

**Learning experiences of inner city early childhood development  
managers who participated in an ECD forum: A social work  
perspective**

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**Submitted in accordance with the requirements for  
the degree of**

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SOCIAL SCIENCE IN SOCIAL WORK**

**at the**

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**SUPERVISOR: DR MP SESOKO**

**JUNE 2019**

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**Learning experiences of Inner City Early Childhood Development Managers  
who participated in an ECD Forum: a social work perspective**

I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading 'BA McLean', written over a horizontal line.

SIGNATURE  
(BA McLean)

13 June 2019

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge and thank most sincerely the following people for accompanying me on my research journey.

My supervisor, Dr Mimie Sesoko your faith in me, gentle guidance, genuine interest and support has sustained me to the end.

My mother Maureen for your unconditional love, belief in me and constant encouragement and for sacrificing our together time.

My late father Peter who inspired me to never stop learning.

To Colin who provided me with the opportunity and means to begin my academic journey.

To my children, Catherine and Chris, their partners, Elizabeth and Jesse and my beautiful grandchildren, William and Frances. Thank you for your unbelievable patience, enduring love and endless backing and for sharing too many USA holidays with my research.

To my sisters, brothers and in-laws for your love and interest and for always listening and offering reassuring words.

To all the significant people in my life who have kept me in your thoughts and prayers.

To my friend Nora for planting the seed and for walking beside me throughout the journey, feeding me with your rich knowledge and interest in the wellbeing of children.

To the ECD community, the educators, stakeholders, families and children in the inner city of Durban and especially those managers who shared your experiences with me. Your stories have enriched my understanding and study.

Without my faith this journey would not have been possible and I thank God for giving me the strength and *“assurance of what we hope for and the certainty of what we do not see”*.

## **DEDICATION**

*I dedicate this study to my much loved and amazing children and their children*

*History will judge us by the difference we make in the everyday lives of children*

*Nelson Mandela*

## **ABSTRACT**

Early childhood development is one of the critical services to support the development of young children from conception to age six. Children raised in vulnerable inner cities, with limited access to quality, well-resourced ECD services, are at risk of perpetuating cycles of disadvantage and exclusion. Even though ECD centres exist in abundance in the inner city of Durban, eThekweni Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal, managers of ECD centres face challenges such as meeting rigorous registration norms and standards, a lack of finances, resources, trained staff and socio-economic factors which affect the wellbeing of children.

Using a qualitative approach, this study communicates the role played by the Inner City ECD Forum in the learning experiences of seven ECD managers through their participation in inter-sectoral stakeholder interventions and capacity building trainings. It further outlines the benefits of networking and collective support. Based on the findings, recommendations for practice, policy and further research are made.

### **KEY TERMS**

Early childhood development (ECD); ECD forum; informal and formal learning; capacity building training; inter-sectoral collaboration; stakeholder interventions; networking; participation; norms and standards; social work student.

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

ABCD	Asset Based Community Development
ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
CBOs	Community Based Organisations
DOE	Department of Education
DSD	Department of Social Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
FBOs	Faith Based Organisations
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IFSW	International Federation of Social Workers
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
NACCRRRA	National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NDP	National Development Plan
NELDS	National Early Learning and Development Standards
NGOs	Non-Government Organisations
NIECDP	National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy
NIP	National Integrated Plan
NQF	National Qualification Framework
PPT	Project Preparation Trust
STEM	Science Technology Engineering and Maths
TREE	Training and Resources for Early Childhood
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNISA	University of South Africa

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## **CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter details a general overview of the study which has informed the research process of gathering information on the learning experiences of Inner City Childhood Development Managers who participated in an Early Childhood Development (ECD) Forum in the eThekweni Metropolitan, KwaZulu-Natal Province. The background, problem statement and motivation for the study are provided, followed by a brief outline of the research methodology, data analysis and chapter outline.

### **1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

In both the developed and developing world “early childhood development (ECD) is one of the most cost effective investments a country can make to build human capital and promote sustainable development” (UNICEF 2009:2). Ensuring healthy child development is not only an investment in a country’s capacity to thrive economically but also as a society (UNICEF 2005:08). Since 1994 South Africa has, through policy documents, legislation and in support of international agreements and conventions, expressed the vision of comprehensive support for young children and their families (Richter, Biersteker, Burns, Desmond, Feza, Harrison, Martin, Saloojee, & Slemming 2012:2). This report highlights the urgency and benefit of support for ECD to enhance the country's socio-economic performance.

The provision of early childhood education is, however, very different in a developing country like South Africa compared to a developed country like the United States where early childhood education and care (ECEC) has become the norm for the majority of children (Greenberg, Herman-Smith, Allen & Fram 2013:309). Laughlin 2010 (cited in Greenberg et al 2013:239) note that over 20 million children under the age of five were in some type of childcare arrangement in the United States in 2006. Giving all children, everywhere, in particular those who are disadvantaged, a ‘fair chance in life’ is every country’s hope for breaking cycles of inter-generational inequities (UNICEF 2015:1). In acknowledging the increase in the number of



employed mothers and the social, emotional and cognitive benefits of quality early education, Government policies and public funding in the United States have made ECEC a growing social work field of practice (Greenberg et al 2013:309). Richter et al (2012:3) refers to numerous elements of comprehensive ECD support and services that are in place in South Africa, through birth registration, health care for women and children, social security and early childcare and education (ECCE). There remains a need, however, for improvement insofar as access, quality and support for parents and families, especially poor families and families with disabled children.

Internationally, and in South Africa, Governments, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), policy makers and the private sector have, in the past decade, come to recognize the importance and need for promoting early childhood education and care interventions in addressing learning and developmental gaps, particularly amongst the poor (Human Sciences Research Council 2015:4). Globally it is accepted that an integrated service to children with access to as many resources as possible is the responsibility of parents, communities, non-governmental organisations and government departments, all of whom have a role to play (Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services 2006:1). The South African Government is committed with regard to its responsibility to collaborate with all relevant role players, including different government departments, non-government organisations, private entities and the business sector in the fulfillment of effective ECD programmes for the well-being and development of children in South Africa (National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECDP) 2015:75).

The Human Science Research Council's (HSRC) research findings suggest that, by enhancing the quality of early childhood development interventions, particularly targeting children from disadvantaged communities, potential harmful consequences for a child's cognitive and social development can be prevented or offset (HSRC 2014:5). With regard to disadvantaged families, Heckman (2012:1) is of the opinion that investing in early childhood development from birth to five years delivers better education, health-related behaviour and social and economic outcomes. In South Africa, as in many other parts of Africa, a significant proportion of children live in compromised environments where there is dire poverty and

unemployment. According to the South African Early Childhood Review (2016:8), many children under the age of six live in households where nobody is engaged in income-generating activities. A third of young children are vulnerable to stunting because they fall below the food poverty line.

In recent times, socio-economic factors have caused a mass migration of citizens from rural areas into Southern African cities. The South African Early Childhood Review (2016:5-6) notes that the proportion of young children living in urban areas has increased from 48% to 57%. Because the first five years of life are critical years for growth and development, children are often the most vulnerable in the conditions in which they find themselves, and they require special safeguards and appropriate childcare. All children are protected by rights in The Constitution (South Africa 1996: section 28[1]) to survival, health, protection and development, especially during the first 1000 days of a child's life, a critical period of development. The Children's Act 38 of 2005, (South Africa 2006: section 6), states that a comprehensive national strategy to enable a properly resourced, coordinated and managed ECD system needs to be developed. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999) proposes that, in laying a foundation that will provide opportunities, especially in developing countries where children may be living in compromised situations, the duty to promote and protect the rights and welfare of the child falls on the shoulders of everyone. This includes exposure to ECD interventions early in a child's life.

Studies have shown that quality protection, stimulation and learning opportunities provided at home by parents or caregivers, and also early childhood development centres, have a positive and long-lasting influence on the ability of young children to develop their full potential (Richter et al 2012:15). ECD centres, therefore, play a vital role in providing a safe, secure and structured environment for these children. The Children's Act 38 of 2005 (South Africa 2006: section 6) has prioritized the funding and establishment of early childhood development programmes in communities where families lack the means to provide proper shelter, food and other basic necessities of life to their children.

It is important to note that, although the South African Government is in theory advocating a progressive ECD policy framework, there remain glaring deficiencies in ECD provisioning for both home and centre-based ECD programmes.

Government funding is directed mostly at registered ECD community centres with only a small minority of children in need being reached (HSRC 2015:4). According to Richter et al (2012:3), very little is in place to support parents and families in the areas of undernutrition and with children living with disabilities. Only about 20% of 0-4 year olds from poor households have access to varying degrees of quality childhood development centres. Consequently, in reaching the majority of children who require support, there is great need to assist aspiring ECD practitioners to achieve sustainable change on micro, mezzo and macro levels through quality ECD service provision and capacity building for staff (World Vision 2016:02).

In addressing the National Development Plan 2030 vision for an inclusive and responsive social protection system that supports ECD, the eThekweni Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal Province, approached the University of South Africa (UNISA) Department of Social Work. Driven by the South African Early Childhood Review (2016:24), which emphasises the need for increased efforts by various duty-bearers to strengthen the protection and safety of children, the eThekweni Municipality was concerned about the increasing number of under-resourced and unregistered ECD centres in the inner city and also the quality of services rendered with the resulting social consequences.

The Global Definition of Social Work as defined by the International Federation of Social Workers (2014) highlights the importance of promoting social change and development as well as the responsibility of social workers to engage in diverse situations to address life challenges, advance human rights and enhance the well-being and liberation of people. Guided by the social work objectives, and in addressing the prescripts of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 to ensure the safety and protection of all children, the university placed the first social work student at an ECD centre in the inner city in 2011 for his/her practical internship. In 2016, seventeen social work students completed their practical training in fourteen ECD centres located in the city, offering social support services to the children, their families, the managers and staff.

The placement of social work students in ECD centres in the city coincided with the establishment of the Point and Inner City ECD Forum in 2011 to assist ECD practitioners who were feeling disenfranchised and were experiencing numerous

problems that needed immediate attention. The ECD Forum consists of ECD practitioners, Government Departments, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), the business and private sector and UNISA social work staff and students. On a quarterly basis, managers, educators and the various stakeholders meet. These gatherings provide a space to establish on-going dialogue, awareness and training as well as collective efforts to promote universal and equitable access to quality ECD services for young children living in the inner city. The social work students placed in ECD centres actively participate in the Forum meetings and activities during the course of their academic year. Since the Forum's inception in 2011, the committee has been able to document some of the problems and challenges facing ECD centres using individual and group feedback and questionnaires. In 2014, the university and social work students assisted the municipality by auditing ECD centres in the inner city. This coincided with the forum hosting a Focus Group Discussion to create an understanding of the challenges in meeting norms and standards for ECD centres in the city and to look at what support was required for centres and practitioners. Addendum F provides feedback on the various levels of challenges faced by ECD centres in the city and makes recommendations to the municipality on how to address some of the challenges. The outcome of the audit formed the basis for many of the activities and interventions appearing on Addendum E, that support the learning experiences of Inner City ECD managers, which is the focus of this study.

A goal of the forum is, therefore, to promote awareness, understanding and joint decision-making through capacity building, learning opportunities in support of ECD managers and centres because many of the problems are mutual and so extensive that they require collective resolution to make a difference and to see change. The stakeholders have formed a supportive network for the ECD centres. In developing networks, Plastrik and Taylor (2006:14) state that many individuals link to achieve collective goals. These "social networks", or systems of social ties such as community forums, are committed to addressing critical needs and improving the quality of life in a specific geographical area. Forums afford communities a voice and an avenue to participate in the governance structures of their area.

Research conducted in England has shown that inter-professional collaborations are invaluable relationships, which can prevent the social exclusion of children. They are now a common feature of welfare policies throughout the world (Edwards 2009:7). An important feature of forums is, therefore, that they are dependent on participation and partnerships. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2015:34) points out that integrated services and effective partnerships mobilize communities by tapping into their collective knowledge and skills and so jointly engaging different stakeholders in local problem resolution. Partnerships provide the capacity for individuals and the ECD centres to achieve what they may not otherwise achieve.

Within the South African context, the Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 details the value of partnerships between different role-players in the development of an integrated approach to ECD programmes that can take different forms and, thereby, meet the needs of the whole child. The Act further details the value of collaborative efforts and a multi-disciplinary approach to problem solving that draws on the professional skills of people from different disciplines in order to find new solutions to complex problems.

The NIECDP (2015:74) recognises the importance of Government collaborating with all relevant role players in a joint effort to commit to and align policies, laws and programmes to achieve the vision, goals and objectives of the national integrated ECD policy. The value of inter-sectoral collaboration is recognized in White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education and is central to realizing the goals of the National Integrated Plan for Early Childhood Development in South Africa (NIP 2005). This plan envisages both integration and collaboration resulting in expanded service delivery and more efficient and effective service delivery (Richter et al 2012:23).

In referring to the critical role that municipalities have to play in securing the rights and associated responsibilities with regard to ECD programmes and services, the National Integrated ECD Policy (NIECDP 2015:75) states that municipalities should have a five-year plan on ECD services within their Integrated Development Plan (IDP). For these programmes and services to be effective, the Policy recommends that different government departments, organisations, agencies and individuals must network, collaborate and develop coordinated activities to achieve a common

purpose in the best interest of children. In this regard, the eThekweni Municipality and the Point and Inner City ECD Forum formed a strong alliance in the support and delivery of learning experiences to enhance ECD programmes and services to children living in the city.

Govender (2015:38) in her research findings notes, however, that gaps exist in the plan, mainly owing to the lack of established systems between government departments and the inter-sectoral sector. In order to realise the goals of the NIPECD for integration and collaboration in expanded service delivery, there, therefore, remains an urgent need for national, provincial and local government departments to work together with civil society and other partners to develop and implement comprehensive policies and programmes and to commit budgets to early childhood care and education. The NIECDP (2015:81) emphasises that NGO service providers be recognized and utilized to complement the fulfillment of its ECD commitments. The collaborative efforts and activities of the ECD Forum reflect the benefits of networking to improve the use of resources and provide effective, 'interwoven' services.

In the inner city of Durban, challenges exist at local government level owing to a lack of capacity and competencies available to address the issues faced by the 'mushrooming' ECD centres in the area. The challenges facing ECD centres and managers in the city are further exacerbated by the Department of Social Development (DSD) being overstretched, which results in limited consideration for the problems on the ground. Local municipalities have a responsibility to participate in the planning of ECD services and to support childcare facilities to meet infrastructural health and safety standards, registration and the development of ECD service provision infrastructure (NIECDP 2015:81). The failure, in most instances, of ECD centres in the city to meet norms and standards as laid down by the Children's Act 38 of 2005 means that much needs to be done to improve the situation, hence the establishment of the ECD Forum in supporting learning opportunities for ECD managers and the motivation for this research.

Various problems and deficiencies identified within the inner city ECD centres include:

- The area where this study concentrated most of the field research is characterized by over population, poverty, violence and crime, gender inequality, a high incidence of substance abuse, prostitution, HIV and AIDS, and xenophobia, all of which have had both a negative effect on, and directly influence, the development of children in this community. ECD is often compromised and even ignored, making these matters worse. Efforts to meet basic needs, such as community infrastructure and the development of human resources to counter the burdens associated with these stressors, are lacking. It is, therefore, incumbent on social workers placed in ECD centres and guided by the values and vision of the profession in advancing human rights, to enhance the wellbeing and liberation of those children and community members caught up in these circumstances (International Federation of Social Workers 2014).
- The need to generate an income by members of the community means that the Forum continues to find an increasing number of ECD centres, crèches, pre-schools and after-care schools springing up in the inner city of Durban. Concern exists amongst officials of the local municipality and early childhood professionals because many of these centres are unregistered and under resourced, and not able to comply with norms and standards. In some instances, the centres are not even aware of Governmental ECD policies. This is in direct conflict with the Children's Act 38 of 2005, which emphasizes that ECD services and programmes should provide learning and support in compliance with prescribed national norms and standards.
- Because many of the ECD centres in the city are operating illegally and, are, therefore, not receiving Government subsidies, this excludes them from receiving monitoring and support. The Children's Act No 38 of 2005 states that, to ensure that ECD programmes and centres align with regulations, norms, and standards, monitoring and assessment are important. Unqualified teachers employed in these centres without proper programmes and infrastructure deprive the children of learning opportunities necessary for their holistic development and well-being. Children, according to Kostelnik, as cited by Theoharis and Brooks (2012:119-120), get to know and master

their world through play. They learn to solve problems, to think, plan, investigate, and use their social skills in response to the stimuli they receive. Many of the children in these deprived environments are devoid of intellectual stimulation.

- The fees the ECD centres are able to charge are sometimes extremely low because of the low-income levels of parents and the high unemployment rate within this deprived socio-economic environment. It is difficult in most cases for the centres to meet the challenge of providing suitable education and care as well as satisfying the Governmental norms and standards for ECD in terms of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (South Africa 2006: section 94). This results in variable levels of ECD education. Although the NIECDP subsidy funding is well meaning and essential to the sustainability of ECD centre programmes in poor communities, Biersteker (2011:40) notes that it does not meet the running costs while the need to pay fees excludes the poorest of children. Many families are unable to pay school fees at all. This places a burden on the financial resources of the centre, which negatively affects the practitioner-child ratio and the availability of suitable educational and play equipment. As these centres rely on parents paying fees, which are often minimal and paid sporadically, it follows that the employment conditions and salaries earned by staff in these ECD centres are below average. Some centres operate privately by owners primarily 'for profit' and are run on a subsistence basis, employing people whose primary concern is often their own survival. There are also centres in the city operated by Churches, or in premises rented from Churches, with the focus essentially being to provide the staff of the centre with an income.
- The Children's Act 38 of 2005 stipulates that ECD programmes ensure the provision of a daily nutritious meal; poverty experienced by many families, coupled with budgetary constraints within these centres, however, is a threat to a healthy nutritional programme. Not all ECD centres are able to provide a daily, nutritionally-balanced meal for children. At centres where children bring their own food, the child may arrive at school without having eaten breakfast, and the food sent from home is, in most instances, not healthy.



Overcrowding in the centres also often leads to the unhealthy preparation of food and the spread of infection. The National Health Act No. 60 of 2003 aims to regulate and protect the rights of vulnerable groups and fulfill the children's right to basic nutrition. According to Vorster (2010:4), an unhealthy diet affects more than a child's physical growth and ability to thrive. Under-nutrition significantly affects a child's behavioural development and competence to interact with his or her environment effectively. The Nutrition Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Centres (2016:1) suggest that the damage to the physical and mental well-being of children through poor nutrition can be irreversible.

- The location and physical environment of many of the ECD centres in the inner city often contravenes local government health and safety requirements. Several centres are in high-rise buildings, office blocks or in unhealthy, poorly ventilated areas with no access to sunshine and green, safe outdoor spaces for children to play. Inadequate space within the facilities results in overcrowding which places constraints on active learning. The Children's Act 38 of 2005 asserts that ECD environments must meet the emotional, cognitive, sensory, spiritual, moral, physical, social and communicative development needs of children. Furthermore the NIECDP (2015:24), in referring to play and recreational facilities, states that a child has the right to rest and that leisure and play activities should be appropriate to their age, as play, in a supportive, secure and stress-free environment is important to promoting children's early learning and skills development.

Many of the aforementioned deficiencies and challenges are intentionally concealed by the non-compliant operators of ECD centres and this results in a distortion of the data obtained by researchers and other interested parties intent on helping to resolve the problems. At times, there appears to be an attitude of 'anything is better than nothing' approach. In commenting on ECD service delivery in accordance with South Africa's NIECDP (2005), Biersteker (2011:42) notes that more advocacy and transparency at all levels are required. There is a lack of parental involvement and support for parents who are often ignorant about the importance and value of early childhood development on brain growth and subsequent learning as well as the

psychological and social development of their children. Parents and other primary caregivers, therefore, need to be aware of what acceptable ECD services to demand.

As highlighted in policy documents referred to above, in order to address and resolve the aforementioned challenges and issues, dedicated advocacy within Government and from civil society structures is necessary. In an effort to address some of the problems and support the managers of the ECD centres in the inner city, the Forum committee adopted an 'open door', non-threatening policy. Rather than 'sweep under the carpet' and ignore the irregularities of ECD practice, the participants of ECD Forum meetings were encouraged to be open and transparent in sharing their challenges and needs.

The forum, therefore, was a platform for ECD managers to learn through networking, sharing resources and knowledge, and participating in capacity building activities and programmes (see Addendum E). The focus of the forum activities is on a wide range of ECD issues, from practical challenges around registration, infrastructure and resources to educating ECD managers and centres on safety and security, nutrition, educational stimulation and programmes that will meet policies on norms and standards for the wellbeing of children in their care. The Forum also served as an avenue to challenge authorities collectively and advocate on behalf of the children. There is support for managers who have an opportunity to share their concerns and realize that they are not alone, that their challenges are real and that, rather than concealing them, they can face problems realistically and learn how best to address them. Participants learn about possibilities beyond their limitations and how their situation and the wellbeing of children's rights can be improved. The experiential learning focuses on enhancing the ECD manager's personal autonomy, on self-fulfillment, interpersonal relationships and training in support of sustainable practices in the best interest of the children accessing ECD services in the city.

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

According to Bryman (2007:5-20), a research problem is a statement about an area of concern and conditions to be improved upon that point to the need for meaningful understanding and investigation. The purpose of the problem statement is to

introduce the reader to the importance of the researched topic and to place the problem within a particular context. The problem statement builds on the context in the introduction section. It serves as the starting point for the research and as a unifying thread runs throughout all elements of the study (Rowlands 2010). The problem statement, therefore, defines and presents to the reader the importance of the topic in order to frame specific questions.

As stated in the introduction, numerous socio-economic challenges that have a bearing on their well-being have an impact on ECD practitioners, centres, children and families in the inner city of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. From a social work perspective, observations are that exposure to a multitude of risk factors for many children living in this area and attending registered and unregistered ECD centres hinders their development and renders them vulnerable.

The problem of 'mushrooming' ECD centres unable to adhere to norms and standards, owing to facilities, programmes and practice being in contravention of government policies, is of great concern to the local municipal departments responsible for ECD. Many of the ECD centres are going unmonitored as they remain 'under the radar'. In most instances, the ECD managers have good intentions but find themselves struggling to administer ECD services in compliance with acceptable standards because of limited training, support and resources.

The researcher has positioned this study in the South African context within a principle adopted in the National Development Plan Vision 2030 (NDP, 2011, Chapter 15) of enabling and facilitating active citizenry through a community-based ECD Forum. The Forum offered all role players, individuals and communities, NGOs, government and the private sector opportunities to share information and resources and provide learning opportunities for the ECD managers. Offering capacity building interventions and activities through collaborative efforts to support the managers and struggling ECD centres created opportunities for both learning and transformation in relation to the above problem.

In collaboration with various stakeholders and the social work students, the interventions and activities of the quarterly meetings were well coordinated during Forum meetings. Experiential learning opportunities offered an inclusive system of

participation, cooperation, capacity building, advocacy and support. According to a study by Zeivots (2016:355), 'experiential learning' is an inter-personal experience process that focuses on personal growth, development and self-actualization. As a person learns, his/her self-image becomes clearer and more positive and he/she is more likely to face the challenges at hand. Learning focusing on the cognitive side only, according to Dewey, as cited by Zeivots (2016:355), can alienate learners from their affective selves. Emotions and human experiences have an important role to play in learning experiences or transformative learning. Damasio, Meyer and Turner, as cited by Zeivots (2016:356), are of the opinion that learning is unlikely to happen in the absence of emotions. Addendum E reflects the interventions and activities that the ECD Forum implemented between 2011 and 2016.

In the inner city of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal there had never been a study conducted on the Point and Inner City ECD Forum. This forum had good intentions, as outlined by some of the programmes and activities introduced, but the question remained as to whether there had been learning for the managers and whether their participation in the ECD forum had assisted them in addressing matters of practical concern in the best interest of children.

Given the challenges outlined under the general introduction, this study explores and describes the learning experiences for inner city ECD managers through their participation in the Point and Inner City ECD Forum interventions and activities.

#### **1.4 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY**

The researcher was the student coordinator for the Bright Site Project Durban, a service-learning centre for fourth level University of South Africa (UNISA) social work students. The service-learning centre is located in the Point precinct of the inner city of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Although this area has seen upgrading, the empowerment and development of residents is a key concern that requires further attention. The university premises are located strategically close to the area where upgrades have taken place, and they served as a venue, hosting the ECD forum meetings. The researcher, as the coordinator of the service-learning centre, participated in the inter-sectoral meetings as a member of the committee representing UNISA.

The researcher has had much interaction with the local municipality and other stakeholders who have knowledge of the social interventions needed in the community. She had been involved in the ECD forum since 2011 when the University launched the Bright Site Project of Durban. The Bright Site management, in recognising the importance and need for promoting early childhood education and care interventions, placed the first social work student at an ECD centre in 2011 for her practical training. Early childhood development has subsequently become a flagship project and a placement opportunity for students in the Point and Inner City with seventeen students completing their practical training at fourteen ECD centres in 2016.

In 2014, the university and social work students participated in auditing ECD centres in the inner city with the support of the local municipality. Furthermore, in collaboration with the Point and Inner City ECD Forum, the researcher and students conducted a focus group discussion workshop. The purpose of the workshop was to:

- Increase awareness and understanding of the challenges and problems experienced in meeting norms and standards for ECD centres;
- Look at what type of support was required and how best it could be provided to ECD centres and managers to assist them in moving to the next level; and
- Provide a platform for the exchange of information on how to mobilize, develop and share resources.

Feedback from the audit and the focus group discussion set in motion the revival of the community-based ECD Forum gatherings and initiatives. The researcher accepted an invitation to sit on the Forum committee as an *ex officio* member and representative of the UNISA social work student interventions. Since 2011, the Forum has met on a quarterly basis to provide a platform for the development and support of ECD managers and centres.

In addition to the researcher's being a participant in the ECD Forum activities, as a social worker and coordinator of social work student practical placements her interest in this study was provoked by the experiences and concerns reported by

the social work students placed in early childhood settings for their practical training. With the above context as background, it was evident that promoting meaningful learning for the managers and psychosocial support and development for children could not be accomplished effectively through the isolated efforts of any one person (Anderson 2013:23).

The Point and Inner City ECD Forum served as an applicable and working example of the collaborative efforts among participating ECD centres who collaborated with the university between 2011 and 2016 to offer work integrated learning to fourth level UNISA social work students. The expertise of the researcher and the social work students made an important contribution to the Forum and the ECD centres. Having been involved for a period of six years with the ECD Forum, the researcher's interest in this study was to understand the value of the forum for managers and, from a social work perspective, to determine the benefits of the Forum for unregistered, under-resourced ECD centres in the interests of the well-being of the child.

In view of the researcher's being closely involved in the development and coordination of the activities of the Forum and the monitoring of social work students placed in ECD centres in the city, reflexivity as a process of 'self-consciousness' inquiry was practised during the study. The researcher kept a journal during the process of interviewing participants to avoid the 'Thomas Theorem' during the study, where "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology Online, sv. "Thomas Theorem"). This assisted the researcher in maintaining an objective study, avoiding, as far as possible, personal perceptions and biases.

The assumption of the ECD forum is that it has provided learning experiences for managers through capacity-building workshops, focus group discussions and awareness-raising presentations and programmes. This study drew on the Strengths Perspective in social work practice to examine the influence the ECD Forum interventions had had on the learning experiences of the ECD managers.

## **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTION, GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

In this section the research question, goal and objectives of the research study will be highlighted.

### **1.5.1 Research question**

The research question defines what the researcher wants to learn or understand and is, therefore, one of the most important pieces, or the heart, of the research design. Qualitative studies, as noted by Creswell (2009:129), ask research questions that do not permit predictions or hypotheses. Concurring with this idea, Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011:35) argue that a qualitative research question focuses on exploring perceptions, opinions, beliefs and feelings. Research questions should begin with preliminary questions (Maxwell 2005:65-66) allowing the researcher to keep an open mind when exploring a phenomenon, and these questions will often evolve and be redefined during the research process. Maxwell further points out that qualitative research questions tend to place an emphasis on 'meaning', 'context' and 'processes'.

To this effect, the study set out to develop an understanding of how the ECD practitioners experience their world, the practical issues and problem areas that they, and the ECD centres, face, how these have had an impact on the well-being of the children, and what processes implemented through the forum were beneficial to the managers' learning experience. The research question formulated for this study is, therefore, as follows:

- What are the learning experiences of Inner City ECD managers who participated in the ECD Forum?

### **1.5.2 Research goal and objectives**

The research question informs the goal and the objectives of the study. According to Locke and Latham (2006:265), goals refer to future valued outcomes. The setting of goals implies discontent with an existing condition and the desire to attain a specific outcome. In the view of Maxwell (2013:4), the goal defines the issues that the researcher wants to clarify and the practices and policies that the researcher is wanting to influence. In order to understand the value of the ECD forum for the

managers of inner city ECD centres, the goal of this research was to have an in-depth understanding of the learning experiences of the Inner City ECD managers who participated in the ECD forum.

Research objectives may be written using the general focus research question as a base. Objectives are evidence of the researcher's clear sense of purpose and direction (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009:34). Problems invariably raise questions, and, in searching for answers, the researcher was able to formulate the objectives of the research. Research can have several legitimate objectives but the overriding objective must be to gain useful or interesting knowledge (Walliman 2001:190). The research objectives indicate what measures were taken to investigate the problem or provide a means of overcoming it. The objectives for this study were:

- To explore the learning experiences for ECD managers through their participation in the Point and Inner City ECD forum; and
- To describe the learning experiences for ECD managers through their participation in the Point and Inner City ECD forum.

In order to reach the research goal, the following research task objectives were attained:

- To obtain a sample of ECD managers from the Point and Inner City area who had participated in the ECD forum activities;
- To conduct semi-structured interviews with the sample of ECD managers from ECD centres in the Point and Inner City in order to explore their learning experiences through the ECD forum interventions and activities;
- To sift, sort and analyze the qualitative data collected according to Tesch's guidelines, as cited by Creswell (2012:244-5);
- To describe the learning experiences of the ECD managers who had participated in the ECD forum interventions and activities;



- To analyze and interpret the data and conduct a literature control in order to verify the findings; and
- To draw conclusions and recommendations about the learning experiences of ECD managers participating in the Point and Inner City ECD Forum interventions and activities.

## **1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The methodology is the systematic practice of solving the research problem, the 'science' of how the research is done (Kothari 2004:8). It describes the research design and procedures carried out in the collection and analysis of data and the justification for their choice in the context of the study (Kallet 2004, as cited by Fox & Jennings 2014:3). Methodology focuses on the plan of action that links the procedures to the outcomes (Crottys 1998, as cited by Creswell 2003:4).

The 'methods' are the tools or techniques employed by the researcher to collect and analyze data, such as questionnaires, interviews, observations, field notes, conversations and recordings (Bryman 2008:160). Examining written research, interviewing practitioners and investigating the assumptions are central to the purpose of methodology, according to Bryman (2008:165).

This study, based on a qualitative research methodology, allowed for interpretations from the frame of reference of the research participants as they explore and describe their understanding of their histories, their social and material circumstances and their perceptions and experiences of a particular phenomenon (Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton Nicholls & Ormston 2014:4).

According to Denzin and Lincoln, as cited by Creswell (2013:44), qualitative research is an activity that locates the observer in the world of the participant, thereby making the world visible. This can be viewed as the researcher's getting "as close as possible" to the participants (Creswell 2013:20).

The researcher followed the qualitative research methodology in order to gain a greater understanding of the individual thoughts and views of the ECD managers through their subjective experiences of learning and participating in the ECD Forum. In using this approach, the researcher was able to spend time getting to know the

participants, the environment in which they worked, their day-to-day challenges within the ECD centres, and how they managed these.

Being located 'in the world' of the participants and through observations and the interpretation of the conversations, the researcher was able to develop themes and portray a picture of the phenomenon being studied.

Chapter Three provides a comprehensive presentation on the application of the research methodology, namely the qualitative approach, and the research design, method of data collection, analysis and verification of data.

## **1.7 CLARIFICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS**

Language is often vague according to Sequeira (2015:4), and, therefore, it is important for the researcher to have a clear understanding of the words and terms that will be used in the study to avoid misinterpretation that could conflict with measurements and results later in the research. By clarifying key concepts, the researcher will specify the meanings of the terms used in this research.

### **1.7.1 Learning Experiences**

The dictionary defines 'learning' as "knowledge gained by study: instruction or scholarship" (English Collins Dictionary 2000, sv "learning") and 'experience' as "direct personal participation or observation: actual knowledge or contact" (English Collins Dictionary 2000, sv "experience"). These definitions imply a personal interaction through traditional or non-traditional methods, programmes or other experiences in which learning takes place.

In analyzing experiential learning, students from the University of Western Ontario felt that learning took place when there was a combination of mental, emotional and physiological stimuli. They noted that conditions for learning included observing, doing, or living through situations, and that learning experiences are associated with skill development and the attainment of practical knowledge. Furthermore, the process of analysis and reflection plays a significant part in the act of sustainable learning experiences (Hansen 2000:27).

Amongst common ideas of experiential learning are professional and personal development, experience-based training and development, outdoors education and adventure learning (Zeivots 2016:355). Engagement at some level with experience is crucial in learning experiences. According to Beard and Wilson, cited by Zeivots (2016), active engagement between the inner world of the person and the outer world of the environment constitutes the 'sense-making' process of learning experiences.

### **1.7.2 Manager**

The Oxford Dictionary describes a manager as "a person responsible for controlling or administering an organization or group of staff". Furthermore, managers can be "regarded in terms of their skills in managing resources" (Oxford University Press 2017, sv "manager").

According to Mujtaba, Han and Cao (2013:55), a sense of purpose and direction in a manager will have a contagious effect on his or her peers, colleagues and employees. A purpose-driven manager is likely to be realistic in facing facts while setting high standards in order to meet objectives.

Furthermore, Tyler (2016:48) notes that managers have the highest rates of anxiety owing to the strain and frustration of trying to meet the needs of both superiors and subordinates while ignoring and underappreciating their own needs and efforts at times.

The term 'manager' in this context, referred to the owner, principal or person responsible for controlling and/or administering the activities and general functioning of the ECD centre. The research considered the learning experiences for ECD managers through the forum and the effect of their participation and whether it had assisted in the regulation of personal and professional stressors. It also looked at the shortfalls within the ECD centres that inhibited their role and functioning as effective managers.

### **1.7.3 Early Childhood Development (ECD)**

Early childhood refers, in the NIECDP (2015:11), to the period of human development from birth until the year before a child enters formal school.

According to the Children's Act No. 38 of 2005, early childhood development means the process of emotional, cognitive, sensory, spiritual, moral, physical, social and communication development of children from birth to school-going age.

UNICEF (2001:2) notes that early childhood development forms the foundation for the future welfare and learning of children and is, therefore, a critical stage of development. While Richter et al (2012:14), ECD refers to children from conception to Grade R when they are 5-6 years of age. In South Africa, however, it is important that the age parameters of ECD are consistent and that the age range from pregnancy to age 8 years as outlined in the UN General Recommendation No. 7 applies.

Taking into consideration the economic, environmental and social challenges experienced by many families living in the inner city, from a social work perspective, ECD includes safeguarding the rights of young children attending inner city ECD centres from birth to school-going age. An objective of the forum was to ensure that these children had equal opportunities to grow and thrive in safe, caring and stimulating environments for learning.

#### **1.7.4 Early Childhood Development Centre (ECD centre)**

A centre is defined as a place at which some specified activity is concentrated, a place of influence (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2016, sv. "centre).

The NIECDP (2015:11) refers to an ECD Centre as a partial care facility that provides an early childhood programme with an early learning and development focus for children from birth until the year before they enter Grade R and formal school.

The Department of Social Development classifies an ECD centre as being "any building or premises maintained or used, whether or not for gain, for the admission, protection and temporary or partial care of more than six children away from their parents" (Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services 2006:6).

The Higher Education Act (Act 101) of 1997 and the National Qualifications Framework Act (Act 67) of 2008 (South Africa 2017:8) refer to community based

play groups, partial care facilities and child and youth care centres as facilities that focus on early learning and care and development of children from birth until the year before they enter school.

For the purpose of the study, an ECD centre refers to a facility that admits babies, toddlers and pre-school aged children, and it refers to a crèche, day care centre, a playgroup, a pre-school, after school care centre or a home based care centre. The researcher will refer collectively to these sites as ECD centres.

#### **1.7.5 Early Childhood Development Forum (ECD Forum):**

The dictionary defines a forum as “a meeting or medium where ideas and views on a particular issue can be exchanged” (Oxford English Dictionary 2010, sv “forum”). According to the HSRC (2015:4-5), a characteristic of forums is their decision-making worth for members and as a platform to share critical needs; a forum provides a space for members to improve their quality of life.

Save the Children (2015:5-6) refers to an ECD forum as a network of ECD practitioners from a specific geographical area. A network is a type of social organization which offers social-change agents opportunities to generate capacities to manage social problems and improve practice (Plastrik et al 2006:4).

The Point and Inner City ECD Forum refers to a network of ECD practitioners, centres and interested stakeholders who meet on a regular basis with the purpose of networking, capacity building, identifying and sharing challenges, ideas and resources as well as developing opportunities for skills development and best practice.

Ideally, community forums should provide participatory channels of communication and negotiation between various role-players so that participants can contribute to understanding and improving their quality of life (HSRC 2015:6). For participating ECD practitioners in the forum activities, the intention of the collaborative efforts of various role-players was to offer learning experiences that contributed to a greater adherence of ECD norms and standards in the best interests of children.

### **1.7.6 Early Childhood Development Practitioner**

A practitioner is a person who practises a profession or regularly does an activity that requires skill or practice (Merriam-Webster 2017, sv “practitioner”).

According to The Department of Social Development (Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services 2006), an ECD practitioner refers to all early childhood development “education and training development practitioners, i.e. educators, trainers, facilitators, lecturers, caregivers and development officers, including those qualified by their experience, and who are involved in providing services in homes, centres and schools”. In respect of educators and trainers, this includes formally and non-formally trained individuals who are providing ECD educational services.

The NIECDP (2015:12) refers to an ECD practitioner as a person who provides early childhood development services through formal early childhood development programmes, family services and playgroups and training, as well as those providing management support services to these workers.

Reference to practitioners in this study includes all ECD owners, principals, managers, teachers, caregivers and support staff in ECD centres. Practitioners participating in the forum include both formally and non-formally trained practitioners.

### **1.7.7 Early Childhood Development Services**

The NIECDP (2015:12) refers to services as support provided to infants and young children or to the child's parent or caregiver by a government department or civil society organization with the intention of promoting the child's early emotional, cognitive, sensory, spiritual, moral, physical, social and communication development as ECD Services.

