walked down a demarcated path. The purpose of this activity was to practise balancing skills. The excerpt below shows a buildup to a noteworthy diversion from the mainstream activities:

A girl and a boy walked with the bean bags on their heads. They were heading towards the group. Halfway back the boy decided to take the bean bag from his head and throw it into the air. He caught the bean bag and shouted out the number, one. He continued with throwing the bean bag in the air and counting…The girl watched for a few seconds and joined his game of throwing the bean bag in the air, catching it and counting. This delayed the official activity. The other children in the small group did not get the chance to do the balancing activities. The game of the two children continued until the teacher came back and scolded them for holding up the flow of the activities (T3/OB).

In the study there was evidence of individual children who totally avoided the teacher's control. For instance, the excerpt below shows how a boy contests the prescribed behaviour by removing himself from the mainstream collective activity, finding his own space and shutting off the sound. The daily exposure to singing time created familiarity with place, procedures and content. It also helped the boy to map out an alternative as a form of resistance and personal agency:

During whole class-time in the morning T1 began the session by singing a Christian song called Fishing for Jesus. Children performed the actions. During this time a boy crawled under the teacher's table. The boy covered his ears with his hands. He sat there until the children stopped singing. The teacher spotted him. He then crawled out. The teacher reprimanded him and instructed him to join the other children. The boy complied (T1/OB).

The social category of gender played an important part in the children's enactment of their agency in the study. Ebrahim (2011) argues that as interpretive beings, children create acts of agency through expanding, overturning and transforming normative procedures. Children explore alternative activities and artefacts for individual creations. There were numerous episodes where children defied adult instructions and expanded on their activities. This had a gendered slant. The example below illustrates how the boys were able to make their concerns matter in the context of high teacher-control. They were able to make a clay activity their own by adding their interpretations and making the activity

livelier. The use of sound effects shows extensions to build a particular theme that was exciting to the boys. In order to do this, the boys had to be knowledgeable of the "loopholes" created by the prescribed activity. Below is an example of this:

> *T5 made apples and oranges with the clay. The children were instructed to replicate the models with the clay in front of them. Once the children settled, T5 moved between the tables. She shouted at two boys for deviating from the model. These boys rolled out the clay to make it flat. The boys ignored her as they pushed the flat clay pieces over the card box. They then added sound effects of a car. T5 reprimanded the boys. They continued to push their 'cars' without making a car sound (T5/VR).*

In the study there was also evidence that long-standing reciprocal friendships were developing (Burr, Ostrov, Jansen, Cullerton-Sen, & Crick, 2005). In my observation I noted that three boys always played together. They participated collectively in certain actions such as kicking the ball, building with blocks and chasing each other. This study confirms the findings of Fabes, Martin and Hanish (2003) that boys do collaborate to go against strict rules to show their presence in places of learning. The excerpt below illustrates how the boys challenged teacher rules and found ways to stay connected when one of them was punished and sent to the "naughty corner". Two of the boys made some strategic moves which helped them to get closer to their friend in the "naughty corner". They provided him with the resource he needed to be included in the play activity that his friends were involved in:

> *T7 sent one of the boys from the triad to the "naughty corner" because he did not listen to her. Two of his friends stayed close to him for a few minutes. They were playing with a car and a truck. After a while they ignored the teacher's rule to stay away from their friend. They "drove" their cars and the truck closer to their friend in the naughty corner. The boys made car sounds and slowly stretched their arms towards the boy in the corner. They moved their bodies closer to him. This was done in a subtle way to maintain contact. The truck was given to the boy in the corner to include him in the play activity.*

After a few minutes of play the teacher announced that everyone should line up to go to toilet. The two boys left the truck with the boy in the corner and joined the others who were lining up to go to the toilet (T7/OB).

Figure 6.2: Young boys' collaborative play strategy to show agency against teacher's rules

Fabes *et al*. (2003) and Blaise (2005) argue that boys do show strong emotions during play activities. They note that boys' play leans towards being rougher than that of the girls'. Boys' play would be more energetic with more incidents of strong physical contact. Wohlwend's (2011) explanation could shed light on why this happens. The authors contend that jostling for male dominance and engaging in competitive behaviour result in boys showing force. Furthermore, "boys quickly establish a hierarchical pecking order" (ibid, 2011: 10). This order is likely to remain unwavering over time. This could be

attributed to boys who work hard to "enact hegemonic masculinities where they want to show their power to gain prestige" (Wohlwend, 2011:11). The excerpt below shows how the hegemonic masculinity of two boys play out and how boys as a group challenge the rules of the centre by taking puzzle pieces out of the class.

Boy 1 as the leader in the game of "Cops and Robbers" takes the lead in creating the weapon to get rid of "naughty people". In his positioning as Robocop, Boy 1 asserts his role. The power, however, is fragile. Boy 3 poses a challenge by making the "biggest gun". The vacillation of power shows the quick shifts in authority as the boys attempt to develop their plot.

> *Boy 1: "Come let's make our guns. But just me, you [pressing on Boy 2's leg] and Thabo".*
>
> *Boy 2: "Yes, I can make a gun".*
>
> *Boy 1: " I am Robocop and I catch the naughty people. [Pointing to two other boys] You don't get guns because you are the naughty people".*
>
> *Boy 3: "I can make the biggest gun... this gun has a lot of bullets. You will see".*
>
> *Boy 1: [Loud]… "I am Robocop. I will shoot you and run after you if you steal my money".*
>
> *Boy 2: "Yes, I am also a Robocop".*
>
> *Boy 1: "No, there is just one Robocop on TV. You can just help Robocop".*
>
> *Boy 2: "Okay…let's shoot the naughty people. See my gun" [Shows his gun to the other boys].*
>
> *Boy 3: "Wait for me. I am still making my gun".*
>
> *Boy 1: [Gets up and does not wait for Boy 3]. "Come let's go shoot the naughty people". [The boys shoot at each other with their "pretend" guns].*

Interesting findings of the study also revealed how girls at the centres asserted their agentic behaviour and thereby revealed their FoK in same gender groups. Wohlwend's (2011) findings reveal that girls tend to organise themselves in small groups and their play is relatively accommodating and cooperative. Their friendship is formed based on different reasons such as shared play, available toys or resources and having time together. In T4's class I observed a structured and a competitive game with a group of four girls. T4 introduced an educational board game by showing the girls how to find the matching shape and to place it into the correct hole on the board. T4 counts 1, 2, 3 and then signals to the girls to begin the activity. She then leaves the girls. The girls begin their activity by following the teacher's instructions. However, after a few minutes the girls share a dimension of their knowledge and capabilities.

[Girl 1: Quietly takes a few random shapes and puts this in front of her].

Girl 2: "I have a red one" [shows this to Girl 3].

Girl 3: "Okay…[takes the red shape from Girl 2 and points to a place on the board]...it goes here".

Girl 2: [Looks at the board game]…"No!... it is not the right place [She points to a different place on the board]… here".

Girl 4: "Yes… yes, put it in here" [also points to the same place].

Girl 3: [She places the red shape in the hole where the other two girls pointed and takes another shape from the pile].

Girl 1: [Still busy with her few shapes in front of her and packs it in a row while pointing to each of the shapes].

Girl 4: "What are you doing? [Looking at Girl 1]. Can I also pack mine here? [pointing to the row which Girl 1 was building]. I have a red and a blue shape".

Girl 3: "I can pack my things here….see I have this blue one".

Girl 1: "Here is my circle and I have more …. move…[touches the objects]' like this [demonstrates] in a line".

Girl 4: "I also have a circle...I put my circle with yours …in your line. Let's find more".

Girl 1: "See, I have another blue circle [puts it with the other circles and a long row of same shapes start to form. All the girls' attention is now away from the competition involving the board game].