According to Richter et al (2012:3), services should include a range of services from the provision of water and sanitation, social security, birth registration and health services to structured programmes for learning. The Department of Social Development (Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services 2006) notes

that ECD services provided at ECD centres need to be complemented by parents, families and communities in order to address children's holistic needs.

The National Development Plan Vision 2030 (NDP 2011:264) recommends that services should be flexible and responsive to the needs of children, families and communities. Some services need targeting at children while others provide support to caregivers. It is also essential that "everybody has access to services of a consistently high standard regardless of who they are and where they live".

In accordance with the Department of Social Development Guidelines as stated above, the forum endeavoured to offer a wide range of stakeholder interventions and activities that provided ECD practitioners with information, skills and training to support norms and standards for ECD. The intention of such learning experiences is to enable and develop the practitioners personally and professionally in providing services that meet the holistic needs of the children.

#### **1.7.8 Early Childhood Development Programmes**

The NIECD Policy (2015:12) defines programmes as those providing one or more forms of daily care, development, early learning opportunities and support to children from birth until the year before they enter formal school. These programmes include, but are not limited to:

- Community-based play groups;
- Outreach and support programmes;
- Parenting support and enrichment programmes;
- Support for psychosocial needs;
- ECD programmes provided at partial care facilities and child and youth care facilities; and
- Any other programme that focuses on the care, development and early learning of children.

ECD programmes provide opportunities where young children can learn together in safe, affordable daycare settings through structured programmes. These programmes should be developmentally appropriate and provide young children in ECD centres with educational stimulation in preparation for formal schooling (Richter et al 2012:3).

ECD programmes are “planned activities designed to promote the emotional, mental, spiritual, moral, physical and social development of children from birth to nine years” (Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services 2006:7).

According to UNICEF (2009:3), investing in good quality ECD educational programmes prior to entering school improves learning outcomes for children, reduces school dropout rates and improves achievement especially amongst marginalized groups. A good quality ECD programme should include education, protection, health and nutrition, and stimulation and care.

Addendum E provides a table of interventions and activities undertaken by the ECD forum over a period of six years. Their focus was on supporting practitioners and ECD centres in the inner city to develop an educational curriculum to meet the holistic developmental needs of the children in their care.

### **1.7.9 Participation**

The dictionary defines ‘participation’ as “the state of being related to a larger whole” (Merriam-Webster 2016, sv “participation”).

Reed (2008:2422) refers to participation as being similar to a ‘service contract’, where the parties cultivate feelings of mutual trust and respect and learn from one another to negotiate potential solutions. Participation requires “changing the rules” and seeing how people can be included and the role they play once included. It is about creating a space for people to debate issues and to participate directly or indirectly in decision-making (Viriya 2009:17).

In the context of this study, participation in the ECD Forum activities refers to the right of all ECD centres located in the inner city and interested ECD stakeholders to engage in the meetings, discussions, activities and decision-making processes of the forum. Although guided by a constitution and membership criteria, the forum



adopted an inclusive approach to membership whereby registered and unregistered ECD centres were welcome.

#### **1.7.10 Interventions and Activities**

An ‘intervention’ describes, “A situation in which someone becomes involved in a particular issue, problem, etc. in order to influence what happens” (Macmillan Dictionary 2016, sv “intervention”).

Activities refer to processes of participation that have the potential to involve mental functions, specifically “an educational procedure designed to stimulate learning by first-hand experience” (Merriam-Webster 2016, sv “activities”).

In commenting on the interaction between lack of food and lack of stimulation in the developing world where a significant number of children suffer from impaired growth, UNICEF (2010:3) makes reference to simple love, play and communication activities that are central to enhancing good development, and, as the definition implies, having an influence on a particular problem.

In the case of the Forum interventions and activities, site visits, workshops, trainings and presentations offered a cross-section of educational activities to enhance ‘first-hand’ learning experiences for inner city ECD managers. Refer to Addendum E.

#### **1.7.11 Stakeholders**

The most common definition of ‘stakeholders’, according to Mathur, Price, Austin and Moobela (2007:4), is those “affected by the outcome or those who can affect the outcome of a proposed development intervention”. They include those who are simply interested in an activity or the development of a project and may include people, communities, organisations, institutions and even “the natural environment”.

This concurs with the dictionary definition of a stakeholder as being “one who is involved in or affected by a course of action (Merriam-Webster 2017, sv. “Stakeholder”).

Referring to being “affected by a course of action” the HSRC, in its research, comments on the benefits of ECD Forum participation for practitioners and external

stakeholders such as local government, which promotes leveraging support and building relationships.

Stakeholders under the Point and Inner City ECD Forum include both those who are affected by, and those who can affect, the aims and objectives of the ECD Forum by offering their time, donations, expertise and services. This includes the ECD centres in the Point and Inner City, ECD practitioners and professionals, government departments, NGOs, business, and private individuals and all role-players who have an interest in the wellbeing of ECD centres in the city.

### **1.7.12 Inter-sectoral collaboration**

Inter-sectoral collaboration describes “cooperation among different groups that enables them to solve common problems” (Medical Dictionary 2009, sv “intersectoral collaboration”). In describing collaborative processes, Mathur et al (2007:6) mention that group activities enhance social capital.

Inter-sectoral collaboration can promote the goals of the NIPECD of both expanded service delivery and more effective and efficient services (Richter et al 2012:28). The plan recognizes that different government departments and stakeholders should work collaboratively to achieve a common ECD development goal. The White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education (South Africa 2001:37) recognizes the importance of inter-sectoral collaboration when taking into consideration the “indivisible rights of young children”.

To this end, the establishment of the Point and Inner City ECD Forum in 2011 resulted from the identified challenges experienced by ECD centres in the inner city. Furthermore, the local municipality motivated the need for collaborative efforts on behalf of numerous role-players, including Government and civil society to understand, improve and address the common problems experienced by registered and unregistered ECD centres.

### **1.7.13 Social Work**

The Global Definition of Social Work (International Federation of Social Workers 2014) refers to social work as “a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the

empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing”.

With reference to the Children’s Act 38 of 2005, social workers have an important role to play in supporting and ensuring registered and unregistered ECD facilities become compliant and adhere to norms and standards. They also have statutory obligations to ensure the safety and protection of children and, in the ECD field, this refers to children under the age of five years attending ECD facilities.

Research conducted in the Western Cape (Govender 2015:1-2) refers to the alarming rate of ECD facilities being launched and the unsatisfactory quality of services being rendered at many of the unregistered facilities. This has highlighted the vital role that social workers employed by DSD play in monitoring and enabling ECD facilities in their efforts to comply with registration requirements in the best interest of the children.

#### **1.7.14 Norms and Standards**

A ‘norm’ is “an accepted standard or way of being or doing things” (Cambridge University Press, 2017 sv. “norms”) and a ‘standard’ is “something that others of a similar type are compared to or measured by, or the expected level of quality” (Cambridge University Press, 2017 sv. “Standards”). Norms and standards are approved rules monitored by an authoritative body (Davis as cited in Govender 2015:8) The norms and standards, therefore, represent accepted principles and the most suitable way of providing a service.

In order to acquire full registration and qualify for funding, an ECD centre or programme must meet norms and standards (Children's Act No 38 of 2005). The Act provides a comprehensive framework for the provision of social services for children in South Africa, enables, and regulates the provision of ECD services and programmes to young children according to stipulated norms and standards that aim at helping children realise their full potential.

The Department of Basic Education National Early Learning and Development Standards (NELDS 2009) and the South African National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for Children from Birth to Four (2015) provide guidance for the design of early learning programmes. The NCF (2015) builds on the NELDS (2009) and takes account of the norms and standards in the Children's Act and DSD Guidelines for Early Childhood Services (2006).

The Constitution (South Africa 2006) affords responsibility to local municipalities to pass laws and policy regulating childcare facilities and to conduct municipal planning, including regulating land use for childcare facilities. The municipal by-laws and policies frequently relate to the required infrastructure and environmental health norms and standards for childcare or ECD facilities.

## **1.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

According to Mason (2002:41-2), planning research and how questions are framed is as important as how the researcher generates and analyses data. The question of research ethics is complex with no single answer. Because a researcher in a qualitative study searches for deep descriptions of a phenomenon, a participant may be asked to reveal parts of his or her private life experiences, and this will require a high level of trust and consideration of ethical practice (Creswell 2012:230). Ethics are “the moral distinction between right and wrong” (Bhattacharjee 2012:137). Unethical conduct will cause damage to a researcher’s professional reputation or even the loss of a job. Below are the ethical standards adopted for this study.

### **1.8.1 Informed consent**

The researcher ensured that all members of the sample group signed an informed consent to participate in the study. Refer to Addendum B. This consent form was discussed and signed at the individual meetings with the prospective participants to explain the process of data collection. The consent form included all the relevant information about the study so that the participant could make a decision based on the benefits and risks of participation. There is nothing to be gained from participants being inadequately prepared (Ritchie & Lewis 2003:66-7). It is, therefore, important to tell them that participation in the study will be entirely

voluntary and that they can withdraw at any stage without any adverse consequences.

### **1.8.2 Confidentiality**

Confidentiality means that the researcher will protect sensitive or private information although it is known to the researcher (Royse, Thyer & Padgett 2010:39). Confidentiality is imperative in qualitative research especially as people share information of a personal nature and data that could be interpreted as having a negative response. As this research included face-to-face interviews, where anonymity was not possible, the participants were guaranteed confidentiality by assuring that the person's identity would not appear on any report or public document (Bhattacharjee 2012:138). The researcher used a coding system on the participants' interview guide. Addendum A refers.

### **1.8.3 Anonymity**

Anonymity implies that anyone reading a final research report or document will not be able to link any particular response with a specific respondent (Bhattacharjee 2012:138). If respondents cannot be assured of anonymity and so feel that the information they share may be a threat to them personally or to their ECD centre, the participants will be informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study and not have their responses recorded. Although the participants of the research knew one another through the ECD forum they were given the assurance that all identifying information in relation to participation in the study would be kept confidential and anonymous by using methods of coding. At no time would their personal details or names be disclosed. Many of the ECD centres in the Point and Inner City were not registered and were non-compliant with government policies and ECD practices. The researcher assured these participants that anonymity would protect the identity of the manager and the ECD centre from any authorities or monitoring bodies. Addendum A and B refer.

### **1.8.4 Beneficence**

At all times during the study the researcher must ensure the welfare of the research participants. In no way should participating in the research or answering questions

cause any harm to, or distress, the participants. As noted by Creswell (2012:232), participants give a great deal of themselves when they agree to participate in qualitative research. The interview process could reveal intimate details and remind participants of difficult experiences in their lives. The researcher needed to be particularly mindful that some of the ECD centres and managers represent vulnerable populations such as children, foreigners and people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and such 'high-risk' populations need especially to be protected. Addendum A and B refer.

### **1.8.5 Debriefing of participants**

Following the discussion on beneficence, and in case possible harm or distress to the participant is caused as a result of information shared, the researcher offered to arrange debriefing and support for the participant by arranging for the participant to have access to lay counselling or professional counselling support if necessary. The researcher considered, as an initial lay counselling option, debriefing and support through LifeLine Durban. Refer to Addendum A.

### **1.8.6 Management of Information**

Linked to the ethical considerations of anonymity and confidentiality is that of managing information in qualitative research. The management of information needs to be planned from the very beginning stage of the research. To ensure that the management of the data respects the terms of consent, confidentiality and anonymity that the participants were assured, the researcher had to consider how the data would be stored, who would have access to the data, and how they would have access to the data. Systems for the management of information must take into consideration the protection of the participants, the researcher and the institution (*The Research Ethics Guidebook 2011*).

Consideration was given to the management of the hard copies of notes made during the interviews and observations and the audio-recordings. There was also computer files with anonymised data and computer files with personal, identifiable data such as the biographical data of the participant and the information about the ECD centre. These computer files would be password protected. If anonymity of participants cannot be assured, sensitive information must be protected by

separating personal identifying information from the research data. The researcher used numeric or other special codes on reports and documents that contained identifying information. The schedule that links these codes with the participants' names was locked away except when in use. All research data, whether sensitive or not, was securely locked away throughout the process of the study and was accessible to the researcher only. Upon completion of the study, the audio-recordings and transcripts of the interviews will be destroyed (Royse et al 2010:39).

## **1.9 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT**

An outline of chapters included in the study is as follows:

### **Chapter 1: General Orientation to the study**

This chapter has focused on the general introduction and orientation of the research study. It includes the problem statement, the motivation for the study, the research question, goal and objectives of the study, the research methodology, clarification of key concepts and ethical considerations.

### **Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical perspectives of early childhood development services**

This chapter covers literature on empowerment theories and experiential learning, ECD legislation and policies and other studies pertaining to ECD management, inter-sectoral collaboration and participation in forum interventions.

### **Chapter 3: Application of the qualitative research method**

This chapter provides a detailed description of the research methodology which includes the application of the qualitative approach, research designs, methods of data collection, analysis and verification of data.

### **Chapter 4: Research findings and literature control**

This chapter focuses on the research findings from the participants, supported by a literature control to compare and contrast the findings with relevant literature in the field.

**Chapter 5: Summary, conclusion and recommendations**

This chapter focuses on the outcomes of the study in themes, the limitations and recommendations pertaining to the research findings, and proposals for further and future studies.



## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT SERVICES**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The intention of the literature review is to document the importance of the research problem at the beginning of the study. According to Shelden et al 2010 (cited by Creswell 2012:80-81), of interest in qualitative research is whether the findings of a study support or alter the views and practices presented in the literature.

The first 1,000 days of a child's life, commonly known as early childhood, is a critical period of growth and underpins all future health, learning and behaviour development of a child (Hall, Sambu, Berry, Giese & Almeleh 2017:4).

Families and their critical role as the primary emotional, physical and economic source of development of young children are under enormous pressure owing to migration, urbanisation, socio-economic living conditions and numerous other challenges having an impact on them (Pascal & Bertram 2001:23). According to Harrison (cited in Giese, Budlender, Berry, Motlatla & Zide 2011:3), it is the very young children in our society, who have the least say and who, as the future of our country, cannot afford to miss the opportunity for creative early learning, good health care and nutrition if South Africa is to thrive socially and economically.

In South Africa since 1994 advances have been made to correct racially discriminating policies and provide improved and accessible ECD services to previously disadvantaged groups. Richter et al (2012:11-15) are, however, of the opinion that gaps exist in the provision of comprehensive, well-coordinated and funded policies that support parenting and early childhood development, and they would benefit from utilising multi-sectoral services in achieving national ECD policies.

The social work profession seeks to engage in a variety of situations that challenge the well-being of people's lives and promote their liberation through the advancement of enabling situations (IFSW 2014). From a social work perspective,

the theories discussed that underpin early childhood policies and programmes include the strengths perspective, experiential learning, empowerment and participatory approaches.

This chapter will focus on a review of the literature on ECD history, policies, practice and the role of collaborative networks and ECD Forums in supporting children, families and ECD caregivers.

## **2.2 HISTORY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT**

According to Kamerman (2006:3-15), early childhood education and care (ECEC) has its roots in institutions for poor, deprived and abandoned children funded mostly by charity. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, North America and in developing countries of the time, such as China and India, early childhood education and care programmes saw the establishment of “kindergartens” for educational purposes and “day nurseries” to provide care.,

The German educator, Friedrich Froebel, developed the first kindergarten, meaning “garden of children” in Germany in 1837 based on his concept of children as active learners using their natural curiosity to develop cognitive and social skills (Passe 2010:42). Kindertartens were considered community centres for the neighbourhood and were a free service which became popular as centres in charge of the moral, spiritual and physical development of children (Muelle 2013:89). After Margarethe Schurz opened the first kindergarten for the immigrant German community in America in 1856, Elizabeth Peabody opened an English-language kindergarten in Boston in 1860. Thereafter, private kindertartens funded by charities opened in all the large cities to care for the children of immigrant factory workers, which, according to Passe (2010:43), was the basis for considering the *whole child*, by meeting its basic need for health, food and clothing as well as its cognitive, social and emotional development. Kamerman (2006:3-15) further points out that, after World War II, in the European countries, acknowledgement of the educational and socialization purposes of early childhood education and care saw significant advances being made. Policies and programmes evolved out of the recognition of the need for child protection; early childhood education; services for children with special needs; and services for children of working mothers.

Nonetheless, according to Vandebroek and Lazzari (2014:328), it is documented globally that there is evidence that children from ethnic minorities and low-income families are less likely to enrol their children for ECD and, if they do, the quality of education and care in many cases is of inferior quality by comparison with that offered their affluent peers.

In South Africa in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, ECD programmes originated out of the widespread childhood disease and death rates. In 1908, as part of their investigation into the high rate of disease, the South African National Council for Child and Family Welfare offered support to families and communities. This motivated parents and the community to introduce initiatives aimed at providing early childhood education and care to young children (Williams & Samuels 2001:08).

Historically, in South Africa political structures and racial segregation of the apartheid system which was imposed by legislation for the better part of 50 years resulted in an education system compulsory for white children and voluntary for black children, which resulted in only 6% of black children accessing ECD services before 1994 (Atmore 2013:153). Biersteker (2018:296) further notes that, during the apartheid and colonial era in South Africa, there was limited government funding for preschools and early childhood education developed typically through the efforts of parents, the private sector, community members and non-government organisations, but these preschools benefited white children primarily.

By 1940, the Department of Social Welfare was subsidising day-care centres that provided custodial services whilst the provincial education departments supported nursery schools, which had an educational function. African nursery schools, however, did not qualify for the welfare subsidies, and, because these schools were reliant on income from parents paying school fees, mostly privileged middle-class children had access to them with the exclusion of African working class children (Williams & Samuels 2001:09). The effect of this limited access to ECD programmes for the majority of black children through the discriminatory apartheid policies and programmes was disruption within families causing instability, detrimental environments and widespread malnutrition (Richter et al 2012:15). Van Den Berg and Vergnani (cited in Atmore 2013:153) further describe ECD in South

Africa during the apartheid era as being segregated, fragmented and characterised by inadequate and unrealistic provisioning, especially for African children.

It was only in the late 1960s and 1970s, through the support of local and international funding, that NGOs which provided early childhood education to disadvantaged children were introduced across parts of South Africa (Biersteker 2018:296). By the 1980s the importance of ECD and need for pre-primary education for children from disadvantaged communities was acknowledged by the state (Williams & Samuels 2001:09). In addition, the high dropout and failure rate amongst black children in their early school grades prompted the government to look at a school readiness programme for all children (Biersteker 2018:296). Williams and Samuels (2001:09) report, however, that, although the Department of Education and Training acknowledged the value of early education in preparing children for entry into formal education, a lack of resources hindered the implementation of interventions.

Atmore (2012:152) argues that, while access to ECD services for black South African children was limited prior to 1994 owing to political beliefs and structures, progress post-apartheid through government education and social development budgets has seen more children accessing Grade R, the year before a child enters formal schooling, and better quality ECD than was previously available. In keeping with international developments and, in particular in the context of South Africa's unequal social and education opportunities especially for families living in poverty, early childhood education and care has become an important strategy in realising the rights of children, those of their families and in reducing poverty (Biersteker 2018:296).

### **2.3 ECD POLICY, NORMS AND STANDARDS**

The Constitution (South Africa 1996: section 29[1a]) supports the right to basic education for children. According to Gardiner (2008:24), ECD policy and services are the responsibility of not only one government department. Biersteker (2018:298) notes that, essentially, the Department of Social Development is responsible for the oversight of ECD programmes for children from birth to the year before they start Grade R and the Department of Basic Education is responsible for rolling out Grade R.

The White Paper on Social Welfare (1997) guides the care and development of children from birth to nine years, and it called for an integrated approach to ECD provisioning in collaboration with government, civil society and the private sector in offering services that help families and communities to meet children's physical, mental, emotional, moral and social needs.

The White Paper 1 on Education and Training (1995: section 3.1.49) committed the Department of Education to developing a policy for children 0 to 9 years. Subsequently the White Paper 5 on Education (2001) established the system of Grade R for children between the ages of 5 and 6 years. The government (Department of Education 2003:4-5) made recommendations to expand the policy to make Grade R compulsory in all public primary schools and revised the target date for the full provisioning of enrolment from 2010 to 2019. Atmore (2013:155) notes that provincial education departments are responsible for financing Grade R through subsidies made to schools to establish the Grade R facilities. Biersteker (2018:298), however, suggests that owing to resource limitations finalising the policy by 2019 is unlikely.

In terms of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (South Africa 2006: section 91 & 92), provision is made for the inclusion of strategies within all government departments to provide well resourced, coordinated and managed ECD systems that promote holistic learning and development of children from birth to school-going age. Furthermore, the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (South Africa 2006: section 94) sets out norms and standards for ECD services and programmes that provide support, security, developmental and social learning in an environment that respects and aids the whole child in meeting its full potential.

The National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (2015:18-22) represents the government's steadfast commitment to all children in South Africa to provide equitable, quality early stimulation, education and care with a strong emphasis on children from vulnerable communities, and it highlights the valuable role of parents and primary caregivers in the upbringing of their children.

According to Biersteker (2018:298), the non-governmental, faith or community based organisations and private for-profit sectors provide the majority of pre-school

going children with early learning programmes. In terms of the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (2015:26-37), the Department of Social Development is responsible for promoting the registration and regulation of these ECD programmes. Furthermore, the department must finance and monitor ECD programmes for children from birth to the year before entering school, especially for children of poor parents attending these organisations by providing a per-child subsidy to the ECD centre. Berry, Jamieson & James (2011:41) state that ECD centres or programmes must meet norms and standards as set out by government regulations to ensure registration with the Department of Social Development and to qualify for funding.

The National Development Plan Vision for 2030 (2011:274) further specifies the importance of introducing children under the age of five to early childhood development free from factors that hinder their physical and cognitive development. The Inter-Department Steering Committee on Early Childhood Development (2012:22-23) are of the opinion that in making allowance for the development of the whole child, there needs to be a shared vision between the different sectors and departments to reduce the gaps in services, especially in the areas of health, nutrition, child, parent and family support and support for children with special needs.

The Department of Social Development (Strategic Plan 2015-2020), through the Child Support Grant, is hoping to influence issues around health and school achievement by contributing towards the eradication of poverty and hunger. According to the Department of Health (2011:17), in May 2011 the Minister of Health announced an overhaul of the Primary Health Care system, with a special focus on maternal and child mortality. This resulted in programmes for young children and school going children to address eye, dental and hearing care and school immunisation programmes. ECD policy documents are clear in recognising parents, families and the community as the primary caregivers of young children and their early development and they require that services, information and support be made available to them in the fulfilment of their responsibilities (Biersteker 2018:299-300)

The eThekweni Municipality (Integrated Development Plan 2017/2018:370) commits to working together with the Provincial Department of Health to improve community

outreach services and this includes working with ECD centres in improving facility conditions and screening children to monitor their developmental milestones and growth. The eThekweni Municipality Child Care Facilities By-Law (2015) policy document regulates childcare facilities to ensure a safe and healthy environment for children.

Despite efforts and the significant progress in ECD policies and provisioning, a comprehensive approach to ECD in South Africa, as reported by Richter et al (2012:21-22), is yet to be co-ordinated. The State needs to take measures to ensure that policies, funding, services and infrastructure are in place to support the most marginalised communities, which includes malnutrition, ECD care and education, children living with disabilities and support for parents and families.

### **2.3.1 ECD Funding and support from Department of Social Development**

ECD is currently under financed and inadequate to ensure quality early education for disadvantaged children according to Putcha, Upadhyay & Burnett (2016:52) who report that both developed and developing countries spend significantly less on pre-primary education in comparison to primary education.

In countries where Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is publicly funded, provision is either free or fees are scaled according to the parents income and are, therefore, relatively affordable (Del Boca cited in Vandebroek & Lazzari 2014:330). Funding for ECD and Grade R in South Africa since 1994, despite progress being made, remains a challenge, with the greatest portion of funding for ECD centres coming from parent fees (Atmore 2013:155-158). According to Vandebroek and Lazzari (2014:331), affordability and availability does not necessarily make ECEC provision accessible to all children. Findings from their research indicate that there is concern in many countries regarding the unequal accessibility of good quality ECEC amongst low-income families, and these authors recommend the need for policy planning at a local level to prevent the exclusion of these children and families from ECEC.

Within the context of South Africa, the Childrens' Act No 38 of 2005 does not necessitate the funding of ECD or ECEC services and programmes through national, provincial or local government. The Minister of Social Development is

obligated through the Act only to develop a comprehensive strategy for a well-coordinated and managed ECD system (Richter et al 2012:27).

Although government funding for ECD comes from the Department of Education and the Department of Social Development, only registered facilities receive funding for children from birth to four years whose parents' or caregivers' income falls below a specific level. In order to be registered minimum standards regarding structures and processes must be in place (Atmore 2013:158). The subsidy does not cover infrastructure and other running costs and, for children living in poorly serviced areas where there is no registered ECD centre, they do not benefit from subsidy support with the result that generally these ECD centres provide poor quality services (Biersteker 2018:298).

In addition to this, the registration process of the funding model unintentionally excludes the poorest children from access to quality ECD services because the majority of children between three and five years of age who come from disadvantaged backgrounds attend unregistered centres (Richter et al 2012:22).

ECD up to Grade R is, in most cases, provided by non-profit organisations (NPOs). Even though those ECD centres may be receiving subsidies from the Department of Social Development, they have to supplement the subsidy through school fees from parents or by means of other funding sources. This often leads to the further exclusion of children from poor households (UNICEF 2016:5-6).

Provincial Departments of Social Development also fund ECD programmes through specific non-centre based ECD facilities such as informal playgroups and family outreach programmes, whilst most of the subsidies from the Department of Education go towards funding Grade R in public schools and registered community Grade R facilities (Atmore 2013:158).

Only a small number of children between the ages of nought and two years attend formal ECD centres. Childminders care for many of these children, which is often a means of generating an income for women. Ensuring the safety and development of these young children is critical and, although previously there were regulatory mechanisms in place for the care of six children or less, the Department of Social



Development does not have the capacity to monitor this ECD provision (Richter et al 2012:15-18).

Notwithstanding the progress in the delivery of ECD in South Africa since 1994, financing for ECD services based on a means-tested subsidy restricted to registered centres will not ensure accessibility of early education and care services for families living in poverty and for children with disabilities in rural and urban areas (Richter et al 2012:35).

Worldwide indicators show that governments have not invested adequately in ECD programmes to ensure equitable access and satisfactory quality to meet developmental returns. Giese et al (2011:71) recommend a national ECD funding policy in which different departments and provincial and local government mobilise a strategy sourced from the government, private and development partners to address gaps in funding and equity across municipalities and provinces for ECD provisioning. The Department of Social Development's Strategic Plan (2015-2020:4) aims to improve access to effective and universal ECD services, equal access to subsidies and the development of a social infrastructure related to ECD.

### **2.3.2 Networks, Collaboration and Stakeholder Support**

Governments rely increasingly on engagement with networks of private and non-profit service providers in offering a more integrated approach to the delivery of public services (Plastrik & Taylor 2006:29).

In meeting the goals and objectives of the National Integrated Plan for ECD (Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services 2007:39), the government emphasises the importance of setting up partnerships with ECD role players so that all who are concerned about ECD have opportunities to raise awareness of issues around children and bring them to the government's attention.

In the case of ECD, where there are gaps in knowledge or the government is unwilling to fund an unregistered programme, the involvement of external stakeholders can identify effective ECD programmes for increased future government commitment (Gustafsson-Wright & Gardiner 2016:59).

Effective stakeholder partnerships, ranging from community-based and faith-based organisations, to global associations, governments, the private sector and academia can assist in setting priorities for action and mobilizing communities to find solutions within the most deprived situations (UNICEF 2015:34). According to Thomas (cited in Raniga, Simpson & Mthembu 2014:126), partnerships can reduce the duplication of services and lead to greater efficacy in addressing complex problems affecting communities.

An important policy document influencing service provision in the social development sector is the White Paper on Social Welfare (1997) that calls for an inter-sectoral national ECD strategy. Such a strategy brings together government departments and the private sector in ensuring the wellbeing of children, their parents and primary caregivers (UNICEF 2007:19). The White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education (2001) envisages that the value of inter-sectoral collaboration will result in representation by all stakeholders, including parents and communities in ECD governance and service delivery. By working collaboratively, departments and stakeholders with different ECD responsibilities can achieve a common development goal and the delivery of ECD services to all children including disadvantaged children and their families (Richter et al 2012:24).

### **2.3.3 ECD Staff and Managers Training**

Crucial to the effectiveness of ECD is the quality of the preschool environment, which includes the school management, the knowledge and skills of ECD practitioners, the physical resources and programmes. According to Taylor and Mabongoane (2015:5), the teacher is an important element with regards to effective early learning and development, and an environment where a child can reach its full potential is dependent not only on **what** a child learns but on **how** a child learns. The emphasis on ECD training for practitioners has shifted significantly in recent years. Under the Children's Act 38 of 2005 regulations (2010: 27a), when applying for the registration of an ECD programme, a minimum qualification of NQF level 1 training in ECD is a requirement or, alternatively, a suitable ECD qualification or three years' experience teaching an ECD programme (Giese et al 2011:37).

The Further Education and Training Certificate in ECD (Level 4) is the entry-level qualification set down by the Department of Social Development as a minimum requirement for ECD teachers. This qualification equips practitioners with general skills to facilitate quality ECD services in various settings (Atmore 2013:157).

The Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services (2006:63-64) suggest that, apart from having appropriate qualifications, a practitioner must be responsible, caring, and physically and mentally capable of meeting the demands of caring for children, in addition to having management and communication skills to address centre responsibilities.

According to the Early Childhood Development Centre Reference Guide for Registration with the Department of Social Development (2016:12), an applicant for an ECD programme must have appropriate knowledge and skills as follows:

- The National Certificate in ECD at National Qualification Framework (NQF) Level 1 to 6;
- An alternative and appropriate ECD qualification; or
- Three years' experience in implementing ECD programmes.

In addition to ECD knowledge, practitioners should possess the following skills:

- Be equipped to identify and report on the developmental needs and progress of children and make recommendations for possible interventions where necessary;
- Design and implement stimulating activities, both indoors and outdoors;
- Promote the holistic development of children that enhances their emotional, spiritual, cognitive, physical and social development through suitable interactions and activities;
- Promote awareness of, and ensure, the rights of children and their safety and protection;

- Provide ECD programmes that cater for the needs of all the children, including those with disabilities or special needs and illnesses; and
- Be able to implement and manage systems, policies and procedures.

Berry et al (2011:32-33) refer to The Children's Act 38 of 2005 that regulates the number of ECD practitioners working in ECD programmes and specifies the norms and standards for the staff to children ratio. In the case of children with disabilities, the ratios may need adjusting.

**Table 2. 1: Staff to children ratio**

Staff to child ratio	Age of children
1:6	1 to 18 months
1:12	18 months to 3 years
1:20	3 years to four years
1:30	5 years to six years

*Adapted from Children's Act Guide for Early Childhood Development Practitioners: Berry, Jamieson & James 2011:33*

#### **2.3.4 ECD programs and how they are structured**

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) comments on the importance of integrating ECD policies and programmes that work in synergy to improve children's health, nutrition, cognitive and social status (UNICEF Programming Experiences in ECD 2006:1).

According to the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECDP 2015:8-9), the Departments of Education, Health and Social Services, are responsible for the management and implementation of the National Integrated Plan for ECD. The medium-term goal of this Policy is that, by 2024, quality ECD programmes that are age and developmentally appropriate will be within reach of all young children and their caregivers.

Richter et al (2012:25-27) notes that, although there are numerous programmes positively contributing to ECD and benefitting families living in poverty, a greater coordination of services and programmes provided by the Departments of

Education, Health and Social Development is needed to address the gaps and improve priority areas in ECD programming. These include:

- Improving infrastructure and learner support equipment;
- Standardising staff training and remuneration;
- Improving child nutrition during the first critical 1,000 days;
- Parenting support;
- Funding of home and community-based care; and
- Reassessing the existing registration process and increasing municipal support and assistance for ECD services and programmes.

The NIECDP (2015:36) highlights the following departments and policy documents that address early childhood development services and programmes:

- The White Paper on Education and Training, 1995, in recognising the importance of all-inclusive development in the early years of a child's life, supports a formal and standardised reception programme for five-year-old children.
- The White Paper 6: Inclusive Education, 2001 seeks to establish processes and programmes that identify and offer opportunities for intervention for children living with disabilities in addition to addressing barriers to learning within the education system.
- The Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 provides a framework for the provision of social services to all South African children. Included in the Act is a chapter on the provision of ECD services and programmes that provide learning and support that are developmentally appropriate. The Act stipulates the registration of all programmes where there are six children or more below school-going age and sets out norms and standards for services and programmes.
- National Integrated Early Learning and Development Standards for children from birth to four years (NELDS) 2009 highlights the developmental expectations and competencies and makes provision for an age and content 'tool' to inform and

improve early learning and development experiences through relevant programmes.

- The South African National Curriculum Framework for children from birth to four, 2014, provides guidelines for designing early learning programmes which must include early learning and development that includes well-being, identity and belonging, communication, mathematics, creativity and general knowledge of the world.
- The Department of Basic Education oversees curriculum development, training and support programmes, including the delivery of the Grade R year.
- The Department of Social Development is responsible for implementing ECD programmes for children from birth to school going age, and this includes financing, monitoring and evaluating ECD programmes.
- The Constitution (South Africa 1996) guides municipalities in the requirements for infrastructure and health norms and standards for facilities offering ECD programmes.

#### **2.3.4.1 ECD Centres**

The Department of Basic Education (2015:78) defines an early childhood development centre as a space for the admission, temporary care and protection of six or more children when they are not with their families. The premises must meet certain standards as a prerequisite for registration. These include safeguarding children in a safe and clean environment with access to adequate inside and outside play areas and enough space for children to move about freely. The premises should be disability friendly (Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services 2007:59). According to the NIECDP (2015:102), appropriate and acceptable infrastructure for ECD centres is determined by:

- An environment that ensures the protection of a child and its caregiver's health and safety;

- Facilities and infrastructure that are within physical access to all children, including children living in underserved and remote areas and children with disabilities; and
- The quality of the infrastructure and environment that can support a quality service.

The following table illustrates the different types of ECD Centres:

**Table 2. 2: Semi-Formal and Formal Early Childhood Development Centres (ECD Sites)**

<b>Home-based ECD Centre</b>	An ECD Centre for more than six children that is operational from home.
<b>Community-based ECD Centre</b>	An ECD Centre for more than six children that is operational from a community centre, church or similar structure.
<b>ECD Centre</b>	An ECD Centre for more than six children operational as a free standing site.
<b>Pre-School</b>	An ECD Centre attached to a school that accommodates children pre-Grade R.
<b>Grade R</b>	Grade R class, either part of a formal school or a community-based centre.
<b>Grade 1 to 3</b>	Foundation phase classes in a school catering for children up to 9 years.
<b>After-School Centre</b>	A after-school centre for the support of young school going children (Grade 1 to 3).

*Sourced from DSD/US AID 2010:111*

#### **2.3.4.2 ECD Services**

The Department of Social Development (2007:7) refers to ECD services as those services intended to facilitate the emotional, intellectual, mental, spiritual, moral, physical and social development of children from birth to nine years. For children between 0 and 4 years of age access to ECD services and programmes can be through ECD centres, in homes and community-run groups, and for Grade R, the reception year of schooling for 5 year olds, in public schools and registered community ECD centres (Biersteker 2012:52-54).

In order to meet key ECD strategies, ECD services require inter-sectoral participation and action that delivers comprehensive services to children with an emphasis on home and community-based programmes that reach the poorest families. This includes adequate nutrition programmes to avoid stunting in young children, as well as parent support activities and programmes to encourage positive parenting (Richter et al 2012:1).

Quality ECD services are an important variable in determining a child's performance in its first year at primary school. In accordance with policy (NIECDP 2015:25-28) the government's public responsibility for ensuring that children develop to their full potential includes the provision of ECD services and support that incorporates:

- Support for parents and primary caregivers through community support groups, parenting programmes, clinic visits and home visits from pre-birth through to the age of 2 years;
- The government's commitment to social security through the Child Support Grant (CSG) for every child, including social assistance for caregivers of children living in poverty from the time a child is born;
- The right to free birth registration and a birth certificate which is the foundation of the associated rights to early childhood services and development;
- Access to basic health care for infants and young children, including preventative and curative health care for pregnant mothers to ensure early diagnosis and intervention of problems that may threaten a child's development;
- Food and nutritional support and safe nutritional practices such as breast-feeding in the first six months of a child's life and the establishment of food gardens to provide healthy food to young children and their families;
- Where parents are absent, or for parents living in poverty, safe and affordable day care of a high quality that includes early learning and care and protection to support a child's holistic development;
- Ensuring parents and caregivers have information about the importance of early learning that begins in the home from birth and, thereafter, providing early



learning services and programmes through community and centre-based programmes that complement the role of the parent or caregiver;

- Implementing measures to protect young children, with special attention to vulnerable children and those with disabilities, from abuse, neglect or violence, including corporal punishment;
- Increasing the understanding amongst parents and caregivers of the importance of play and recreational activities in early learning and development; and
- The provision of early childhood development services which are comprehensive and specialised for children living with disabilities to ensure the participation of affected children and their equal enjoyment of ECD services and benefits.

## **2.4 ECD MANAGEMENT AND OWNERSHIP**

### **2.4.1 Role of Manager/Owners**

Studies have confirmed that the realisation of quality ECD is reliant on the quality of the intervention, which is directly associated with the qualifications, skills and abilities of managers and practitioners (NIECDP 2015:92).

ECD leaders need to be engaged in a host of contexts that extend beyond their day-to-day work and their knowledge of child development. They should be competent in organisational development and advocacy roles and also have skills to envision and facilitate change (Whitebook, Kipnis, Sakai & Austin 2012:1).

The Department of Social Development (Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services 2006:40) highlights the responsibility of managers to have in place sound administrative systems and procedures to ensure the effective and efficient management of the ECD facility and activities. Families must be kept informed of policies and procedures relating to admission, privacy policies, reportable incidents and child protection that respect and safeguard families and children.

Taylor and Mabogoane (2015:5) refer to the key role of leadership regardless of school level, and they suggest that poor quality school management, as one of the

indicators of quality ECD provisioning is likely to reinforce educational inequality in South Africa.

The responsibility of ensuring an adequate number of suitably qualified human resources, including managers, to meet universal standards of quality ECD services lies with the Government. Essential to the process of regulating and monitoring ECD managers and practitioners is that they register with a professional organisation, government department, and/or municipality (NIECDP 2015:92).

#### **2.4.2 Role of Parents/Governing Board**

As the primary caregivers of their children, parents are encouraged to be involved in the day-to-day activities and functioning of the ECD centre. It is important that a strong and supportive relationship exists between the ECD management and staff and that parents can freely express their concerns or dissatisfaction (Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services 2006:55). Landry (2014:1-4) refers to responsive parenting as a style of supportive parenting that plays a vital role in establishing a strong foundation for a child's cognitive and social development and, therefore, the development of interventions that promote responsive parenting practices for families from high-risk social-personal backgrounds should be encouraged.