The above is also an illustration of the imminent tensions that exist between individual and collective interests embedded within early-childhood centres. Children learn effectively through observing but also by participating with peers and more skilled members of their society (Rogoff, 2003). The early-childhood centre is "an institution, which on the one hand, is based on the idea that children as members of a collective are supposed to take part in different organised activities which in these centres were mostly teacher-directed" (Markström & Halldén, 2009:117). It could be argued that children's alternative actions that emerged from their reading showed that the structuring properties of their routines and collective activities were fluid, socially-constructed and therefore could be changed.

Where children cohered in larger groups, they were powerful and took leadership roles in disrupting the mainstream activities of teachers. Rogoff (2003) contends that through side-by-side participation with peers, the children realised that bringing about change was something that was achievable. Wood (2014:10) adds that such collective "agency is expressed through children's confidence to lead play and invent ways of challenging a teacher's control". The excerpt below shows how a group of children confidently took the initiative to convert a teacher-directed activity into a powerful child-interpreted one. The teacher's prescriptions gave way to creativity that gained momentum – so much so that the teacher gave in to the children's interpretation:

T6 enjoyed teaching children different dances. One such dance was based on a Bible story of Saggias with the integration of words based on early

measurement and literacy skills. T6 showed the children how to bend down to show Saggias as a short man and how to stand up to show Jesus as a tall man. The children complied with her instructions but then decided to pursue their own interpretations of the tall and short. Some of children ignored the teacher's guidance and explanation and decided to jump up and down while lifting their hands in the air to show Jesus as a tall man. The teacher tried to stop the children but at this point more children were attracted to their peer's interpretation of tall and short. They joined the others in jumping up and down. The teacher was overwhelmed and left the children to continue with their actions: jumping up and down on the same spot and lifting their hands above their heads as they sang a self-created song called "Jesus was a tall, tall man". The teacher decided to leave the children and looked through papers that were on her table (T6/OB).

The discussion thus far shows that young children can be deliberate in breaking the rules to make room for individual and collaborative agency. These rules were both formally and informally communicated to the children as verbal reminders and sometimes as threats. Numerous studies (Hallström *et al*, 2015; Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2009; Sebanc, Kearns, Hernandez & Galvin, 2007; Burr *et al*., 2005) show how children's friendships can be implicated in their enactments. During early-childhood young children's friendships are normally characterised by active participation and cooperative play. Sometimes this finds expression through momentary deviations which contribute to building short-term and sporadic friendships.

To conclude, this theme shows that normalised activities at the centres were serving as templates to bring about changes. The children were creative about what was on offer to them and how this could be changed. This was competently done by being covert, avoiding the teacher's gaze and taking initiatives to change activities. Furthermore, breaking and disrupting of classroom rules for personal and group pleasure took place by extending games in the outdoor space or being loyal to friends. Children showed through their actions that they are not passive recipients of adult direction and control. This is a challenge for teachers who use high teacher-control strategies to get children to comply

with rules. This needs to be balanced with room for child-participation which is characterised by co-construction, coupled with exploration and space for acting out curious behaviour. Where adult control was weak the children revealed their agency and thereby their FoK. From a theoretical perspective children's agency in this study shows multifaceted interaction in which children are simultaneously affected by contexts and life environments. The children in a disadvantaged context actively build their childhoods through an interplay and contestations between teacher priorities and children interpretations, resistances and experimentation. The next section continue with the ways children negotiate the use of toys and entrance to play areas with peers.

6.2.2 Peer and gendered negotiations

In this study, children made use of different strategies and revealed their agency when they protected their play from others and negotiated with peers to extend play activities and to get access to resources. The children were active in constructing their own peer cultures, in which they established norms and values for their social life at the centres (Corsaro, 2015). In these peer cultures, they were learning about relationships and how to collaborate as members of a community. Playful participation was aimed at bringing a sense of togetherness and a shared purpose (Corsaro, 2015).

As active meaning-makers the children in the study collaborated to help each other in the context of teacher-directed activities. This type of interaction amongst children is valuable in the learning process. Williams (2001:18) emphasises that much of what we learn, we learn from others. The key to social learning is the capacity for imitating and developing higher mental functions. The advantage here is "that children, being guided by an adult or a more competent peer who is also participating in cultural activities, are given the best possibilities to allow for the building of tools for thinking (Vygotsky, 1978:102). This occurs through children's peer scaffolding; that is teaching one another to reach his or her next level of the ZPD. In the first excerpt with T5, the more abled peers who could figure out and complete activities in a short space of time were willing to share their expertise with others. In the second excerpt this happened despite the teacher's warning the children not to assist each other:

In the first group, four children received a box with animal shapes and another four children a box with transport shapes. The children had to find the correct shape and place it in the correct opening on the plastic board. T7 stopped for a few seconds and showed the children how to find the correct animal and transport shapes and how they should place them in the correct opening. T7 moved also to the other groups of children. One of the girls took 2 minutes to find the correct transport shape and placed it in the correct place. She was very pleased with herself. Most of the children working in this group were busy turning and trying the different holes to find the correct place to put the shape. The girl continued by helping the other children. Together they found the transport shapes and placed them in the correct openings.

T7 moved to the group doing cutting and pasting. At group 3, she held up a page with a picture of a sheep. She instructed the children to use the outline to cut out picture of the sheep. She told a boy not to help the other children. However, he ignored this instruction. When the teacher was gone the boy took the page from another boy and showed him how to hold the scissors and how to cut (T7/OB).

Young children showed different reasons why they played or ate with different children called their friends. In early-childhood centres, children use sharing and friendship to protect play activities and shared interest. Furthermore, "the notion of friendship relates to observable shared activities, playing together in specific areas and protecting the play from other children" (Nilsen, 2005:120). The young children in the centres worked collaboratively to resist other children interrupting their play and thus they made their own meaning from learning experiences. However, play is an important activity for all children.

Young children take a lively interest in their peers. They look for opportunities to interact with them and this is crucial to their learning and development. The chance to build informal groups and friendships catalyses the sharing of FoK and this leads to the making of new meaning as a sense-making activity (MacNaughton & Williams, 2004). Thus far

we have seen that “agency can be expressed in multiple ways within the many paradoxes of play such as seeking order and disorder, creating and subverting rules, being inclusive and exclusive, and being sociable and unsociable” (Wood, 2014:15).

Corsaro (2015) and Emilson and Johansson (2013) are of the opinion that in early-learning centres “children are in a sense anchoring ownership to themselves and their playmates when they verbally mark off a specific area of play as shared and protected from others”. The verbal body language and non-verbal actions are used to protect a territory, create boundaries and maintain particular momentary objectives. The picture that follows is illustrative of how a group of four children engaged in an activity which involved mixed gender play and the protection of their play from onlookers. The activity was the unifier for the shared purpose where particular negotiations took place. The boy with the hat was outside the activity and could only function as an onlooker.

Figure 6.3: Child-initiated activity and protection of play

To a certain extent, play groups were dependent on the teacher's values around gender differences and this impacted on the children's participation. Emilson and Johansson's (2013) study showed that teachers in different ways contributed to children's development of masculinity and femininity. This study showed that female teachers tend to value calm play. Some of the teachers emphasised the importance of social development in same gender groups. As an illustrative example of this, I refer to the interview with T3 where she expressed a narrow categorical view of gender, and in her case this was a replication of an unchallenged childhood experience.

> *"I play with the children. Like I play with the ball or play with the toy cars with the boys or at the doll house with the girls. The boys should play one side and the girls should play on their own. This is how I played as a child and my grandmother always told us, girls, not to play with the boys. So I also tell the girls in my class not to play with boys" (T3/I2).*

Gender stereotypes are created as early as the age of three in early-childhood centres. “More extreme and stereotypical behavioural differences between early-childhood centre boys and girls have been observed when boys and girls play in same-gender groupings” (Fabes *et al*., 2003:921). The gender stereotypes were reinforced by some of the teachers at the centres. The excerpt below shows how specific spaces were demarcated for gendered play. The children were getting a sense of the normative roles of boys and girls and the expectations from being in spaces that defined role categories:

> *In a corner of the class is a kitchen, with a play stove, a small bed, an iron board and a play iron and cupboards. There was also a small table with 4 chairs. On the table were plates, cups and a kettle. T3 told the girls to play in the kitchen area. T3 moved over to the boys who are playing with the wooden cars as they pushed each other around. On the carpet were a few toy cars that children pushed around. T3 walked around and observed how the children were playing but she did not interact, or talk to them - she just allowed them to play.*

Peer acceptance was one of the ways “best-friend status” was shown (Sebanc *et al*., 2007:83). “Well-liked children had a higher probability that their friendship choices will be reciprocated than children who were not well liked” (ibid, 2007:83). In addition to this, “being physically aggressive may make a child less likely to have friends. Between the ages of four and six, boys have more friends and interact in bigger groups than do girls” (Sebanc *et al*., 2007:83). Although children played together peacefully, there were moments of conflict and differences of opinion among them. One such dissension took place amongst three boys as they waited for their porridge. The older children had to stand in a line and wait for their turn to sit. During this time a few boys decided to break this rule. The boys were asserting themselves as they disputed what was right or wrong. These moments of dissension were emotional for the children as seen below:

[Three boys gathered around a library book on zoo animals. They sat on the carpet away from other children at Disney Kids Centre. They knew that they had to wait for their turn and had a conversation around the pictures and what animals eat. They pointed to the animals. They said the names of the animals although some were incorrect. One boy took the lead because he knew more about animals as he visited the Bloemfontein Zoo with his family. He told the others about the animals he saw].

Boy1: "The big lion was lying in the sun and he wanted water".

Boy 2: "No, they don't drink water it is just us that drink water…they drink milk".

Boy 3: "Yes, they drink milk".

Boy 1: "…and water…..and they eat people".

Boy 2: "How can they eat people?..they eat other animals like dogs".

Boy 1: "Yes, I saw on TV they eat animals…. They run after the animals and catch them…they can catch an elephant also".

Boy 2: "No, an elephant is too big…. They can't catch elephants… you lie!"

Boy 1: "No, no! don't say I lie. I am going to tell teacher……I saw it on TV…..I don't lie" [boy starts crying].

Fighting and arguments amongst young children were common. Where there was a difference of opinion, it also sometimes resulted in physical encounters such as fighting. This must be understood in the context of forming friendships, keeping friends and being part of the peer culture (Corsaro, 2015). "When children first arrive in early-childhood centres, they realise that their conceptions of ownership, possessions, and sharing, which are based on their earlier experiences in families, are often not compatible with the interactive demands of the centre" (ibid, 2015).

There were many situations in the study where children brought specific negotiation skills to the fore. Play-activities with blocks and figurines, created challenges for the children. There were incidents of forceful actions in order to achieve particular outcomes. The excerpt below shows Boy 1 who wanted to get involved in the Girl 1's activity. However, he was refused permission but was offered some toy animals which he refused to accept. He is then able to move to his home group and realises that he needs more resources. Despite the refusal of permission, he takes what he needs:

Boy 1: "See there [pointing at his group] we making a garage for our cars".

[Girl 1 and Girl 2 do not look at him]

Boy 1: "What are you making?"

Girl 1: "We are making a home for the animals…the animals of Jesus".

Boy 1: "Can I help?"

Girl 2: [Loud] "No, no! Play there [pointing at his group] with them".

Girl 1: "Yes…play there. You will take our animals".

Boy 1: "No, I don't want your animals".

Girl 1 and Girl 2: [loud] "Go!"

The boy moves over to the other boys who have broken down some parts of the garage walls. He does not look happy and goes back and tries to negotiate for a few long blocks with the girls.

Boy 1: "Give us these blocks then we will give you some of our blocks".

Girl 2: "No!"

Girl 1: "This is the house of the animals of Jesus. You can't take it. Where will the animals go?"

Boy 1: [Ignoring the girls and starts picking up 2 long blocks]… "I will bring it back".

Observation of free play activities also showed the negotiating access to play through the use of toys and suggestions for role extension (Gmitrova, 2013; Parsons & Howe, 2006). To illustrate, at Special Children Centre, a few girls were playing with dolls and were pretending to be mothers comforting their babies. Another group of girls was in the kitchen area where they poured water from a kettle into small cups. Both groups of girls were engaging in behaviour where they negotiated their roles as traditional nurturing females. In the excerpt below, Girl 1 is ignored when she requested the other girls to look at her baby. She gains the attention of one of the other girls by introducing her baby and asking permission to have tea. This helps her to gain entry into the group and engaging in a set of activities related to helping out with childcare and mother-roles.

Girl 1: "Look at my baby" [Points to the doll in the toy-pram].

[The three girls continue to drink their tea].

Girl 1: "My baby's name is Thato… Can I drink tea?"

[Girl 2: Looks at the doll in the pram].

Girl 1: "See my baby drinks tea from a bottle" [Puts the bottle on the table where the other girls are drinking tea].

Girl 2: "Can I give the baby the bottle?"

Girl 1: "Yes, and then I can play with you. You can give my baby the bottle and then I play with you".

Girl 3: "You the mummy with the baby…we drink tea".

Girl 2: "We must put on clothes for the baby. We going to Shoprite to buy food".

To summarise, the children's side-by-side and joint participation allowed them to collude with the norms and to disrupt the norms. The children in the study were active in creating opportunities where they could learn from each other and collaborate with peers. This theme also revealed the tension that exists in early-childhood centres as children

establish friendship and negotiate for access to play. Gender play and behaviour is prominent in these centres and also strongly influenced by teacher attitudes and FoK. Where children did play in same gender or mixed gender groups, they showed their interpretations of their lifeworld.

6.2.3 Pretend play - imitation of adults and the lifeworld

The previous section showed some indication of how the imitation of adults is an important way in which children come to understand the workings of the world they occupy. Pretend-play is a critical vehicle through which children can show high agentic behaviour. Gmitrova (2013) and Wood (2014:14) state that "pretence is a form of agency". This is significant for young children because through their imaginary roles and events, the children created their own situations, rules and internal logic. They transformed people and objects in ways that presented different possibilities for control or resistance. Their actions enabled them to exercise and affirm their agency (2014:14).

In addition to the aforesaid, Vygotsky (1978:102) argued that pretend-play is a 'leading activity" for young children. Through pretend-play young children develop abstract thought because "in play, it is as though [the child] were a head taller than himself" (Vygotsky, 1978:102). In the study the teachers valued play in a way that separated this aspect from serious academic learning. The excerpt below shows how play is valued for the opportunities it affords for learning about adults and the work that adults do:

> *"It is important for children to learn through play. Many times we laughed at the children because during the interval we listened to the children when they talked to each other. I heard how they said, I am teacher Lorna or teacher Sophie. Then they talked just like us, the way we teach and explained the work in the class. And they do exactly what we do in the class. It is therefore important how I am in front of them because they imitate us when they play" (T4/I2).*

In the study, children participated with peers through imitating the activities of the teacher. In an observation a girl displayed her knowledge of being a teacher through exerting her

agency and taking the lead with a group of peers. The play sequence was also "protected" from two onlookers. The girl included only the children seated at her table:

> *[In T3's class, one of the girls took the small library book which the teacher had just used. She pretended to be the teacher. She imitated T3 by saying 'one tomato'. The children who sat around her repeated after her. She also asked them the colour of the tomato. The children answered correctly. She smiled at the children and they gave each other a high five to express praise their joy in getting it right].*

The girl was able to extend the content that was undertaken by the teacher:

> *The girl held up her fingers and asked the children to name how many fingers were held up. She then used her arms and the children had to identify how many arms were held up. She continued using other body parts.*

The children in the study were able to act out particular sequences they experienced at the centres. A few girls at Giggles Centre showed their FoK about the shopping experiences with their mothers. They were also able to integrate and extend the story of Aunty Bets which T5 told them a few days ago. The excerpt below at the fantasy corner shows how two girls extend the story of Aunty Bets to address their own priorities:

> *Girl 1: "I like this dress and the shoes. I think I will buy this for me".*
> *Girl 2: "Do you have money?"*
> *Girl 1: [Opens the 'pretend hand bag'] "Yes, I have money… I will also get fruit for the children".*
> *Girl 2: "Yes, we can buy bananas and oranges and mealies. Teacher said so in the story. Aunty Bets bought fruit".*
> *Girl 1: "Yes, I remember but where is your money. I have one, two, three… money [takes the pieces of paper out of the hand bag as she starts to count the money].*

Girl 2: [looks in the same handbag]…"Yes, here is the money. I can buy a new dress for me and high shoes" [Picks up a shoe and shows it to Girl 1].
Girl 1: "I will be your mum…[looks around and takes a dress from the hanger] see here is your new dress. Come, let me put it on for you [getting into the new dress which is taking some time].
Girl 2: "I like it".(whirls around so that Girl 1 can see it).