In recent years, the Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 has transferred considerable authority for decision-making and self-management to the schools. The Act mandates school governing bodies to manage the schools funds and entrusts the governance of public schools to the governing body. This allows parents and other school stakeholders to be directly involved in matters of concern (Mestry 2006:27-28).

Grade R learners in South Africa are taught according to the National Curriculum Statement, published in 2002, which guides the minimum standard for this level of learning. The curriculum is flexible allowing the school governing board and educators the opportunity to interpret and adapt it to meet the needs and context of the school environment thereby affording parents an opportunity for input in the learning experience for their children (Gardiner 2008:17-18).

### **2.4.3 Role of Training Organisations**

Creating an environment for leadership amongst ECD educators has been marginalised according to Maxfield, Ricks-Doneen, Klocko and Sturges (2011:8) who are of the opinion that ECD teacher education has suffered owing to insufficient acknowledgement of the role that ECD education plays as a critical partner in educating children.

Research in the United States of America, undertaken by the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRRA 2011:5), suggests that ongoing professional development for ECD educators is important in providing services of a high quality to children and their families.

In South Africa during the apartheid era, the educational philosophy ‘fundamental pedagogics’ under the Christian National Education system underpinned teacher training. This training regarded the child as ignorant and adopted rote learning which did not encourage questioning or critical analysis (Hoadley 2011:144). By 2001, teacher-training colleges had been incorporated into universities across the country. According to the Report of the Ministerial Committee on Teacher Education, as cited by Gardiner (2008:22), this move had a negative impact on the training of Grade R and Foundation Phase teachers in that the teaching of basic literacy and numeracy in early schooling deteriorated. It is thought that universities did not have the experience in training teachers for the Foundation and Intermediate Phases.

In terms of the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 and the National Qualifications Framework Act 67 of 2008 (South Africa 2017: section 1.2.11-13), limited career opportunities for ECD educators and practitioners exist. Current training programmes fall short of producing the number and quality educators required for the diverse ECD context. The Policy refers to the minimum requirements for qualifications in higher education for Early Childhood Development Educators, and acknowledges that quality ECD services depends on committed, passionate and suitably qualified educators. Furthermore, the Policy states that the educator sector, namely civil society, government and the universities must take responsibility for designing and offering standardized qualifications that equip ECD educators with

career opportunities and the necessary knowledge and skills to support the National Curriculum Framework.

#### **2.4.4 Role of ECD Forums**

A forum is defined as “a meeting or medium where ideas and views on a particular issue can be exchanged” (English Oxford Living Dictionaries 2018, sv “forum”).

The Foundation for Community Work, supported by the Department of Social Work, refers to ECD forums as places for the pooling of ideas and resources where opportunities for dialogue, awareness, learning and accountability towards the wellness and safety of children are offered (Allie 2011:27).

According to Plastrik and Taylor (2006:32-33), forums, comparable to networks, connect people and organisations to one another for the purpose of: building relations and accessing information; supporting people in order to develop and spread a collective value intention; and fostering shared action for specific outcomes.

South Africa embraces the concept of *Ubuntu*, defined by Lefa (2015:5) as being aware of one’s self and one’s duty to others, and, in the context of ECD forums, *Ubuntu* recognises the value of community and promoting and supporting the positive development of others.

Malombe (cited in Early Childhood Development Forums Impact Assessment Study 2014:6) notes that the exclusion of community members and stakeholders in decision-making is a key obstacle to change and development, and, for that reason, ECD forums seek to achieve the following objectives:

- a. Provide a platform to enhance awareness and understanding of good practice and opportunities for learning;
- b. Provide a participatory setting to open up channels of communication and negotiation between local government and other ECD stakeholders; and

- c. Assist ECD owners, principals, managers and educators in identifying and addressing their challenges by coming together as a community and mobilizing broader social networks to develop solutions.

## **2.5 THEORETICAL APPROACHES**

According to Schenck, Nel and Louw (2010:42), a theory is the structure that supports an explanation and understanding of a phenomenon and guides the thinking and actions of a researcher.

To explain the learning experiences for inner city ECD managers through their participation in the interventions of an ECD Forum various empowerment theories and models are used. A discussion of the application and contribution of these theoretical approaches in relation to the learning experiences of the managers follows.

### **2.5.1 Empowerment Theories and Models**

Gutiérrez (2003), as cited by Corcoran (2011:5), describes a theory and practice model that goes beyond increasing individual self-efficacy and works towards social justice as an empowerment practice which offers consciousness-raising to assist people in understanding the environmental roots of their problems and ways to rise above the concept of power in social relationships. Empowerment, according to Zimmerman (2000), as cited by Cattaneo and Chapman (2010:646), is a concept that is central to improving human lives and embraces a collaborative approach in striving for change by utilising the strengths and capacities of individuals and communities to determine and achieve a measure of control over their situations.

Empowerment, according to Freire (cited in Moulaert, MacCallum, Mehmood, & Hamdouch 2015:198) has to do with understanding political and socio-economic disparities and dealing with these elements of reality, in particular for marginalized groups. Based on the empowerment theory, the ECD Forum, as a collaborative network for ECD centres and practitioners, acted as a catalyst and a 'consciousness-raising' and enabling platform for the ECD managers and staff to support one another through shared experiences, best practices and learning opportunities.

Exploring empowerment theory through the lens of a constructivist, Rouse (2012:16) suggests that empowerment holds a different meaning for different people depending on time, situations, past experiences and the targeted population. Based on John Freidmann's theory of empowerment (cited in Moulaert et al 2015:199), empowerment for those in need is about directing and restoring one's destiny by strengthening individual self-confidence and enhancing community development, contrary to bureaucratic policies.

Examining empowerment in the ECD sector, Quaglia (cited in Rouse 2012:16) argues that, where there is satisfaction with opportunities for decision-making, status and professional development, educators sense a high level of empowerment and also that income, working conditions, stress factors, professional status and a sense of capacity to undertake their teaching role are all associated with educator satisfaction and empowerment.

#### **2.5.1.1 Asset Based Community Development**

The aim of this study was to determine the learning experiences for inner city ECD managers through their participation in the interventions of an ECD Forum. Therefore, the researcher made use of Saleeby's Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach. This approach, with an emphasis on empowerment, reflects a strengths-based orientation according to Kretzmann and McKnight (cited in Moulaert et al 2015:286) and shares the essential components of a just, fair and healthy society built on capacities and abilities rather than deficits and needs. Research has found that, by encouraging achievements and the recognition of people's contributions, confidence in their capacity to be creators rather than recipients of development is generated (Foot & Hopkins 2010 as cited in Patton 2012:5). The ECD forum provided a platform for participating stakeholders and ECD centres to pool their knowledge, experiences and resources to enrich learning opportunities, regardless of the challenges.

Although Corcoran (2011:1) notes that there is no strengths-based model of practice *per se*, various practice models characterize a strengths-based practice in that they hold, as their fundamental assumption, that people are resourceful and capable of solving their own problems. Based on the ABCD approach, the forum incorporated

the collaborative efforts of government, private individuals and key ECD stakeholders who recognized that ECD managers and centres, given their challenges and the resources available to them, did their best to 'survive' through their resourcefulness and self-determination.

As a strengths-based model, the ABCD approach is a way of viewing people as resilient in the face of adversity. Saleebey (2006:19) is of the view that an environment can be understood as potentially rich in resources and possibilities no matter how harsh and testing it may be. While Swanepoel and de Beer (2006:113) indicate that the responsibility of managers is to be aware of the demotivating environmental factors in a situation so that they can mobilize and motivate the inner strength of their human resources for group action and decision-making. From the ABCD approach, every environment has something to give, and self-sufficiency is based on a bottom-up, grassroots approach through 'bonding' social capitals such as local networks within and outside the community to identify, mobilize and build assets (UN-HABITAT 2008:7). This is particularly relevant in the case of the inner city where ECD managers, for the most part, felt infrastructure and resources were inadequate and centres were not able to meet the norms and standards for registration as many of the centres, their staff, and their families were caught in the 'poverty trap'. Working from the ABCD approach became a means for the ECD managers to reflect on, and utilize, the capacity building and networking opportunities available through the Forum.

From a social constructionist perspective to community development, the ABCD approach is a knowledge-building process through practical and generative processes where meaning making emerges through the day-to-day activities of the participants in a relationship with others, and Saleebey (2006:14) suggests that only when a community establishes "otherness" can humans "come into being". In acknowledging the "best of what is", and not looking to the deficits, necessitates an intense belief in the potential of a person or a community (McNamee, as cited by Moolaert et al, 2015:288) and without collaboration with others, the discovery and testing of one's knowledge and internal strengths and opportunities cannot be discovered and enhanced. Kretzmann and McKnight cited in Saleebey 2006:250) believe that often the abundance of assets and resources of marginalized

communities go under-utilized because such communities have learnt survival under difficult circumstances. By adopting the ABCD approach, and through their active participation in the activities of the forum, the managers were able to identify and build upon their assets and hopes for a better future for themselves and their ECD centres (Saleebey, cited by Knifton & Quinn 2013:14) by developing their capabilities to align their practice to ECD norms and standards.

Furthermore, Mathie and Cunningham (2003:474) comment on the appeal of the ABCD approach based on the collaborative efforts of communities driving the process of development by mobilizing existing, but often unrecognized, assets. This supports the view of Pinkett (2000:7) of the ABCD approach as being relationship driven by way of establishing ongoing productive social relationships that can fuel local associations and networks to overcome barriers and get to where communities want to be. The ECD Forum served as a collaborative network for ECD practitioners in partnership with numerous role-players and a space where participants could support one another, share experiences, resources, ideas and knowledge on best practice.

Kretzman and McKnight (cited in Mathie et al 2003:5) describe the ABCD approach as constructing a “new lens” through which communities can assemble their strengths into new combinations, new structures of opportunity and control and, therefore, possibilities. Underlying principles common to both the assets- and strengths-based approaches, according to Kretzmann et al (2013:298), is that all individuals, communities and organizations have within them assets, skills, capacities and networks and also that effective community development starts with building relationships and identifying the assets in order to achieve the visions and plans emerging from the process. Guided by the ABCD approach, the ECD forum set out to provide a non-threatening environment for the managers in which to build trusting relationships, confidence and the acknowledgement of their assets and resources previously untapped with the aim of establishing a ‘new lens’ for themselves and their ECD centres.

Participatory Action Research (PAR), as an assets and strengths based community development approach, emphasizes the committed involvement of the participants not only in the process of data collection but also through the integration of reflexive



processes that facilitate ‘transformative dialogue’ (McNamee as cited by Moulaert et al, 2015:288). Drawing from this approach, the ECD Forum provided an environment for reflexivity for the managers to communicate their rich and multiple experiences and perspectives, and their personal, professional and environmental strengths.

### **2.5.1.2 Experiential Learning Approach**

Kolb’s experiential learning theory places an emphasis on a learner’s internal cognitive process and, as an educational technique, it is described by Keeton and Tate (cited in Kolb 2015:xviii) as an approach whereby the learner is directly acquainted with the realities being studied. The emphasis of this type of learning is on in-context action and direct experience as the key sources of learning which involve the process of developing knowledge through the transformation of experience (McLeod 2013: 1).

According to Wurdinger as cited in Schwartz (2012:01), experiential learning is built on an interdisciplinary and constructivist learning foundation where learners are not cut off or unconnected from the real world. McLeod (2013:02) states that effective learning takes place only when a person has progressed through the four stages of the learning experience, namely having a concrete experience, reflecting on the experience, learning from the experience, and actively experimenting or trying out what has been learnt.

How a learner solves a problem and what he/she takes away from the experience will be different from someone else as the learner plays a central part in assessing his/her learning experience (Wurdinger as cited in Schwartz 2012:12).

In defining a method of learning as experiential, Chapman, McPhee and Proudman (cited in Schwartz 2012:01-02) suggest that the following characteristics should be present:

- a balance between the experiential activities and underlying theory;
- the environment should be without judgment for the learner to work through the process of self-discovery;

- the learning activities should have meaning and be personally relevant;
- there should be a relationship between the experiential activities and ‘worldly’ systems;
- an element of reflection and bringing the “theory to life”;
- the learner must be fully immersed – there must be emotional investment in the process;
- a space for examination of values must be present;
- meaningful relationships among the learner and the self, the instructor and the learning environment must be present; and
- accountability for one’s actions and consequences.

This approach to learning, according to Moon (cited in Schwartz 2012:2), allows the experiential learner to have an element of control of his/her ‘voice’. Professionals are of the opinion that experiential learning and the role of active, ‘learning by doing’ in experiential learning optimizes the learning process (Smart & Csapo, cited in McCarthy 2010:131). Learning through the ECD forum was informal and guided by the needs identified by the managers of the ECD centres through participatory activities, workshops, group discussions and learning through doing and reflection. Freire’s philosophy about a non-formal approach to education is compatible with the action orientation to learning and change approach (Carroll & Minkler 2000:22) adopted by the ECD forum.

### **2.5.1.3 Participatory Approach in ECD Programmes**

The participatory approach of teaching and learning places an emphasis on the construction of knowledge whereby learners are encouraged to use their prior knowledge to construct new and improved understandings through social discourse, interaction and negotiation (Straits & Wilke 2007:59).

The participatory learning approach, grounded in the constructivist theories of learning of Piaget and Vygotsky suggest that people learn by applying their knowledge to meaningful problems (Shen, Wu, Achhpiliya, Bieber & Hiltz 2004:2)

and that knowledge is not simply transmitted to learners but they actively build their own understanding.

Participation is seen as a 'pedagogical right' in an educational system that promotes democracy (Bernstein, as cited in Kangas 2016:9). An ECD educator plays an important role in the process of participation for children who cannot participate or be listened to if educators do not make allowance for such opportunities when planning their activities and programmes (Emilson & Johansson as cited in Leinonen & Venninen 2012:466). According to Taylor (as cited in Kangas 2016:9), an expression of participatory democracy in ECD education is to give children a voice by offering them opportunities to be actively involved in everyday issues regarding their learning, well-being and development (Taylor 2000, as cited in Kangas 2016:9).

The Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 promotes the involvement of families, caregivers and parents in participatory early learning programmes with access to specialized knowledge and ECD educator practice that includes stimulation, free and guided play and a conducive, supportive environment to encourage learning.

Through the participatory approach to learning, the recognition of a child's voice and ideas directly influences its life (Göncü, Main & Abel, as cited in Leinonen & Venninen (2012:466), and participatory skills, such as negotiation, sharing and waiting one's turn are learnt and developed through this approach. Unfortunately, according to Nyland and Smith (as cited in Leinonen & Venninen 2012:466), there are many instances where children have limited daily interactive and participatory experiences owing to tight schedules and limited human resources or suitably qualified educators and staff. This places limitations on a child's right to participate and express his/her views. In the context of the inner city environment and the challenges facing ECD centres and managers the participatory approach to learning serves as a positive approach to capacity building through increased awareness of the situation and utilizing the manager's existing aptitude, knowledge and potential to learn from the inside and not only from outside inwards (Schenck, Nel & Louw 2010:283).

#### **2.5.1.4 Collaborative Partnership and Learning Approaches**

Collaborative partnerships as defined by Kolbe, Allensworth, Potts-Datema and White (2015:3) are enabling processes where individuals and organisations combine their human and material resources with the purpose of achieving objectives they would not accomplish alone. Such partnerships are critical to improving education in that an educated adult has a greater chance of wellbeing.

Collaborative learning is rooted in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory based on the belief that effective learning and development is a social process which takes place in a cooperative environment and through personal interactions (Lin 2015:12).

According to Laal and Ghodsi (2012:487), collaborative learning refers to a method of instruction where learners work together in small groups to achieve a common learning goal. Results show that, compared to individualistic efforts, which can be competitive in nature, the benefits of collaborative learning result in greater achievements and productivity; more supportive relationships; better psychological health; social competence; and improved self-esteem (Laal & Ghodsi 2012:489). Collaborative learning in the view of Lane (2016:602-607) improves communication, and the exchange of ideas among participants in a group as well as active involvement in the learning process motivates learners to become critical thinkers through the process of discussion (Lane 2016:602-607).

The philosophy of Laal and Ghodsi (2012:486) expresses the opinion that collaboration, based on cooperation and consensus building, should be seen as a way of living where individuals are responsible for all their actions including learning, and that, when in group situations, respect for individuals and their abilities and contributions are important. This approach provides a way of appreciating and understanding the diversity and varying levels of the ECD manager's personal capacity and ECD centre resources. Collaborative learning and partnerships are, therefore, critical with regard to discovery and improving conditions for educators and the wellbeing of children living in the city because collaboration provides opportunities for knowledge building and developing awareness and internal strengths (Saleebey 2006:14).

This approach has, however, been criticised because of the varied uses of the term within various academic fields. Defining collaborative learning is difficult according to Dillenbourg (2007:1) as the broad definition; *“a situation where two or more people endeavour to learn something together”* is unsatisfactory as it could imply two people, a small group, a community or society, who may be studying course material or performing learning activities by way of various forms of interaction. Furthermore, Lane (2016:602-607) notes that collaborative learning may not suit everyone as some people prefer to learn in isolation, and there is also the risk of there being one or two people in the group who dominate which excludes others from making a contribution which may hinder the learning process.

Notwithstanding these opinions, referring to collaboration in teacher education, Anderson (2013:23) considers it critical that there should be interdisciplinary collaboration between early childhood teachers and social workers in providing effective psychosocial support and ECD services. Similarly, Carnwell and Carson (2019:3) suggest that improved early childhood education and care is possible through collaboration and joint efforts.

## **2.6 ROLE OF SOCIAL WORK IN ECD PROGRAMMES AND SERVICES**

Social workers are said to play an important nurturing and caring role in ECD settings in supporting children who have experienced or witnessed violence and who present with behaviour problems (Greenberg, Herman-Smith, Allen & Fram 2013: 309). The Global Definition of Social Work (2014) states that social workers are obligated to uphold human rights and social justice by intervening at points where people interact with their social, natural and geographic environments, which influence their lives. Referring to the ECD environment, this necessitates that a social worker upholds the responsibilities of facilitator, enabler and guide in supporting children and their families.

Research indicates a link between poverty and the abuse of children living in under-resourced communities where parents and caregivers struggle to meet their basic survival needs over and above early childhood development needs. The caregivers of these children experience high stress levels and would benefit from social work interventions (Van Der Vyver, as cited by Vorster, Sacks, Amod, Seabi & Kern

2016:12). This supports the study by Hooper et al (as cited in Gupta, Featherstone & White 2016:347) which suggests that quality human relationships and public responses are ways of mitigating the complexities of poverty, parenting and the wellbeing of children in diverse social situations.

### **2.6.1 Trainer**

The protection and welfare of children has particular relevance for social workers who must have knowledge of child development as a prerequisite for carrying out policies and practice that affects young children (Graham 2011:1535-1539).

In preparing for ECD practice, Greenberg et al (2013:311) believe that early childhood education training in the social work curriculum is essential to enhancing student knowledge and preparation for early childhood practice. By integrating information on a child's development and early childhood education, social workers can equip themselves to advocate for competent ECD programmes. There is a clear directive in the South African Constitution (1996) to protect the right to basic education of young children which includes the need for effective, quality programmes and an integrated social response to meeting children's needs.

In contributing to an equitable future and avoiding practices that exclude vulnerable children or children living in poverty from accessing high quality early childhood education and care, social workers working within this field must ensure that programmes cater for the social, emotional and cognitive development of all children, particularly children at risk of social and emotional disadvantage (Schiettecat, Roets & Vandebroek 2014:652).

### **2.6.2 Facilitator**

The IFSW (2014) defines Global Social Work as "an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people". It further points to the role of social workers as facilitators, responsible for assisting people to achieve their self-advocacy, community development and policy change objectives. In this role, as a facilitator, social workers work with individuals, groups or communities and, through the use of their social work knowledge and skills, facilitate processes that will support people to

make changes in their lives in reaching desired outcomes (Moriarty, Baginsky & Manthorpe 2015:6). Historically, social workers have always shown concern for the wellbeing of vulnerable mothers and their children by facilitating early intervention and care services to enhance children's development (Greenberg et al 2013:312). Social workers have a responsibility, according to Moriarty et al (2015:6), to take the lead in facilitating processes and programmes that safeguard and support children and families who are socially excluded, vulnerable or at risk of neglect or abuse.

### **2.6.3 Enabler and Guide**

The multiple roles and responsibilities of social workers function on a continuum between care and control and, as members of a collaborative profession, social workers work alongside other professionals in an effort to enable, guide and support people (Moriarty et al 2015:6). An enabling function of social workers as defined by the Global Definition of Social Work (IFSW 2014) is to advance social justice on behalf of vulnerable children. In the context of ECD, social workers can use their skills and knowledge to promote and enable the development of quality, supportive services by building active collaborations with local and national government and ECD stakeholders (Greenberg et al 2013: 318).

### **2.6.4 Monitoring and Evaluation**

As a requirement of the human rights approach it is essential to have proper monitoring and evaluation systems to track progress in the level of access to, and the quality of, ECD services for young children (NIECDP 2015:114). Reliable monitoring, evaluation and reporting on ECD services provides knowledge for the purpose of measuring and shaping future interventions, policies and practices (van Leer 2016:40).

Hall et al (2017:38) indicate that the poor progress in access to, and the quality of, ECD services particularly for disadvantaged communities is the result of the absence of an effective monitoring and evaluation system and structures to track progress. Data on ECD services sourced through surveys is not ideal for maintaining a reliable monitoring and planning structure.

Social workers, therefore, have an important research role to play in monitoring and evaluating practice interventions and programme outcomes in enhancing effective services in the interest of all children (Dinneka 2015). The importance of promoting high-quality ECD makes this a growing social work field of practice, and Greenberg et al (2013:309) believe that ECD will benefit from social workers practising in this field, undertaking research and advocating for policies, programmes and services that affect young children and their families.

## **2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has focused on a review of the literature relative to the theoretical perspectives underpinning learning experiences of early childhood managers and educators through their participation in an early childhood forum from a social work perspective. The first section of the chapter provided a brief background to the roots of early childhood education and care in Europe and America with particular focus on the history of early childhood programmes and services in South Africa. Historically, owing to political structures and the impact that poverty has had on families, the provision of ECD for the majority of children has been limited.

The policies guiding ECD practice and services for managers, educators, parents, social workers and ECD centres in South Africa and the role of collaborative networks was discussed in highlighting efforts being made to improve the quality of life for all young children.

Attention to the theoretical perspectives that inform the learning experiences of ECD managers and educators, namely the asset based community development approach, experiential learning, empowerment and participatory theories was given.

Chapter three focuses on the application of the qualitative research method undertaken for this study.



## **CHAPTER THREE: APPLICATION OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter outlines the application of the qualitative research process in understanding the learning experiences of inner city early childhood development managers who participated in an ECD forum from a social work perspective. It also focuses on the research approach and design, the identification, collection of, and analysis of the data for the study.

### **3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Research methodology refers to the theory of how a research study is to be undertaken (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009:3). It is the work plan of the research study, the various systematic procedures used by a researcher to describe, explain and predict phenomena or solve a problem (Rajasekar, Philominathan & Chinnathambi 2013:5).

As a systematic analysis, qualitative research includes, but is not limited to, people's experiences, their behaviour and how connections can shape relationships and a person's life (Teherani, Martimianakis, Stenfors-Hayes, Washwa & Varpio 2015:66). Qualitative methodology refers to research methods that address the collecting and recording of a person's spoken or written words and their observable behaviour, and this is described as descriptive data (Taylor, DeVault & Bogdon 2016:7).

Bryman (2008:159-168) refers to methodology as the discussion about why a particular method was chosen and its relevance to the research problem. It includes a literature review of the methods used to research similar topics in other studies. As a method seeking to develop concepts that will assist in understanding the experiences and views of participants with an emphasis on 'meaning' for the participants (Al-Busaidi 2008:11-19), a qualitative research methodology was considered to be appropriate in understanding the learning experiences of inner city ECD managers who participated in the ECD Forum from a social work perspective.

### 3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

Qualitative research is frequently described as a “naturalistic, interpretative approach” as it explores phenomena according to the perspectives and experiences of the research participants (Ritchie et al 2014:3). Through practices, such as interviews, recordings, field notes and reflective memos to self, the researcher attempts to understand the meanings people bring to their worlds. Denzin and Lincoln 2011 (cited in Ritchie et al 2014:3) refer to this approach as “a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible”.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher focused on making visible the world of the ECD managers and their lived realities through face-to-face semi-structured interviews. By recording and transcribing the interviews, the researcher was able to discover the learning experiences of the managers through their participation in the ECD forum.

As a method of enquiry, the qualitative approach builds on the idea that reality and knowledge are socially constructed. In other words, according to Schwandt 2003 (cited in Andrews 2012), knowledge emerges within society through the interactions of individuals. According to McNamee 2004 (cited in Moulaert, MacCallum, Mehmood, & Hamdouch 2015:288), the “practical and generative” process of social constructionism in sense-making is the key to knowledge building through an inductive process that emerges from the day-to-day activities of participants. The researcher in this study had the opportunity to engage with the participants over an extended period through their involvement in the activities of the ECD Forum. Through these interactions, knowledge of the ECD managers lived experiences of the realities and challenges as managers of ECD centres and their learning experiences emerged.

The researcher in qualitative research is the primary instrument for data collection, seeking to answer questions about how or why a particular phenomenon occurs (Miller 2010:1). During the process of qualitative research it may be necessary to make changes to the questions and the data collection plan in order to reflect questions that will provide sufficient data to understand the phenomenon (Creswell 2013:20). Data collected are analyzed inductively and the researcher organizes

the patterns, categories and themes that produce explanations or arguments that best answer the research question (Miller 2010:1). The process of inductive data analysis is referred to as “from the ground up” according to Creswell (2013:22) where the researcher goes back and forth between data gathering and organizing the categories until a comprehensive set of themes has been established.

The researcher developed an interview guide using open-ended questions to communicate and capture the rich experiences of the managers, both positive and negative. As a basis for developing findings representative of the participants’ day-to-day experiences, their feelings, beliefs, values and assumptions the data were analyzed, interpreted and organized into categories and themes. As the main instrument of data collection in qualitative research, the researcher should be constantly examining his or her actions and role in the research process (Mason 2002:7) because in qualitative research it is difficult for the researcher to be completely neutral or objective. All researchers bring their values to a study, and they should actively report the “value-laden nature” of information that they collect from the field (Creswell 2013:20). The process of reflexivity as a characteristic of qualitative research is the researcher’s necessary and constant effort to avoid biases or pre-conceptions according to his or her experiences and worldview (Konstantatos, Siatitsa & Vaiou as cited in Moulart et al 2015:281).

As a member of the Point and Inner City ECD Forum committee actively involved in the programs of the Forum, it was important that the researcher maintain an impartial, strengths perspective relative to the learning experiences and capacities of the managers. By keeping personal notes and creating space for dialogue with members of the forum committee, the researcher was able to maintain regular self-reflection of her role in the research study.

The objective of qualitative research is not the extent of information accumulated, but the level of understanding about the phenomena being studied (Miller 2010:2). The researcher, therefore, considered the qualitative research approach to be a suitable means of expression for the in-depth understanding of the learning experiences of ECD managers from inner city ECD centres. A characteristic of qualitative research is that it seeks to identify intangible issues such as socio-economic status, social norms and beliefs. By exploring the behaviours, opinions,

relationships and emotions of participants, information about the “human” side of a problem or issue can be understood (Mack, Woodson, MacQueen, Guest & Namey 2005:1).

The researcher, having cultivated rapport and trusting relationships with the participants of the study, was of the opinion that those ECD managers interviewed produced what Mason (2002:3-4) refers to as contextual understandings based on ‘multi-layered and textured’ social worlds. As a descriptive approach, qualitative research investigates meaning, feeling and the why and how of decision-making. It is the study of patterns. To study these patterns, the researcher applies reasoning and uses words to map and explore the formation of relationships (Rajasekar et al 2013:9). By focusing on the participants’ personal experience of learning, their needs and feelings and understanding of the ECD landscape and their relationship with the staff, parents and children, the researcher sought to produce ‘rich’ understandings of the complex situations facing ECD managers and also their efforts to build personal capacity.

Being concerned with the lived experiences of participants, qualitative research aims to interpret and explain the “what” and “why” of something said by an individual. Methods of data collection should allow participants to express themselves freely and without constraint (Austin & Sutton 2014:438). The use of open-ended questions followed by probes in response to the answers from the participants, therefore, enabled the researcher to write a detailed report derived from the data and identified themes.

The following section will focus on the research design adopted to enable the study to realize its research goals and objectives.

### **3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Because of the multiple choices of research approaches, Creswell (2014:3) suggests a general framework will assist the researcher in all aspects of the study, from assessing the theoretical ideas through to the data collection and analysis procedures. The research design, therefore, becomes the plan outlining what steps should be taken before data collection or analysis can begin and it shows the logical inquiry that the researcher will use to answer the research question. In the opinion

of Strydom (2013:149-150), before the design of a study can be developed, an initial idea or topic must be clearly defined; in other words, the purpose of the study should be formulated. From these ideas, further specific questions develop which will then guide the design, the method of data collection and the data analysis followed in the study. Saunders et al (2009:136-137) emphasize the importance of the researcher having valid reasons for all his or her design decisions. Of utmost importance is a clearly defined research question and objectives derived from the question which should be consistent with the researcher's philosophy.

### **3.4.1 Exploratory Design**

According to Marlow, as cited by Strydom (2013:151), exploratory research generates initial insights into the nature of an issue. It is a process of enquiry into a phenomenon in an attempt to gain further understanding when the problem is unknown. Exploratory research becomes the prelude to developing questions that will be investigated in a more extensive study. Where exploration of a situation has not previously been undertaken, exploratory research into this new area of inquiry to test the feasibility of further research can be conducted (Bhattacharjee 2012:6). Motivation for this study was that no research into understanding the learning experiences of the inner city ECD managers through the interventions and activities of the ECD Forum had been undertaken. Exploratory research uncovers what Schenck, Nel and Louw (2010:59) describe as, "alternative perceptions and meanings about the present situation". Semi-structured interviews and questions guided the process of uncovering information about the personal and professional benefits of participating in the ECD Forum for the managers as well as their experiences and perceptions of their situations within their ECD centres.

According to Lewis-Beck, Bryman and Liao (2004:966-967), the researcher must know 'what' is going on before a phenomenon can be explained. Being involved in the activities of the forum since 2011, the researcher had developed strong relationships with the ECD managers, educators, the local municipality and other key stakeholders. Exploratory research provided information into the situation under study and the 'what' of the problems and challenges facing the ECD managers and centres from a social work viewpoint.

The nature of exploratory research is information gathering, and the steps are not necessarily clear. Because this is the first of a sequence of phases in the study, the researcher must be open minded and creative in exploring all sources of information as the direction of the enquiry may change. 'What', 'why' and 'how' questions ask the reasons for and causes of a situation and assist the researcher in understanding or explaining the relationship between actions or processes (Strydom 2013:152-153). The researcher considered it appropriate to utilize an exploratory research design in acquiring information on the ECD managers' participation in the forum and their perception of their learning experiences.

### **3.4.2 Descriptive Design**

According to Marlow, as cited by Strydom (2013:153), descriptive research is not primarily concerned with 'the causes of' but rather the process of recording and reporting data. Descriptive research builds on the explorative design by way of gathering, organizing and describing the data collected.

As noted by Bhattacharjee (2012:6), descriptive research is concerned about documenting in detail the thorough observation of the phenomena. The researcher had developed a level of trust with the ECD managers and understanding of their situation through their membership in the forum over a period. From a social work perspective, the researcher had an opportunity to visit the ECD centres to observe and monitor the social work students' interventions. The descriptive research design, therefore, assisted in the description of the rich information gathered.

As suggested by Rubin and Babbie (2005:125), descriptive research seeks to gain the participants' deeper meaning of their situation through a more intense description of the phenomena. Good descriptive data that is more reliable and not forced can challenge 'the way things are' and provoke action. Being of a qualitative nature, the study sought to depict the participants as accurately as possible. The researcher conducted the interviews where possible at the ECD centre in an effort to observe and validate the existence of the ECD managers' experiences, their attitudes and beliefs and information about the day-to-day activities, the environment and interactions with their staff and children.

### **3.4.3 Contextual Design**

According to Hennink et al (2011:9), contextual design attempts to identify how the everyday settings of people's lives shape their experiences and behaviour. This includes the social, economic, cultural or physical context of their lives. The focus of this qualitative research study was the Point and Inner City area characterized by over population, poverty, crime, xenophobia and other socio-economic challenges. The researcher sought to understand the impact and significance of these influences on the perceptions and experiences of the ECD managers who participated in the Point and Inner City ECD forum.

In the opinion of Creswell (2014:9), by visiting people in the context in which they live and work, qualitative researchers can gather personal information in order to understand the historical and cultural worlds of participants. In addition to the socio-economic challenges, many of the children attending the ECD centres in the city are from other countries, and a number of the owners and managers of the ECD centres are also foreign nationals. Holtzblatt and Beyer (2014:13) refer to 'grounding' the interview by focusing on specific important events in a person's life, and the larger context of a person's self, circumstances and relationships. As a measuring instrument, the contextual design assisted the researcher in guiding the interview by gathering information on how the ECD managers function, taking into consideration their past experiences, traditions, expected roles, values, challenges and also how these influenced their perception of self.

### **3.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLING**

A population can be described as a well-defined group from whom information will be discovered. It is the purpose of the study which will guide the definition of the population, and those to be included and excluded in the population must be clearly explained (Banerjee & Chaudhury 2010:2). In the human sciences, researchers are interested in learning about groups of people who have similar characteristics. These groups of people can be large or small. This group, according to Creswell (2012:142), is referred to as the target population. Of importance to the researcher is that this group has some defining and common characteristic that can be identified and studied by the researcher.

For this study, the target population can be described as all ECD managers of ECD centres in the city who have participated in the ECD forum gatherings during the period 2011 and 2016 and who have engaged in certain forum interventions as referred to in Addendum E. In 2016, forty-one ECD centres were registered on the Point and Inner City ECD Forum database. This number fluctuates as a result of centres closing down, others functioning 'under the radar' and wishing to remain anonymous and an ever-increasing number of centres in the city starting up. The target population for the purpose of this research was, therefore, the total forty-one ECD managers from the forty-one participating ECD centres in 2017.

Because it would not be feasible to study this complete population, Bhattacharjee (2012:65) points out that a sample that will depict the target population should be selected. Sampling is the process of selecting a subset from the fully defined population of interest with the purpose of making observations and gathering patterns of behaviour within the population. Qualitative researchers make sampling choices that will enable them to expand their understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Blackstone 2012:168). The sample is thus the actual group from whom the data is collected.

Qualitative research is usually about understanding the "depth, nuance and complexity" of a phenomenon, and the researcher is asking the sample to assist in providing the experiential contexts and illustrations that will allow the researcher to develop theoretically-grounded arguments to inform the study (Mason 2002:121). Because the intention is to develop an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon, Creswell (2012:206) suggests that the sample should be from those people who will provide the richest source of information. As noted by Bhattacharjee (2012:65), it is important to select a reliable sample to avoid unpredictable interpretations. To ensure that the sample for this study was trustworthy and typical of the target population, the sample was chosen from the forty one managers who had been actively involved in the Point and Inner City ECD Forum for a period of three years, between 2014 and 2016, and who had had exposure to between six or more interventions during this period. When selecting the sample, the researcher ensured the availability and willingness of the ECD managers to participate, taking into consideration their ability to communicate experiences and opinions to "maximize



efficiency and validity” (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood 2013:3).

### **3.5.1 Purposive sampling**

In the process of sampling, two techniques can be used, probability and non-probability sampling. In probability sampling every unit in the population has a chance of selection, and this can be accurately determined. In non-probability sampling some units of the population have a zero chance of being selected in that their selection cannot be accurately determined based on certain criteria (Bhattacharjee 2012:66-7). Researchers can select from several types of non-probability samples. These include purposive, snowball, quota and convenience samples (Blackstone 2012:171). For the purpose of this study, the non-probability technique using purposeful sampling was considered, where the researcher intentionally selected ECD managers in consultation with the ECD Forum Committee who were what Creswell (2012:206) describes as being “information-rich”. According to Patton, as cited by Suri (2011:4), “information-rich” cases are those from which a great deal of information about issues of central importance in relation to the purpose of the study can be learnt. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research because the researcher seeks to identify and select people who not only have rich knowledge but also experience and insights relating to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al 2013:2). To draw a purposive sample, a researcher will focus on specific perspectives that he or she wishes to examine and he/she will then actively seek out research participants who cover this full range of perspectives (Blackstone 2012:171). For this study, the researcher identified and selected managers of ECD centres who were representative of the lifeworlds of many of the families and children from ECD centres living in the city in so far as socio-economic, geographic, historical and cultural contexts are concerned.

Although purposive sampling actively sets out to identify and select subjects who will be best suited to provide rich information, the researcher needs to ensure that the subjects fit certain criteria for the proposed research. Suitable selection is likely to enhance a true association between intervention and outcomes (Velasco 2012:2).

A clearly predefined set of inclusion criteria guided the researcher when selecting the target population and the sample for this study:

- Participants in the study were all ECD managers, namely they were either the owner or principal of the ECD centre or an educator in a senior managerial position. For the purpose of this study these participants have collectively been referred to as 'managers'.
- Only those ECD managers who actively participated in the forum gatherings and associated awareness, discussion and capacity building interventions during the period between 2014 and 2016 were considered for inclusion in the study. In other words, the manager had to have been a participating member of the forum during the three year period.
- The ECD managers must have attended at least six, or 50%, of the ECD forum meetings over the three year period and participated in six or more of the interventions as per Addendum E depicting forum interventions and activities between 2011 and 2016.
- Identification and selection of the sample and pilot study was in consultation with the Point and Inner City ECD Forum Committee.

### **3.5.2 Sample size**

In purposive sampling, Mason (2002:134) maintains that the size of the sample is not as important as whether it provides access to sufficient, information-rich data that speaks to the research questions or the complexity of a situation. The sample size is dependent on the process of data saturation, which is when the information shared has generated sufficient explanation and the data become repetitive and redundant (Royce et al 2010:93). For this reason, all sampling decisions may not be able to be made at the outset of the study. In qualitative research it is not uncommon, therefore, to study a few individuals or cases (Creswell 2012:209). For this study it was important for the researcher to collect in-depth and detailed information based on the participants' experience of their involvement in the ECD forum and their learning and capacity building through the interventions in managing the perceived threats and challenges as managers of the ECD centre. The sample

size was thus not determined before data collection but, after conducting the seventh interview, the data had generated sufficiently rich information and the process of interviewing was finalised.