Vygotsky (1978:102-103) views pretend-play as a "leading activity" for young children's development and this is simultaneously linked to creating an "imaginary situation". Other researchers added to the work of Vygotsky and state that play is really more than a "recollection of something that has actually happened. It is more memory in action than a novel imaginary situation" (Worthington & Van Oers, 2016:54; Vygotsky, 1978:103). This was important to consider taking into account the context of vulnerability the children lived in. During informal conversations with teachers it was evident the children were witnessing the harsh realities of reckless behaviour and crime. One teacher told me about an unfortunate situation that took place over the weekend when two teenagers died during an illegal drag-racing incident in the community. This affected some of the children and seen in their imaginative play. The negative issues have an equal chance of manifesting in play behaviours – the same applies to positive issues.

Van der Aalsvoort, Van Tol and Karemaker (2004:152) note that in play, "children evoke their own anxieties and experiment with what happens in order to cope with such feelings in real-life settings". The outward manifestations including verbal and non-verbal actions must be addressed with the children to help them move beyond trauma. The excerpt below shows how a segment of the adult world is translated by children. The notion of speed, recklessness and breaking the law comes into play as the children act out their knowledge of their lifeworld:

Boy 1: "See... [hitting on his tyre filled with sand] my car, it's a BMW and it is really fast".

Boy 2: "Yes my car is also fast" [standing with his tyre].

[Boy 1 and Boy 2 start rolling the tyres and some of the sand falls out due to the speed. The boys push the tyres fast for a few metres near the first tree].

Boy 1: "Let's see how fast our cars can go… come Lebo, let's drive fast".

[Boy 1 and Boy 2 roll their tyres to the next tree where a group of girls are playing. Boy 1's tyre lands against one of the smaller girls and she starts to cry. She goes off to find the teacher. The other girls start to argue with the boys].

Girl 1: "I am going to call the police because you killed her". [she takes her sandal off her feet, holds one next to her ear (the pretend phone) and gives the other sandal to her friend].

Girl 1: "See you killed her…I am calling the police".

Boy 1: "We are driving here and you can't stand where we are driving…the cars drive here".

Boy 2: "Yes, this is the cars' place and if you stand here you get hurt….You have to stand at your house".

Girl 2: "I am going to tell teacher you killed her with the car" [Girl 2 walks in the direction of the teacher].

Children used creative and innovative ways to reveal their agency and FoK in these early-childhood centres. These young children made this space their own by avoiding teacher instruction, breaking rules and working with their peers to make their interest a priority.

6.3 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter is to answer the research question: ***Which strategies do children use in order to show their agency and thereby their FoK in a disadvantaged centre?*** The three themes showed how children in a disadvantaged context creatively use

different strategies to construct and re-construct their meaning of being a child living in particular circumstances with particular opportunities. The finding confirms the view that young children are no longer simply passive observers in these early-childhood centres. These young children are knowledgeable beings who function as social actors who make meaning of what is on offer and how this can be used to address their priorities. The teacher-created spaces then results in unintended learning which needed to be taken up to advance learning.

The first strategy of avoiding, ignoring and challenging adult control is an entry point for the argument that early-childhood centres are perceived as being socially constructed and therefore fluid and changeable. Teacher-control is therefore regarded as fragile. The children do accept the instructions but then subvert them for individual and collective agency. They can do this as they find the loopholes to bring in alternatives to the mainstream activities and their structuring properties. The second strategy of peer and gendered negotiations shows how joint participation functions as a strength. Friendship-building and peer-learning with a gendered slant allowed the children to engage in activities where they showed partial compliance, playing at the borders of rules and creating new situations. The third strategy shows how the imaginary activities highlight insight into adult behaviour and happenings in the lifeworld.

The overall findings suggest that young children in a disadvantaged context are strategic and capable social actors. This view of children requires a sensitivity that was not forthcoming from the teachers as they were positioned in discourses related to faith-development and school-readiness. Their emerging professionalism did not have a sufficient base to create alternate images of the children. The children's strategies through which they show the FoK were largely dismissed by the teacher as they did not fit in with the outcomes of the prescriptive curriculum. In this context, the co-construction for making meaning with the children and to understand their perspectives is thus viewed as irrelevant.

Chapter 7 continue with a discussion of the synthesis, the contributions and the limitations of this study.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusions and implications

7.1 Introduction

This study sought to explore the FoK and practice of teachers in a disadvantaged context as a bounded setting. This exploration could not just be limited to examining teachers only. In order to gain a fuller picture of the FoK it was necessary to also look at three-to-four year old children's FoK. In this thesis, I argued that teachers and young children are competent and knowledgeable and I thus proposed an asset-based approach to understand the complexities of ECCE in SA. The analysis of both the adult and the child group enabled the emergence of a fuller picture on the operationalisation of teacher's knowledge and action. A study of this nature makes sense in terms of the context of vulnerabilities and complexities of professionalisation of the early-childhood workforce as noted in the introductory chapter in this study.

In what follows I provide an overview, an explanation of the findings and the significance of the empirical study. Followed by the original contribution, implications and limitations of the study.

7.2 An overview of the study

The main research question in this study was framed as follows: ***What does ECD teachers and three-to-four year old children's FoK suggest about their knowledge and practice in early-childhood centres in a disadvantaged context?*** The understanding of teachers' FoK could not be approached without the examination of what children were exhibiting as their knowledge in the practices that were observed. Hence the focus on children's influential strategies is complementary to making sense of the teachers' FoK and practice for shaping early-education. Approaching a study on

ECD teachers and children in this way, highlights a strengths-based perspective where both adults and children are viewed as agents. This is particularly important considering the pervasive perception that both the groupings are framed in deficit terms in relation to what they can offer to the practice of early-childhood education. In what follows, I present each of the "build-up" chapters to show how the agentic perspective, mobilised through focus on FoK, gained traction in this study.

In **Chapter one**, I discussed the context of ECD and the impact which the disadvantaged context had on quality ECD provision for young children. From my readings, I was able to explore three prolific justifications for why ECD is important, namely: the child's rights, social justice- and the economic investment case. The children's right to basic education is entrenched in the Constitution of SA. Access to quality education at different types of community-based or privately owned early-childhood centres guarantees the rights of children and ensures a social justice vision for the needs of young children growing up in a society that was historically ravaged by deep divisions based on race. I examined different SA policies that, amongst other things, supported children as full human beings and as social actors with participatory rights. For instance, the NIP (RSA DoBE, 2005), the NCF (2015) and the National Integrated ECD policy (2015), focus strongly on social justice for young children and the teachers working with the age group of birth-to-four years. I showed how inequities in provision continue to challenge exposure to high quality care and education (Atmore, 2013). Such circumstances have the potential to contribute to "toxic stress" (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012:232) and cause developmental delays (Ebrahim *et al*., 2013). Hence, economic investment in human capital is necessary to avoid cognitive and developmental delays which may result in practices counter-productive to the building of a healthy citizenry. (Barnett, 2009; Heckman, 2011 & Atmore, 2013). In summary, the three justifications make intervention in ECCE an imperative. This implicates the conditions of service of teachers and their knowledge and practice when working with the vulnerabilities that young children are exposed to.
This study is intended to fill the gap of a context-based understanding of teachers and children and their practice in a disadvantaged context. In using a FoK lens with an

eclectic theoretical mix, this study shows the value of examining what exists and how it is operationalised rather than a sole focus on what is missing. In order to present a broader view of teachers and children in a disadvantaged context, I explored sources of teachers' knowledge, support offered in teacher –guided practice and then focused on children's agency.