### **3.6 PREPARING PARTICIPANTS FOR DATA COLLECTION**

The goal of data collection is to collect an exhaustive set of articles and information relevant to the study and to develop a systematic plan for accurately documenting the data (Randolph 2009:6). In addition to collecting multiple types of information, the researcher must also spend time engaging with the participants of the study so that the complexity of the phenomena can be established (Creswell 2012:212). As the university's *ex-officio* member of the forum committee and the operational manager of the university's service-learning site for social work students, the researcher was well known to many of the managers and ECD centres and relationships of trust had been established. This paved the way for preparing participants for data-collection.

In qualitative research, Creswell (2012:210) suggests that gaining approval to conduct research may involve obtaining permission on numerous levels from individuals, organisations, the site of practice and review boards. As a master's student, the researcher submitted a detailed research proposal which was approved by the Research and Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Work at the University of South Africa.

Researchers have a moral and ethical obligation to engage in research in a transparent manner. Singh and Wassenaar (2016:42) refer to the importance of seeking permission to conduct the research from the gatekeepers, those individuals who have control over permitting or denying access to information, institutions, organisations, persons, space and services. The researcher needed to safeguard not only the cooperation of the participants of this study, namely the managers of the ECD centres who formed the sample. In addition it was necessary to negotiate the approval of the ECD Forum Committee and inform the various role-players and stakeholders who participate in the ECD forum quarterly meetings. The process of informing the Point and Inner City ECD community and the prospective participants before data collection is described below.

**Table 3.1: Process of gaining entry to the Point and Inner City ECD Centres and Managers of the ECD Centres**

Accessing gatekeepers	Response from gatekeepers
<p><b>The Point and Inner City ECD Forum Committee:-</b> As a member of the ECD forum committee, the researcher presented her proposal and explained the aim, objectives and methodology of the intended research at a scheduled quarterly committee meeting.</p>	<p>The researcher was requested to compile a schedule detailing the forum interventions between 2011 and 2016 (Addendum E) and write a formal letter to the committee requesting permission to undertake the research (Addendum G). Approval to conduct the research was granted by the committee. In the same meeting the researcher requested guidance in identifying and selecting the potential ECD centres and managers for the pilot study and sample. The proposed names of ECD centres were agreed upon.</p>
<p><b>The Point and Inner City ECD Forum Members:-</b> Membership of the forum included the forty one ECD centres together with local government departments, non- government departments, individual and organisational ECD professionals and role-players. These participants were seen as the unofficial 'gatekeepers' and fulfilled supportive, training and capacity building roles. All participants were invited to attend the ECD Forum quarterly meetings and training initiatives on a regular basis.</p>	<p>Although the permission of the unofficial 'gatekeepers' to conduct the study was not required, in addition to informing all member ECD centres, the researcher informed all stakeholders of the purpose of the study at a quarterly ECD meeting. The researcher shared information from a Focus Group Discussion with members of the Point and Inner City Forum which was held in 2014 to increase awareness and understanding of the challenges and problems experienced in meeting norms and standards for ECD centres (Addendum F). It was explained that this feedback provided a backdrop for the research. Information about the criteria for selecting participants for the study was discussed.</p>
<p>Once the approval of the ECD Forum Committee had been obtained, the pilot and sample ECD centres had been identified and the ECD Forum members notified, a formal letter (Addendum A) was written to each of the selected participants.</p>	<p>The potential participants were approached face-to-face at one of the forum meetings or contacted telephonically. The letters were either hand delivered or emailed to participants and, upon receipt of the letter requesting their participation in the research project, verbal permission was granted.</p>

As part of the process of preparing participants and before data collection can begin, Creswell (2012:147) emphasises that gaining permission from and informing individuals and organisations is necessary to ensure cooperation from the participants and to confirm that they understand why the study is being carried out.

Researchers need to take the issue of informed consent seriously to ensure rigorous moral practice (Mason 2002:82). The researcher has the responsibility of ensuring that a participant never feels coerced into participating in a study (Ogletree & Kawulich 2012, as cited by Nyahodza 2016:29). According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003:68-9), it is also important to consider how the study could give rise to sensitive issues for the participants. For this reason, the researcher arranged a time to meet with each participant before conducting the research interview. The letter, the informed consent and the declarations documents (Addendum A, B and C) were discussed with the participants in detail. The following points, as proposed by Creswell (2012:211-12) to be considered when preparing participants for data collection, were addressed:

- The purpose of the study was explained to the manager;
- Why the manager and ECD centre had been identified and chosen to participate in the study was explained;
- The amount of time that the researcher would need to spend at the ECD centre to collect the data was dealt with;
- The specific activities that the researcher would engage in, namely, face-to-face interview/s, and the potential for these and the researcher's presence to be disruptive were described;
- The use of audio recording of the interviews to ensure the capturing of valuable and accurate information was introduced;
- How the results of the data collection would be used and reported was explained;
- The possible value and benefits of the study for the manager and the ECD centre were highlighted;

- The importance of ethical arrangements to protect the anonymity of the participant and the management of information and the research findings was stressed; and
- The right of voluntary participation was explained.

Once the participants had been fully informed of potential risks and had had the opportunity to ask questions to confirm their understanding of the areas the study would address and the researcher was satisfied that the process of preparation had been completed, the participants were asked to sign the voluntary and informed consent forms (Addendum B and C), which included permission to enter the ECD centre and conduct the study with the manager at the centre.

Confidentiality is an important consideration when choosing a location for the interview, and, as far as possible, there should be no distractions from outsiders and the privacy of the participant should be protected (Mack et al 2005:34). For the purpose of this study, the researcher invited the participants to identify the location most suitable for them. All but two of the interviews were at the ECD centre, and, although in some instances there were distractions from children coming into the office, this was the setting most convenient and where the manager felt comfortable.

### **3.7 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

Researchers need to consider the advantages and disadvantages of the different data collection methods, such as observations, interviews, documents and audiovisual materials (Creswell 2012:233). When selecting methods, consideration must be given to procedures of good practice and the collection of information that will provide answers to the research questions. Ritchie and Lewis (2003:56-7) concur with this thought by highlighting the need to choose methods that are likely to shed the most light on the subject whilst not limiting the participants' views. For this study the researcher employed naturalistic observation, interviews and audio-recording techniques to capture the participants' interpretation and understanding of the phenomenon. The following section provides a discussion of the methods of data collection used.

### 3.7.1 Observations

Observational roles vary depending on the researcher's rapport with the participants and familiarity with the research site. The researcher can gather fieldnotes by being a participant observer or a non-participant observer (Creswell 2012:214-5). Where the observer attempts to share in the life-world of the participants or group being observed in an effort to experience and understand these experiences, the observer is referred to as a participant observer (Kothari 2004:96). Unstructured or naturalistic observation is simply recording what the researcher sees and the participant's spontaneous behaviour in a natural surrounding (McLeod 2015). Unstructured observation, according to Kothari (2004:96), is most likely to be considered in an exploratory study in that no careful definition of the individual elements to be observed are selected. In addition to building relationships and observing the participants through their involvement in the forum meetings over a number of years, the researcher had visited all the ECD centres on previous occasions for the purpose of monitoring the social work activities of the students. This unstructured, participant observation provided an opportunity for the researcher to gain insight into the total situation for the ECD centre and managers. The environment, ECD centre activities, routines, programmes and the managers' interactions with staff and children were able to be seen and listened to, and they provided the researcher with an overall setting for observation of the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for the centre and manager.

Although this was not an observational study *per se*, Flick (2009), as cited by Blandford (2013:222), refers to a variety of forms of observation which can include the dimension of self-observation versus observation of others and the attention given by the researcher to their reflexive self-observation when collecting data. For the purpose of this study it was not only important for the researcher to have a good understanding of the context for ECD managers but also to engage in self reflection throughout the process on her role in constructively participating in the development of the research.

### 3.7.2 Interviews

According to Mason (2002:62-3), interviews are “the interactional exchange of dialogue”, and meanings and understandings are constructed or reconstructed during this interaction involving the researcher and interviewees. These interviews may include one-to-one interactions or larger group or focus group interviews. In this study, the researcher employed one-to-one, in-depth interviews with the ECD managers with the aid of a semi-structured interview guide. Creswell (2012:218) notes that one-to-one interviews are useful when the participants feel comfortable about sharing ideas openly in a trusting environment. Ritchie and Lewis (2003:148) note that the relationship and the role of the researcher as an active facilitator of the interview contributes to feedback to the questions that cover a breadth of key issues and also a depth of coverage. The researcher, being actively involved in the Forum for six years, had developed trustworthy relationships with the ECD centres and practitioners. Being familiar with the researcher, the interviewees were in no way constrained in answering questions of a personal nature.

Data were collected from participants by means of a semi-structured interview which was guided by a set of pre-determined open-ended questions. These questions related to the managers’ experience of participating in the ECD forum activities and the significance of their involvement for their learning experiences and the challenges and threats in managing the ECD centre.

As noted by Turner (2010:756), open-ended interviews will produce detailed information because, although they may be structured in terms of the wording of the questions, the questions allow for open-ended responses where the researcher can ask probing questions and the participants can be encouraged to express their viewpoints fully. Although the design of questions and themes of the semi-structured guide may be planned ahead of the interview, unexpected and interesting avenues of enquiry may emerge during the interview (Blandford 2013:6.4). Moreover, the use of interviewing in qualitative research provides data that make allowance for the participant’s social life (Alshengeeti 2014:39). Numerous sources define interviewing as a “sort of face-to-face social interaction”, a conversation between two people that has as its purpose information gathering about one person’s perceptions and experiences of his/her daily life (Berg 2009:101 & 130).



Furthermore, there is flexibility in a semi-structured interview as it allows the interviewer the opportunity not to follow the sequencing of questions and change the wording of a question if necessary, thereby making allowance for probing and expansion of the responses by the interviewee (Rubin & Rubin 2012:29). In the opinion of Creswell (2012:220), closed-ended questions may also provide useful information to support concepts that, when followed by an open-ended question, will permit the participant to explore his/her experiences and understanding of a situation on a deeper level. Berg (2009:107) suggests that interviewers are almost expected to digress from the systematic order of asking questions in a semi-structured interview and to probe beyond the answers to their prepared questions.

In developing an interview guide, questions must be worded in such a way that they provide data that keeps within the confines of the purpose of the study. Equally important is the manner in which a question is asked and that it allows for complete and honest answers (Berg 2009:115). Although the interview guide provides for flexibility, a strength of having an interview guide is that the same overall focus areas of questions and information is collected during the interview (McNamara, as cited by Turner 2010:755).

For the purpose of this study an interview schedule was developed and the interviews were guided by a list of predetermined, open-ended questions.

### **Interview Schedule**

#### **Biographical data of the interviewee:**

- Name;
- Age;
- Gender;
- Nationality; and
- Education.

#### **Information about the ECD centre:**

- Are you the owner, manager, or principal of the ECD centre?

- For how long have you been managing the ECD centre?
- How many children do you have at your ECD centre?
- How many staff members do you have at your ECD centre, including yourself?
- Are your teachers and carers trained in ECD?
- Has your ECD centre been registered with: the Department of Social Development; the Department of Education; or as an NGO?

**Open-ended questions:**

- Which of the ECD forum interventions and activities did you participate in between 2014 and 2016?
- Which of these interventions and activities did you find most helpful/interesting?
- What have you personally learnt through your participation in the activities of the ECD forum; what has your involvement meant to you?
- Is there anything else about your experience of participating in the ECD forum you would like to share?
- What other interventions or activities do you feel the ECD forum could introduce to enhance the learning experiences for ECD managers?
- What are the perceived threats or challenges facing you as a manager and the ECD centre?
- What has helped you to manage these threats or challenges?
- What are the three most common factors that you believe compromise the well-being of the children who attend your ECD centre?
- What important change or assistance do you, as the manager, feel is needed to improve conditions for yourself, the ECD centre, staff, the children and their families?
- Are there any other suggestions you would like to make to the ECD forum Committee?

The researcher applied the following interviewing skills and techniques when gathering information during the semi-structured interviews:

### **3.7.3 Establishing Rapport**

It is likely that relationships will develop during the process of research, some of which may become close and involve friendship, trust and mutual disclosure. The researcher must consider and manage carefully the personal, emotional and intellectual aspects of establishing rapport as this can shape both the process of research and the data (Mason 2002:95). Being involved in the ECD forum, the researcher had a moral responsibility to provide feedback from the research to the ECD managers and the forum participants. By continuing contact with the participants after the process of data collection had been completed, the researcher was able to support the forum activities in the long term.

### **3.7.4 Logical Order**

As interviews come with their own dynamics, it is important that the interview guide should include a rational order where participants are gently eased into the interview, and where questions are straightforward and information is collected that will provide a context for follow-up questions (Ritchie & Lewis 2003:112). The initial questions were of a biographical and personal nature and moved the interviewee into the non-threatening and conversational manner of collecting data (Ritchie & Lewis 2003:113) and were followed by questions that elicited information about the ECD Centre. The final questions were intended to provide a summary of the key topics and experience of the participant and recommendations.

### **3.7.5 Active listening**

Really listening to what a person has said includes remembering what the person has said and the question asked. Finding a balance between talking and listening takes a great deal of awareness of what you do and say in an interview and of the consequences of not listening or of frequently having to interrupt the interviewee (Mason 2002:75). As a technique, listening with the intention of deepening the understanding of the speaker's thoughts, feelings and general wellbeing and making

sure they have been heard can be referred to as active listening or listening with purpose (Louw, Todd & Jimakorn 2011:71-72).

### **3.7.6 Rephrasing**

The dictionary defines rephrasing as “to say or write something again in a different way” (Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary 2018, sv “rephrase”). In cases where it is necessary to redirect the flow of an interview to ensure responses are in line with the research purpose, Mack et al (2005:40) highlight the importance of eliciting the perspective of the participant by rephrasing a question or asking questions in a different sequence. During this study, where the researcher needed to check the interviewee’s responses for understanding, rephrasing a question was necessary.

### **3.7.7 Clarification**

When the interviewer needs to check his/her understanding of the interviewee’s response to a question, the use of a closed question can assist in clarifying his/her interpretation of the message (Louw et al 2011:72). As an example, the researcher used this skill to encourage additional information and to clarify her understanding of the feeding and nutritional needs within the school. “So they must bring their own lunch?” When the interviewer repeated a key word or phrase used by the interviewee, it prompted further conversation and clarification of the topic under discussion.

### **3.7.8 Silence**

Interviewers often have to “think on their feet” and address unanticipated moments not taken into consideration by the scripted questions. The use of silence as a probe is the act of pausing and not asking the next question but rather waiting as an indication that the interviewer is waiting for additional information or detail from the interviewee (Bhattacharjee 2012:79-80).

### **3.7.9 Neutral probing**

Probing is dependent on what the participant has said and, therefore, cannot be specified ahead of time. Probes are follow-up questions used to explore key issues and provide the greatest amount of detail from an interview (Ritchie & Lewis 2003:124). During the interactive inquiry in a qualitative study, the research questions are the “navigational tools” that can be used when it may be necessary to find out about the unexpected or assist the researcher in mapping the direction of the inquiry (Agee 2009:432). Should a respondent provide only a cursory response to a question, the researcher can use probing as a skill to prompt a more in-depth response (Bhattacharjee 2012:80). As a navigational tool, neutral probing was utilised when necessary in an effort to demonstrate a willingness on the part of the researcher to understand fully the information shared about the experiences and perceptions of the interviewees.

### **3.7.10 Motivational probing**

The interviewee’s sentences should not be finished by the interviewer, nor should the interviewer be tempted to approve or disapprove of the responses of the interviewee. It may, however, be necessary for the interviewer to encourage more detail or to elaborate on something said by the interviewee (Bhattacharjee 2012:79-80). This is when the use of motivational probing is effective and can include the occasional use of “uh-huh”, “okay” or “can you tell me more?”

### **3.7.11 Attentiveness**

Attentiveness is the skill of being able to recognize the verbal and non-verbal cues, the body language and the mood of the interviewee that may influence his or her demeanour or emotions. Being able to recognise when an interviewee is upset, angry or uncomfortable during the process of the interview is important in the management of the social dynamics of an interview (Mason 2002:75). An interviewee is likely to be more receptive when a researcher is attentive. Maintaining good eye contact and the use of paraphrasing and reflection demonstrates attentiveness (Grobler, Schenck & du Toit 2003:132-133). Attentiveness was utilised during the interviews to show respect for the stories and experiences that the participants shared.

### **3.7.12 Closing questions**

By signalling to the interviewee that the interview is approaching the end, the researcher can ask a general closing question related to the topic. In the final question of the interview, the researcher asked, 'Are there any other suggestions you would like to make to the ECD forum committee?' Such a general question allows the participant to address issues of importance, feelings or reflections that had not been mentioned previously, and in addition it provides a space for a gradual return to a more informal social interaction between the interviewee and the interviewer (Ritchie & Lewis 2003:146).

### **3.7.13 Fieldnotes and Audio-recording**

Fieldnotes can include observational and personal notes taken by the researcher for the purpose of recording what she or he hears and sees and provide a valuable source of data on the emotions and reactions experienced by the researcher during the course of the interviews (Fox & Bayat 2012:74-74). Audio-recording has the advantage of recording the more sensitive and perhaps confidential information that the interviewer may find difficult to capture in writing (Muswazi & Nhamo 2013:15). In addition to the researcher's keeping notes for the purpose of giving meaning and understanding to the phenomenon being researched, the researcher obtained the permission from the participants to use audio-recording to capture the one-on-one interviews. Audio-recording the questions and answers during the interview provided the researcher with an accurate record of the conversation. The conversations were then transcribed into words and classified into categories.

### **3.7.14 Language**

The researcher must be receptive to the language of the participant as it is important that there is no misunderstanding and that words and terms reflect the language with which the participant is comfortable (Ritchie & Lewis 2003:123-124). Although the sample for this study included foreigners, all the interviews were in English and there was no need for an interpreter.

### 3.8 PILOT STUDY

The pilot study represents an essential part of the research process and is intended to examine the viability of the approach to be applied in the conducting of the study (Leon, Davis & Kraemer 2010:626-629).

To assist in identifying potential problems in the research design and measurement instruments, a pilot study, using a small subset of the target population, is tested. Once the researcher is confident with the pilot testing, the process of data collection can begin with the sample population (Bhattacharjee 2012:23). According to Turner (2010:757), participants with a similar interest or concern to the sample participants for the study should lead the pilot test. The pilot test will also assist the researcher in refining any research questions to ensure these will be intelligible to the targeted sample.

For the purpose of this study, preparation for data collection commenced with the pilot study. The researcher conducted the pilot study with two managers of ECD centres from the inner city precinct who had participated in the Point and Inner City ECD Forum activities. The same sampling criteria as discussed in Section 3.5.1 for selecting participants for the study were applied when selecting the pilot study participants. The face-to-face interviews were conducted at the ECD centres using a semi-structured interview guide, and they were conducted in English. With the permission of the participants, the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for the purpose of testing the questions and their applicability for the large research study. In testing the interview guide the feedback highlighted the need to reformulate the following questions owing to similarities and lack of clarity:

- Tell me more about your experience of participating in the ECD forum activities.
- What have you learnt through your involvement with the ECD forum?
- In what way did these lessons assist you?

These questions were reformulated to enhance the interview guide to read as follows:

- What have you personally learnt through your participation in the activities of the forum; what has your involvement meant to you?

- Is there anything else about your experience of participating in the ECD forum you would like to share?

The pilot study provided insight into other practical processes that needed to be considered when gathering data, such as making sure the participants fully understood the questions and the importance of using interviewing skills to explore more deeply, to clarify and to elicit information relevant to the investigation. The data acquired from the two pilot interviews were not included in the findings of the study.

### **3.9 DATA ANALYSIS**

The qualitative data analysis phase of the research refers to the process after data collection when the transcripts are organised and coded according to each participant's response to the questions. It includes reducing the data into the most prominent themes that emerge across all the interviews (Mack et al 2005:30). The volume of raw data generated by qualitative research through interviews, audio-recording, field notes, consent forms and other documents makes it imperative for the researcher to begin organising and analysing the data as early as possible. Taking place at the same time as data collection and management, is what Royse et al (2010:93) refer to as finding "meaning units" by analysing and reducing the data to develop a creative and descriptive conceptual system. Making sense of text and data collected during qualitative research studies requires an understanding of the necessary steps to take in order to be able to form answers to the research question (Creswell 2012:236).

In this study the researcher followed a systematic process of analysis of the data collected from the managers of inner city early childhood development centres who participated in the ECD Forum. Tesch's eight steps (cited by Creswell 2012:244-5) assisted the researcher in interpreting and understanding the data collected on the learning experiences of the managers from a social work perspective.

1. The researcher read all the transcripts thoroughly to gain a sense of the 'whole'. During this process the researcher made notes on the transcripts as ideas came to mind.



2. One transcript was selected and read by the researcher to determine the underlying meaning of what the person was saying. The ideas were recorded in a few words in the margin of the transcript.
3. The above step was followed for all the transcripts. The researcher then identified topics in the text and grouped these together into 'segments'. This process assisted the researcher in categorising the topics.
4. Each grouping of 'segments' was labelled and given a code. These codes were expressed in the most descriptive language established by the researcher and were written next to the segments in the text.
5. Once the researcher had coded an entire text, all code words were listed by grouping similar codes that related to one another together and organising them into themes.
6. The researcher made final decisions on the coding by testing this initial organising system by going back on the data to establish any new codes and by identifying new quotes from participants that supported the codes and discarding any redundant codes.
7. To limit the number of themes, the researcher made a final decision on the description given to each theme and included only codes most frequently discussed by participants, as a qualitative report with fewer themes produces a more detailed report.
8. After the researcher had completed these steps, the data were recorded.

The researcher engaged with an expert independent coder who analysed the data, compiled a table of themes and, after a consensus discussion, a comparison was made of the findings from the independent coder's report and those of the researcher in order to identify the themes, sub-themes and categories.

### **3.10 VERIFICATION OF DATA**

It is important to pay attention to rigour in all research methods because, without it, research loses its value and becomes worthless (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers 2002:14).

Qualitative researchers are responsible for the reliability and validity of the data they collect and analyse throughout the process of data collection. Validating findings will determine the accuracy or credibility of the findings which is important especially in qualitative research because of the self-reflective nature of the informative gathered (Creswell 2012:259). Strategies used to validate qualitative data vary. What is important is that the researcher resists personal bias or pressure from the outside to influence the study (Royse et al 2010:95). In the 1980s reliability and validity were substituted with the concept of 'trustworthiness' by Guba and Lincoln (cited by Morse et al 2002:14). This model includes four aspects, namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as strategies for demonstrating qualitative rigour. In search of a trustworthy study the researcher implemented verification strategies according to Guba's Model and the criteria to be considered as discussed below (Shenton 2004:63).

#### **3.10.1 Credibility of findings**

Credibility involves the process of establishing that the results of the research are believable. It was anticipated that the different techniques used in this study for data collection would ensure credibility and also improve the 'richness' of the data gathered. This is often more important than the amount of data collected. To ensure the truth-value of the research (Korstjens & Moser 2017:121) strategies, such as prolonged engagement, persistent observation and triangulation were used. Prolonged engagement refers to the long-term engagement with the participants and becoming familiar with them and their context in order to build trust and gather rich data (Korstjens & Moser 2017:121). Persistent observation is the identification and observation of elements that are most relevant to the problem being studied in the natural context (Johnson & Rasulova 2016:17). Both prolonged engagement and persistent observation were utilised by the researcher who, over the three years of engaging with the ECD managers during their participation in the ECD forum and

placing social work students in their ECD centres, was able to build rapport with the participants and become familiar with their settings and circumstances. This was helpful in ensuring quality data.

Triangulation, according to Royse et al (2010:95), refers to a strategy that relies on more than one type of data to gauge the credibility of findings by verifying evidence from different sources. In this way the accuracy of interpretations can be enhanced as each information source will be examined to find evidence in support of the themes (Creswell 2012:259). This multiple method of gathering the data serves as a method of cross-validation (Elliott & Timulak 2005:151).

This study drew on a number of sources of information, individuals and processes in an effort to establish credibility. The researcher interviewed seven different managers from distinctly unique ECD centres with their own strengths, weaknesses and challenges. Different types of data gathered through interviews, observation, fieldnotes and audio-recording were collected. Investigator triangulation refers to the use of independent coding, analysis and interpretation of the data (Korstjens & Moser 2017:121). In reaching a decision on the themes, sub-themes and categories for the study, the researcher and an independent coder analysed the data independently before having a discussion with the research supervisor.

### **3.10.2 Transferability of findings**

Transferability is the extent to which the qualitative research can be generalised or applied to other contexts, settings or with other groups. This is why the researcher must present sufficient descriptive data to allow for comparison. These data are referred to by Bhattacharjee (2012:111) as “thick descriptions”. A researcher can enhance transferability of findings by describing the research content and assumptions thoroughly so that a reader can ‘transfer’ the results to other settings independently. By providing detailed descriptive information of the behaviour and experiences of the participants and the context of the study, the information becomes more meaningful to the reader who can draw similarities with another context (Korstjens & Moser 2017:121). Generalising the meanings or findings constructed in qualitative research is not necessarily the goal of the research. Identifying and explaining the phenomena under study and the findings can,

however, enable researchers to understand the many perspectives that define the problem and its relevance to other contexts (Moon, Brewer, Januchoski-Hartly, Adams and Blackman 2016).

Although this study was unique to the socio-economic and cultural settings within the inner city of Durban, Kwazulu-Natal, the researcher used purposive sampling to select as many different participants who could provide detailed information on the learning experiences of managers of inner city ECD centres and whose characteristics could be compared against demographic information in similar regions and settings.

### **3.10.3 Dependability of findings**

Dependability is concerned with the reliability and transparency of the steps taken throughout the study to the development and reporting of the research findings (Korstjens & Moser 2017:121). Research is said to be dependable if two independent researchers, conducting a similar study and using the same evidence, are able to arrive at similar conclusions (Johnson et al 2016:24). To ensure dependability, sufficient information about the phenomenon and the social context in which it is embedded must be provided (Bhattacharjee 2012:110). According to Lincoln and Guba (cited in Pandey & Patnaik 2014:5750), by using the technique of “inquiry audit” as a measure to ensure dependability another researcher, examining the methods of data gathering, analysis and interpretation, should be able to understand and evaluate how decisions were made, categories derived and the findings were supported by data.

Another strategy in achieving dependability of findings is what Johnson et al (2016:24) refer to as peer examination, and this may include the internal or external process of colleagues checking decisions around the methods of sampling, data collection and analysis of the data. In addition to supervision throughout the study to ensure the objectivity and credibility of the research plan and implementation, the data were examined and coded independently and compared with the researcher’s conclusions before consensus was reached on the themes, sub-themes and categories in reporting dependable results.

### **3.10.4 Confirmability of findings**

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the research findings are not fabricated by the researcher but clearly relate to the data collected and analysed and can be confirmed by other researchers independently (Korstjens & Moser 2017:121).

Because qualitative research is interpretive, all researchers need to be self-reflective in an effort to remain neutral and consider how his or her personal history, assumptions, preconceptions and values may shape the interpretation of the findings (Creswell 2012:259). This process of critical reflexivity should also take into consideration the relationship between the researcher and the participants and how the participants' experiences and circumstances can affect the researcher's observations. The association that the researcher has with the settings and participants also changes with time and can potentially affect the research (Johnson et al 2016:18). The researcher had had associations with all the participants over a period of six years through the placement of social work students at their ECD centres for their practical training and or through their participation in the ECD Forum activities. It was important, therefore, to guard against these long associations and the knowledge of the participants' challenges and personal histories interfering with the analysis and interpretation of the data. The researcher ensured confirmability of the findings by reflecting after each interview on the information gathered and keeping a diary of her personal biases, feelings and limitations. The participants in particular need to be able to confirm that the conclusions reached by the researcher are consistent, accurate and valid and this involves reporting findings back to participants (Creswell 2012:259).

### **3.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has discussed the application of the qualitative research methodology employed for this research study. The researcher utilised a qualitative research method to explore, describe and contextualise the learning experiences of inner city early childhood development managers who participated in an ECD Forum in the city of Durban, eThekweni Municipality. Purposive sampling was employed to select seven ECD managers who met the selection criteria. Data were collected by way of semi-structured interviews that were recorded and the data analysed utilising the

eight steps as proposed by Tesch. The themes, sub-themes and categories identified were coded and verified according to Guba's Model and the four alternate constructs.

Chapter four covers the research findings.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND LITERATURE CONTROL**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The establishment of the Point and Inner City ECD Forum in 2011 arose out of a need for registered and unregistered ECD centres operating in the city to have a platform to meet on a regular basis with other ECD centres, practitioners and key stakeholders to share experiences and resources with the intention of mobilizing, being capacitated and learning. The ECD managers were motivated to participate and learn by their desire to offset the challenges facing inner city ECD centres and managers and the associated economic and social challenges experienced by many families whose children attended the ECD centres.

At the outset of the qualitative research study, the following research objectives were formulated:

- To explore the learning experiences for ECD managers through the interventions carried out by the Point and Inner City ECD Forum;
- To describe the learning experiences for ECD managers through the interventions carried out by the Point and Inner City ECD Forum; and
- To use reflexivity in analysing and synthesising the data from a social work perspective.

In order to realise these objectives, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven managers of inner city ECDs who had actively participated in the forum's meetings and associated awareness, discussion and capacity-building interventions during the period between 2014 and 2016. These managers were either the owners or principals of an ECD centre or educators in senior managerial positions. Prior to data collection, the researcher determined the criteria for the inclusion of the ECD managers in the sample which included managers who had been actively involved in the ECD forum over a period of three years and had participated in six or more of the activities or interventions during this period. The managers highlighted their learning experiences during the interviews which varied

from merely attending meetings to participating in site visits and interventions, observing activities and participating actively in the workshops and group discussions supported by the UNISA social work students.

#### 4.2 Biographical profile and description of the participants

The table below gives the demographic particulars of the research participants, namely the managers of ECD centres.

**Table 4. 1: Biographical profile of the participants**

Parti- pant	Gender	Age	Nationality	Training	Owner/ Manager/ Principal	Number of years managing the ECD Centre	Number of children	Number of Staff	Registra- tion of ECD Centre
<b>A</b>	F	49	Congolese	Honours degree in community development	Manager	10	130	9	NPO
<b>B</b>	F	61	South African	M.Ed in Educational Psychology	Manager/ Principal	21	92	8	NGO, DOE and DSD
<b>C</b>	F	55	South African	Teaching diploma and B.Ed Education Management	Owner/ Principal	9	65	8	DSD
<b>D</b>	M	43	Congolese	Bachelor Theology and Internal Auditing	Principal	4	87	6	DOE and DSD
<b>E</b>	F	55	South African	CIS, Marketing and General Management	Principal	5	142	12 fulltime/ 2 part-time	NGO and DSD
<b>F</b>	F	55	Zulu	Grade 12 plus NQF level 4	Owner/ Manager/ Principal	9	70	7	NPO
<b>G</b>	F	67	South African	Diploma in Education	Manager/ Principal	7	52	7	NPO

##### 4.2.1 Gender distribution of participants

Of the seven participants, six were females and one was a male. This statistic is an indication of the domination of female managers and educators within early childhood settings in the city. This confirms Mashiya's (2014:24) findings that traditionally fewer males work in childhood education settings owing to stereotyping



such as the belief that teaching is a woman's job. Furthermore, Drury 2008 (cited in Mashiya 2014:24) refers to the gender prejudice of males carrying out basic care tasks as a profession for men. In addition, van Polanen, Colonesi, Tavecchio, Blokhuis and Fukkink (2017:412) note worldwide only 3% of men are found in pre-primary education, and they argue that increased gender equality and male caregivers in early childcare settings could serve as role models for boys in particular. Interestingly, the male participant in this study had no early childhood education but had a background in theology and finance.

#### **4.2.2 Age distribution of participants**

The youngest participant in this study was 43 and the eldest 67 years old. Three of the female participants were the same age, namely 55 years old. Drawing on the developmental life stage theory of Erik Erikson (Louw, van Ede & Louw 2003:54), in order to develop optimally an adult must resolve stages of psychosocial development with generativity versus stagnation covering most of adulthood between 40 and 65 years. This concept includes productivity and concern for enriching other people's lives, for instance by educating and caring for children. This stage and choice of work is, therefore, representative of the life stage of all the participants. According to a research study (Sewdas, de Wind, van der Zwaan, van der Borg, Steenbeek, van der Beek & Boot 2017:6), working after 60 and into retirement enables a person to utilize his/her abilities by passing on knowledge and skills in addition to learning new knowledge and skills himself/herself and thereby maintain a purpose in life by being an active citizen. This is applicable to two of the participants in this study.

#### **4.2.3 Nationality of participants**

The race distribution of participants in this study includes three White people, one Coloured person, one Black person, all South African, and two Congolese nationals. One participant in the pilot study was an Indian which means that overall all the race groups living and operating ECD centres in the city of Durban were represented. According to Sabet-Sarghi 2000 (as cited in Amisi 2006:1-2), in Durban, in 2000, there were 787 Congolese refugees and asylum seekers representing 29.5% of all refugees and the largest refugee group in Durban. As immigration and labour

policies become stricter, the refugee community experienced further exclusion from access to formal job opportunities, social welfare and protection. This is of particular importance to this study as a number of foreigners either manage, or are educators in, city ECD centres. In most, if not all, of the centres the children from foreign families attend the ECD centres. In the case of one participating ECD centre that is managed by a Congolese person, the ratio of foreign to local children was 60:40. In the area where this ECD centre is located, there are many foreign nationals from different countries.

#### **4.2.4 Educational qualification of participants**

Only three of the participants in the study had formal educational training. The remaining participants had a variety of formal training backgrounds, namely a bachelor degree in community development, a bachelor degree in theology and finance, while one participant had a corporate background in marketing and general management and one participant had a National Certificate NQF 4 in Educare. All the managers were educated in early childhood education and care. They all have some experience in the ECD field.

A manager, owner, or principal of an ECD centre must also have childcare practitioner knowledge and should, therefore, be equipped with relevant ECD knowledge. The National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy document (2015:77) indicates that it is the responsibility of the Department of Higher Education and Training to provide early childhood development training, and this includes overseeing the quality and accreditation of training practitioners through the relevant Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and qualifications councils. In the Diagnostic Review of Early Childhood Development, Richter et al (2012:29) highlight the need to improve the human resource situation relating to early childhood care and education (ECCE) services by providing ongoing training, upgrading and development of career opportunities to retain staff in ECCE. The inner city managers aspired to learn and grow their knowledge and skills by attending the forum meetings to stay abreast of the new ECD developments and policies.

#### **4.2.5 Participants role within the ECD centre**

One of the criteria used to identify participants for the study was that they held a position of management within the ECD centre. Apart from being responsible for administering the overall functioning of the ECD centre and the staff, two of the participants were also the owners of the ECD centre. In both instances, the motivation for opening an ECD centre was to provide a service to the local community. Quality early learning and school readiness as well as the holistic wellbeing of children living in environments with limited safe outdoor space provided their main objective over a profit-making venture. In addition to the responsibilities of managing the ECD centres, four of the six principals were also actively involved in the daily teaching programmes, placing enormous strain on the human resources within centres. Richter et al (2012:50) comments on the importance that leadership and management play in the quality of the ECD centre and notes that gaps exist in the funding and service delivery models to those ECD Centres, NGOs and CBOs who lack strong management, resources, infrastructure and finances to sustain services of a good quality. In the absence of adequate monitoring and evaluation and support structures for many of the city ECD centres, the forum provided an informal setting for capacity building and, importantly, what Sachs 2003 (cited in HSRC 2015:6) refers to as a catalyst for identifying problems and collectively finding solutions to these problems.

#### **4.2.6 Duration of time managing the ECD centre**

The length of time that participants had managed the ECD centre ranged between four and twenty-one years. One of the inclusion criteria for participation in the study was that the managers must have participated in the forum activities over a period of three years. The extent and range of experience of participants, in particular those who had served in their communities for periods of seven, nine, and ten and twenty-one years, added credibility to the findings. Regardless of the challenges, all the participants had appreciated and encouraged 'the best' that the community had to offer in continually building a new future for the ECD centre (Schenck, Nel & Louw 2010:65). This duration of time as managers and their experience were more valuable than the size of the sample in providing data that was rich in information (Mason 2002:134).

#### **4.2.7 Number of children and number of trained and unqualified staff at the ECD centre**

The number of children attending the ECD centres ranged from forty-five to one hundred and forty-two children. The number of staff per ECD centre, including the manager, ranged from six to twelve and this included teachers, teacher assistants, cooks, cleaners and gardeners.

It was important to note that a number of the participants reported that attendance of children at the beginning of the year and at the end of the school year fluctuated because of parents trying to cut back on paying school fees. For the purpose of this study, the significance of the number of children and staff is that it provided information on the efforts of the managers to adhere to norms and standards as stipulated in the Children's Act 38 of 2005 insofar as the ratio of staff to child is concerned.

The level of training of the staff within the ECD centres varied from having obtained degrees in the B.Ed foundation phase to having the National Certificate in ECD at NQF levels 4, 5 and 6. Still other staff were in the process of training towards formal ECD training. All staff had ECD training through experience. The managers showed a commitment to upskilling their staff who were included in forum meetings when it was possible to release them from their duties at the ECD centres. If managers were unable to attend, they would send a representative staff member in their place. Managers were aware that, in applying to register with the Department of Social Development, applicants had to fulfil the qualifications, skills and training criteria (Jules-Macquet 2016:12-13).

#### **4.2.8 Registration status of the ECD centre**

Four of the ECD Centres were registered with the Department of Social Development (DSD) and, in addition, two of these centres were registered with the Department of Education (DOE). As such, these centres would have the opportunity to apply for the DSD subsidy for children from 0 – 4 years whose caregivers passed the income means test (Giese & Budlender 2011:3-4). As reported by the participants, however, this process is not easy because the grant is conditional on meeting certain criteria, and it can be withdrawn if the centre fails to meet these. In

the case of community-based centres with Grade R registered with the DOE there are also subsidy opportunities in the form of 'per child' or a salary subsidy for a Grade R teacher (Giese & Budlender 2011:3-4).

The other three sites registered as non-profit organisations expressed their eagerness to comply and register with DSD; however, they did not meet the criteria at the time of the research. One of these centres operates from Church premises and falls under the overall control of the Church; one is in the heart of the city and hub of market activity. Although this latter centre has received support from the local municipality, receives reliable support in kind from various stakeholders and their facilities are of a high standard, there are gaps in the areas of management and the provision of learning programmes and trained staff. The third centre operates from a building that is condemned and does not meet the criteria for registration with DSD regarding infrastructure and health and safety standards. Many of the children attending this ECD centre come from families living below the poverty line, and the school management and staff, although dedicated, themselves are foreigners struggling to make ends meet. The Global Partnership for Education Strategic Plan 2016-2020 (Bernard van Leer Foundation 2016:22) endeavours to enhance partnerships on a global level to ensure equitable education for all by assisting families in low-income countries realize their right to education through increased funding to support efficient education systems. Giese et al (2011:6), however, note that neither DSD nor DOE is obligated to fund ECD services even to the poorest and most marginalised communities.

#### **4.3 DISCUSSION ON THEMES, SUB-THEMES AND CATEGORIES IN RELATION TO LITERATURE**

Table 4.2 encapsulates the themes, sub-themes and categories that emerged from the interviews with the managers of ECD centres participating in the activities of the ECD Forum.

**Table 4.2: An overview of themes, sub-themes and categories that emerged from the data analysis:**

<b>Theme 1: The Forum provided a comprehensive participatory adult learning experience</b>
<p><b>Sub-themes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning how to support the children</li> <li>• Learning how to support the parents</li> <li>• Learning how to support the teachers</li> </ul> <p><b>Categories:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning through music training</li> <li>• Learning through Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) training</li> <li>• Learning through recycling training</li> <li>• Learning through the Personal Doll training</li> <li>• Learning through First Aid training</li> <li>• Learning about gardening, outdoor spaces and nutrition</li> <li>• Learning about safety and security</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 2: Learning to improve the operational management of the ECD centre</b>
<p><b>Sub-themes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning how to manage the ECD finances and budget</li> <li>• Learning how to apply policy and to comply with governance</li> <li>• Learning how to build resources for the ECD centre</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 3: Learning through networks and engagement with other key role-players</b>
<p><b>Sub-themes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning through peer group activities and conversations</li> <li>• Learning through networking with external stakeholders</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 4: Participants perceptions of the challenges experienced by the ECD managers, staff and the ECD Centres</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sub-theme:</b></li> <li>• External challenges</li> <li>• <b>Categories:</b></li> <li>• Poverty</li> <li>• Finances</li> <li>• Inadequate support from property owners</li> <li>• Inadequate premises and space</li> <li>• Inadequate number of primary schools</li> <li>• <b>Sub-theme:</b></li> <li>• Internal challenges</li> <li>• <b>Categories:</b></li> </ul>

- Trauma and stress
- Human resources
- Finances
- Minimal parental participation
- Parents not understanding school readiness

#### **Theme 5: Participants accounts of common factors compromising the well-being of the children**

##### **Sub-themes:**

- Poverty
- Unhealthy environments and lack of resources
- Poor parenting
- Absenteeism and arriving late

#### **Theme 6: The participants accounts of what helped them to manage the identified threats or challenges**

##### **Sub-themes:**

- Participation in the forum activities
- Empowered teachers
- Parent participation
- Fund-raising background, financial management and other assistance

#### **Theme 7: The participants' recommendations**

##### **Sub-theme:**

- Recommendations to the forum committee relating to learning interventions or activities

##### **Categories:**

- Learning opportunities for teachers, staff and parents
- Meetings for managers only
- Forum to visit and evaluate ECD centres

##### **Sub-theme:**

- Recommendations to the forum committee on assistance or change needed to improve conditions for ECD centres, staff and families

##### **Categories:**

- Practical assistance
- Revisit norms and standards
- Financial support
- Access to outdoor play spaces
- Greater stakeholder collaboration and a municipal ECD champion for the rights of children
- Coordinate additional meetings and community engagement opportunities
- Address the need for more primary schools
- Social work support and a basic guidelines tool kit
- Need for strong ECD leaders

In the next section of this discussion, each one of the main themes and accompanying sub-themes and, where applicable, categories will be presented and confirmed or endorsed by direct quotes from the transcripts of the interviews and thereafter compared and contrasted with available literature.

The forum hosted quarterly meetings, and the managers must have attended 50% of the activities or at least six of the forum meetings over the three-year period between 2014 and 2016 to qualify for the study. Table 4.3 provides an overview of the categories of learning activities that each of the participants referred to during the interviews.

**Table 4.3: Categories of learning activities attended by the participants**

<b>Parti- pant</b>	<b>Training for Managers/Educators</b>	<b>Training on ECD policy and registration</b>	<b>Training on childcare activities</b>
<b>A</b>	<p>Inter-sectoral training - iTrump/Tree/DSD/ECD Forum – available training; what the municipality is doing in the city and how they can support ECD centres; registration requirements</p> <p>Senior Municipal Manager - budgeting and coordinating services in terms of Children’s Act</p> <p>Soul Action SA – training, monitoring and support programme over 11 weeks</p>	<p>DSD – registration process for ECD centres</p> <p>DSD – norms and standards presentation</p> <p>Department of Environmental Health – health and safety requirements for ECD centres</p> <p>Forum Committee presentation on Draft National ECD Policy gazetted by the Minister of Social Development – discussion and input report submitted to DSD</p>	<p>Mennonite Central Committee – Learn Through Play</p> <p>LEGO SA – Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) training</p>
<b>B</b>	<p>College of Emergency Care KZN – First Aid Training</p> <p>KZN Children’s Hospital – assessment criteria for children</p> <p>Visit to Birches Pre-Primary School and eThekweni Aquaponics Research Centre – eco-awareness and discovery learning</p> <p>Social work support from UNISA students</p>	<p>DSD – registration process for ECD centres</p> <p>DSD – norms and standards presentation</p> <p>Department of Environmental Health – health and safety requirements for ECD centres</p>	<p>Soul Action SA – workshop on making musical instruments using waste materials</p> <p>eThekweni Municipality Department of Parks and Gardens – Nature based play awareness training</p> <p>Persona Doll Training – tool to address issues of diversity and inclusion</p> <p>UKZN School of Arts and Music – the value of music and musical concepts to be taught to children in ECD settings</p>
<b>C</b>	<p>KZN Children’s Hospital – assessment criteria for children</p> <p>College of Emergency Care KZN – First Aid Training</p>	<p>DSD – registration process for ECD centres</p> <p>DSD – norms and standards presentation</p>	<p>Soul Action SA – workshop on making musical instruments using waste materials</p> <p>UKZN School of Arts and Music – the value of music and musical concepts to be taught to children in ECD settings</p>



	<p>KZN Children's Hospital Educational Psychologist and Addington Hospital Clinical Psychologist – identifying special needs and assessment and therapeutic processes available</p>	<p>Department of Environmental Health – health and safety requirements for ECD centres</p> <p>Childline KZN and Point SAPS – awareness and advocacy – child protection and how to identify child abuse</p>	<p>Persona Doll Training – tool to address issues of diversity and inclusion</p> <p>Imagine Durban Sustainable Living Exhibition – children participated by submitting their mobiles made from repurposed waste</p>
<b>D</b>	<p>Visit to Birches Pre-Primary School and eThekwini Aquaponics Research Centre – eco-awareness and discovery learning</p>	<p>Department of Environmental Health – presentation on health requirements for ECD centres</p> <p>Childline KZN and Point SAPS – awareness and advocacy – child protection and how to identify child abuse</p>	<p>Soul Action SA – workshop on making musical instruments using waste materials</p> <p>UKZN School of Arts and Music – the value of music and musical concepts to be taught to children in ECD settings</p> <p>LEGO SA – Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) training</p> <p>Persona Doll Training – tool to address issues of diversity and inclusion</p>
<b>E</b>	<p>KZN Children's Hospital Educational Psychologist and Addington Hospital Clinical Psychologist – identifying special needs and assessment and therapeutic processes available</p> <p>ECD Forum Committee presentation on young children's behaviour and identifying special needs and problems</p>	<p>Childline KZN and Point SAPS – awareness and advocacy – child protection and how to identify child abuse</p>	<p>LEGO SA – Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) training</p> <p>eThekwini Municipality Department of Parks and Gardens – Nature based play awareness training</p> <p>UKZN School of Arts and Music – the value of music and musical concepts to be taught to children in ECD settings</p> <p>Persona Doll Training – tool to address issues of diversity and inclusion</p>
<b>F</b>	<p>eThekwini Municipality Department of Parks and Gardens – permaculture training</p> <p>College of Emergency Care KZN – First Aid Training</p> <p>eThekwini Municipality – safety and security of young children attending ECD centres in the city</p> <p>Food for Life and eThekwini Municipality – poverty alleviation and food and nutrition presentation</p>	<p>DSD – registration process for ECD centres – norms and standards.</p> <p>Department of Environmental Health – health and safety requirements for ECD centres.</p>	<p>Persona Doll Training – tool to address issues of diversity and inclusion</p> <p>LEGO SA – Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) training</p> <p>Soul Action SA – workshop on making musical instruments using waste materials</p> <p>UKZN School of Arts and Music – the value of music and musical concepts to be taught to children in ECD settings</p> <p>Imagine Durban Sustainable Living Exhibition – children participated by submitting their mobiles made from repurposed waste</p>

<b>G</b>	eThekweni Municipality – safety and security of young children attending ECD centres in the city  KZN Children’s Hospital Educational Psychologist and Addington Hospital Clinical Psychologist – identifying special needs and assessment and therapeutic processes available  College of Emergency Care KZN – First Aid Training	DSD – registration process for ECD centres  Department of Environmental Health – health and safety requirements for ECD centres.	Persona Doll Training – tool to address issues of diversity and inclusion  UKZN School of Arts and Music – the value of music and musical concepts to be taught to children in ECD settings  Soul Action SA – workshop on making musical instruments using waste materials  LEGO SA – Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) training
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#### **4.3.1 Theme 1: The forum provided a comprehensive participatory adult learning experience**

This theme focuses on the forum as a comprehensive participatory adult learning experience. According to Marzano, Lubkina and Siguencia (2016:69-70), adult lifelong learning fulfils issues of employability by meeting the need for learning new skills, and it is a valuable tool for addressing topical issues and providing people with a sense of active citizenship and social inclusion. Table 4.1, the biographical profile of the participants, reflects on the participants ECD educational levels and period they were active in the field of ECD. Although this varied considerably, it in no way influenced the level of commitment and enthusiasm for participating, sharing and learning of both the managers and their staff attending forum meetings. Referring to the principle of learning, Swanepoel and de Beer (2006:32) highlight the value of continuous learning to fulfil needs and the importance of participation and collective learning where there is no one teacher but where all are role-players; government, non-government, formal and informal participants learn together in realising their objectives.

Section 1.2.2 of the report, under ‘motivation for the study’, refers to an audit conducted in 2014 by UNISA Department of Social Work and a focus group discussion with ECD centres and stakeholders. Feedback from both these interventions provided the forum with an inclusive framework for possible areas of capacity building and informal learning. In addition, during the quarterly meetings, the identified and dynamic needs of the participants in the forum guided the

committee in identifying professional training, presentations, awareness interventions and outreach activities for the forum participants.

The request for ongoing learning opportunities through the forum closely relates to McGivney's 1999 (as cited in Golding, Brown & Foley 2009: 36-37) definition of informal learning, namely activities such as discussions, presentations and guidance facilitated by a range of professionals, organisations and sectors outside a traditional learning environment and arising from the interests and needs of individuals and groups.

A participant's comment supports this definition:

*"I would like to say continue what you are doing, build on, look, you have asked us as the forum what we would like to hear and what we do want to learn....so I am grateful as a member of the forum you are listening to us. So I think keep doing what you are doing, keep asking the forum because also for us our challenges and needs also change almost on a daily basis".*

This comment also supports Fung 2003 (as cited in Moulaert et al 2015:405) who asserts that participatory scenarios for learning should allow people to develop through open consultation and adequate information.

The participating managers of the ECD centres were asked to describe their involvement in the activities of the ECD forum in which they had participated.

The responses are given in three sub-themes, namely learning how to support the children, learning how to support the parents, and learning how to support the teachers.

#### **4.3.1.1 Sub-theme: Learning how to support the children**

The managers referred to activities and information they received through the ECD forum that related to the socio-emotional needs of children and their role as managers in promoting the best interests of children including matters of care, protection and general well-being (Children's Act No. 38 of 2005: section 9).

*“There were many. I tried my best to not miss any one ... in 2014 I participated in the ECD educator. It was facilitated by UNISA social worker. We got information and a lot of ideas on how to improve the lives of children in the ECD centres”.*

Commenting on the importance of social work intervention in early childhood education settings, Greenberg et al (2013:310-312) notes that the needs and well-being of families and young children have always been a core focus of social work. Social workers play an important role in delivering services and addressing socio-economic inequalities within those settings. Furthermore, research conducted in South Africa (Training and Resources in Early Education [sa]:3-22) highlights the importance of basic ECD training for social workers and their crucial role in providing support and transformation to enhance ECD service delivery and, thereby, significantly impacting on the well-being and development of children.

Another participant reported that, in an environment where children come from varying socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and struggle with the concomitant daily hardships, he had learnt the value of showing love and caring for children as evidenced in the following storyline:

*“OK what I learned, my experience in the forum I can say, OK allow me just to say I learn how to work, I know I work with the kids, but how to treat the children. How to love the children, how to work with the children, you have to take them as your own children. Because there is always a difference between your own children and others and someone else's children but those children they come from different places but when they come here, when you take them as your own children you will love them, you will never harm them because you were taking them like your own children”.*

Reporting on refugee migration in the city of Durban, South Africa, Amisi (2006:46-49) reports that a consequence for families is that children often suffer in that their parents are unable to provide for their basic needs, needs such as food, shelter, school fees and general care. The influence of a child's home, social, economic and cultural environment significantly influences the development of a child, and the social and emotional relationships that a young child has with parents, siblings and

significant others are paramount to their well-being (Louw, van Ede & Louw 2003:234).

#### **4.3.1.2 Sub-theme: Learning how to support the parents**

Through the professional and specialised learning opportunities coordinated by the forum, managers were equipped with knowledge relating to childcare and identifying childhood learning challenges. This enabled them to support parents by referring them for professional assistance. The family as the “pillar of society” is central to facilitating support and care for their children. According to a study by Ebrahim (2012:1-3), however, because families living in poverty are prone to not functioning optimally, their children’s development is at risk, and support systems to assist the family in accessing resources and services to meet their parenting responsibilities are required.

A manager spoke about how she had learnt about identifying autistic symptoms and how this enabled her to refer families for support:

*“This goes back to ..... how to assess children....her area of study was autism and we have had parents come into our school with children with symptoms of autism, learning challenges and the typical situation where the parent knows that there is something wrong and now you see all those dynamics play out. So she contributed a lot...gave a lot of information on that. How to identify how to refer and how to manage. Yes and then from that we actually referred children....Where I personally learned a lot.... I was then able to take that back to my school to benefit children in the school. Because then I could say to the parents look this is the route you follow go to (the hospital) and they do have a department that would then assist”.*

The above comment supports the Children’s Act No. 38 (2005: section 7) which refers to the responsibility of parents or any other caregiver to provide for the protection of children from physical harm, violence, neglect or any other harmful behaviour. The presentation by the South African Police Service on the safety and security of children living in the city equipped ECD managers and staff with information and processes to which they should adhere regarding the safety of

children and the signs of abuse and neglect of children in their care. The managers and ECD centres became a support structure for parents and children in this area.

*“The police...Yes I find that very beneficial...I think the forum is the right platform to get engagement and interaction and to roll out information because the schools can reach the parents... And I think from there also the fact that they could do school visits and talk to them and change the perception of police being watchdogs, rather to being the friend that a child can go to on the street you know I enjoyed that”.*

The managers referred to the limitations on parents owing to their personal circumstances. They felt that their participation in the forum and capacity building activities assisted them and their staff to intervene by supporting parents and their children as part of the child’s broader support environment.

Commenting on the role of parents in ECD, Landry (2014:2) refers to research conducted in relation to children at high-risk, including children living in poverty and the positive impact that responsive parenting and active engagement and support from friends, family and the social environment has on promoting normal development in children. In contrast, unresponsive parenting and limited support may threaten a child’s social, emotional and cognitive development and well-being.

Another participant commented on the numerous opportunities for capacity building that there was for forum participants that assisted managers and ECD centres to be the support environment for families:

*“No outdoor space, limited home space because there are two or three families living together, working moms and dads who don't have the time but want to. So we find that we have to fill in those gaps. So well this year we achieved that as a forum, doing the music. I think we did a lot of that this year and I was very happy with that. We have done a lot of art and creativity and recycling, I think one of the other things we could focus on is developing the large muscle in a limited space, how do we challenge that, how do we take that forward?”*

The finding confirms the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 13) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Article 12) for a child's right to play, to receive recreation, art and cultural activities, all essential to enhance social skills and develop physical agility and muscle coordination (Prest Talbot & Thornton's 2009:13-19).

#### **4.3.1.3 Sub-theme: Learning how to support teachers**

Most of the participants referred to their efforts to implement change within their ECD centres by developing their teachers' skills. They did this by including them in the ECD forum's activities where possible. At times, it was difficult for the managers to attend meetings themselves so they would send their staff. Ideally, they would want their staff to accompany them to the meetings so that they could have their own learning experience and opportunity for empowerment, but circumstances within the ECD centres and limited human resources did not always allow for this. The attempt of the managers to instil a culture of learning through participatory processes supports Chambers' (as cited in Schenck et al 2010:82) view of change that emphasises listening to the stories and experiences of others and includes self-reflection by the practitioner to assist in rethinking actions and adopting new approaches to complex problems. The following excerpts illustrate this point:

*"Most of those ECD forum meetings and trainings I used to come myself or send one teacher".*

*"Depending on the agenda that is how I select my staff. I want my staff to interact with the other schools; I want them to see what is offered because I think the forum brings in interesting people....."*

*"... also the platform that empowers the teachers, so I think the forum benefits the school on both levels. My teachers have benefited a lot, like I said now for myself being an experienced teacher, sometimes I come just to empower my teachers. Just for them to interact..."*

These findings confirm the view that personal and professional development significantly influences competencies, standards and the quality of services rendered by the ECD workforce and, although competences may vary, interpersonal

and communication skills are essential core competences that are (Putchá 2018:4-5) offered by the workshops.

Another participant stressed the importance of giving all staff the opportunity to learn through the ECD forum:

*“I always do like let's say this month we have a meeting I must make sure today I'll bring one teacher, the next meeting I have to bring another teacher not only one because all of them they must also learn. ....you can't just go and learn and keep it for yourself because it is not about myself me alone here. We are working as a team. Whatever we learn from there the ECD forum, when we come back here we always share with other staff”.*

This type of experiential learning, as explained by Schwartz (2012:2-3), is suited to learners who benefit from the motivation of contextual learning, where there is no classroom or textbooks, where the learner is able to connect what he/she is learning to the world he/she is in and also have personal hands-on experience and examples of the subject.

The value of promoting growth and change through participatory, experiential learning processes accessed through the forum was expressed in the following quotation, confirming Korten's (as cited in Schenck *et al* 2010:84) view of change as a social learning process that allows people to develop:

*“...I wish I could bring all my staff but the thing is I can't leave the children. Practically you see that is the thing...I try and bring a minimum of two staff. I don't want to be greedy, but at the same time I want to expose as many of my staff as possible, because I always come back and in our staff meetings we share with the other staff. We always give a feedback session like today. I did that just today on what the Captain had said ....do not take children home and take the child to the closest police station and all that kind of thing. But it is not the same as if my staff were with me at the meeting, actually being exposed. And also another thing is they hear my voice every single day. So sometimes for them I see it as a treat for them to get out of the school environment and come to a meeting. ....So yes, that is why I love to*



*bring my staff and I just wish I could bring all of them. But practically it is just not possible”.*

For staff who had no formal training participating in the forum activities empowered teachers who were able to put into practice their learning and build confidence in their abilities:

*“I must say....training in 2014 benefited one of my staff members, a caregiver, who had no training whatsoever .... it empowered her that yes, she can work in a classroom with small children and I think it helped her in terms of different play activities and so on...”.*

Essentially ECD practitioners should have an NQF Level 4 qualification or other accepted qualification that equips them with knowledge and training to deliver ECD programmes, which could include three years of practically applying an ECD programme (Berry et al 2011:32).

The benefits of ongoing training interventions for the managers and teachers were confirmed by research undertaken by Lessing and de Witt (2007:55) which draws attention to effective personal and professional development and highlights the importance of first identifying the specific needs of teachers and the value of learning on a continuous basis to support teachers and build their confidence. The response below supports this research:

*“I think the forum meetings when we just meet four times a year are quite short, but it is the ongoing interventions, which are the most useful. For example, even the presentation by Dr G. Maybe my question about that is that it was just a short presentation of I think about an hour and something and she did it very well, very professionally, but it is difficult to absorb so much information in a short time and then to still see how it applies in our different contexts. So yes, but following from that actually one of the social work students who is based in my school ran a support group and invited a UNISA Honours student who went through some of those areas with us as a team, with the teachers, and we could discuss things like autism, like ADHD you know and that was useful”.*

Five categories emerged from this sub-theme, namely learning through music training; learning through Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) training; learning through recycling training; learning through the Persona Doll training; learning through First Aid training; learning about gardening, outdoor spaces and nutrition; and learning about safety and security.

The Children's Act 38 of 2005 (South Africa 2006: section 91(1)) defines ECD as "*the process of emotional, cognitive, sensory, spiritual, moral, physical, social and communication development of children from birth to school-going age*". The following categories focus on the attempts of the ECD forum to offer different activities and training that aimed at introducing teachers to a variety of play and learning activities to stimulate the development of children in their care.

#### **4.3.1.3.1 Category: Learning through music training**

ECD teachers are not only required to have developmental and pedagogical knowledge but also knowledge that nurtures creativity. Research on music training for ECD teachers suggests that exposure to music in their environment helps children to explore their emotions and thoughts either alone or with others (Trevanthen & Malloch 2002, as cited in Vannatta-Hall 2010: 20-22).

The participants described the training workshops on music and making musical instruments as valuable not only for the children but for themselves. They felt that they had limited musical ability and knowledge and that, particularly for children living in the city who spend much of their time indoors in overcrowded high-rise buildings where they lacked play spaces, music was a valuable tool for expressing of feelings:

*"...making musical instruments the teachers enjoyed that ...I found that very interesting...because sometimes you find that there are certain areas in the curriculum that you don't have the expertise to touch on or offer, myself I can't sing to save my life so I will be in trouble so I need help there... So I mean for that, the learning curve for the teachers would be phenomenal because these children, the inner city child need music, they need that therapy, they are cooped up all the time so they need as much practical as much music, I believe music is therapy. When they walk into the school in the morning, we*

*have a radio playing and you just see the moods change...We play all the nursery rhymes in the morning and it's healing even for us teachers”.*

*“I mean the music course where they all got the sticks then I made them all sticks and each classroom had swirl sticks...from that point of view it just re-generates”.*

The concept “regenerates” refers to “improving a place or system so that it is active or producing good results again” (Cambridge Dictionary 2019, sv “regenerate”). In support of these storylines and the concept of regeneration and building peace and social justice, Nicholls ([sa]:12) refers to the benefits of art and music and the peace-building theory of John Paul Lederach (2010). His work focuses on ‘sonic phenomena’ where individuals and communities regain their ‘voice’ to repair conflict by finding a space where they feel safe and can express and receive the “echo of each other’s voices”. Likewise, the American poet, singer and civil rights activist, Maya Angelou, once said, “music was my refuge. I could crawl into the space between the notes and curl my back to loneliness ” (Muse 2016).

#### **4.3.1.3.2 Category: Learning through Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) training**

The principal and an educator from selected ECD centres in the city benefited from STEM training and the donation of LEGO kits through an initiative sponsored by the eThekweni Municipality in collaboration with public stakeholders. The launch of their STEM Programme in 2014 was an effort by the local municipality to support initiatives that would offset the effects of poverty experienced by children living in the city and their right to quality care and educational stimulation. This intervention through the forum was in keeping with the local government’s responsibility as outlined in chapter 6 of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 (South Africa 2006: section 94) to provide appropriate programmes to assist all children to realise their full potential by meeting their cognitive needs.

A large majority of the inner city ECD centres were dependent on support from external stakeholders to provide resources, equipment and teacher training. Through the donation of LEGO kits and STEM training, the principals and teachers

were taught how to use the blocks not only for creative play and for fine-motor development but also to teach the basics of mathematics and problem solving.

The participants had the following to say about this training:

*“I’m hungry for knowledge because I want to know as much as I can to be able to implement as much as I can so to answer your question, the DUPLO (LEGO) I found absolutely fascinating”.*

The sense of participants being ‘hungry’ to learn through play and impart the learning to their teachers and the children is consistent with the view of Theoharis and Brooks (2012:120) that children apply skills of critical thinking and problem solving when they manipulate objects in the block area, learn to compromise in the drama corner, and ponder the properties of colour through art. Such play is the perfect environment for teachers to apply their knowledge.

*“When we did the LEGO we came back and re-trained so all that information gets cascaded and fed back into the school”.*

A study by Wilson (2007:6) makes reference to Chaille and Britain’s (2003) image of the children as active, naturally curious scientists and places the responsibility on teachers to provide children with an environment with opportunities and materials for scientific thinking where they can explore and construct meaning. Research has also shown that many educators themselves did not succeed in science and mathematics in their schooling and yet teachers can make a serious difference in introducing STEM education in the early years of a child’s life.

#### **4.3.1.3.3 Category: Learning through recycling training**

In confirming this category of learning experiences and the managers’ storylines, Sachs & Biersteker (as cited by TREE 2018: 13-14) report on the critical role that practitioners play as facilitators and mediators of learning through planned activities using equipment and opportunities which allow children to explore and experiment using all five senses. The managers of inner city ECD centres learnt the value of waste management and that limited resources need not deter them from planning educational experiences to meet the children’s developmental needs. Managers mentioned activities that enhanced their creative knowledge, which they, in turn,

transferred to their teachers who had an opportunity to participate in the eThekweni Municipality Sustainable Living Exhibition:

*“There were so many things that we learned there. To have children is not only about to have money, to have a lot of money so that you can do something for the children. Even the things that you can pick from the floor or the street you can take them. They taught us how to make them useful to help the children you can see that from nothing you have something”.*

*“...the first year we did the mobile in the recycle yes that was lovely the children had a lovely learning experience there, using waste to make mobiles and now we did the tree on the last one (Sustainable Living Exhibition), our little magic tree”.*

#### **4.3.1.3.4 Category: Learning through the Personal Doll training**

Many children attending ECD centres in the inner city were from refugee families or from families who were experiencing the effects of post-apartheid prejudices and were living in extreme poverty based on ability or class. The ECD forum offered managers, their staff and social work students the Persona Doll training an anti-bias, psychosocial support ‘tool’ based on the tradition of universal story telling. This learning experience for teachers supported the importance of play in times of trauma and the view that play and telling their story through the Personal Doll assisted children to channel their emotions and experiences in a safe space where they could escape from their fears or negative memories (Prest Talbot & Thornton 2009:24). Referring to the characteristics of a school that fosters the emotional development of children, Sachs and Biersteker (as cited by TREE 2018:22) stress the value of caring, skilled practitioners when a child needs an outlet to persevere through challenging times or when his/her confidence and self-image is at a low point.

*“...the Persona Doll was very good. Two of my teachers did attend. They did the training they have been using it in the classroom and...in fact we are re-doing at the moment the school is very quiet so we are using that time to re-train the other teachers”.*

*“...I loved that, absolutely loved that and the teachers who came with me loved it and they in turn have come back to the school and done a mini workshop with the rest of the staff”.*

*“...it was very interesting because when we are teaching the children they are not afraid to talk now because, if I carry the doll, they think this doll is talking. So that’s why they are proud to talk now because if I talk to them I say, you see my child is talking so why you not talk because you see my child is talking. Then they talk freely”*

This anti-bias training assisted the social work students to have a better understanding of their own biases where awareness, according to Greenberg et al (2013:317), is important when social workers are helping parents and child carers in the management of children’s behaviour.

#### **4.3.1.3.5 Category: Learning through First Aid training**

The Children’s Act No. 38 of 2005 (South Africa 2006: section 94) asserts that a person suitable to work in the field of ECD must be competent to care for children constructively by providing the support and security they may require. Young children, particularly under the age of four years, are vulnerable to a number of dangers as they tend to explore through their mouths and are not able to distinguish between bad odours or tastes. They can easily swallow poisonous and potentially life threatening substances or objects (UNICEF 2006:81).

The National Health Act, 2003 (Act 61 of 2003: section 83) outlines the responsibility of municipalities for administering municipal health services. To assist the managers in their responsibility for ensuring a safe environment for children in their care, First Aid training was facilitated and this included the identification, prevention and management of illnesses. The Department of Environmental Health provided information about the requirements for an ECD centre, which included a donation of an improvised First Aid Box in cases where centres could not afford expensive equipment.

*“I have to comment about the Department of Health. They came to explain to us about if you are at school in case something happens to a child...how*

*to deal with the situation you just can't take the child, maybe the child swallowed something...maybe swallowed let's say coins, how to help the child take it out. You can take the child to the hospital but something just happens you need to do before, to do something to help the child".*

*"And the first aid training was most appreciated by my teachers and the first aid supplies very useful in the school"*

#### **4.3.1.3.6 Category: Learning about gardening, outdoor spaces and nutrition**

The Nutrition Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Centres (2016:1-2) draw attention to childcare providers and their unique position in laying a good foundation for a healthy and active lifestyle for children's optimal growth and development in preventing potentially irreversible damage to their physical and mental wellbeing. The South African Early Childhood Review (cited by Hall et al 2017:18) reports on the cycle of poverty and inequality caused by poor nutrition and the resultant poor health and educational outcomes for children. According to this report, a fifth of under five year old children in South Africa are malnourished and suffer from stunting which results when the brain does not get the correct nutrients as it is growing.

Participants reported on the benefits of the permaculture training and learning about a daily balanced diet for children. This training assisted ECD educators in learning the art of small scale, water wise vegetable gardening and, for those centres with outdoor space, in becoming self-reliant by supplementing their meals with freshly grown vegetables:

*"...they sent me to...Botanic Gardens and they teach me about how can I plough my garden....they teach us many steps to make the soil rich even though it takes a long time...I want to use that crops that I planted in the garden...we use it for the kitchen like spinach".*

*"The social worker, they said we need four menus...but I was using one menu. They don't want the child to know...if I am coming to school Monday I*

*am going to eat beans, so I change the menu everything, in the kitchen I have my four menus”.*

For many children living in the inner city in high-rise buildings and attending ECD centres in converted, overcrowded flats and buildings intended for office space, access to sunshine and open green and safe outdoor play areas is non-existent. According to Prest Talbot and Thornton (2009:70), this is every South African child’s birth right but sadly remains “a dream”. Training by the Department of Parks and Gardens highlighted the importance of accessing nature and outdoor green spaces for children and their development:

*“I loved the address from Botanic Gardens. As a result of their visit I now have trees planted in our grounds”.*

In a research study on children’s perspectives of outdoor spaces, when asked to take photographs of places inside their ECD centre of importance to them, a number of children took photographs through the door to the outside. This confirmed the findings that children value outdoor spaces because they have the freedom to move, be physically active, socialise and pretend (Merewether 2015:104-105). Furthermore, Vygotsky (1978), as cited in Theoharis and Brooks (2012:119-120), believes a child’s primary source of development, namely play, under the active participation of the teacher allows a child to explore, apply critical thinking, problem solving and learn new concepts.

#### **4.3.1.3.7 Category: Learning about safety and security**

Participants referred to the presentation on safety by the Police as being an important learning experience in implementing day-to-day safety and security procedures for the children in their care. UNICEF (2015:27), reporting on the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy, draw attention to children’s vulnerability to abuse and exploitation through their immaturity and dependence on significant others which can expose them to potential harm. The findings and storyline of a participant confirms this report:

*“What I learned is you can see but some things are small, small things and we just take them lightly but they are really helpful. There was a lady who*



*said don't write the name of the child's name in the child's bag. And when she explain I said no...the first thing we do is because we say no, someone can take my child's bag so the first thing we do is write the child's name. But she advised us we don't need to write names. Why we don't need to write names because a strange person can see how this is Paul, 'Hello Paul how are you?' the child will go, he will smile he will smile with the stranger person, no I'm your uncle and the child will trust the person and then he's going to keep the child. You know it's a small thing but the way she explained it to us I said no this is serious, this is really serious...And also about the badge for the children, they must put it in their bags, they must write the father's name and his cell phone numbers and the mother's. Sometimes we just allow the parents to send their children but those small, small, small things we don't even think about it but they are very important. I really enjoyed last week meeting”.*

#### **4.3.2 Theme 2: Learning to improve the operational management of the ECD centre**

This theme focuses on learning to improve the operational management of the ECD centres through the manager's participation in the activities of the ECD forum. The theme emerged from participants' responses to the question: *What have you personally learnt through your participation in the activities of the forum; what has your involvement meant to you?* After speaking of their involvement in the forum activities the participating managers spoke of their appreciation for the training and networking opportunities and expressed the fact that they had “learnt a lot”. Access to training and the benefits of ‘belonging’ to the forum appeared to be major incentives for the ECD managers. The participants' descriptions of learning opportunities are presented in three sub-themes, namely learning how to manage the ECD finances and budget; learning how to apply policy and to comply with governance; and learning how to build ECD centre resources.

##### **4.3.2.1 Sub-theme: Learning how to manage the ECD finances and budget**

Government funding for ECD in South Africa comes predominantly from the Departments of Social Development (DSD) and Education (DOE). The DSD provides subsidies to registered ECD centres for families who pass an income means test for the 0 – 4 year old children per day as well as programme funding for registered non-profit ECD centres. The DOE subsidise Grade R in schools and community-based Grade Rs which could either be in the form of subsidising a Grade R practitioner's salary or, depending on the ranking of the school and the number of Grade R learners, a per child subsidy (Giese et al 2011:7-8).

A number of the managers lacked information on policies and procedures and how to access and manage funding available to qualifying ECD centres who were compliant with national norms and standards according to the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (2006: section 93).

*“I was there for the last ECD forum where the Senior Municipal Management tell us how to budget and how can we coordinate our services in terms of the Child Act”.*

This comment confirms the view of a research study undertaken in KwaZulu-Natal by Project Preparation Trust (PPT) (2014:07) who are of the opinion that many informal ECD centre managers are often the owners who have significantly invested their own resources and are committed and keen to learn how to make improvements in managing their centres.

#### **4.3.2.2 Sub-theme: Learning how to apply policy and to comply with governance**

The participants felt that they had learnt from the presentations by different government departments about the host of policies and laws guiding the universal human right of all young children to equal and quality ECD services (The Constitution 1996: chapter 2(29)). In this regard participants reported feeling empowered by the information that was shared on early childhood education and the role they play in realising the national development goals of reducing poverty and inequality by effecting the right of all young children to develop to their fullest potential (NIECDP 2015:22).

*“I have had the privilege of being a deputy principal of a school for ten years and in a primary school with nine hundred children, so I am very strict on management side and I am very particular in terms of rules, regulations and compliancy, so the forum offers that. I benefit from that, for me interacting with those people, the Social Development, the Health Department, so from a management level there is much learning. Much learning and much empowering of the ECD owners and the principals”.*

*“The same with the Environmental Health people...they presented their requirements as well and that was also a good networking for the school because I think once you are part of the forum, they almost see you as being more structured and they want to engage with you more”.*

These comments are consistent with the assertion by Cattaneo and Chapman (2010:647) that empowerment is more than simply a person’s feelings about his/her strengths but also includes the profound influence of the social context in constraining or facilitating a person’s efforts to empower and achieve his/her goals.

With regard to learning about the requirements for registration from the Department of Social Development, participants expressed feeling encouraged to address the arduous process of registration. They felt that their personal interaction with the department and the informative presentations had equipped them in driving the registration process forward.

*“The Department of Social Development I went to that workshop I learned a lot from that because that then takes you through the whole process of how to register your school, all the documentation that was required. I think from that I was able to fast track my application. It was very informative and very well presented”.*

From a participatory learning and action perspective, the self-mobilisation that the participants referred to was in accordance with Pretty et al (1995), as cited in Swanepoel and de Beer (2006:164), and the process of a community taking the initiative to change a system free from outside control. This mobilisation should not, however, simply be tokenism, and people must have sufficient information needed

for decision-making and empowerment, according to Swanepoel et al (2006:29-30). The following comment supports this research:

*“And I came also to another one where the Welfare Department was explaining the requirements to register the ECD centres.... Another one was run by the Health Department where they were talking about how to improve the health, and the city centres how they must look like in terms of the health and environment and whatever, I was there. And there was another one that was run by eThekweni official City Manager. They give the requirements from the municipality how the ECD centre must look like and the requirements”.*

In addition to learning from the different departments regarding the requirements for ECD norms and standards, participants referred to the value of networking, learning from other ECD centres and the general sense of identity and recognition that came from being a member of the forum. This confirms the opinion of Mehmood and Parra (as cited by Moulaert et al 2015:60) who refer to innovative social actions in meeting social needs and the value of institutional relations as facilitators in building identity and strengthening systems. According to Plastrik et al (2006:117), the value of networks is in the trusting relationships built through the type of information shared amongst network members and their common experiences.

*“I learnt a lot by experience it was a learning experience from other ECD centre staff and also as you can see it was a good opportunity to get information regarding registration requirements from the municipality and also those kind of trainings free of charge. I was supposed to pay somewhere else and it was a good experience”.*

These storylines highlight the expressed benefits for managers through their participation in the forum and access to learning opportunities through training workshops to which they would not normally have access or be able to afford. As a platform for engaging with government officials, they felt they had gained information to see beyond the deficiencies within their centres and use their existing resources and inherent skills to make incremental efforts towards improving standards for their ECD centres and programmes.

Commenting on state support for informal ECDs, the Project Preparation Trust of KZN (2014:09) concurs with the findings that there should be a willingness to work together in recognising the efforts and acceptable ECD services being provided by centres, even though they may not adhere to formal standards for registration. Likewise the findings support the strengths perspective that acknowledges people's strengths and capacities in addition to their afflictions and problems and places emphasis on the value that the community and the government play in not focusing on what is wrong but ensuring that people have access to fair and vital support for developmental and social infrastructures (Saleebey 2006:280).

#### **4.3.2.3 Sub-theme: Learning how to build resources for the ECD centre**

Learning through the forum for a number of the participants was an opportunity to refresh prior skills and introduce changes to their management systems by tapping into their existing skills. The findings confirm the outlook of Hope and Timmel (cited by Schenck et al 2010:285) that it is not only people's skills that are needed to solve problems but first and foremost they must be aware of their existing competencies and knowledge. Managers felt that together with their teachers they kept attending forum meetings because, although not all the ECD centres were in a position to register with the Department of Social Development and they did not meet the infrastructure requirements, the informal learning nevertheless assisted them in managing the centres resources more effectively. This reality is confirmed by a study of informal ECD centres which pointed out that centres in vulnerable communities, although registered as Non Profit Organisations and, for some, conditionally registered as partial care facilities, most of these centres were unlikely to be able to make the 'step up' to gain full registration (PPT 2014:08).