In **Chapter two**, I presented the key theoretical ideas that helped me in the analysis and to offer explanations in this study. I argued that it is difficult to just use one theory to explain FoK and practice as these were complex. I therefore drew on two paradigms to help me to make sense of the aspects in this study. Specifically, interpretivism with special attention on social constructivism and the critical paradigm, was used to focus on both subjective meaning-making and issues of power. The constructivist paradigm provided a lens to understand the socially-constructed nature of the participants' FoK and the capitals. The critical paradigm provided a deeper understanding of the issues of power amongst the teachers and the children in these early-childhood centres. I explained the basic tenets of the FoK approach as a counter perspective to deficit theorising and also highlighted the "dark" side of FoK which offered greater insight into the realities of the disadvantaged context. It was also necessary to unpack the sources and specific kinds of knowledge that were being accessed by the teachers. I therefore used the notion of capitals as explained by Yosso (2005). This helped to create sensitivity to the 8 Cs of chapter four. The work of Vygotsky (1978 & 1986) and Rogoff (2003) was important in examining practices. In this study, the concept of scaffolding is understood through explanations of instructional techniques that showed the concept operating on a continuum. It was used in this way to be sensitive to the practice in a rule-based environment with high teacher -control. The FoK enabled a view of the teachers as agents who were providing a context-based early-education. In order to further the understanding of agency and capabilities of the children, the sociology of childhood was explained. This helped to unpack the influential strategies that were used by the children.

Chapter three, described the multiple case study methodology used in this study. Qualitative research is most appropriate in studying this real-world context. A case study design was used where the four sites are considered to be the case in a bounded setting. This helped to focus on the patterns and common features that emerged within and across the early-childhood centres. Purposive sampling was used to get the involvement of eight teachers from the four early-learning centres in Bloemfontein – urban Free State. The teachers' informal, personal, experiential and emerging professional knowledge was collected through semi-structured interviews. Observations recorded through field notes and a video-recorder was used to make sense of the richness and complexity of practice of both the teachers and the children. Research with young children is a complex and 'messy' endeavour. Therefore, getting children's 'assent' become a continuous process of being vigilant to their non-verbal and verbal response to my presence and negotiating participation from them (Dockett & Perry, 2011:233). Moment-by-moment signs of dissent from children were indicators for the research to move away and adhere to a respectful relationship with the young children in these centres. Data was analysed using thematic analysis.

7.3 The findings and significance of the empirical study

The first findings chapter (**Chapter four**), focused on the sources of the teachers' FoK in a disadvantaged context. The semi-structured interviews uncovered the roots of teachers' context-bound FoK. The dimensions of their FoK show a complex, multi-layered and socially constructed nature of the sources of their FoK. This was specifically undertaken in order to expand the narrow understanding that only formal professional knowledge impacts on practice. Additionally, the assets of the teachers needed to come to the fore. This was necessary in the light of teachers in the disadvantaged context being perceived as those that are in deficit and in need for intense intervention. This chapter showed how teachers used multiple sources of their FoK to make the centres functional despite many challenges. Teachers were positioned as active agents who constructed and reconstruct their knowledge about context and in context. This presented them as people who were resourceful in accessing key knowledges from the personal, experiential and emerging

professional base to shape early-care and education. The chapter presented the eight Cs which were noted as childhood memories, context of the community, children's social circumstances, caring, Christian faith-based knowing, community of practice, content knowledge and centre-based practices. The findings revealed tensions in the sources of teachers' FoK. Their FoK from childhood memories, Christian faith-based knowing and content knowledge were inclined towards limited understanding of teaching very young children. Each of the 8 Cs helped to unpack frames of reference that were used to makes sense of teachers' knowledge for practice. They are good tools for visibility of teachers' FoK in a contextual way.

Chapter five is the second findings chapter. This chapter focused on the support of children's learning with the view to ascertain teachers' FoK in teacher-guided practices. It was important to examine the activity context and the pedagogic techniques. The latter showed how scaffolding operated on a continuum. Both the aim of Christian faith development and school-readiness formed the overarching philosophical thread for practice. This was significant because teachers concentrated on language development, memorisation and repetition of content which are not always possible through more progressive pedagogies of discovery. The teachers took a prescriptive and authoritarian approach to facilitate ascribed identity-development and compensation for the deficits in the home environment and the threats they posed for life-skills and school learning. The chapters showed how direct instruction, demonstration and telling children, operated. At face value such approaches would be deeply criticised. However, the rationale behind these approaches first needed to be understood to make sense of the practical activities that were informing early-education. Child-participation in a teacher-guided context was explored to show capabilities of the children. Teachers' FoK in practice, functions both as an enabler and disabler of supporting children's learning. Whilst the teachers were catalysing change by unlocking alternative realities, they were also in need of deeper approaches to supporting children's learning. They needed to explore different images of children and pedagogies affirming these images. This points to the need for systematic and thoughtful professional development which is contextually responsive. The teachers

need to move beyond their existing starting points to grow in professionalism. This echoes the message for professional development opportunities to take into account where teachers are located personally and professionally to effect context-responsive practice.

Chapter six is the third findings chapter. I addressed the strategies that children used at the centres to show their agency and thereby their FoK in a disadvantaged context. As noted previously, this is an integral part of understanding teachers' FoK and practice and mapping a way forward. The centres were characterised by high teacher-control which imposed structure on children's activities. Even in this space the children were able to negotiate their priorities. This chapter showed the influential strategies the children from a disadvantaged context used. The child-perspective is important to consider in the light of the NCF which uses the social actor image of the child as foundational. Examples are provided on how children navigate their way to show that they are not just receiving adult instructions, but are also able to interpret opportunities, set priorities and act out their knowledge. This disables the image of the needy and deficient child in a disadvantaged context. The chapter presents three interrelated themes to show active meaning-making. The strategy of avoiding, ignoring and challenging adult control makes early-childhood centres socially-constructed institutions that are fragile and can change based on human action including those of young children. The children deliberately found alternatives to the mainstream activities and were mindful of their structuring properties. They use this to their advantage. In the strategy of peer and gendered negotiations, joint participation is a resource to reach certain outcomes. The children play at the borders of rules to make their concerns matter. In analysing imaginary play, the children show their interpretations of the adult world and subversions, to be in control.

7.4 The original contribution of this study

This section must be read together with the 'implications' section. This study 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. Adequate qualification and the ongoing professional development of teachers are recognised by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as essential aspects in developing sustainability in the ECD sector (UNESCO, 2008). In SA the current concern is both professionalisation and professionalism in the ECD field. Currently, many teachers in the ECD sector hold minimum teacher qualifications at level 4 and 5 on the NQF (RSA DoHET, 2011). The first Policy on Minimum Requirements for Programmes leading to Qualification in Higher Education in ECCE (birth-to-four) for teachers is opening pathways to further qualifications (RSA DoHET, 2016). The policy pathways start with diplomas in ECD and continues with higher degrees which can be done at universities and colleges across SA.

This study fills the gap in research about teachers' knowledge and practice in the disadvantaged context in early-childhood. Teachers in disadvantaged contexts are normally targeted for professional development interventions from the perspective of them being in deficit. This happens because particular types of formal knowledges and their related practices are valorised. They are based on universal principles of best practice for teacher-education in early-childhood. These are normally developed through the lenses of how teachers are trained in western contexts. Where this is the case, teachers have to largely come up to the expectations that are developed in decontextualised ways. The rigidity creates many exclusions for teachers performing in vulnerable contexts.