In its report, Save the Children South Africa (Strategy 2015-2019:24) notes that many ECD centres go without being either monitored or mentored by the Department of Social Development because they are unregistered. There are two areas in particular where these unregistered ECD centres do not meet the required standards; these are administration and infrastructure. Improving ECD centres in vulnerable communities is possible through increased support at multiple levels, national, provincial, municipal and local. That many of the ECD centres have their conditional registration renewed repeatedly is an indication that these centres are

providing a much-needed and valued early education service to families in the inner city (PPT 2014:08). The comment below confirms these findings:

*“They bring in different partners, let's say partners, very important partners which then open the mind of the teachers also. So very often a teacher doesn't know what management of an ECD centre is about. Sometimes people think we can just open an ECD centre if I can just call a few kids together, they don't realise how difficult it is to manage a school”.*

Many of the ECD forum members attend the quarterly meetings regularly because the forum provides solidarity and an environment where the members feel valued and where they learn something new at every meeting to take back to benefit their ECD centre.

*“And they are learning, they are learning that is why they come. If they weren't learning anything they wouldn't be coming out. So that is why I keep staying because I see who comes out and they want to be there, they want the fellowship, they want the sharing, they want the caring and they want the learning”.*

The value of building bridges through shared learning and engagement is confirmed by Plastrik et al (2006:87-89) who point out that groups or networks should provide opportunities for accountability and creating new understandings about best practices and, most important, they must ensure that people feel connected with one another.

#### **4.3.3 Theme 3: Learning through networks and engagement with other key role-players**

The ECD forum was an important link for managers to engage with key ECD role-players. They reported on the benefits of coming together as the ECD community where the environment was conducive to sharing with other ECD centres and external role-players.

*“I learnt a lot by experience it was a learning experience from other ECD centre staff...”.*

Learning in this section is presented in two sub-themes, namely learning through peer group activities and conversations, and learning through networking with external stakeholders.

#### **4.3.3.1 Sub-theme: Learning through peer group activities and conversations**

The following quotations refer to the benefits of learning through the group activities and interventions coordinated by the forum. Participants valued having conversations, discussing similar problems and debating options in finding ways to address the challenges facing the managers of inner city ECD centres. Schenck et al (2010:247) agree that people primarily interact through group situations with the purpose of sharing information and making decisions that will help members of the group manage their own situations.

*“I think what I find most valuable is the sharing that goes on and the discussion that goes on after the presentation when people come up with different perspectives and different points of view....and they keep revisiting some of the same things again and again that need addressing. The problems don’t go away; they are permanently there - the forum can’t address those problems....and different people can suggest different avenues so if we don’t see it one way we can try another way”.*

Of importance when working with diverse groups is the freedom of individuals to participate and express feelings and to value each person’s concerns and contribution (Toseland & Rivas 2005:05-07).

*“The only thing that makes me go every time to the meeting is because I know that every time I am going to gain new things, if I am not going there I know I lose... So I don’t want to miss the day to go to the meeting...because they give us the time to share....”* This finding supports an appreciative inquiry point of view in that the community is the expert in its situation and, when given opportunities to engage and express itself and to appreciate the potential in one another, they learn (Schenck et al 2010:66).

Participants spoke of the value of meeting with managers from other inner city centres who share similar challenges, saying that this had led to finding solutions for themselves, and their ECD centres.

*“Many problems are solved, because sometimes other teachers they coming with his problem but you have same. Then they talk and then the problem is solved because most of the time they have the same problems in our schools. So to meet together is making a big sense...because if you are staying at home, you can’t hear nothing. But if you went to the meeting, you don’t come empty, you always gaining something”.*

This quotation supports the belief that successful programmes with groups and communities experiencing socio-economic and other debilitating problems involve the community and professionals in common pursuits and are “of” the community and not just “in it” (Schorr 1997, cited in Saleebey 2006:257).

#### **4.3.3.2 Sub-theme: Learning through networking with external stakeholders**

Participants shared their experiences of the power of networking through relationships and connections between forum members and external stakeholders. This supports what Louw et al (2003:24) describe as social cohesion and the influence that the wider social groups and the environment that people belong to has on their development and self-image. Social cohesion is a concept linked to changes in social bonds constructed to maintain social ties within society (Giardiello 2014:2).

*“I am always saying to the ladies, network, network, and network, vitally important. And if they hear what (participant E) has been saying for five years from a fresh voice, hello, it is reinforced...because understand also that my staff, I come out of corporate, so I have networked all my life, that is my strength... so I understand the benefits of networking. These ladies I don’t think have been exposed. So as much as I want them to stay with the ECD Centre ...at the same time, I want these ladies to grow and develop and part of my job is to grow and develop them. And if that means that I grow and develop them out of the ECD Centre, so be it. And so that is how I sold it to*



*them, that they need to network to expose themselves, to grow their confidence, to learn to speak publically, yes and just to network, to share challenges and ideas and that kind of thing”.*

*“For me the networking has benefited me personally, I have learned a lot from it. I have been able to take that into my school and from that, the children benefit and the parents”. Yes and then also like I said the networking component you then meet the people face value, first hand that were involved”.*

These examples confirm what Plastrik and Taylor (2006:39-40) refer to as the collective value proposition created by networks and the commitment of members of a network to add value to one another by not only looking at how the network benefits the individual but how the individual can benefit the network. This is similarly expressed in the HSRC (2015:109-110) report on the value of participation in a forum in dispersing information and ideas, developing capacities and learning new skills to address challenges, taking collective action and responding to common needs.

#### **4.3.4 Theme 4: Participants’ perceptions of the challenges experienced by the ECD managers and the ECD centres**

Participants described their perceptions and experiences of the threats they faced as managers and the challenges for the ECD centres. Two main sub-themes, namely external challenges and internal challenges, reflect their responses.

##### **4.3.4.1 Sub-theme: External Challenges**

A number of external challenges faced managers and the ECD centres in the inner city, and these are presented in five categories, namely poverty; finances; inadequate support from property owners; inadequate premises and space; and inadequate number of primary schools.

###### **4.3.4.1.1 Category: Poverty**

Managers of ECD centres in the inner city find themselves having to subsidise the feeding of children in their care who arrive at school not having eaten breakfast. Supporting children living in poverty is undoubtedly key in the reduction of inequality. The Children's Act 38 of 2005 (South Africa 2006: section 93) and the National Integrated Plan for ECD have prioritised ECD funding for families who do not have the means to provide food and other necessities for their children (Biersteker 2012:52-55). It is clear from the findings, however, that a large number of children attending ECD centres in the inner city are not benefitting from this funding because they have not been able to register with the Departments of Social Development and Education:

*"...the children are poor, you find some children they don't have food on the table at all. You have to make sure when the child they get here they get something food or whatever. You have to find the money to get food or find food or whatever, All the time you are busy, busy, busy...we give them breakfast and lunch"*

*"And you know this kind of a poverty I mentioned also it's affecting the refugee community because when they are not working you have to receive the children all the time. If they need the crayon, you have to provide it for them because the parents are not able to provide too but they are not working...every single day this is a challenge because it is an ongoing process. You are dealing with the same family with the same background it doesn't change. So you find it is not an easy environment but you put yourself in the same background..."*

These findings align with Max-Neef's view of human's fundamental needs as potential resources in that people can be motivated and mobilised into action in striving to meet their needs through creative processes (Schenck et al: 2010:09-10). Furthermore, they confirm the reality for a number of ECD centres in the inner city where a significant percentage of children are from families living in environments of poverty, and this is one of the reasons why managers find their involvement in the forum a source of emotional and 'in kind' support. Sachs (2003), as cited by HSRC (2015:06), confirms that one of the objectives of forums as agents of change

is to act as catalysts and facilitators in advancing opportunities and finding solutions that will bring change and enhance the lives of individuals and communities.

#### **4.3.4.1.2 Category: Finances**

Unemployment and an unpredictable income for a number of the refugee families and the socioeconomic challenges facing families residing in the city in general directly influences the financial stability for most of the ECD centres.

*“Struggling to get parents to pay fees for example and then not having money for first aid boxes. It is not just other schools that need those first aid boxes, my school is equally in need...We are advantaged in many ways but we still have those constraints of budget and parents can't afford fees and so on”.*

This comment from a manager of a registered ECD centre confirms the findings in the Diagnostic Review of Early Childhood Development (Richter et al 2012:07) that civil society and the private sector need to unite in supporting vulnerable children and families by adopting an equity-based package of ECD services that include multiple modes of delivery.

When asked whether they received any subsidies for their centre, a participant commented:

*“I did not apply for any of them because it was just so complicated and I cannot depend on money coming from somewhere else”.*

Another manager said that her ECD centre did not receive financial support because they were not registered and, although they could meet most of the requirements, the process was just too difficult:

*“...but it is too difficult to deal with because most like me, I know I have everything right, the only thing I have no auditors but they need the auditors so I think that is a problem... It is not easy. Because there are so many things you have to do to register”.*

These responses confirm a report on accessing the Department of Social Development subsidy for those who really need it, which notes that meeting the

stringent and complex processes and requirements for registration of a partial care facility and an ECD programme does not necessarily guarantee funding (Giese et al 2011:40). If the government were to relax the existing norms and standards and adopt a model of incrementally improving informal ECD centres, there would be greater opportunity for governmental support to have a positive impact on these centres (PPT 2014:07).

Families were committed to the education of their children and had good intentions to pay school fees, but the nature of their work and their irregular income placed financial strain not only on themselves and their children but also on the management of the ECD centres and their ability to pay staff a reasonable salary and on time. Gupta et al (2016:340-341), in their research on understanding parenting in adversity, comment on Amartya Sen's (1999) Capability Approach and the ability that people have to convert their personal, social and environmental resources into capabilities or opportunities. Poverty deprives certain people of their capabilities as it interferes with their ability to participate fully in society and make even basic choices relating to nourishment, clothing, and shelter and participating in community activities without shame. This supports the following finding:

*“Yes and sometimes they come and explain I like to send my child here but I have no money. Even now, I am looking for a job. Others they bring their child they not paying but when they have got a job they come and pay... Sometimes I have no money, nothing, and I am fighting to give the teachers money because if I am not giving them maybe they are not coming let's say month end...they will say I have no money to come to school...I can't afford to work alone...”*

Many of the ECD centres in the inner city rely heavily on donations of food, toys, books and other resources including training opportunities. It is not, however, possible to depend on this support, which is not guaranteed. This is another example of why financially under-resourced centres struggle to employ quality teachers and provide teaching materials and equipment to meet their needs:

*“In terms of the actual ECD centre, our reliance on donations and kind is huge, huge, so over 80%. So if we had to lose a particular donor that would*

*be scary because the income that we get from school fees and social welfare is small and it doesn't even cover our running costs, the biggest expense of course being salaries and wages. So that always frightens me because I want to pay my people well...they are all qualified, my teachers and my teacher assistants. They have all done a minimum of two years if not three years or five years of tertiary education, so you want to pay them well... So that is a concern, is our very heavy reliance on donations”.*

Further to the findings on turning capacities into capabilities, Nussbaum, (2011) as cited in Gupta et al (2016:341), is of the opinion that creating environments for people to function optimally is through *combined capabilities* and, therefore, society and the government must play a role in ‘reclaiming humanity’ by supporting people and communities to realise their capabilities.

#### **4.3.4.1.3 Category: Inadequate support from property owners**

Many of the inner city ECD centres are operating out of Church-owned property or in buildings owned and managed by unethical property owners. A lack of support or taking responsibility by the Church or the property owner for the maintenance and repair of the space leased to the ECD centre was a challenge and a threat to adhering to norms and standards, in particular a safe and secure environment for children. The eThekweni Municipality Child Care Facilities By-Law (2015: chapter 3:7) states clearly that premises that are operating a childcare facility must comply with the National Building Regulations requirements, and these premises must be structurally stable, waterproof, well ventilated, have fire extinguishers and be free of any physical features which may present a risk to children.

The findings below express the lack of support and non-compliance of property owners:

*“They think they have helped us by giving us a facility but that is where their duty stops. They have given us a facility so now get on with it...but if there is nobody supporting the facility...then the manager might as well just sit...in the office doing nothing”.*

*“...because if you want to keep that facility as a good facility then it has got to have some support because these people are not able to get their own support and enrol help whether it be money, food, stationary any of those things you know. So the municipality needs to say...the owner of this building has to do XYZ because we want to keep this facility going...The security is not good here”.*

Research confirms that the constraint for many informal ECD centres with regard to meeting the municipal and DSD requirements to register as partial care facilities is the poor state of their facilities and that, without support, these centres are not able to overcome challenges, such as incorrect zoning, inadequate space and facilities that do not meet environmental health and building regulations (PPT 2014:22-23).

#### **4.3.4.1.4 Category: Inadequate premises and space**

Inadequate premises and no, or limited, space as mandated by policy for indoor and outdoor space per child per square metre was a challenge in the management of the ECD centres. The Guidelines for ECD Services (2007:41) states that indoor and outdoor space must be safe, clean and allow children to move freely. The minimum standards for premises and equipment requires that there should be 1,5 square metres indoor space and 2 square metres outdoor space per child. The eThekweni Municipality Childcare Facilities By-Law (2015: chapter 3:8) states that the indoor play area must be used for play only and have adequate and safe indoor play equipment where children under three years of age can be separated from children over three years. Those ECD centres not registered with the Department of Social Development and not able to comply with such norms and standards vented their frustration at having the information and understanding of the requirements through their participation in the forum workshops, but not being able to act or comply accordingly. The following excerpt reflects a participant's feelings:

*“We come to the ECD forum and we learn something and sometime we can maybe, we get here and we try to practice and find it is not easy according to the environment or the premises that we are in. So, you see sometimes you say I do have information but how to use them because my place, my environment doesn't allow me to use them”.*

Through the forum training workshops, managers and educators learnt about the value of play and of providing suitable spaces for play in accordance with the United Nations proclamation that play is a universal right and important in the development and wholeness of children. In the view of Frank (1982), as cited in Landreth (2002:10), children learn through play what no amount of schooling or instruction can teach them. For children who have witnessed trauma or who live in compromised and overcrowded environments such as those experienced by some children living in the inner city, during play the children are able to feel in control, they feel secure as they attempt to organise their experiences through the symbolic function of play (Piaget 1962, as cited in Landreth 2002:11).

*“...from the ECD maybe I can command if it is possible there is some ground from the municipality around here that is not used...where we could manage to use even the containers and we can put the schools there and ground that can be used. Because we don’t have that voice to go and talk to anyone, and challenge, but maybe ECD forum can help us to apply for that, even if we can pay money to rent that ground but we can manage and where children can have their outside...and we can even meet those requirements from municipality”.*

Managers saw the ECD forum as a structure to express their challenges and needs, in particular with local government departments. The above finding from a participant whose ECD centre was located in an ill-suited and unsafe building with limited and no outdoor space appealed for assistance through the forum’s partnership with the local municipality. A benefit of community-based groups being in partnership with municipalities is the ability to support change and service delivery by sharing knowledge of local conditions according to Cranko and Khan (1999), as cited in Raniga, Simpson and Mthembu (2014:126). Their findings, however, warned against political influences and top-down partnerships that have the potential to place constraints on development and change and maintain the *status quo* in terms of service delivery.

#### 4.3.4.1.5 Category: Inadequate number of primary schools

Families living in the inner city found that there were insufficient primary schools to accommodate children after they had completed their ECD schooling, and managers expressed concern that urbanisation was impacting on access to schools for families living in the city. Vandebroek and Lazzari (2014:331) suggest that there are numerous obstacles excluding children from poor families and migrant and immigrant families from accessing ECD and other schooling services and these include waiting lists, bureaucratic processes, language barriers, and enrolment policies. The following findings express the extent of this problem for families living in the city:

*“The biggest challenge of my ECD Centre is feeder schools....there are not enough ECD centres number one for the inner city....you have this mass of people, not enough accommodation, not enough schooling and part of the facilities is obviously schooling, ECD centres. There are not enough ECD centres in the inner city, but the even bigger problem, there are not enough feeder schools in the city”.*

*“I have parents crying, I have parents asking me to please take my child back again. That perpetuates the problem because now I have new Grade Rs wanting to register, and I have old Grade R parents saying can my child come back to you next year I haven't found a school. So that really, really is probably one of the biggest challenges that I as an ECD centre face”.*

The challenges expressed confirm a report on the potential that access to schooling and a good education holds in breaking cycles of poverty and enhancing the developmental and human rights of children living in South Africa. The view of Save the Children South Africa (2015:18), however, is that owing to the ineffective utilization of the country's sizeable education budget many children do not have access to quality education.



#### **4.3.4.2 Sub-theme: Internal challenges**

The internal challenges for managers and their ECD centres are presented in five categories, namely trauma and stress; human resources; finances; minimal parental participation; and parents not understanding school readiness.

##### **4.3.4.2.1 Category: Trauma and stress**

In some instances, managers found themselves having to deal with children from refugee families traumatised directly or indirectly by the experiences of their parents. As some teachers were themselves refugees, they too had experienced trauma, and managers found that their responsibilities extended to including those of being a counsellor. South Africa has experienced an increase in urban populations as refugees from other African countries and families migrate from rural to urban areas for safety and economic reasons, often to the detriment of their children (Save the Children 2015:17-18). Silove, Ventevogel and Rees (2017:01) are of the opinion that the majority of refugees experiencing post trauma mental health problems are not likely to receive appropriate care often resulting from barriers to accessing available services and the stigma of mental health in addition to being a refugee. The excerpts below highlight this challenge for managers:

*“Oh there are quite a number of challenges the first of all I am dealing with children who are traumatised from the past of their parents. We are talking about the refugees who come from all of the trauma and stress....when they get in South Africa. When you deal with someone, because the children are born in the same family of trauma and stress, the mind of the parent, even the children they are the same they are just traumatised and just stressed”.*

*“And, there is something else you are dealing with, the staff also who are from the refugee families they still traumatised sometimes they deal with the stress they forget they are here to work. You have to do the kind of counselling”.*

##### **4.3.4.2.2 Category: Human resources**

There was a general sense that ECD teachers employed by the inner city ECD centres, especially those who have no formal qualifications, receive very low

remuneration and lack initiative. Unskilled, unmotivated and insufficient staff were dynamics that participants alluded to in the following storylines as being challenges in the management of their ECD centres:

*“How do I motivate my staff, how do I get them running with some of these ideas? We've had a whole motivational session now at the end of this year, and it just has to be slotted in and there just has to be very strict planning and signed plans and agreements and so on for next year...the structures are there, the daily programmes are there but they're not planning...”*

*“...one of the challenges for me is that...I work incredibly structured and organised and this is not that kind of environment... And definitely the staff that I have....coming out of corporate I had a secretary that I would just say do this, do that... so I have far too much work... I work long, long, long hours....being the organisation that we are we can't afford to employ more people so that for me is a big challenge...”*

*“I struggle sometimes with a lack of passion and energy and enthusiasm and motivation...I have learnt a lot about my colleagues. I think I have learnt tolerance and patience, and perseverance. I have learnt that you might do something differently to me but the end result is the same and that's ok”.*

*“...I think recycling and getting the girls to use recycling stuff and do box construction every week. Because if that is not the easy thing for the educators then they don't do that so then I need to be steering them to do that and I need to be bringing in enough paper and we can't afford to buy paints... So yeah I think without a good manager, I don't know whatever good looks like on the spectrum, then nothing gets done in the ECDs”.*

These storylines support research findings that many ECD employees have no formal job description or staff development plans in place, and, not being registered, they have no Unemployment Insurance which factors influence staff morale and motivation (HSRC 2015:72). Similarly, Richter et al (2012:05) notes human resources as a priority area for improvement, namely staff qualifications, conditions of service and remuneration. Furthermore, research confirms that a lack of skills and capacity and access to training are particular challenges for informal ECD

centres (PPT 2014:06). Putcha (2018:04) concurs with the evidence that professional development and training impact not only on the quality of ECD services but also on the status and incentives for ECD staff to remain in their roles (Putcha 2018:04).

#### **4.3.4.2.3 Category: Finances**

All participants in the study referred to finances as a factor contributing to the challenge of managing and sustaining the ECD centre and essentially to the learning environment for children. Poverty experienced by many of the parents as well as the difficulty for some centres to meet the standards to enable them to access government subsidies negatively influenced their financial stability. Participants spoke about the non-payment of school fees by parents and highlighted the challenge for refugee parents in particular, who, for many working as car guards, although committed to paying fees, could do so only when they could afford to. Graham, Restifo and Nelson (2015:31) acknowledge that the lack of legal documents places restraints on the capacity of refugee parents to earn an adequate income, which makes accessing education difficult.

The consequences of poverty on the regular attendance of children whose parents would keep them out of school for extended periods also created concerns for the managers and educators. In a report on financing for all children, Save the Children (2017:01) refer to the determinants of whether a child attends school and learns and these correspond with the findings of this research study, namely who a person is, where they live, and their ability to generate an income. The NIECDP (2015:45) recognises the gaps in the current ECD system and notes that service provision for underserved areas and families living in poverty needs upscaling with regard to funding and governance.

The following storylines from participants indicate the complexity of financial challenges and their far-reaching effects on managers, their ECD centres, the staff, families and their children:

*“You find that finances for me, people can't afford.... they can't afford it so the cost of education is another challenge. You find that they really, really battle to pay ...but they want to and they really do try... I want to empower*

*my teachers, I want to teach them as much as I can that they can go anywhere, I don't want to pay them peanuts but you do get pressure when people don't pay”.*

*“When we started the school the concept...was go ahead and make it self-sufficient so the fees that come in go straight back into equipment, goes back to this, goes back to that, to offer the best standard that we can. The idea was not for it to be profit making but for it to be self-sufficient, that was the concept...”*

*“...the child is compromised if the parent brings the child only in April and takes the child out in October to save on school fees because they need the money for other things whatever it may be, and that's what happens. 40% of our parents did not pay November fees at the end of this year...if you have out of twelve months of the year parents only paying six months fees or seven months fees just so that they can get their child a little bit of Grade R to get into Grade one, it compromises the educational programme.... It is also a threat to the relationship that the teacher needs to establish with the child and with the parents. The parents start running away from paying school fees by dropping the child off outside on the pavement, not bringing the child in according to school rules and not signing the child in and not handing the child over to the teacher, because they don't want us to ask about the fees. So this is where the Department of Social Development Grant In Aid will help to support the school...”*

The dynamics of being a refugee living in the city with limited earning capacity confirms findings by Save the Children (2017:01) that poverty alone is not the only reason for exclusion from accessing ECD; often children from ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities experience discrimination that excludes them from education.

*“...this preschool belongs to the Church. The majority of the church members they are refugees I am also one of them... Most of the refugees they are living in town, here in town the rent is so expensive but the people who are staying here in town not because they want to stay here in town they just staying because they feel that they are safe here as a foreigner. Most of the*

*foreigners they are doing those kind of well we have to call it jobs because they're making a living, like car guard, security, you can see their salary is not really it's not enough to feed the children, to pay rent. I remember even one of the parents here is a car guard and if you see the way this man is coming to pay the school fees, the same time you will cry...to get the full amount is just a problem... We don't get money from the government to pay a teacher...we are only working through the school fees from the school fees....I know we have got even some children that we just close our eyes they are not paying and we can't just do this to everyone as we also have to survive..."*

These experiences endorse findings by Save the Children South Africa (2015-2019:15) that a large number of children do not enjoy a quality of life or their rights owing to the impact of persistent poverty which leads to the reinforcement of inequality. In a report on accessing government funding for an ECD, Giese et al (2011:68) refer to research by Van der Berg et al (2010) which found that municipalities provided little support for ECD services. Where municipalities are providing funding for ECD the amounts are limited and generally once off with the most common areas of support being training, rent-free space, provision of land and assistance with infrastructure. Although there may be *ad-hoc* interactions, effectively there is little to no relationship between the government and informal ECD centres for structured programmes to assist the centres that do not meet minimal standards (PPT 2014:07). The NIECDP (2015:69) recommends that, in an effort to scale up ECD to meet universally acceptable and equitable access, the provision of home and community based (centre and non-centre based) ECD programmes need to be developed and funded.

#### **4.3.4.2.4 Category: Minimal parental participation**

Parental engagement and quality care and learning within the home environment, together with parental involvement in a child's schooling, is said to be linked to success at school and social and emotional development (Schiettecat et al 2014:653). The apathy of parents to participate in their children's early education and the socioeconomic factors that influence their involvement are supported by a report by Save the Children South Africa (2015-2019:15) highlighting the

vulnerability of children and their social exclusion owing to poverty coupled with their living conditions. Access to adequate support services for families in reducing the harmful effects of their low socio-economic status in order to improve the developmental opportunities for their children is limited.

The following excerpts capture the poor parental participation:

*“...there is no participation generally, from my experience in our ECD forums to try, as we heard to try to get those parents to parents meetings. We had one last month... And we have important things, we had a speaker and we have heard it again and again the parents don't participate, they can't, they won't, all of those. So if we had parent participation the children would be learning from the parents, from the ECD centre from everybody but right now those parents that I come across and a lot of the people that participate they are from the bracket of people that can't leave work”.*

*“...you find they are not working they are stressed you know. They are not able to support their children, even helping with the homework... You put homework in the bag tomorrow it is still there the same, they don't help the child...They don't have the time to spend with their children”.*

#### **4.3.4.2.5 Category: Parents not understanding school readiness**

An internal challenge for managers in preparing children for primary school was their experience of parents who did not appear to understand the concept of school readiness and what it entails and the importance of spending dedicated time with their children in their capacity as the primary teachers. Landry (2014:03) confirms the critical role that parents play in laying a good foundation for early learning and suggests that factors that may have bearing on supportive parenting could include their own experiences of childhood, their social context, their physical and mental health and their understanding and attitude towards their importance in their child's life and learning.

The following quotation confirms the seeming lack of parental understanding and involvement and the role that the ECD centre plays in the child's education:

*“...we want to empower the children so that when they go to school they fly. So it's about school readiness, that is it, that's our passion, the curriculum...I think the parents didn't know what was important for the child...you look at the Grade R syllabus in itself what is expected of the child and you look at the input. Parents don't sit with their children for homework, they think this is a day care...they don't know that they should be sitting with the child, that they should be spending time and they just expect the school it's a school function basically...”.*

The Department of Basic Education (2015:65) supports the finding that, in the early years of a child's life, he/she is curious about his/her world, which includes his/her immediate physical surroundings, his/her family and his/her history, and assisting a child to increase his/her experiences of his/her world is a responsibility of the parents and significant other adults.

#### **4.3.5 Theme 5: Participants' accounts of common factors compromising the well-being of the children**

The managers described their experiences and perceptions of the three most common factors that compromised the well-being of the children attending their centres. According to the Department of Basic Education (2015:17), 'well-being' which includes the social, emotional and physical characteristics of children's development, is vitally important because a healthy, well-nourished and physically active child is more motivated to learn.

The responses of the managers are presented in four sub-themes, namely poverty; unhealthy environments and lack of resources; poor parenting; and absenteeism and late arrival.

##### **4.3.5.1 Sub-theme: Poverty**

The participants cited poverty as being an overarching factor compromising the well-being of the children. Poverty, according to a participant, had a direct influence on the very essence of childhood and development. UNICEF (2014:02) report that globally millions of under five year old children from low and middle income families face inequalities because they grow up with risk factors such as, amongst others,

poverty, poor nutrition, high levels of stress within the family and environment and inadequate learning opportunities and care. Aubrey (2017:3) recognises that much still needs to be done by the ECD sector in diminishing the socio-economic disadvantage that deprives millions of South African children from equitable, quality ECD services.

How poverty influences a child's most important expression of their world around them is evident in the following response:

*"...in an underprivileged environment, yes, so it's the clothing of the children for example. Some children don't come with adequate clothing especially if the weather changes, they don't have the little jacket or the raincoat, they don't have closed shoes for example. So we do get donated clothing...so it's not a train smash if a child messes themselves or wets themselves, they don't have to be shouted at and punished... It could be one reason why some parents choose to send their children to a school in a high-rise building with no outdoor playing space and no paint or crayons for drawing so that the children don't get messed up. They don't have the expense then of washing not just one set of clothes but two sets of clothes in a day. Their child can go to school even in the same clothes the next day... For the well-being of children, they need to be able to take their shoes and socks off and run in the sand...it's poverty, these parents can't afford to be washing clothes every day".*

Many of the refugee families are unable to find employment that coincides with their qualifications or skills because they do not have the required foreign status certification. They take on menial, poorly paid jobs simply to survive, and this consequence of poverty negatively affects a safe living environment for their children:

*"...for the poor, the children who are coming from the poor families. You know let's say they don't want to be poor but not because they are poor but because of maybe because for foreigners we cannot have an ID. You have got skills, but maybe they ask you for the green ID you don't have it but now you have to suffer, you have to go and be a car guard, do the car wash and*



*now you can't afford to rent in a better place you understand. You understand so yes, the living conditions”.*

This feedback supports the findings of research by Amisi (2006:21) undertaken with Durban refugees and the different challenges relating to their various livelihood strategies. For example, employment in the car guarding and security guarding business offers little job security, inflexible working hours and irregular income without any formal registration or access to a Security Officer Board.

Another participant spoke about the living conditions of families that compromised the children's well-being because of their socio-economic environment:

*“...this ECD Centre is like this little safe haven for the children. They arrive from a place of dysfunctionality if I can say that, they go back to a place of dysfunctionality....when I say that I am saying very, very, very few children are coming from a home where there is a biological mother and father...I don't think there are any. So I have got children that are coming from a single parent or a parent with a boyfriend or another man in her life that is not the biological father of the children, and that comes with its own challenges.... so they are coming out of extreme poverty. They are coming out of homes where they live in maybe one room so these little ones are being exposed to things that would maybe even cause your and my hair to stand on end....the parents are struggling to make ends meet and just put food on the table”.*

This viewpoint is in accordance with Save the Children's (2015-2019:12) report that quotes Stats South Africa's 2012 feedback on the number of children in South Africa residing with their parents. Only 35% of children are living with both their parents with 23% living with neither of their parents, 30% with their mother only and 3% with only their father. For many of the children not living with their biological parents, members of their extended families care for them. These statistics confirm that, for a large majority of children, they are not living with their nuclear family as reported in the findings.

These findings confirm a report by Graham et al (2015:9-10) that points out the multiple violations of human rights through poverty which they suggest has many levels, often invisible and remaining “in the shadows” because of the stigma and

obstacles faced in accessing rights and participating in poverty-reducing programmes.

#### **4.3.5.2 Sub-theme: Unhealthy environments and lack of resources**

From a social work perspective, it is important not to ignore a person's immediate environment, the context of where they live out their day-to-day lives, because of its influence on behaviour. According to Saleebey (2006:242-243), changes in the interpersonal, built and physical contexts of environments, such as school, the playground, people and structures, no matter how small, can turn an environment from one where there are deficits and disorganisation to one where there can be hope and pride. Managers referred to various deficits in the environment linked to socio-economic factors that compromise the well-being of the children:

*"...their transport, their getting to school, their security in the places, the little Church underneath, the door is open because it is the only ventilation. The healthy environment - just being able to get them to wash their hands and to not be sitting on communal potties because they don't have the facilities...Their health, because they don't get nutrition, they are not in a healthy environment. So healthy environment means cleanliness, nutrition, enough space, safety, they are not getting that because we are not, the municipality is not enforcing the requirements so then they are in an unhealthy environment".*

The eThekweni Municipality by-laws (2015: chapter 3:7-11) are very clear regarding the requirements for childcare facilities and, in order to comply with National Building Regulations, there should be sufficient ventilation, toilets, running water for washing and indoor and outdoor space. There is also a responsibility for people who provide childcare for children under five years of age to put in place healthy eating attitudes and practices as they can positively influence the nutritional intake of children (Department of Health 2016:03).

In addition, managers spoke about the shortage of stationery and teaching aids coupled with teachers who lacked sufficient skills and knowledge to influence the teaching and learning environment for children:

*“No material, they don't have any material just like they don't have the requirements for an ECD, they don't have material. We have talked about putting a little book together, not everybody needs it but the people who come to the forum...my girls have all got a list that says skills required for every week as basic as that. They need to be drawing and they need to be painting and they need to do a box construction and their prep has to include all of those skills but most of them have no clue about that”.*

This comment focuses attention on The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) which emphasises the importance of reflective practitioners who are able to review their practice with and for children taking into consideration the developmental complexities of children (Department of Basic Education 2015:05).

Another participant spoke about teachers who lacked creativity in their approach to early childhood teaching and the value of creating strong bonds between the teacher and child and the teacher and parents. The following finding emphasises the importance of ECD centres and staff creating environments where the children's right to play, explore and discover will stretch and develop their imagination, skills and understandings in participation with and under the watchful eye of their teachers (Prest Talbot & Thornton 2009:14). In addition, the Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services (UNICEF 2007:42) recommend that parents, as the primary caregivers, must be encouraged to be involved wherever possible in the functioning of the ECD centre which, as part of the child's environment, must ensure that there are good relationships between the centre and family.

*“...it is also allowing children the freedom to explore, experiment, discover, to expand the natural curiosity, and that means staff who are flexible enough to accommodate that sort of thing. But they are coming from their own experiences of what education is which is a very formal type of education, a formal model of what a teacher is and should be... My concern is that it is not about what image you project out there of your school whichever school it is, it's what is actually happening inside the school - the relationships that are formed within the school between the children and the teachers, and the teachers and the teachers, and the teachers and the parents. That creates that kind of a welcoming happy environment where the children can flourish*

*even if you don't have a playground, even if you don't have the space you know...we have an open door policy but I mean other schools in town I have seen, you are not allowed through the grille of the front entrance. You cannot go in and see what is happening... That is a great concern for the well-being of children, there has to be a kind of transparency of what is actually happening in your school..."*

In aligning with standards for ECD, administrative systems as a resource must be in place to ensure the efficient and effective management of activities and procedures (UNICEF 2007:42). To ensure that children applying for entry into formal schooling meet the requirements, the ECD centre must provide a report on the child's progress and participation in early education. Berry et al (2011:34) agree that staff in managerial positions must have, in addition to other functions, the necessary skills to write notes, keep records and write reports. The following quotation suggests that gaps exist and that this is not happening in some centres, which compromises the child's chance of accessing further education:

*"...the ECD centres are not giving out reports because they have no facility... the schools don't want to take them unless they can produce a report... we don't want to take children that have not had any pre-school education. Its discrimination but it's what is happening... So on one hand it's financial, the school wants to know that they have been paying; the school wants to know that they have been educated to some level...they have had some English in the ECD. And, I understand the schools don't want to take grade R children that have had no preschool education and they are discriminating against those children".*

#### **4.3.5.3 Sub-theme: Poor parenting**

Participants referred to poor parenting and parents' actions that had the potential to harm the wellbeing of children. Hooper et al (2007), as cited in Gupta et al (2016:347), refer to research on the intricate relationship between poverty, parenting and a child's wellbeing in socially diverse situations. Their findings suggest that stress, unless supported by adequate social or other sources of support, significantly increases the risk of maltreatment of children in some form for parents

who live in poverty. Furthermore, the context in which parents find themselves, such as the quality of their neighbourhood and available resources, is likely to influence parents' ability to fulfil their expectations (Krishnan 2010:11). The following quotation is an example of poor parenting related to the socio-economic and lifestyle environment of a family and the effect on the wellbeing of their child:

*“There is another challenge when you find a child is here then at the end of the day they don't come to fetch their child. You have to take the child with you at home. ...you can't punish the child because of the parents.....you can't take the child of a refugee to the police because it is going to be another trauma when they arrest the parents....You can't punish even the parents it is not their fault. You must understand why they do this what happened to their family... When you go to their home you find the mother was fighting with the father and the mother leaves the children with the father .....What are you going to do, are you going to leave the child with the father who is traumatised and busy taking drugs or whatever, you have to try and take the child and find out another solution...”*

In addition, poor parenting, in terms of disciplining children and respecting children's rights, was also a concern for their wellbeing:

*“...another area of concern is of course parent communication and the kind of discipline that the parents use on their children which is mostly corporal punishment...It is a big concern for the well-being and the type of disciplining of the children. Trying to establish more respectful relationships with children, more participatory relationships with children in my school, is a critical area of concern. Are we really listening to the voice of the children themselves? Are the parents really listening to the voice of the children?”*

The above sentiment supports the responsibility of the Government as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its commitment to supporting, building capacity, providing counselling and, where necessary, resources to parents or a child's primary caregiver in strengthening a nurturing relationship between parent/caregiver and the child (NIECDP 2015:25). From a social work perspective, the findings of a research study suggest that child and

family social work interventions need to caution against denying parents in poverty situations their point of view when addressing their parental responsibilities. Instead, social work practice needs to explore the myriad ways of defining, constructing and supporting the circumstances of parents and children who find themselves in poverty situations (Schiettecat et al 2014:656).

#### **4.3.5.4 Sub-theme: Absenteeism and arriving late**

Absenteeism and arriving at school late was common practice for some children and compromised their progressive learning opportunities. Families were not able to pay school fees, which kept their children out of school and resulted in the high rate of absenteeism. For ECD centres reliant on receiving the Department of Social Development grant this had serious implications.

In under-resourced communities, poverty is a challenge that has extensive and complex implications. In a report by Statistics South Africa (2013), as cited in Vorster et al (2016), many South African children live in conditions characterised by hardship where, at times, early childhood education simply cannot take precedence over basic survival needs for families. How absenteeism and arriving late to school compromises the well-being of child is evident in the following quotes:

*“We have a ridiculous rate of absenteeism... When the parents run out of money, the children can’t come to school. And a lot of the children come to school with siblings so if a sibling is at a neighbouring school and they finished writing exams, they don’t go to school so neither does little brother or sister that is normally at the ECD Centre. So our rate of absenteeism, I can quote you children that have missed over the period of the year up to 70 days...and the way ECD works is that it is progressive... I try and explain this to the parents, you don’t send Simphiwe to school on Monday and he comes to school on Wednesday, he has missed two days of that theme. He is now two days behind, he’s lost the foundation. Even parents sending their children to school late. They miss the early ring or they miss breakfast...and it ties in with the education of the parents because ok if you haven’t got money for a bus you haven’t got money”.*

*“We do charge school fees a small amount of money, because I also believe that parents must be accountable, responsible and take ownership so we do charge school fees but what I find sometimes happens is if a parent hasn’t paid then they don’t send their child to school. It is another education thing... this last term has been horrific with absenteeism. And that...also ties in with our funding because through Social Development we get a grant for 60 out of the 148 children whose parents earn less than a certain amount of money per month for the days the child comes to school. So if the child does not come to school there is no grant from Social Development. So the whole thing is like a vicious circle...this is why I don’t sleep, I lie awake at night with these things buzzing through my head and I don’t have answers....But this is overwhelming stuff”.*

These extracts reflect the challenges and lack of dignity experienced by families living in the city, many of whom find themselves in what Swanepoel et al (2006:05-07) refer to as the deprivation trap where unemployment renders them isolated, vulnerable, unable to pay for their children’s school fees and, thus, improve their lives and those of their children. For many of the inner city ECD centres not registered, Harrison (2012), (as cited in PPT 2014:05-06), concurs with the findings that the government appears to be ‘blind’ to a large percentage of children outside the current system of funding provisioning and the only children ‘seen’ are those attending registered ECD centres. This affects many families, and keeping their children away from school seems like their only choice. In addition, it further compromises the financial stability of those registered ECD centres who access the Department of Social Development subsidies and risk losing the funding if the children are absent for an extended period.