The focus on FoK is important for teacher-development. It empowers teachers, and validates the work they do by sharing their knowledge and FoK with others. This gives the teachers the opportunity to see that their FoK is relevant to their real-life context and what works and what does not work in these similar contexts. A major implication is that teacher-development can be approached from the "ground up". Therefore teachers' FoK from the disadvantaged context can contribute to a "ground-up" perspective that can enable the concept of teacher-development to be reconceptualised in ways that reveal the reality of their FoK (Cotton, 2013:27).

This thesis proposes the teachers' unique FoK 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" (RSA DoHET, 2016:9). Hence just the personal, intuitive knowledge is inadequate as assets. 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 (Hedges & Cullen, 2005:66). 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 (ibid, 2005:67).

This study expands the remit of professional development into a more contextually responsive framework. To make sense of this, it was necessary to put together an eclectic mix of theories to address the complex strands that characterises a study of this nature. The FoK, coupled with the notion of a variety of capitals as resources, creates a degree of sensitivity when unpacking the sources of knowledge. Knowledge in action, however, requires a more nuanced analysis. This study showed the socially constructed view of knowledge and reality which makes it possible in understanding what makes teachers act the way they do, and how these actions are meted out to children and the effect they have. The children's FoK and agency becomes visible in these early-childhood centres. This allows one to see where the arenas for strengthening and for reform are necessary.

7.5 Implications of the study

This study has several implications to move early-childhood teacher-education forward. The thematic discussions that follow show the different aspects that warrant a key focus to building the early-childhood teacher-education in SA. The themes that follow are: engagement with complexity, building a facilitative environment for early-childhood education research, creating "CoP", raising the status of the field, and paying attention to the knowledge mix.

7.5.1 Engagement with complexity

Both the analysis of teachers' and children's Fok in the disadvantaged context show the multifaceted nature of what both groupings know and are able to do in practice. What happens at a micro-level cannot be read in isolation. There are systemic and structural aspects shaping the conditions-of-service of under-qualified teachers in this particular context. Hence, multilayers of forces such from the historical, economic, political, social and cultural perspective act out in a context. The new policy for teacher- education for birth-to-four year olds highlights the importance of addressing the critical challenges facing ECD in SA "by incorporating situational and contextual elements that assist teachers in developing competences that enable them to deal with diversity and transformation" (RSA DoHET, 2016: 8-9). This points to a particular way of dealing with the complexities.

This study highlights the need to examine early-childhood knowledge and practice from engagement with bottom-up complexity rather than application of universal standards and expectations which are decontextualised. The exploration of both the nature and the consequences of complexity in early-childhood practice has been raised by Cumming, Sumsion and Wong (2015) who argue that the policy attention in early-childhood education is double-barrelled. On the one hand they open up conceptualisations of early-childhood practice and thereby knowledges needed to effect it, and on the other hand they shut it down. Using the concepts of assemblages and refrains from the work of Deleuze and Guattari, the author used data from ten early-childhood teachers in Australia to show how sensitivity to complexity can be engaged with.

The notion of assemblages as noted by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) as cited in Cumming *et al* (2015: 81) is about elements such as humans, material, places, discourse and time that consolidate to effect particular functions in early-childhood centres. When it comes together, it gives a sense of stability. Collective action can bring change to elements as combinations are thought of in new ways. People are viewed in a constant state of becoming and can therefore bring about stability and change when elements are no longer of value. The agency perspective of key actors is necessary to concentrate on.

This study showed how the focus on teachers and children opens up possibilities for fresh dialogue on teachers and their work. Bogue (1999:126) as cited in Cumming *et al* (2015: 81), using Deleuze and Guattari's work, focus on the concept of the refrain which is 'a rhythmic regularity that brings order out of chaos'. This regularity stems from aspects that surround something. The order is created by paying attention to the elements and then putting them in organised ways and combinations that are workable. This allows for context responsiveness as elements are combined to make sense of practice.

This study showed how the teachers made sense of the assemblages through informal, personal and emerging professional knowledge of the context of disadvantage and early-education practice in this context. Order and stability is effected through driving particular aims to give recognisable shape to what the teachers and the children were involved in at these centres. Particular combinations are put together to bring about alternate realities to the ones the children were facing.

The value of engaging with complexity in early-childhood education in SA lies in the possibilities it opens up for asking new questions. Some of these are as follows: what are the assemblages that exert a profound influence on early-childhood education in different contexts? How can they be broken down to understand what is necessary for context responsive policy-making, practice and research in early-education? What combinations are necessary to produce appropriate practice with all children? How can participatory processes assist in the building and rebuilding of early-childhood education in SA?

With regard to complexity and professional development of teachers, this study has shown that the teachers 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 many knowledges and the translations thereof in contexts of importance. This is essential for disruption of narrow understandings and to open up new combinations to create contextually responsive knowledge and practice. It is also essential to ensure that early-childhood teachers do not uncritically adopt restrictive regulation. They need opportunities to move from fixed

mindsets to growth mindsets where flexibility and responsiveness become part of their professional disposition.

7.5.2 Building a facilitative environment for early-childhood teacher-education research

This study points to the need to build a research culture for the advancement of early-childhood teacher-education through SA evidence. Several elements need to be addressed in order for a vibrant early-childhood teacher-education research culture to flourish. Horm, Hyson and Winton (2013) make the following suggestions which are relevant to building the evidence-base in the SA context:

- Collaboration

  In order to get a holistic picture of the narratives and the numbers implicated in early-childhood teacher-education there has to be collaboration amongst qualitative and quantitative researchers. Both the case studies using small samples for in-depth investigations and large scales studies are needed to inform policy and practice. This collaboration can also be trans-disciplinary to better afford perspectives on the education of teachers for complexity.

- Coherent programmatic research agenda

  Currently in SA there is fragmentary research in early-childhood which individuals and specific organisations have undertaken. The recently established South African Research Association for Early Childhood Education (SARAECE) and the Special Interest Groups that are currently in operation together with the RSA DoHET can be instrumental in developing an appropriate research agenda for the early-childhood teacher-education field. This is emerging in the new EU Funded projects in partnership with the universities, civil societies and the RSA DoHET but it needs a more structured response.

- Development of future researchers

  There is a need to develop future early-childhood teacher-education researchers

to prepare them for the content knowledge of the field. They need to be exposed to a number of disciplines and methods in order to carry out robust research. This means paying attention to Masters' and PhD students and building their competence. These graduates can then fill in positions in faculties, research organisations and policy development institutions.

7.5.3 Creating Communities of Practice

The roles and responsibilities of teachers are multiple. The implementation of the NCF (2015) is one of the implications for teachers' development. The NCF is flexible in nature and facilitates the autonomy of the teachers through their FoK which becomes practical in the SA context. Through the implementation of the NCF, the participatory rights of the child comes to the fore to be acknowledged by the teachers as not being a threat but where the teacher and child are collaborators in a co-constructor relationship.

A flexible curriculum allows for judgements to be taken by teachers in a disadvantaged context in order to plan for responsive practice that adheres to their needs according to their context. ECD teachers need to be encouraged to work in "CoP"s. This is an alternative and practical pathway to help teachers to improve their knowledge and practice with young children. The understanding of learning as a social activity informs the question of how learning has occurred in teachers involved in early-childhood education – it is also a given that teachers are continually learning on an ongoing basis from everyday experiences with learners at early-childhood centres. Creating "CoP" is integral to this learning (Cotton, 2013; Boud & Middleton, 2003; Wenger, 2000). 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 will be different because teachers across different centres and in the same centres support each other consistently as opposed to sporadic training options which are poorly monitored or supported by the trainer (Cotton, 2013; Boud & Middleton, 2003).