#### **4.3.6 Theme 6: Participants’ accounts of what helped them to manage the identified threats or challenges**

In response to the question as to what had helped them to manage the perceived threats or challenges for themselves, their teachers and ECD centres, participants gave their accounts which are recorded under four sub-themes, namely participation in the forum activities; empowered teachers; parent participation; fund-raising background; financial management and other assistance.

#### 4.3.6.1 Sub-theme: Participation in the forum activities

Managers recalled how their participation and learning through the forum had assisted them to challenge the *status quo* in addressing some of the challenges.

All participants agreed that being a member of the forum had created opportunities to learn from and share with one another and build capacity through the interventions tailored to address the socio-economic context of inner city ECD centres (HSRC 2014:10-11). Participants felt energized through their interaction with others, which confirms what Plastrik and Taylor (2006:68) say about the productive relationships created through networks where trust and confidence in the connections established facilitate the quality and effective sharing of information. Engaging with other managers and principals provided valuable support and attending workshops assisted in refreshing prior learning. In their role of leadership, the participants were motivated to facilitate an enabling environment and build capacity amongst their staff, all of which helped them in managing the threats and challenges.

The following storylines underscore the value of the forum for participants:

*“I just know that...every meeting that I attend I come away with a pearl of wisdom or something that I didn't know or something that I now know that I can do better...”*

*“You know as I say every meeting that I have attended I write copious notes and then I come back and I share with my staff and we try and implement at least one thing”.*

*“Otherwise, I get stale and those older educators get stale if they are not being energised by the forum and for me the forum...is my link to other educators to other managers, principals how they do things, what are they doing, how do they encourage their uneducated staff...The psychologist lady, the counsellor, the police.... Now I have to look at safety issues well I don't have to but it has been brought to mind and I have to look at those safety issues and what will I allow and what won't I allow...it has been like a refresher course for me. We heard all of that way back because I did my*



*diploma so far back. It has just brought it to mind again and the importance of having a leader there because they can't lead themselves they can't stimulate themselves and because I have always worked in a privileged environment... and there all the educators were qualified so they did not need the same as this staff needs”*

*“...and you know the creative workshops and the music workshops. Because I have been in it for so long those are refresher courses for me, so then I put it back into place you know”.*

The findings underpin the theory that promotes networked learning communities whereby “many are smarter than the few” and bottom up processes of enhancing learning and strengthening capacity through the examination of beliefs, actions, new ideas, skills and knowledge is supported (Katz, Earl & Jaafar 2009:02-06). The forum adopted the guiding principles of the strengths-based approach in promoting relationship building and coordinating interventions with not only the ECD centres and educators but also the key ECD role-players who had a direct impact on the world of ECD in the city and in finding strategies to address the challenges (Saleebey 2006:275).

Although the process of change was slow, managers shared their experiences of positive change and staff being motivated and passion rekindled:

*“We've had a whole motivational session now at the end of this year, and it just has to be slotted in and there just has to be very strict planning and signed plans and agreements and so on for next year...I am going to be improving the signed planning sheets and also the signed agreements”*

*“...the staff, I mean what I manage to encourage my staff to do that wasn't happening five years ago...I have set incredibly high standards, remember I said I come out of corporate...so all my ducks marched in a straight stripe... so that in itself has been a learning curve for me. So I do have to acknowledge that positive change has taken place just not at that pace and the speed that I would like to see. But it has taken place”*

These comments confirm the value of relationships as social capital and an objective of the forum to provide the ECD community in the city with an enabling environment where they could work together over time to achieve what they could not accomplish on their own (Katz et al 2009:05). Furthermore, Schenck et al (2010:162) emphasise the value of human resources, which are often the only resource in impoverished environments and, as such, need recognition because the contributions of people's skills, capacities and talents are of primary importance. The findings support the strengths practice adopted by social workers in helping people to bring together their virtues and personal assets in addressing problems (Saleebey 2006:301).

#### **4.3.6.2 Sub-theme: Empowered teachers**

Some managers found themselves taking on the responsibility of enabling and providing opportunities for the personal and professional development of their untrained staff. Biersteker (2018:306) confirms that, in South Africa, one of the challenges in delivering quality early childhood education is that practitioners are not adequately trained and, although the government has made efforts to subsidize in-service training, historical backlogs and the growth in this sector have hampered their efforts. Hope and Timmel (2003:09) refer to the "bonds of poverty and oppression" and, in liberating people from the struggles that hold them back from the fullness of life and well-being, they need opportunities for development and education.

The following findings are examples of managers' efforts to enhance opportunities for learning and personal and professional growth for their staff:

*"Doing workshops on actual teaching like the music...my teachers came back empowered and also enthused. You know what, when you can rekindle the flame and that is what the forum does, you bring back the passion because they come back.... Teaching you can get tired you're working with these little ones the whole day and everyone is draining you, everyone is draining you. And you need that, that is why I rotate my teachers, that is why I use that to just take them out, let them interact, let them network, boost them and fire up that hunger again to come back and want to renew and to do things for the*

*children. Because you can get stuck in a rut you know, I do this day in and day out..."*

*"...language was a barrier for them when I came here. I said no this is an opportunity to support them...most of them are refugees, they come from war and they do not know what to do. So I started to think how can you involve South African teachers who know really what to give to the children and...they are going to train the refugee who are working here so...now if you can see we have only two South Africans and the other is a refugee but all of them they can manage the children".*

*"...I think my staff are also in a good place. Our ECD centre has sponsored the majority of them for their tertiary education where we have paid between 50% and 60% of their tertiary education fees yes, so that is one area. Not only are we looking after the children but we are also helping the staff...and when I get notification of workshops I give my staff...an opportunity to go so that they can grow and develop. So we definitely encourage them to pursue ECD qualifications, we do stipulate however which ones, which institutions they should go to".*

The findings align with the idea of "learning communities" where groups and institutions share the responsibilities and rewards of promoting societal change. These public, private and non-profit partnerships whose aim it is to increase capacity within a community in an effort to promote self-management and regeneration are referred to as "collaborative empowerment" (Himmelman (1994), as cited in Kilpatrick, Barrett & Jones 2012:02).

#### **4.3.6.3 Sub-theme: Parent participation**

The systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 1998, as cited in Krishnan 2010:05) proposes that the environment is a primary mechanism in the development of children who cannot develop in isolation but develop instead through the regular and interconnected system of relationships between family and society. Although ECD centres encouraged opportunities for parental interaction, participation in the activities of the ECD centre was the exception and not a view shared by all participants. There were parents, however, who made every effort to play a leading

role in the education of their children teaching and nurturing them long before entering school and supporting their early education. Bonci, Mottram, McCoy and Cole (2011:02) confirms that the earlier parents become involved in their children's literacy practices the greater and more lasting the positive effects will be.

The following storylines are examples of parent's participation:

*"...I have a mixture of the two (South African and foreign parents) but they are very particular in terms of what we are teaching the children they want to see teaching and learning...we now have opportunities to have meetings with the parents, orientation meetings and even empower them... Good participation when we have our orientation programmes. In the beginning we have Father's Day there is amazing responses we have Mother's Day..."*

A manager of a slightly more affluent inner city school had this to say:

*"And then of course I think I am serving a different market also, we are not working with the poorest of the poor which sometimes you think that when you are in the inner city that is what you're doing. But what we found is that there was this part of the community that was neglected, they are not the poorest of the poor they can afford to pay a little bit more but they can't afford to go to a model C school and they cannot go out of the area"*

#### **4.3.6.4 Sub-theme: Fund-raising background, financial management and other assistance**

Fund-raising and financial management were regarded as important skills to manage the funding challenges experienced by centres. In the Children's Act Guide for Early Childhood Development Practitioners, Berry et al (2011:34) confirm that the Department of Social Development has the discretion to fund ECD centres, drop-in centres and partial care centres fully, partly, or not at all. For this reason, they recommend that ECD service providers find alternate ways to raise money through school fees, applying for donations and through fund-raising initiatives.

The following findings are examples of how participants managed the challenge of funding and financial management:

*“In terms of the ECD centre and the funding, I do come from a very strong fund-raising background....and having come out of corporate I have this massive network of contacts. So that has definitely been hugely advantageous. I have worked hard to get the donations...I work very hard at establishing the relationships, the communication with our donors, acknowledging...”*

One participant spoke of the importance of sound financial management, accountability and transparency in managing the schools funds:

*“Schools are one of the biggest targets for white collar fraud because we are all cash cows. So the money is just going to some places, some of the money some of the time, it is just so easy not to put this school fee child through so there is nobody managing that manager, that she is putting all her school fees through”.*

Some participants referred to receiving financial assistance or assistance in kind predominantly from Church organisations or NGOs:

*“...this ECD centre belongs to the Church and we thank God we are working with Pastor who is always there for us and the leaders of the church also they always praying for us because we have got faith and we believe in God and also as a Church they are helping us”.*

*“...actually the municipality has not helped...it was (name of organisation) and the Church was helping me”.*

These findings confirm research by the HSRC (2015:80-81) that many ECD centres rely heavily on donations in various forms and that, because centres cannot always rely on school fees to cover the cost of running the centre, managers should be attempting to raise funds. Their research found that ECD centres are not doing enough to raise funds, and this could be because managers do not have the skills to write funding proposals.

### **4.3.7 Theme 7: The participants' recommendations**

The final question posed to participants focused on the suggestions they would like to make to the ECD forum committee. After having described their involvement in the forum's activities and their learning experiences, the researcher asked participants to make suggestions on future interventions that the forum could introduce to enhance their learning and the assistance or change required to improve conditions for ECD centres, managers, staff, the children and their families. Their responses are presented in two sub-themes, namely, recommendations to the forum committee relating to learning interventions or activities and recommendations to the forum committee on assistance or change needed to improve conditions for ECD centres, staff and families.

#### **4.3.7.1 Sub-theme: Recommendations to the forum committee relating to learning interventions or activities.**

All the managers felt there had been learning on different levels through their participation in the forum's activities, and they felt that they would benefit from ongoing learning and community engagement opportunities through their membership of the forum. Three categories emerged from this sub-theme, namely learning opportunities for teachers, staff and parents; meetings for managers only; and the forum to visit and evaluate ECD centres.

##### **4.3.7.1.1 Category: Learning opportunities for teachers, staff and parents**

In scaling-up the delivery of ECD services to families and their children, research is very clear that effective interventions depend on empowered and professional teachers who are able to implement comprehensive programmes that meet the growing challenges facing children and their families according to Ionescu, Josephson & Neuman (cited in Bernard van Leer 2016:46). Managers referred to staff who were discouraged owing to their own personal circumstances, especially refugee teachers who were dealing with the aftermath of war and conflict and who struggled to deliver the message of hope and reconstruction so necessary for children's well-being (Collier as cited in Bernard van Leer 2016:86). There was a

general sense of teachers and ECD staff in general needing to be inspired and learn new skills as is evident in the following quotations.

*“...to continue upgrading my staff’s qualifications, to continue to do in-service training and professional development and motivate them... The teachers themselves I think have become de-moralised and de-energised by some of the constraints and problems they face personally in their lives and from low socio-economic backgrounds themselves and earning low salaries...I mean this is still a struggle for them when they are the breadwinner and their husbands are not working”.*

*“....the knowledge that we had that was empowered to us in terms of learning nursery rhymes all the things that we use in ECD, many of my teachers don't know them. We are teaching them the nursery rhymes to go into the classroom. They say where did you learn that? And we did it at school...”*

*“I would love a first class secretary that I could just bark out instructions in a loving way and get on with the business of being with the children. That is my passion. I want to make positive changes and I want to grow my staff and develop my staff but I find myself bogged down with administration and doing work that probably as a principal I shouldn't do but I just genuinely do not have capable people to delegate to”.*

Biersteker (2018:308) refers to the Department of Education and Training, 2017 policy on early childhood higher education minimum requirements that outlines different levels of early education qualifications and basic competencies necessary for staff, including further postgraduate and professional qualification paths. The report notes that, even though significant progress and access to early childhood education in South Africa has been made, much still needs to be done to improve the equity of education in realising social transformation and the benefits of high quality services for all children, not only those who already have advantages.

This literature echoed the sentiments of all the participants who felt that learning opportunities relevant to the problem and challenging areas experienced by the city ECD centres had been valuable, and they recommended that centres and staff

would benefit from continuous teaching and learning opportunities. The following excerpts express their views:

*“And then the overview of the assessment criteria....I keep thinking perhaps we must re-visit and go back to that and take one or two particular problem areas that she mentioned and go into it in a bit more depth, especially if they are common problems which might be experienced by the different schools”*

*“Do you know learning is experience and you can't learn once, it is a process, learning is a process... if there is more training, please remember those centres that don't have the budget to pay for training. We need the ongoing training.”*

*“...it just shows that it is more a question of ongoing professional development and training and it cannot just be a once-off project or programme that starts at a certain time and ends at a certain time and done that got the sticker and move on...”*

These findings confirm the important characteristic of what Hope and Timmel (2003:127) refer to as good adult education based on problem posing and not merely depositing knowledge into the empty heads of the learner. It supports the theory of adult learning according to Paulo Freire who recognises the potential in people through their participation and contribution to their learning and empowerment based on principles of dialogue, reflection, action and relevance (Schenck, Nel & Louw 2010:99).

A further recommendation from a participant was to equip teachers with dance and exercise skills to address the needs of inner city children. A common area of concern for inner city children living in high-rise buildings with limited space and attending ECD centres with no outdoor space was that they lacked opportunities for exercise. Research findings suggest that engagement in physical activities positively influences the learning of words, their meanings, and language understanding for young children (Bidzan-Bluma & Lipowska 2018:01-07). Referring specifically to dance and the arts, the Reggio Emilia approach embraces these informal and visceral means to literacy learning as a way of children expressing their deep thinking, connections and their understanding in the absence



of words (Wood, Thall & Parnell 2015:99-100). This recommendation is expressed in the following quotation:

*“Bring in dance. What about aerobics and exercise...teach that to the teachers and to the other schools...we've got the space, what do you say to the school that is in a small room?...you can do something, you can put a row of chairs they can jump up climb down. We have had children enrolled in our school who you can see the feet they are undeveloped they are in shoes all day. That is one of the problems of the inner-city child. They don't want them to get dirty which is one of the things we find when we moved here. So if we do more workshops we will be empowering those schools”.*

Most of the participants felt that parents would benefit from support and information on the important role that they play in their child's early learning. This supports literature on the Reggio Emilia method as an approach to early childhood education where family, community and environment play an important role in a child's well-being and education, and parents need to be actively involved and participate in the life of the school, as a “partner not as a consumer” (Kelemen 2013:90).

The expressed recommendation for a parenting workshop follows:

*“Yes and maybe as we are chatting now there's something coming up maybe if the forum even has a workshop for parents...they are victims of an apartheid education system... ..that is why I say education for us, to really see change is going to take generations but these parents are trying. They want a difference...but in terms of I won't say parenting skills, I would say in terms of knowledge as to what the child needs to know, the school readiness... But they want you to teach the child and they are lacking themselves”.*

This finding is supported by various policies. The Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 (South Africa 2006: chapter 8) makes provision for parenting and family support in the area of ECD services as key outcomes to prevention and early intervention. Similarly, the White Paper on Families, 2012 aims to support parents in fostering the well-being of families and strengthening individual member's development. The NIECDP (2015:36) confirms that it is the responsibility of the Department of Social

Development to provide these services, and programmes do exist for developing effective parenting skills under the Parental/Primary Caregiver Capacity Building Training Package. There is no doubt that the influence of parents as role models influences both the academic performance and competent and healthy behaviour of their children (Biersteker 2018:300).

#### **4.3.7.1.2 Category: Meetings for managers only**

Participants suggested that the ECD forum should consider arranging meetings for managers only with a focus specifically on developing their areas of need:

*“Also we need a forum meeting maybe once every three months for only, not the teachers, only the managers of the place alone. Sometimes when we are there we are mixed with teachers you know we are not doing the same work if even though we from the same centre. We are dealing with the teaching, the training, the challenges we are facing, we need our own space for the managers maybe once every three months or six months but we need that space..., we need to meet on our own and hear our experiences and challenges when you are here you don’t know who is a manager”.*

*“...I would like to have a meeting an ECD quarterly meeting just for the managers. So then we say OK as the manager this, this, this and this you need to be doing as the manager. So look at your finances, look at your number of children in the classrooms, here are the regulations for you”.*

These findings align with the theory of “learning communities” and the shift from learning as an individual to learning as part of a community and the benefits that result from building on the individual synergies of the group working in partnership to address their shared needs and challenges (Kilpatrick et al 2012:1-3). Furthermore, Wenger 1998, as cited in Excell (2016:04), refers to the social theory of communities of practice and the strength of learning through social participation, a process of “learning and knowing” within a group of people who share “lived experiences” and strive towards common goals. The recommendation to arrange meetings for managers only, where they can share common concerns, experiences and challenges, aligns with Hope and Timmel’s (2003:142) view of the social need to build community and the benefits of small, homogeneous groups that allow for

the participation of members where learning through “inclusive circles” allows members to experience the wholeness of their lived experiences.

#### **4.3.7.1.3 Category: Forum to visit and evaluate ECD centres**

In selected ECD centres in the city UNISA social work students were placed for their fourth level ‘work integrated learning’ where they offered social work support to the ECD centre staff, children and families for seven months of the year in fulfilment of their Bachelor of Social Work Degree. Although they were not responsible for monitoring *per se*, they assisted the forum by ensuring that ECD centres were utilising the tools introduced through the forum, such as the Persona Doll and the LEGO sets. The students also mapped inner city ECD centres in developing a database, an important monitoring and evaluation tool for the forum and the municipality. These were important functions which aligned with the role of social workers under the Department of Social Development who have a responsibility to visit ECD centres to monitor their services in terms of their registration as Partial Care Facilities (Children’s Act 38 of 2005: section 80). Similarly, the National Development Plan and National Integrated ECD policy of 2015 recognises the many aspects of ECD and the importance of all sectors in society playing various support roles if every child in South Africa is to have access to the full range of early learning services by 2030 (Ilifa Labantwana & Kago Ya Bana 2018:02).

Although there were some aspects of monitoring and evaluating offered by the social work students and the forum through the quarterly meetings, a manager recommended that the forum initiate regular on-site visits to all the participating ECD centres for the purpose of monitoring, evaluating and supporting centres:

*“I would also suggest if like maybe once a month we (the forum) can just go around maybe once a month for 30 minutes just walk around in most of our preschools here. ....You can see what’s really going on here....If we are doing that you never know if we passed by your school...you will say this thing is very important”.*

#### **4.3.7.2 Sub-theme: Recommendations to the forum committee on assistance or change needed to improve conditions for ECD centres, staff and families**

Based on their experiences and the extent of the challenges threatening the day-to-day functioning and sustainability of ECD centres in the city, the managers made a number of recommendations to the forum committee. The nine categories emerging from this sub-theme included: practical assistance; revisit norms and standards; financial support; access to outdoor play spaces; greater stakeholder collaboration and a municipal ECD champion for the rights of children; coordinate additional meetings and community engagement opportunities; address the need for more primary schools; social work support and a basic guidelines tool kit; and a need for strong ECD leaders.

#### **4.3.7.2.1 Category: Practical assistance**

Participants felt there were a number of practical ways in which the forum could assist the ECD centres. Recommended focus areas for support included the following.

Assistance in accessing teaching material:

*“You know if you are not registered with the government, you can’t have the programme for Department of Education. We teach the programme, we even go and steal it from other schools. Other ECD centres they teach anyhow they don’t know what they supposed to give to the child. Please we need help in terms of programme...so when the child goes to primary school they have the necessary skills to start at school”.*

This comment supports Prinsley and Johnston (2015:01-03) who are of the opinion that an education system that produces skills needed in the future requires teachers that are not only passionate and knowledgeable but also well supported and resourced through collaborative public and private investment. In addition, it has been recommended that the Department of Basic Education increase their involvement insofar as the provision of educational resources and programmes is concerned in improving educational needs not only for formal ECD centres but also the informal centres (PPT 2014:13).

Assistance with first aid supplies:

*“It’s the same as the first aid, it must be constantly upgraded. We need to rethink how we can get donations for those first aid boxes to help try to meet some of the norms and standards that the schools are not able to do financially or whatever”.*

This comment confirms the Guidelines for ECD Services (UNICEF 2007:62) which stipulates that all staff should have knowledge in dealing with accidents and the use of the contents of the first aid box. Berry et al (2011:43) state that the availability of first aid kits is not enough; ECD centres must ensure that they contain medicines and that medicines have not reached their expiry date.

Assistance with donations of food:

*“And we need the practical things, we need people who are interested in rolling out food and then a follow up, did it happen? So there is not enough practical help for these little places...I throw out much food that people give us because they are giving us old food or substandard because they think that these children are poor children...and it’s not right. So there is not enough practical help for these little places”.*

This identified need for feeding programmes confirms the 2016 South African Demographic and Health Survey findings (South African Early Childhood Review 2017:20) that only 23% of children between 6-23 months are receiving a minimal acceptable diet leaving a large percentage of children at risk of ill health through malnutrition. Informal ECD centres registered conditionally are able to access DSD subsidy for food and nutrition but this is dependent on the centre’s obtaining full registration (Berry et al 2011, as cited in PPT 2014:21). Although there has been progress in reducing child poverty and inequality, the findings and recommendations by participants in this study confirm the historical fault lines in the survival, development and access to quality education, health care and food and nutrition for vulnerable children (Save the Children 2015-2019:15-16).

#### 4.3.7.2.2 Category: Revisit norms and standards

Some of the participants mentioned that, in order for inner city ECD centres to meet the policy requirements for registration, there was a need to revisit and reassess the norms and standards. Managers were eager to comply, but the socio-economic environment and challenges, such as exploitative property owners, hampered their efforts. This according to PPT (2014:10) highlights the gap in support for these intermediate informal ECD centres and their efforts to achieve incremental change and improvements. The current framework adopted in South Africa for ECD centres to achieve registration focuses on formal ECD norms and standards based on high levels of capacity, affordability, funding and resources

The following quotations express participant's sentiments:

*"...try to minimise those standards and requirements so that at least even if they can't register the ECD centres even the Department of Education we need a programme for those who are teaching".*

*"...the government can help, not only us...you can see we have space, but you will see other preschools you can see they've got good staff ...but the only problem because they don't have the possibility to rent a big place. And also another problem the government they mustn't be so hard. If I am talking about hard, sometimes the government they don't care, they will say no for you before you open here you must hire all the building. You can have skill but you don't have money..."*

The participants' responses are consistent with the view that KwaZulu-Natal is one of the provinces in South Africa with the greatest number of ECD centres lacking adequate basic infrastructure and in need of urgent maintenance and repair. Centres do not comply with norms and standards as they are unsafe, lack security, adequate ablution and cooking facilities, are overcrowded with no outdoor space and many lack basic equipment and teaching material (Kotzé 2015:14). A study conducted by HSRC (2014:106) found that ECD centres perceived to be high vulnerability centres were more likely not to be able to comply with regulatory requirements raising concerns for children's health and safety. Berry et al (2011:11-12) make reference to the changing context in which children live and services are

delivered and why the Children's Act, the law regulating matters relating to children, may need to change from time to time to accommodate children's needs and aspects that no longer work in practice. In support of the findings, the HSRC, (2014:107) in referring to the need to boost ECD centre registration for struggling, unsubsidised centres, recommends that the ECD sector engage with the Department of Social Development to consider alternate registration processes.

#### **4.3.7.2.3 Category: Financial Support**

The following storylines are suggestions made by participants with regard to the funding crisis and the support needed to sustain their ECD centres. ECD centres not registered with the Department of Social Development or the Department of Basic Education do not qualify for a subsidy. In 2015, alarming feedback from research indicated that 77% of unregistered ECD centres in South Africa are those found operating in disadvantaged areas and, taking into consideration the socio-economic environment in which they function, financial support through fees, fund-raising initiatives or donations was restricted (Kotzé 2015:14).

A participant's recommendation relating to financial support from the government:

*"...and also if the government or the municipality or whatever if they can provide some financial support even if it can be food, not money, or books whatever...Because what we are doing you can't take a child from the street and take to primary school. What we are doing is supposed to be the job of the government now in one way we are supporting the government and they must acknowledge what we are doing. We need enough support financial or material whatever they can support but we need their support because these children should be on the street and in containers on the road. Now we are trying to keep them eight hours a day is not a small thing..."*

The majority of inner city ECD centres, unregistered or conditionally registered, found themselves in what Kotzé (2015:14-15) describes as the "low-resource trap" where their inadequate infrastructure and equipment prohibited them from registering and receiving a government subsidy. The participants in the study indicated that the lack of financial and other support from the government restricted

their efforts to provide children in the inner city with basic nutritional, recreational and teaching resources for their well-being.

A participant's recommendation relating to financial support through increased school fees:

*"...I know the kind of parents we are dealing with. You can see everything after two or three months you go to the shop, you see things they increase what, what, what. Because I am the administrator, the principal of the preschool I always defend that they must not increase the school fees but it is something that we need to increase because we also don't have... But we are supposed to increase the school fees but when I look because I am the one who knows and I always say no please guys don't".*

Save the Children, in their report (2017:01-02), support this comment in noting that throughout the world countries are experiencing a learning crisis, and it comes as no surprise that socio-economic challenges and a family's income and their ethnicity are key to determining whether they can go to school and have opportunities for quality learning.

A participant's recommendation relating to financial support through private donor funding is:

*"...for the sake of the children is to continue getting the kind of financial support and donations that we need to improve the whole building and in particular replace that toxic asbestos roofing which is a very unhealthy... I think we need to start supporting each other within the school itself, and secondly you know we need more support from the parents as well. But we understand they have very difficult circumstances some of them but when it comes to financial support we need to depend more on outside financial support in order to really serve people who do not have financial means to send their children to our school... I am thinking more in terms of trust money from business trusts or whatever".*

There is a plethora of evidence that ECD, in particular for the disadvantaged and people living in poverty, is underfinanced and that there is a need for innovative



ways to supplement conventional financing methods if the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by countries around the world in 2015 are to be reached (Putchá et al 2016:52-54). The Diagnostic Review of the ECD Sector (Richter et al 2012:44) notes that in many countries ECD has appeal for private investors. In South Africa, the Corporate Social Investment Handbook indicates that a third of the listed companies fund children's programmes. In recognising that ECD services are under-funded there is a need for costing for the ECD sector that has all-inclusive coverage and not only increased funding for existing services that are already available in well provided for areas. Save the Children (2015:02) recommends that developing countries increase their tax bases and make education a priority in national budgets.

#### **4.3.7.2.4 Category: Access to outdoor play spaces**

Space and opportunities in the inner city for ECD centres to access outdoor play areas was an expressed concern and there were calls from participants for the forum, through their partnership with local government, to assist in addressing this issue. Studies on children's environments indicates that children prefer outdoor educational spaces because of the range of opportunities to do what children wanted and needed to do in open environments such as socialising, observing, moving and pretending (Merewether 2015:100-105).

The following storyline expresses the participant's recommendation to the forum for assistance in accessing municipal property:

*"...from the ECD, maybe I can command if it is possible there is some ground from the municipality around here that is not used... There is a big ground, I went there to visit, that is not even used, where we could manage to use even the containers and we can put the schools there and ground that can be used. Because we don't have that voice to go and talk to anyone, and challenge, but maybe ECD can help us to apply for that, even if we can pay money to rent that ground but we can manage and where children can have their outside and we can have, we can even meet those requirements from municipality".*

According to the NIECDP (2015:38), the South African National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for Children from Birth to Four 2014 places emphasis on play-based learning in early childhood. The local municipality has the responsibility for the provision of sport facilities, recreation and municipal parks according to schedule 5 Part B of the Constitution (South Africa 1996), and these facilities should be accessible to children. The eThekweni Municipality Child Care Facilities By-Law (2015: chapter 3 point 9) stipulates that an outdoor play area should be provided on premises where a child care facility is operated, and, in the absence of such an area and subject to the approval of the municipality, an additional indoor play area may substitute for the outdoor play area.

#### **4.3.7.2.5 Category: Greater stakeholder collaboration and a municipal ECD champion for the rights of children**

All participants in this study regarded the forum as an enabling platform for nurturing, learning, and promoting opportunities to share ideas and address challenges in making a better world for children living in the city. The National Development Agency (2015:04) refers to this citizen engagement as an essential process and the right of citizens to participate in decision making that affects their well-being and their lives. The Department of Social Development (DSD) was actively involved in the activities of the forum, attending quarterly meetings, facilitating training and providing practical support around issues of compliance and registration for participating ECD centres. In addition, the Point and Inner City ECD Forum participated in the quarterly DSD district integrated forum meetings where all government departments and key ECD role-players responsible for delivering ECD services shared ideas and discussed challenges. In a report on transforming early learning through social innovation, Giese (cited in Bernard van Leer 2016:96) comments, "...we've seen at first hand that the best ideas happen in the spaces between diverse sectors, as different perspectives collide to spark new ways of thinking".

Notwithstanding the existing partnerships with government and other stakeholders, participants were of the opinion that there needed to be greater collaboration between the municipality and key ECD role-players and a need for intentional action. They felt strongly that in order to have their voices heard there was a need for a

leader at municipal level to advance the rights of families and children living in the city. Richter et al (2012:07) are likewise of the opinion that there is a need for an independent mechanism such as an agency or board with expertise, authority and resources that brings together all governmental sectors in working towards common ECD goals.

The following storylines draw attention to these recommendations:

*“So one of the suggestions that actually came up at our last committee meeting was to bring in more stakeholders on to the committee itself. Have a more formal relationship with the municipality and work towards that idea of a champion of the children within the municipality so that there can be that networking and collaboration. It is already happening but we need it perhaps to be in a more formalised way. And I do think that the committee that is going to start taking on some of the concerns and issues and questions of the members on a more ongoing basis. I think we might have to employ a field worker or something to liaise between the municipality and the forum”.*

*“I think I would want to say and if in any way you can help the voice of the ECD centres being heard, that we are asking you to do. You know, hear our voice. We are here at grassroots, you know we facing the challenges...I don't work with rose-tinted glasses, I am seeing reality every day of my life. But if I knew there was a forum that was helping my voice and when I say my, I am speaking as the ECD centre. Hearing the voice of the ECD centre, the teachers, the children, everybody that is part of the ECD centre, the parents that would make me happy. And not just hearing my voice because I love to talk but I am an action girl. Let us not just talk. The time for talk, talk, talk, seriously has actually got to stop. It is time for action...”*

*“I have learnt how desperate we are for well-run ECDs. We are desperate for a champion who will say this is illegal, even though it breaks my heart to put out 20 children... that are in somebody's lounge somewhere, because where would they be if they weren't in that lounge? So I am not wanting us to put the kids on the street but I am wanting and have learnt from all of the people that, not the ECD people like me that are running places but the parents who*

*have got children in those ECD places, they are desperate. They want better for their children and they are not wanting them in those lounges but that is what the facilities are right now”.*

*“And some of the concerns that are put forward to the committee after the forum meetings where we try to grapple with different issues, for example, trying to get a champion for children in the city is an ongoing concern”.*

Save the Children (2015:21) concurs with these viewpoints and the need for collaboration between civil society, academia, business and the government and opportunities to learn from these partnerships and support their efforts to reach and achieve lasting change for children in South Africa. In addition, Save the Children backs the idea of a champion for children’s rights, a leader who will be the voice for children, developing solutions to factual, evidence-based challenges and creating platforms for children and the ECD community to share their problems and provide opportunities to have their needs addressed.

The findings are consistent with the National Integrated ECD Policy (2015:86) that emphasises the critical role that partnerships play in implementing integrated ECD services and advancing the rights of childhood development, a national priority. The policy document further points out that the Presidency has undertaken to support the Inter-Ministerial Committee on ECD with the purpose of reinforcing this national priority at provincial and municipal levels. At a municipal level, the Mayor is responsible for reinforcing ECD and ensuring that it is included in the municipal Integrated Development Plan (IDP) with sufficient commitment, resources and collaboration from municipalities to meet national outcome targets for ECD.

#### **4.3.7.2.6 Category: Coordinate additional meetings and community engagement opportunities**

Some participants suggested that the forum should meet more frequently. Forum meetings took place quarterly and during the lunch period when children in the centres were sleeping, making it easier for educators to participate. Although staff shortages made leaving the ECD centre to attend meetings difficult for many of the managers and their staff, they made the effort to attend because they experienced

their participation as an essential learning and growth opportunity for themselves and their ECD centres.

In support of this recommendation, a manager shared the following:

*“I think what you do is very important, I think that everybody who comes...to your quarterly meetings, there is huge learning happening all the time. You know it would be nice if we could say have it once a month but it is not practical for the people to leave their ECD site to come to the meeting... For me even to get there and to leave my kids at lunchtime, feeding time, for me to get to a forum meeting is difficult...they try to be there under any circumstances but it is scratching the surface...we could maybe look at Saturday morning but you know some will and some won't”.*

The National Development Agency (2015:04) maintains that only when participation adds value does it become democratic and beneficial. Likewise, the theory of Max-Neef (1991:08) supports human scale development that focuses primarily on people through their participation in situations where they can become agents of their own future.

Another manager suggested that children from the ECD centres would also benefit from their participation in joint outreach activities:

*“If it is possible as you always make a time for let's say us staff to go there to the meeting, why not also to make this thing also to be big. Like maybe to organise a day away where all the schools can meet together with all our children... and allow also the children to come together to know each other”.*

This comment supports the view of Richter et al (2012:07) who believe that comprehensive ECD services should encourage the introduction of quality, enjoyable learning opportunities at home, in groups and through programmes where children can build confidence, self-control and social respect through their interactions with other children and adults.

#### 4.3.7.2.7 Category: Address the need for more primary schools

A number of participants reported that there were not enough primary schools in the city, and they requested the forum to intervene on their behalf through their partnership with local government. Managers were of the opinion that if a child lived in the city and had basic education and school readiness it should not be so difficult for them to access primary schooling. The strong sentiments expressed by managers is supported by Hope and Timmel (2003:122) who are of the view that literacy is the foundation of progress, and it should be the country's priority to develop opportunities for basic education because when a person's mind is starved it hurts as much as when their body is starved.

The following quotations express the participant's deep concerns:

*“One of my big concerns that we see annually is when our children move out from here...there is only one school available to these children and the challenge that these people have, trying to find a school for their children is a concern. I know we have representation from Department of Education and I think realistically if we look at things geographically... And what they're doing to the parents is terrible.... and so I'm thinking that the Forum needs to approach the Department of Education.... You would cry if I tell you how they get sent from pillar to post. When you have to beg for a space, it is really sad, what is the problem is it inadequacy and why can't these schools support the inner-city realising that that there are no schools. There are no primary schools; there are a few high schools... Where do they go after ECD?... Finding a place for your child to be educated needs to be easier...”*

*“There are not enough ECD centres in the inner city, but the even bigger problem, there are not enough feeder schools in the city...I have made good relationships with all the feeder schools, I get the information from all the feeder schools, I let the parents know, go and register now. But those schools can only take a limited number, I have parents crying, I have parents asking me to please take my child back again. That perpetuates the problem because now I have new Grade Rs wanting to register and I have old Grade R parents saying can my child come back to you next year, I haven't found a*

*school. So that really, really is probably one of the biggest challenges that I as an ECD centre face...You know parents say to me ....start a Grade 1, but then where do you stop? Because once I take Grade 1 how are they ever going to get into Grade 2. It will be the same argument. Then I must go through to matric. And we can't grow any further we have expanded to maximum”.*

In commenting on equity of outcome, Richter et al (2012:04) support the view that, in bridging access and gaps in quality education for the marginalised, it is the responsibility of the state to ensure that regulation, funding, infrastructure, services and programmes are in place. Furthermore, the participants' comments are consistent with the provisions in the Constitution (1996: section 29 [1 a and b]) and the right that everyone has to basic education and further education which the state must make available and accessible. The White Paper on Education and Training (1995: chapter 7 [10 & 11]) furthermore emphasises the four distinct educational rights, namely to basic education, equal access to educational institutions and choice of language of instruction at an educational institution of an acceptable quality.

#### **4.3.7.2.8 Category: Social work support and a basic guidelines tool kit**

A suggestion to the forum was to create some form of tool kit for inner city ECD centres, a basic guidelines document with information on norms and standards, examples of programmes and processes to follow and how to source resources and make referrals. The following excerpts sum up this recommendation:

*“...I have a sense that many of these ECD don't even know what the requirements are. We as a forum we can put together a pack that says that these are the minimum requirements you need. That would be so useful for them...It will serve many little ECDs who come to the forum just to have this little booklet...”*

*“...we have a prep sheet, a basic prep sheet, what will you do on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. What science experiment will you do, what story will you tell and what will you sing? Basic stuff but unless you are going to give them a little booklet that has got those basic things in, I*

*mean they could be given a basic report, then they can use that basic report as a template and then those children can get into a school”.*

*“We need the more information either from ECD or you UNISA social workers who know what to do, where we can go in those cases where the parents abandon the children, what we can do. Maybe if you can provide information or advice maybe ongoing training, you know capacity building...we are foreigners and we don’t know where to go and who to call on...other NGOs or other departments, which can help in that case”.*

Referring to the forum’s role in creating opportunities for participants to access knowledge resources, these views are consistent with the notion of social capital and the social interaction that enables people to collaborate, learn, and work together in aspiring to achieve what people could not easily accomplish on their own (Halverson, 2003, as cited in Katz et al 2009:03). In a previous study on ECD forums, the need for tools to monitor, evaluate, and strengthen processes to support and measure the impact of forum interventions was recommended (HSRC 2014:114). In acknowledging the need for social work support related to practical capacity building, Training and Resources in Early Education (TREE [sa]:03) are of the opinion that Social Workers are at the core of service delivery of early education in South Africa and play a significant role in determining quality services, support and protection for children and families.

#### **4.3.7.2.9 Category: Need for strong ECD leaders**

There were reports of managers who lacked the necessary leadership skills to safeguard quality ECD services as expressed by one participant:

*“...there needs to be in every ECD, there needs to be a leader who guides...that principal in that place is the most educated but she is never meeting with her staff and encouraging them, fund-raising for them, so we might as well remove her... that is what happens in many of those places... So even when all the people are working, they are not working together, they are not pooling their resources of any sort... They are not educating their own educators to the best of ability...because there is no structure within the school you know”.*



This finding highlights the importance of dialogue in education and development according to Freire, as cited in Hope and Timmel (2003:29), and the value of creating a climate where everyone can actively participate and contribute to decision-making processes in which all feel heard. These are essential components to exercising authority effectively and ensuring unity and commitment in a group. This quotation further supports the view of Schenck et al (2010:254) on leadership, a view which motivates and demands the best of what people have to offer. It empowers by providing opportunities for individuals or organizations to collaborate with one another and outsiders, such as the government, business and key stakeholders to develop joint actions and decision-making efforts. In recognizing the need for development opportunities for ECD practitioners necessary to realize the scale and quality of ECD services, Richter et al (2012:45) recommends a human resource development strategy that includes opportunities to improve staff qualifications, subsidize training opportunities and professionalize the ECD sector. Such career development would result in improving the qualifications, salary and job security and career progression of leaders and practitioners whilst making a significant difference to child development and wellbeing.