7.5.4 Raising the status of the field

This study has implications for a field which is not professionally recognised compared to Grade R classes which forms part of the formal school phase in SA. This section has historically been burdened with a low status linked to “minding”, “caring”, “babysitters” and “foundation builders” in contrast with the teachers in other phases (Harwood *et al*., 2013:5; Lloyd & Hallet, 2010:77). This resulted in a continuous history of ECD teachers devaluing their own “professional identity” (Harwood *et al*., 2013:5). Thus by exploring the “meaning-making” processes of teachers themselves and their FoK it can be validated and become visible in the public arena. The implications of there being a greater focus on the professionalised field of ECCE have different advantages such as better status with better conditions of service. The starting point of a professionalised field is the implementation of the NCF and how it considers the FoK and the capitals that the teachers bring to their places of work. Further research around the teachers and children is a necessity. Future research can investigate *how early-childhood teachers in SA perceive of themselves as professionals and how their values, beliefs and FoK contribute to their professional identity*.

7.5.5 Paying attention to the knowledge mix

Another implication and of greater importance is that thorough subject knowledge can lead to deeper engagement with children through more progressive child-appropriate scaffolding techniques because transmission approaches are more likely to be used if teachers are underqualified or under-qualified. Through the different pathways to higher qualification, teachers stand a chance to gain different types of knowledge which can complement the FoK which they already have. Knowledge of child development and “theories of early-childhood education” are also central to further development. Consequently, teachers will acquire the following types of knowledge (RSA DoHET, 2016:14):

- fundamental learning;
- educational learning;

- disciplinary learning;
- pedagogical learning;
- situational learning; and
- practical learning.

The last section provides an explanation the limitations of the small-scale study.

7.6 The limitations of this study

This study used a small sample of four early-childhood centres. This was done with the aim of getting a more nuanced understanding of knowledge and practice in a disadvantaged context which I saw as a bounded setting. The qualitative approach however, allowed for an in-depth examination of teachers' "talk" and observation of their actions at the four centres. The intention of my study was not to generalise because the contexts are unique. I wanted to understand how teachers used their sources of FoK and socially constructed their practice with very young children. The findings are only applicable to my sample which included the eight teachers and children at the four early-childhood centres. This is a limitation as we do need more quantitative components to get a further insight into knowledge and practice of ECD teachers and children in the disadvantaged context. Future research should be undertaken using mixed research approaches to provide population level evidence.

A second limitation of the study is that I did not look at how the family FoK impact on the children's engagement in these centres. The children's FoK coming from different sources can therefore be dealt with in detail for future research. The study mainly focused on the teachers and the children as the unit of analysis. The impact of the managers' FoK was not investigated as a way of seeing how it shaped the teachers' FoK and their practice.

The limitations of this study were a result of time and financial constraints. It is also an individual study for a qualification and there were certain requirements that had to be fulfilled in terms of the scope for a focused study.

7.7 Concluding remark

This study affirms the idea that all individuals have a contribution to make. This contribution comes from tapping into their subjective meaning-making in context. The wealth of perspectives individuals bring can only come to the fore if the theoretical ideas and methodologies used are friendly to accessing them. This study showed that margainalised groups such as ECD teachers and young children are agentic and have contributions to make. Early-childhood researchers need to be sensitive to who teachers and children are, what assets they possess and how they mobilise this to shape their lives. More studies are needed to make marginalised perspectives visible and to decentre normative practices that border on deficit thinking and correcting of fault lines. The facilitative role of the researcher needs greater engagement to create more possibilities for affirming prior knowledge as starting points for intervention. This is important considering the professional turn in preparing early-childhood teachers in SA.

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APPENDIX 1: LETTERS AND CONSENT FORMS

1A: FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

1B: EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRE MANAGER/MATRON

1C: EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS/PRACTITIONERS

1D: PARENTS AND/OR GUARDIANS OF CHILDREN AT THE CENTRES

1A: Consent Letter for the District Manager at the Free State Department of Education.

Glynnis Daries	Prof. Hasina Ebrahim
49 St Helena Street	University of the Free State
Uitsig	Winkie Direko building
Bloemfontein	ebrahimqufs.ac.za
dariesges@ufs.ac.za	051 401 2047

11 February 2014

Consent form for the Department of Education.

Sir/Madam

Re: Request permission to conduct research into the knowledge and practice of practitioners

I, Glynnis Daries am a registered doctoral studies candidate at the University of the Free State. I am a lecturer at the University of the Free State where my area of specialisation is early-childhood education. This study is part of the European Union Project where the intention is to enhance learning and teaching in early-childhood education. It is because of my involvement in the European Union Project and my specialisation in early childhood that I have decided to embark on this research project. The purpose of my study is to investigate the practitioner's knowledge regarding the teaching of young children as well

as his/her knowledge and practice of the new researched curriculum in three centres for three -four year old children in the Free State. With the implementation of the NELDS and the Free State Curriculum (birth to four), the opportunity presents itself to explore and understand the discourses that shape knowledge and practice in these centres.

Bearing the above in mind, the study will focus on early-childhood practitioners' understandings of curriculum and how these perceptions relate to classroom practice. The official research will take place in the three selected centres from an education district and will engage all the practitioners in focus group discussions, interviews and classroom observation. I hope to focus intensively on early-childhood practitioners' practices in class and how their sources of knowledge influence their practice over a period of time. The early-childhood practitioners' participation will be totally voluntary and I will assure them of confidentiality and anonymity. The findings of the study will be used to report on practitioners' knowledge and to contribute to filling in gaps in research regarding their knowledge and practice for children birth-to-four years of age within South Africa. I will be happy to address any questions or requests which you may have.

I humbly request your permission to conduct this study.

Yours sincerely

Glynnis Daries (071 1166884)

The signatory below grants permission for the abovementioned research to be carried out in early-childhood classrooms at the centres.

District Manager :……

Date: ……

1B: Consent Letter for the managers/matrons at the early childhood centre.

Glynnis Daries	Prof Hasina Ebrahim
49 St Helena crescent	University of the Free State
Uitsig	Winkie Direko building
Bloemfontein	ebrahimqufs.ac.za
9301	051 401 2047
	25th of February 2014

INFORMED CONSENT:

Dear Principal

Re: Request permission to conduct research into the knowledge and practice of practitioners

I, Glynnis Daries, am engaged in doctoral studies at the University of the Free State. I am a lecturer at the University of the Free State where my area of specialisation is early-childhood education.

I am investigating early-childhood practitioners' knowledge of the young child and how these perceptions relate to their classroom practice. This study is part of the European Union Project where the intention is to enhance learning and teaching in early- childhood education. During this year of the project, I would like to conduct semi-structured interviews at the centres where practitioners were trained on the Free State birth-to-four curriculum. I hope to focus intensively on early-childhood practitioners' practices in class and how their sources of knowledge influence their practice. This will be accomplished through observations in their classrooms over a period of time. The early-childhood practitioners' participation will be totally voluntary and I will assure them of confidentiality and anonymity, if so requested. Follow up research will include one-on-one discussions with the practitioner.

Bearing the above in mind, the study will focus on early-childhood practitioners' understandings of curriculum and how these perceptions relate to classroom practice. I will be happy to address any questions or requests for more information which you may have. Through the study I hope to provide insights that will contribute to research on knowledge and practice of practitioners who facilitate teaching-learning processes of children birth-to-four years of age.

Please sign the form below if you are willing to grant permission for me to conduct the research in your early-childhood centre.

Yours sincerely

Glynnis Daries

The signatory below grants permission for the abovementioned research to be carried out in early-childhood classrooms at the centre.

Principal…….
Date ……

SCHOOL STAMP

1C: Letters and consent forms for the teacher/practitioner at the centre.

Glynnis Daries	Prof Hasina Ebrahim
49 St Helena crescent	University of the Free State
Uitsig	Winkie Direko building
Bloemfontein	ebrahimqufs.ac.za
9301	051 401 2047
	25th of February 2014

INFORMED CONSENT:

Dear Early Childhood Practitioner

Re: Request permission to conduct research into the knowledge and practice of practitioners

My name is Glynnis Daries and I am engaged in doctoral studies at the University of the Free State. I am a lecturer at the University of the Free State where my area of specialisation is early-childhood education.

I am investigating early-childhood practitioners' knowledge of the young child and their understanding of the birth-to-four curriculum and how these perceptions relate to their classroom practice. This study is part of the European Union Project where the intention is to enhance learning and teaching in early-childhood education.

I would like you to participate in this research because you were trained on the birth- to-four curriculum and your knowledge and practice will give me insight into the implementation process. During this year of the project, I would like to conduct semi-structured interviews at the centres where you work. I hope to focus intensively on your practice and observe your classroom practice by doing observations over a few days. These observations will be video-recorded.

The possible risks to you in this study are very minimal but your participation will be totally voluntary and I will assure you of confidentiality and anonymity during the process of the research. If you choose to take part, and should an issue arise which makes you uncomfortable, you may at any time withdraw your participation. If you experience any discomfort or unhappiness with the way the research is being conducted, please feel free to contact me directly to discuss it, but you are also free to contact my study leader (indicated above).

The ultimate goal of this study is for the findings to help train other practitioners in the field that have not been trained on the birth-to-four curriculum. I will be happy to address any questions or requests regarding any further information which you may require.

Yours sincerely

Glynnis Daries

Please fill in and return this page.

Study: Knowledge and practice of curriculum for birth-to-four years in early-childhood centres in disadvantaged contexts in the Free State.

Researcher: Glynnis Daries

Name and Surname:…….
Practitioner at the centre for children birth-to four-years (Yes or No):……..
Contact Number: …….

- ✓ I hereby give informed consent to participate in the above -mentioned research study.

- ✓ I understand what the study is about, why I am participating and what the risks and benefits are.
- ✓ I give the researcher permission to make use of the data gathered from my participation, subject to the stipulations he/she has indicated in the above letter.

Signature:…….

Date:……

1D: Letters and consent forms for the parents and / or guardians of the young children in the centres.

Date: 25 February 2014

Dear Parent / Guardian

Re: Research into the knowledge and practice of practitioners

I, Glynnis Daries, am engaged in doctoral studies at the University of the Free State. I am a lecturer at the University of the Free State where my area of specialisation is early-childhood education.

I am investigating early-childhood practitioners' knowledge of the young child and their understanding of the birth-to-four years' age group curriculum and how these perceptions relate to their classroom practice. This study is part of the European Union Project where the intention is to enhance learning and teaching in early-childhood education.

The research project will involve observation of early-childhood practitioners' classrooms. As part of the research, I will take some video-recordings of the teaching and learning. These recordings are a useful means of helping us to know about how teachers teach and how learners learn. I would like to refer to these recordings when I write up my thesis.

Your child may appear in some of the video clips. Therefore your permission is required for me to use the material for academic purposes. Confidentiality is assured; your child's name as well as the name of the centre will not be used in any written or spoken reports. If you agree, please sign the consent form below.

Yours faithfully

Glynnis Daries

CONSENT FORM

I consent to video clips of my child and his/her written work being referred to in the thesis and research papers of Glynnis Daries. I understand that the material will be used for research purposes only. I understand that this agreement is voluntary.

Name: ……..

Signature: …… Date: ……..

APPENDIX 2: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Background information

What is your name?

Where were you born? How old are you?

Tell me about your family.

Think back to when you were very young. Tell me about your early-childhood experiences?

Did you attend a crèche when you were young?

Can you remember any of your experiences? If so, give examples?

What were your schooling experiences like?

Do you use any of your experiences in your practice as an early-childhood teacher?

For how many years are you working at this centre?

What made you become an early years' teacher?

What are the good / positive aspects you experience in your work at this centre?

What are the challenges or negative experiences you face in your work at this centre?

Centre details

Is this a privately owned or community based centre?

Do you receive subsidies (money) from the Department of Social Development? / Do you get money from the Government?

If you do not receive subsidies, how much does the parent pay?

Is the money enough for the running of the centre? If not how do you cope?

Context Influences

Tell me about the history of this area.

What are problems that young children experience in this area?

What are positive / good aspects that young children experience in this area?

What are the problems that families experience in this area?

What kinds of *knowledge* does a teacher need in order to make a difference in the lives of young children here at your centre / in this context?

What kinds of practices (that which you do) are expected of a teacher working in this area?

Tell me about some of the things you have done that make a difference in the lives of children and/or their families in this context / centre.

Childhood experience

Comment on your childhood experience.

Do you draw on your childhood memories to inform your practice? Explain.

Training

Tell me about how you were trained.

What kinds of knowledge and skills did you develop from your training in the birth to four curriculum?

How do you use it in practice?

Child development, learning and learning environment

Tell me about how children develop and learn in this community.

What do you do to support their development and learning?

Tell me about the key aims that you use to develop the children's learning and development.

What kinds of learning environments are needed to support children in a disadvantaged context?

Planning, teaching and assessment

Tell me how you plan for learning

Explain the teaching method you used with the children

How do you know if children are learning?

Tell me about how you are supported for teaching and learning.

Parents

Tell me about parents in this community.

How does problems in families and the communities affect the children?

What do you do to help the children?

APPENDIX 3: APPROVAL TO CONDUCT THE RESEARCH FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Enquiries: Motshumi KK
Reference:
Tel: 051 404 9290
Fax: 086 667 8678
E-mail: motshumikk@edu.fs.gov.za

education
Department of Education
FREE STATE PROVINCE

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR:
STRATEGIC PLANNING, POLICY & RESEARCH

27 March 2014

Ms.Daries GES

RE: APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION:

1. This letter serves as an acknowledgement for receipt of your research request in the Free State Department of Education.

2. Research topic: **Knowledge and practice of curriculum for birth to four years in early childhood centres in disadvantaged contexts in the Free State.**

3. Approval is granted for you to conduct research in the Free State Department of Education.

4. This approval is subject to the following conditions:-

   4.1 The names of participants involved remain confidential.

   4.2 The structured questionnaires are completed and the **interviews are conducted outside normal tuition time or during free periods**.

   4.3 This letter is shown to all participating persons.

   4.4 A bound copy of the research document and a soft copy on a computer disc should be submitted to the Free State Department of Education (Strategic Planning, Policy Development & Research).

   4.5 You will be expected, on completion of your research study, to make a presentation to the relevant stakeholders in the Department.

   4.6 The attached ethics document must be adhered to in the discourse of your study in our department.

5. The costs relating to all the conditions mentioned above are your own responsibility.

6. You are requested to confirm acceptance of the above conditions in writing, within seven days after receipt of this letter. Your acceptance letter should be directed to:

   DIRECTOR: STRATEGIC PLANNING, POLICY AND RESEARCH,
   Old CNA Building, Maitland Street OR Private Bag X20565, BLOEMFONTEIN, 9301

Thank you for choosing to research with us. We wish you every success with your study.

Yours faithfully,

Mothebe MJ –Director: Strategic Planning, Policy & Research.

APPENDIX 4: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE

17 November 2011

ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPLICATION:

KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE OF CURRICULUM FOR BIRTH TO FOUR YEARS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES IN DISADVANTAGED CONTEXTS IN THE FREE STATE.

Dear Ms G Daries

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of Education, I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Ethics Board of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research with the following recommendation:

- You may wish to consider acquiring guardian permission from all learners present in the classroom when video recording devices are utilised. This could be included in the informed consent form for parents.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence, is:

UFS-EDU-2011-0050

This ethical clearance number is valid for research conducted for one year from issuance. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension in writing.We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted in writing to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise. At the conclusion of your research project, please submit a project report stating how the research progressed and confirming any changes to methodology

or practice that arose during the project itself. This report should be under 500 words long and should contain only a brief summary focusing primarily on ethical considerations, issues that may have arisen and steps taken to deal with them during the course of the research. Upon receipt of this report, a final ethical clearance certificate will be issued to you, which will form part of your final dissertation.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Barclay

Faculty Ethics Officer