#### **4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has presented the research findings. In order to achieve the goal and objectives of this study, the researcher conducted seven semi-structured interviews with managers of inner city ECD centres who had actively participated in the forum meetings and associated awareness, discussion and capacity-building interventions. The perceptions and experiences of participants were recorded, documented, and analysed. In the first section of the chapter, the researcher provided the biographical profiles and descriptions of the participants, followed by a discussion of the seven themes, twenty sub-themes and twenty-nine categories, which emerged during the data analysis processes. The first theme focused on the forum as a comprehensive participatory adult learning experience. The second theme discussed learning to improve the operational management of the ECD centre. The third theme looked at learning through networks and engagement with other key role-players. The fourth theme discussed participants' perceptions of the challenges experienced by the ECD managers, staff and the ECD centres, and the

fifth theme discussed the participants' accounts of common factors compromising the well-being of children. The sixth theme followed, and this theme illustrated the participants' accounts of what had helped them to manage the identified threats and challenges. Finally, theme seven dealt with the participants' recommendations. The researcher quoted the storylines and compared the findings with the relevant literature.

The next chapter provides the summary, conclusions and recommendations from the study.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this research study was to develop an in-depth understanding of the learning experiences of inner city early childhood development managers through their participation in an ECD forum from a social work perspective. This chapter will provide a brief summary of the previous chapters and the conclusions and recommendations arising from the qualitative research methodology that guided the study.

### **5.2 SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS**

Chapter One presented a general introduction and background of the research topic and the motivation for undertaking the study. The research question, goals and objectives that guided the research were provided. A brief outline of the research methodology was introduced. This was followed by a discussion of the key concepts and ethical considerations that guided the researcher's conduct during the research study.

Chapter Two explored and described literature on the history of early childhood development, policies and programmes, and the role of collaborative partnerships in facilitating practitioner learning. An overview of the theoretical perspectives underpinning the learning experiences of ECD managers through an ECD forum was presented, namely, experiential learning theory, the asset based community development approach, participatory models, collaborative partnerships, and learning approaches. Attention was given to the role of social work in early childhood development programmes.

Chapter Three elaborated on the research methodology, namely the application of the qualitative method that was employed to explore and describe the learning experiences for ECD managers through their participation in an ECD forum. The chapter discussed the research design used to achieve the aims and objectives, the

process of recruiting and procuring a sample, preparing the participants for the semi-structured interviews and the process of data collection, analysis and verification of the findings.

Chapter Four presented the research findings emanating from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the seven managers of ECD centres located in the inner city of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, eThekweni Municipality. The biographical information of the participants was provided and the outcome of the data analysed by both the researcher and an independent coder was presented according to seven themes, twenty sub-themes and twenty-nine categories. The findings were verified by means of a literature control.

Chapter Five will summarise the first four chapters of the research report. The chapter will also present the conclusions reached based on the qualitative research process and findings presented in the previous chapters. The researcher will conclude the chapter by making recommendations based on the key findings, which emerged from the qualitative research process.

### **5.3 SUMMARIES, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY**

This section summarises the research process and methodology applied for the study. The conclusions drawn during the various phases and the recommendations for practice, policy and future research are presented.

#### **5.3.1 Summary of the qualitative research process**

In order to explore the learning experiences of managers of ECD centres in the inner city and gather rich information the researcher employed a qualitative method together with an exploratory, descriptive and contextual design. The following overarching research question was formulated for the purpose of the study:

- What are the learning experiences of Inner City ECD managers who participated in the ECD Forum?

The goal that provided a framework for the research was:

- To have an in-depth understanding of the learning experiences of the Inner City ECD managers who participated in the ECD Forum.

The following research objectives were taken into account when conducting the study:

- To explore the learning experiences for ECD managers through their participation in the Point and Inner City ECD Forum; and
- To describe the learning experiences for ECD managers through their participation in the Point and Inner City ECD Forum.

The research goal was divided into task objectives that need to be attained in order to meet the goal:

- To obtain a sample of ECD managers from the Point and Inner City area who participated in the ECD Forum activities;
- To conduct semi-structured interviews with the sample of ECD managers from ECD centres in the Point and Inner City in order to explore their learning experiences through the ECD Forum interventions and activities;
- To sift, sort and analyze the qualitative data collected according to Tesch's guidelines, as cited by Creswell (2012:244-5);
- To describe the learning experiences of the ECD managers who had participated in the ECD Forum interventions and activities;
- To analyze and interpret the data and conduct a literature control in order to verify the findings; and
- To draw conclusions and make recommendations about the learning experiences of ECD managers participating in the Point and Inner City ECD Forum interventions and activities.

As the researcher wanted to develop an in-depth understanding of the learning experiences of inner city early childhood development managers who participated in an ECD forum from a social work perspective, qualitative research was employed for the purpose of this study. The researcher recruited a sample using the non-probability and purposeful sampling method supported by her existing knowledge of the population and in consultation with the Point and Inner City ECD Forum Committee. A pilot study was utilized to test the interview guide and process for data collection to determine the relevance of the proposed questions in eliciting data required to answer the overarching research question for the study. Semi-structured interviews guided by a set of predetermined questions from the interview guide were used to obtain information rich data from the seven managers of ECD centres in the inner city according to their experiences and perceptions. The interviews were recorded and an analysis of the data followed the eight steps proposed by Tesch (cited by Creswell 2012:244-5). Seven themes, twenty sub-themes and twenty-nine categories emerged from the data. Guba's Model (Shenton 2004:63) was utilised to verify the data. An independent coder analysed the data and those findings were compared with the researcher's findings during a consensus discussion with the researcher and the independent coder and the supervisor.

### **5.3.2 Conclusions relating to the qualitative research process**

The researcher concluded that the qualitative research methodology adopted for this study had proved to be an effective and valuable means of gathering in-depth information from the participants on their learning experiences and the meaning they attached to their participation in the ECD forum in coping with the challenges they experienced as managers of inner city ECD centres.

The qualitative approach, utilizing an exploratory, descriptive and contextual design, enabled the researcher to acquire information on what motivated the managers to participate in the forum activities and to discover their perceptions of their learning experiences. Questions that elicited the managers' deeper meanings of managing an ECD centre in the inner city taking into consideration the social, economic, cultural and physical context of their lives provided in-depth data for the study.

The purposive sampling method utilised to select the sample proved an appropriate technique for this study. The managers selected provided a great deal of rich information about the learning experiences and issues of central importance to the ECD managers who had experience and insight into the challenges facing the managers of ECD centres in the inner city.

The prolonged engagement and trustworthy relationship that the researcher had established with the participants through her active involvement in the forum contributed to the willingness of the managers to volunteer to participate in the study and share their experiences, thoughts and feelings in covering a breadth and depth of key issues that ensured quality data.

The pilot study assisted the researcher in testing the questions to determine the appropriateness of the interview guide to elicit data relevant to the investigation. In addition, the pilot study provided insight into the envisaged procedures and the use of interviewing skills necessary to explore more deeply to generate trustworthy data in planning for the data collection stage.

The semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to explore the learning experiences of the ECD managers through their participation in the ECD forum activities. By utilising this type of interview, the researcher was able to probe more deeply into the world of the ECD managers, their lived realities and the meanings they attached to their experiences.

Tesch's eight steps (cited by Creswell 2012:244-245) as a method of data analysis proved to be a suitable process in making sense of the data collected in answering the research question by providing a logical and systematic approach to data analysis. The themes, sub-themes and categories emerging from the data analysis provided extensive descriptions of the learning experiences of the managers of ECD centres.

In gaining clarity and accuracy with regard to the emerging themes, it was useful for the researcher to engage with an expert independent coder who analysed the data and compiled a table of themes. The use of Guba's model (Shenton 2004:63) of data verification proved to be useful in determining the reliability and validity of the data collected. In mitigating the self-reflective nature of this qualitative study and

the researcher's personal bias, the technique demonstrated an accurate and trustworthy description of the findings.

The values and ethics of the social work profession guided the researcher's conduct throughout the study in an effort to create an enabling environment for the participants to share the deeper meanings of their life experiences.

With the researcher being actively involved in the placement of social work students in ECD centres in the city for their fourth level practicum and also being a member of the ECD forum committee, it proved valuable to keep a record of her thoughts, feelings and role in the research study and sharing these with committee members to avoid personal biases and pre-conceptions.

### **5.3.3 Summary and conclusions based on the research findings**

The following section summarizes the seven themes, twenty sub-themes and twenty-nine categories emerging from the qualitative data analysis and the conclusions arrived at on each particular theme.

#### **5.3.3.1 Theme 1: The forum provided a comprehensive participatory adult learning experience**

The managers highlighted the positive benefits of participation and collective learning through their involvement in the activities of the forum. The data are interspersed with feedback on the forum as an environment where various ECD role-players could participate in the process of teaching and where adult learning occurred through multi-disciplinary and multi-dimensional processes.

The findings revealed that much of the learning had been informal learning taking place through presentations, focus group discussions, workshops and participation in practical events facilitated by various professionals, government and non-government organisations and individuals.

Respondents indicated that the forum had provided an opportunity for refreshing prior skills and building capacity and knowledge in previously untapped areas of importance, such as the importance of play in a child's life.



Learning experiences were direct and indirect. Indirect learning came through social learning processes whereby participants listened to the experiences, challenges and coping mechanisms of other forum members and acted on the indirect knowledge and information to benefit themselves, their staff, the children and families.

The comprehensive direct learning experiences included numerous topics of interest identified by the forum participants that focused on learning that promoted the personal and professional development of the participants in the areas of:

- Learning how to support the children;
- Learning how to support the parents; and
- Learning how to support teachers.

The evidence presented overwhelmingly supported the positive impact of participation in the forum and opportunities for adult learning that benefited managers, staff, the children, parents and the ECD centre. All respondents felt that the ECD forum was vitally important, particularly in the inner city where the challenges and needs of managers of ECD centres changed frequently and where many of the centres were unlikely to be able to make the step up to meet the norms and standards required for full registration. The managers participating in the study believed that the forum filled an important gap as it empowered and provided strategic guidance and support to forum participants.

### **5.3.3.2 Theme 2: Learning to improve the operational management of the ECD centre**

It is worth noting that four of the ECD centres in this study had registration with the Department of Social Development. In addition, two of these four centres had registered with the Department of Basic Education. The remaining three centres were non-profit organisations.

The study found that all the managers of the centres appreciated the learning opportunities that addressed the operational management of their centres. All the centre managers were of the view that the information and capacity building

workshops on meeting registration and early childhood care and education policy regulations were valuable, regardless of their registration status.

The following points highlight the operational management areas for improvement and learning.

- **Learning how to manage the ECD finances and budget** – it was evident from the research findings that all the participating ECD centres were operating in vulnerable communities with high levels of poverty where a number of parents were unable to pay school fees on a regular basis. This being the main source of funding for centres coupled with the limited or no financial support from a government grant or private sector support negatively affected administrative and management systems.
- **Learning how to apply policy and to comply with governance** – there was evidence of managers having partial knowledge, capacity and resources to comply with policy and procedures for ECD centres and programmes. Managers felt that having direct contact with and receiving training from the different government departments through the forum was empowering and equipped them with current information. Respondents were of the opinion that the personal connection with government departments would assist in fast tracking their applications and help them implement improved administrative and management procedures in their centres.
- **Learning how to build ECD centre resources** – all the managers felt that whether registered or unregistered, because of the socio-economic challenges facing many families accessing their ECD centres, the capacity building trainings and opportunities for referral and access to various resources meant that the forum acted as a bridge to resource solutions. There was consensus that participants regularly attended forum meetings because they received practical support on how to address challenges and improve the management of their centres.

It was evident from the manager's responses that the formal and informal training workshops, resource mobilisation and leveraging of support through referrals and in kind through the forum assisted managers in addressing some of their centre

deficiencies and to mitigate certain challenges. The researcher arrived at the conclusion that all the respondents were motivated to learn and make improvements to their systems of management, but not all ECD centres and managers were equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, capacity and resources to do so.

### **5.3.3.3 Theme 3: Learning through networks and engagement with other key role-players**

The managers' feedback spoke to the power of learning through networking, relationships and partnership development, shared experiences and collective action. There was overall agreement that the forum promoted social cohesion amongst all participating members in the forum.

The benefits of learning through networks and engagement with other key role-players was summarised under two categories:

- **Learning through peer group activities and conversations** - managers expressed the value of the small group activities and discussions that took place after the presentations. They reported on the benefits of interacting with other managers, staff, the social work students, key government and non-government role-players and individuals and being able to discuss, share experiences and challenges, and thereby strengthen ways of addressing their needs.
- **Learning through networking with external stakeholders** – managers experienced the forum as a platform for exposure to key stakeholders and the wider ECD community and a means of gathering and dispersing information, ideas, opportunities and learning new skills through the collective value created by networking through the forum.

There was agreement that the forum could not address all the identified problems experienced by inner city ECD managers, but, from an appreciative inquiry and strengths based perspective, engagement in the forum provided opportunities for all participants' contributions to be voiced and valued.

Participants felt they always came away from the quarterly meetings and activities having gained some new knowledge or skill and, therefore, they made every effort to attend meetings. Forum participation had instilled a sense of *Ubuntu* in the

building of important connections between forum members and the wider community and promoted the benefits of networking in the common pursuit of goals. The managers also expressed the social protection function that the forum served by way of relationship building that enabled them to cope with and minimize areas of weakness.

#### **5.3.3.4 Theme 4: Participants' perceptions of the challenges experienced by the ECD managers, staff and the ECD centres.**

The study found that managers of ECD centres in the inner city experience a myriad challenges that threaten the welfare of the centre, the management and the staff. The challenges were categorised under external and internal challenges as follows.

##### **5.3.3.4.1 External challenges:**

- **Poverty** - where centres were not registered, they were not able to access ECD funding set aside for families living in poverty. In both registered and unregistered centres, managers found themselves having to assist families who struggled to provide food and other basic needs for their children.
- **Finances** - unemployment and informal employment for many of the families resulted in an unpredictable source of income through school fees for ECD centres. Even for the registered centres, the income from school fees and social welfare was insufficient to cover running costs, and centres relied heavily on donations. The stringent requirements for registration coupled with financial limitations hindered managers in advancing their ECD centres, the services and the basic conditions of employment for staff.
- **Inadequate support from property owners** – because of the demand for affordable and accessible ECD in the inner city many of the centres were found to be situated in properties that compromised the children's health, safety and appropriate environment for learning. Managers experienced property owners as being uninterested or in contravention of their responsibility to maintain and repair the property.

- **Inadequate premises and space** – many of the inner city ECD centres had either limited or no outdoor space; their facilities and infrastructure were inadequate, and the centre did not comply with childcare facility by-laws.
- **Inadequate number of primary schools** – managers faced increasing demands to extend their ECD centre to include additional grades to meet the challenge of an insufficient number of primary schools in the inner city. Managers reported a shortage of quality, accessible ECD centres and schools in close proximity to where an increasing number of families lived and worked.

#### **5.3.3.4.2 Internal challenges:**

- **Trauma and stress** - the findings established that a large number of rural families and families from other African countries live in the inner city of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal for safety and economic reasons. Managers reported the challenge of having to offer emotional support in particular to the children of refugee parents and their staff, some of whom were refugees themselves having experienced direct or indirect trauma.
- **Human resources** - inadequately trained and unskilled staff, staff who lacked motivation, not enough staff and the retention of skilled members of staff presented as challenges for the managers. The findings established that in some instances there was also a lack of capacity amongst management pertaining to institutional management processes and ECD skills.
- **Finances** – the cycle of poverty experienced by families and unpredictable access to income through school fees and other funding from government grants and private funding challenged the financial stability of ECD centres.
- **Minimal parental participation** – although there were efforts made by managers to offer regular opportunities for parents to participate in parent meetings and other school events, managers experienced indifference amongst most parents with regards to participating in their child's school activities. Explanations for the non-participation of parents included their socio-economic environment and the lack of support services for families in mitigating their social exclusion, working long hours and unable to take time from work, and, for

unemployed parents, their stressful circumstances rendered them unable to support their children and participate more fully in their lives.

- **Parents not understanding school readiness** – managers reported a seemingly lack of understanding amongst most parents about the value and importance of the early years of education and the concept of school readiness. Parents showed little interest in following through with requests and recommendations for parental involvement in home activities to support the early learning experiences of their child. There was a general feeling that parents felt that preparing their child for school was the responsibility of the educators.

The findings confirmed that a large number of inner city ECD centres face challenges that weigh heavily on the ECD centres' human and natural resources, the infrastructure and the early education and care programmes and services.

#### **5.3.3.5 Theme 5: Participants' accounts of common factors compromising the well-being of the children**

The findings indicate that managers expressed common concerns relating to factors that directly compromised the well-being of the children attending their centres, and these were categorised as follows.

- **Poverty** – managers reported families living in dire poverty whose children were not able to experience their world of childhood to the full. In an environment where parents were struggling to provide their families with the basic needs, the findings indicated that a large percentage of children were not receiving sufficient nourishment, protection, and stimulation to expand their curiosity and development. Poverty directly influenced the physical and emotional environments that children were living in, with reports of dysfunctional home situations where children were not living with their biological parents or the nuclear family.
- **Unhealthy environments and lack of resources** – there was evidence of centres where children faced health and safety threats resulting from overcrowding, unsafe and insecure premises, poor ventilation, inadequate toilet, washing and kitchen facilities, and being limited to no outdoor play areas. There

were reports from managers of a shortage of teaching resources and programmes in addition to teachers who had limited training and skills to enhance the learning environment for the children attending their centres.

- **Poor parenting** – where parents were caught in a poverty trap they demonstrated poor parenting skills and knowledge of acting in the best interest of their children. There were reports of parents not collecting children at the end of the day, using corporal punishment on their children, not respecting their rights and generally showing little effort to communicate or build nurturing relationships with their children. From a social work perspective, the evidence highlighted the need for interventions to address and support the circumstances of parents and children in such situations.
- **Absenteeism and arriving late** – the research findings suggested that the adversities linked to poverty had complex implications for families where their basic survival needs often had to take precedence over paying for transport or school fees so that their child could attend school regularly. For ECD centres registered and receiving a government grant, they risked losing their grant calculated in accordance with attendance per child per day. A significant finding was that a child arriving late at school or being absent resulted in their losing out not only on the foundations of a themed programme but also on receiving breakfast which, for children not getting a nourishing meal the previous evening or in the morning, was a concern for their well-being.

Based on the above-mentioned challenges the feedback confirmed that for parents living in poverty and deprived physical and social environments, their children are vulnerable to risk factors that negatively affect their health, safety, psycho-social and early learning opportunities, and, hence, their overall well-being.

#### **5.3.3.6 Theme 6: The participants' accounts of what helped them to manage the identified threats or challenges**

The findings of the study revealed that there were opportunities that assisted the managers in coping with the threats and challenges. These were categorised under the following points.

- **Participation in the forum activities** – there was overwhelming agreement amongst the managers interviewed that their membership of, and participation in, the activities of the forum contributed to their learning experiences. Participants referred to the learning and capacity building opportunities accessed through the forum that mitigated certain threats and challenges to their management efforts. Significant findings from the research study indicated that, in impoverished early childhood settings, the connections and trustworthy relationships, shared experiences, collective action and contributions of various role players through the structured and informal forum learning interventions were experienced as being empowering and supportive in reducing the gaps and barriers for registered and unregistered ECD centres.
- **Empowered teachers** – according to the participants, they made an effort to include as many of their staff in forum workshops and activities as possible and found that their participation rekindled their passion and interest in early childhood education. The study found that all managers supported the idea of “learning communities” and accessing all possible opportunities for personal and professional development for their staff.
- **Parent participation** - the study found that overall parent participation was lacking, but, where parents had the luxury of time, motivation, and the means and understanding of the benefits of participating in the activities of the ECD centre, this positively influenced the parent child curiosity and the demand for quality early education.
- **Fund-raising background, financial management and other assistance** – managers reported on the positive benefits of accessing donations and resources through the various stakeholders accessed through the forum. The findings revealed that all participating ECD centres in the study relied heavily on donations in various forms. Because income from school fees was unreliable, the managers emphasised that knowledge of fund raising was an essential skill. It was evident that there were varying levels of proficiency in the manager’s ability to raise funds and manage the centre’s finances. Managers with strong fund raising and financial management skills appeared to have better structures and systems of managing their financial challenges.



The managers were appreciative of the many benefits of their forum membership and access to learning, referrals and donations, human and other resources and opportunities that helped them manage the threats and challenges. They felt, however, that there was a need for greater involvement by the municipality to address the barriers and narrow the gaps that threatened inner city ECD centres, management, staff and families.

The researcher acknowledged the significant role the forum and participating stakeholders had played in supporting managers and staff of ECD centres, but she is of the opinion that improved monitoring and evaluating of ECD centres would reduce the threats and incidence of vulnerability to exploitation and inadequate ECD provisioning.

### **5.3.3.7 Theme 7: The participants' recommendations**

The participants made recommendations to the forum committee within two categories, namely:

1. Recommendations relating to learning interventions or activities to enhance participants learning; and
2. Recommendations for assistance or change needed to improve conditions for ECD centres, staff and families as summarised below.
  - **Learning opportunities for teachers, staff and parents** – the forum should address the issues of skill, motivation and the short supply of suitably qualified educators and support staff in ECD centres by engaging various government, non-governmental and private training providers to facilitate subsidized formal and informal training opportunities for all categories of staff. The forum should consider offering parenting workshops and early education awareness and support campaigns for parents.
  - **Meetings for managers only** – in addition to the quarterly forum meetings for all stakeholders, managers felt they would benefit from specialized managers only training workshops that focused on their specific roles and responsibilities and developing skills such as fundraising, proposal writing, good accounting practices and other administrative skills.

- **Forum to visit and evaluate ECD centres** – the forum should introduce a monitoring and support role through regular visits to participating ECD centres in the inner city with the purpose of identifying areas of weakness and encouraging ways for improvement in striving to meet ECD requirements.
- **Practical assistance** – the forum should continue developing relations with various public and private partners to access educational resources, programmes and other basic equipment for ECD centres on behalf of registered and unregistered centres.
- **Revisit norms and standards** – the government needs to consider a more realistic registration processes for those ECD centres unable to comply with the existing stringent norms and standards. The efforts and good intentions of ECD centres to comply should be acknowledged, and an incremental, achievable system for centres to make improvements be considered.
- **Financial support** – there is a critical need for a government-funded model that extends to the different types of ECD service delivery and which targets vulnerable children and families unable to pay school fees in particular. The model should include support for those ECD centres which either do not qualify for existing services and funding or which need additional support in supplementing their existing efforts. The forum should assist ECD centres in leveraging private sector and corporate social responsibility initiatives to access financial support and other resources for ECD centres.
- **Access to outdoor play spaces** – managers whose ECD centres had limited or no outdoor space felt frustrated and powerless to make changes to their circumstances. They appealed to the forum to engage with government departments and the local municipality to advocate for the development of, and access to, safe play areas in unused or underutilized city spaces. Participants felt that to address the challenge facing many inner city ECD centres paying high rentals in unsafe buildings and unsuitable environments for children, the municipality needed to identify and develop municipal property in the inner city for early childhood facilities.

- **Greater stakeholder collaboration and a municipal ECD champion for the rights of children** – the managers were appreciative of the learning, exposure and access to various ECD stakeholders provided by their involvement in the forum. They highlighted the need for sustainable partnerships and collaborative efforts between the government and private and public stakeholders in assisting centres to meet ECD requirements and diminish the extent of their challenges. The idea of an ECD champion within the municipality incorporating coordination and support functions and programme roll out for families and children by the municipality was proposed.
- **Coordinate additional meetings and community engagement opportunities** – motivated by the value of the forum as an agent for learning, support and change, it was suggested that the forum facilitate more frequent, monthly meetings and extend the reach to include opportunities for children from the participating ECD centres to engage in community learning activities and events.
- **Address the need for more primary schools** – as a voice for the inner city ECD centres, managers requested the forum to engage with the relevant government departments in the ECD sector to advocate for support and action from the state in addressing the critical shortage of feeder schools to meet the demand for basic education opportunities for inner city families.
- **Social work support and a basic guidelines tool kit** – managers agreed that it was beneficial for ECD centres to have access to social work support for families and children attending the ECD centres. They felt there was a need to strengthen opportunities for families, in particular the refugee community, to have access to information, referral opportunities and social worker services. Managers recommended that the forum develop a basic guidelines document specifically for inner city ECD centres with information on norms and standards and operational requirements, daily programme guidelines and activities, practical processes and examples of improvised alternatives to costly resources in fulfillment of minimum registration requirements.
- **Need for strong ECD leaders** – the findings highlighted the need for ECD managers with strong administrative and leadership skills in addition to early

childhood education knowledge to be able to motivate, support and empower their staff to work together in the best interest of the children.

#### **5.3.4 Recommendations based on the research findings**

The learning experiences of inner city early childhood development managers through their participation in the forum was influenced by many factors, some of which have been examined during the process of this research study. Based on the findings, the researcher makes the following recommendations for practice, policy and further research.

##### **5.3.4.1 Recommendations for practice**

- Create a role within the local municipality for an ECD champion who can act as an ombudsman to mediate between the ECD sites and municipal and provincial authorities. The person in this position should campaign, coordinate, monitor and evaluate all ECD services and centres, both registered and unregistered, and ensure that there are systems of accountability and answerability for grants accessed through government or private sponsors and funders.
- The study identified the benefits of the forum as a community of practice where ECD practitioners and interested stakeholders could share concerns and develop a repertoire of resources in addressing ECD problems. To ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the Point and Inner City ECD forum model, it is important for the forum committee to rethink ways of strengthening systems of identifying and selecting roles on the management committee for participants and stakeholders. This will ensure committed partnerships and efforts in collaboration with government and key ECD stakeholders in supporting inner city ECD centres and practitioners through the forum model.
- A marker of quality ECD services is the educational qualification of the staff and opportunities for career advancement and fulfillment. Evidence from the research found that manager and teacher advancement in the inner city was associated with various personal barriers and limited opportunities to access affordable and suitable training programmes. Achieving improved standards of ECD leadership, management and teaching, and the retention of quality staff, in

early education and care in the inner city depends on funded, ongoing professional development strategies coordinated by inter-sectoral structures.

- Develop improved and sustainable linkages between local and provincial government departments and the private sector to enhance service delivery and the effective use of resources and to establish possibilities to co-finance early childhood education and boost quality job creation in the early education sector.
- Inner city ECD centres grapple with limited resources and restricted budgets. Strengthen networks with various private and public organisations to receive donations, funding and support in kind. In particular, increase assistance from the Departments of Social Development and Basic Education in accessing educational programmes, resources and materials.
- Vulnerable families and those living in poverty have challenges in participating in the early learning activities of their children. Develop opportunities for awareness campaigns, training programmes and systems of parental support in reinforcing the importance of positive and active parenting in children's early development.
- There is a need for a database to assist early childhood practitioners and families in accessing affordable systems of support, information and efficient referral systems for childhood services such as child protection, mental, physical and emotional health care and treatment.
- The fourth level social work students played a significant supportive role in assisting ECD centre managers, staff and families to access social work support. Tertiary education institutions should strengthen opportunities for work-integrated learning for social work, psychology, health and basic education students in the field of early childhood development under qualified supervision.

#### **5.3.4.2 Recommendations for policy**

- There is a mushrooming of informal and unregistered ECD centres in the inner city partly owing to the demand for livelihood opportunities for the owners and the demand for affordable and accessible city based early education and care

facilities for local and foreign families. Many of these centres do not meet norms and standards and have poor quality infrastructure and low capacity services. In recognizing the need for informal and formal ECD centres in the inner city, the municipality and relevant government departments must rethink the demanding registration policies and introduce simplified processes. Mechanisms of support to encourage incremental changes and improvements for under resourced ECD centres to meet basic minimum criteria will circumvent ECD services that may further disadvantage families already affected by poverty.

- As many of the inner city ECD centres do not receive a government subsidy and all charge school fees, a large number of children from vulnerable households access early childhood education sporadically or not at all. There needs to be a review of funding support for ECD centres within this bracket or consideration for the exemption of school fees for parents living in dire poverty to ensure the equity of early education and care and healthy environments for all children in the inner city to learn and grow.
- There is a growing demand for quality ECD centres, primary and secondary schools and access to safe play and recreational green spaces for children in the inner city. The municipality and relevant provincial government departments must include in their plans for the regeneration of the city opportunities to build ECD centres or turn existing derelict buildings into school facilities and develop green and unused spaces into safe play areas. This will enable families living and working in the city to send their children to schools in close proximity to where they live and work and create a child friendly city.
- The municipality needs to address the problem of property owners and operators of ECD centres who disregard, or do not meet, the municipal by-laws for premises on which childcare facilities operate. Improved systems of monitoring and regulating ECD centres in the inner city to prohibit the use of facilities that compromise the safety and security of children and ways of supporting lessees to make improvements to the infrastructure are required.

### **5.3.4.3 Recommendations for research**

- This interpretive study has explored and described the learning experiences of ECD centre managers who participated in an ECD forum in the inner city of Durban, eThekweni Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal. As the findings were restricted to this context and region, they cannot be generalized to forums or ECD centres in other regions. Research in other inner city municipalities and provinces around South Africa would contribute to the further interpretation of the benefits of ECD forums as systems of collective stakeholder interventions and support for ECD centres and practitioners in meeting their needs on the ground.
- A key element to quality early childhood development is the teaching and learning environment and the capability of school leadership, the management and teachers. There is limited research available on the competences and standards of inner city early childhood owners, managers and teachers. Further research to determine the educational qualifications and skills of the early childhood workforce would contribute to policies and efforts to strengthen systems of subsidized professional development and ongoing mentoring and support for ECD administrators, educators and support staff.
- There is a need for further research to explore and describe the challenges and threats faced by inner city ECD centres, managers and teachers in relation to the current requirements for registration of child-care facilities and the proposal that ECD comes under the Department of Education. Understanding the constraints could assist in the review of the rigorous processes for registration and address funding gaps to safeguard access to quality infrastructural, adequately resourced and accessible early education for all families in safe, well-functioning ECD environments.
- Many of the children in the inner city were from low socio-economic backgrounds and living in households where parents or significant adults had limited time, resources and understanding of the importance of literacy practices, parental involvement and regular attendance at quality preschools. Further research into the circumstances and needs of vulnerable parents and families living in inner cities and accessing early learning facilities is required. Such research could

contribute to improved systems of awareness, support and opportunities for vulnerable families to participate fully in their children's early learning and care.

The research report captures the everyday circumstances for ECD managers and their experiences and perceptions of the complex realities for themselves, their ECD centres, staff, families and children accessing ECD in the inner city. It was evident that the extent of the socio-economic challenges, barriers and gaps in support for inner city ECD centres shaped the experiences encountered by the managers and participants of the ECD forum.

The researcher was confident that the findings of the study were accurate and relevant to the experiences of eThekweni Municipality inner city ECD centre managers. There was positive evidence of the committed involvement, collective sharing and support, motivation and empowering opportunities for managers and their staff through their participation in the ECD forum activities. The forum has, in a small way, assisted ECD centres in collaboration with key ECD government and non-government role players in accessing learning opportunities, resources and networking possibilities for responsive action in scaling up support for managers, teachers and ECD services in the inner city.

#### **5.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In conclusion, this final chapter has demonstrated the process of achieving the goal of the study through the qualitative research approach. It commenced with a summary of the previous chapters and the introduction to the research methodology. The summary and conclusions from the qualitative research process applied to investigate the learning experiences of inner city early childhood development managers through their participation in an ECD forum were presented. The chapter included a summary and conclusions based on the findings of the themes, sub-themes and categories that emerged during the process of data analysis. In closing, the chapter presented the recommendations for practice, policy and further research.



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## **ADDENDUM A: A LETTER REQUESTING THE INDIVIDUALS' PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT**

Dear

I, Barbara McLean, the undersigned, am a social worker in the service of the UNISA Bright Site Durban Project under the University of South Africa's Social Work Department. I am also a part-time Master's degree student in the Department of Social Work at the University of South Africa. In fulfilment of the requirements for the Master's degree, I am required to undertake a research project and have chosen as my focus the following research topic:

**Learning experiences of inner city ECD managers through an early childhood development (ECD) Forum: A social work perspective.**

In view of you having knowledge of the topic, and as the manager of your ECD centres, I hereby approach you with a request for your participation in the study. For you to decide whether you wish to participate in this research project, I am going to provide you with information that will help you to understand the aims of the study and the reasons for the need for this particular study. Furthermore, you will be informed about what you will be asked, what you will be requested to do during the study, the risks and benefits of participating in this research project, and your rights as a participant in this study.

This research project is an outcome of my involvement in the Point and Inner City ECD Forum and my role as coordinator of social work student placements in ECD centres in the city. Knowledge of the concerns, challenges and problems facing ECD centres has motivated me to conduct a research study into the experiences and coping strategies of ECD managers who participate in the activities of the ECD Forum, and if their participation has provided learning experiences for them in the best interest of the ECD centre and children. The information gathered from this study will contribute towards the development of strategies for consideration and implementation by the ECD Forum and stakeholders in an effort to support and address matters of practical concern for managers and ECD centres in the inner city.

Should you agree to participate in this research study, you would be required to take part in face-to-face interviews that will be conducted at your ECD centre at a time convenient to you. Each face-to-face interview will be approximately two hours in duration, where you will be asked questions and there will be follow up sessions conducted for further discussion of the questions.

With your permission, the interview(s) will be audio-recorded. The recorded interviews will be transcribed word-for-word. Your responses to the interview both the recorded and transcribed versions will be kept strictly confidential. The audio-recordings will be coded to disguise any identifying information. The recordings will be stored in a locked office at UNISA Bright Site Durban and only I will have access to them. The transcripts, without any identifying information, will be made available to my research supervisor and to an independent coder with the sole purpose of assisting and guiding me with my research undertaking. My research supervisor and the independent coder will each sign an undertaking to treat the information shared by you in a confidential manner. Upon the completion of the study, the audio-recordings and the transcripts of the interviews will be destroyed. Identifying information in any subsequent publication and/or presentation of the research findings will be deleted or disguised.

Please note that participation in the research is voluntary. You are not obliged to take part in the research study. Your decision to participate, or not to participate, will not affect you any way now or in the future and you will incur no penalty and/or loss to which you may otherwise be entitled. Should you agree to participate, please sign the information and informed consent documents herewith, as proof of your willingness to participate in the research study. Please note that you are not signing your rights away.

If you agree to take part in the study, you have the right to change your mind at any time during the study. You are free to withdraw this consent and discontinue participation in the study without any loss of benefits. However, should you withdraw from the study you would be requested to grant me an opportunity to engage in an



informal discussion with you so that the research partnership that was established can be terminated in an orderly manner.

As the researcher, I also have the right to dismiss you from the study without regard to your consent if you fail to follow the instructions or if the information you divulge is emotionally sensitive and is upsetting you to such an extent that it hinders you from functioning physically and emotionally in a proper manner. Furthermore, if participating in the study at any time jeopardises your safety in any way, you will be dismissed from the study. Should I conclude that the information you have shared has left you feeling emotionally upset, or perturbed, I am obliged to refer you to a counsellor for debriefing or counselling should you agree.

You have the right to ask questions concerning the study at any time. Should you have any questions or concerns about the study, you can contact me on **083 629 7556**.

Please note that this study has been approved by the Research and Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Work at UNISA. Without the approval of this committee, the study cannot be conducted. Should you have any questions and queries that have not been sufficiently addressed by me as the researcher, you are more than welcome to contact the Chairperson of the Research and Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Work at UNISA. His contact details are as follows: Prof AH (Nicky) Alpaslan, telephone number: **012 429 6739**, or email: [alpasah@unisa.ac.za](mailto:alpasah@unisa.ac.za).

If, after you have consulted the researcher and the Research and Ethics Committee in the Department of Social Work at UNISA and their answers have not satisfied you, you may direct your question/concerns/queries to the Chairperson, Human Ethics Committee, College of Human Science, PO Box 392, UNISA, 0003.

Based upon all the information provided to you above, and being fully aware of your rights, you are asked to give your full consent in writing should you want to participate in this research study, by signing and dating the information and consent

forms provided herewith, and initialling each section to indicate that you understand and agree to the conditions contained herewith.

Thank you for your participation.

Kind regards

.....

Barbara McLean

(Researcher)

083 629 755

[34021469@mylife.unisa.ac.za](mailto:34021469@mylife.unisa.ac.za)

## ADDENDUM B: INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

**Title of the research project:**

Learning Experiences of Inner City Early Childhood Development Managers who participated in an Early Childhood Development Forum: A social work perspective.

**Reference Number:** 34021469

**Researcher:** Mrs Barbara McLean

**Address:** 91 Mentone Road, Morningside, Durban, 4001

**Contact cell phone number:** 0836297556

<p><b>DECLARATION BY THE PARTICIPANT:</b></p> <p>I, THE UNDERSIGNED, _____ (name), [ID No: _____] the participant of _____          _____ (address)</p> <p><b>A, HEREBY CONFIRM AS FOLLOWS:</b></p> <p>1. I was invited to participate in the above research project, which is being undertaken by Barbara McLean of the Department of Social Work in the School of Social Science and Humanities at the University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa.</p>	Initial
<p>2. The following aspects have been explained to me:</p> <p>2.1 Aim: The researcher will explore and describe the learning experiences for inner city ECD managers through their participation in the interventions of the Point and Inner City Early Childhood Development Forum</p> <p>The information will be used to:</p>	Initial

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perceptions and coping strategies of ECD managers and centres and;</li> <li>• Develop guidelines and make recommendations for future capacity building and support of ECD managers and centres for consideration and implementation through the ECD forum and key role-players.</li> </ul>	
<p>2.2 I understand:</p> <p>The goal of the study, the need for the study and the benefits this study will have for me, my work colleagues and other stakeholders.</p> <p>The reasons for being selected to participate in the study and that my participation is voluntary.</p> <p>That I will participate in face-to-face interviews at the ECD centre at a time convenient to me for a period not exceeding two hours.</p> <p>The information that I share will be audio recorded and documented on paper and later transcribed.</p> <p>The information that I share will be made known to members of the ECD Forum and the public by means of a power point presentation, research report and may be used in subsequent scholarly presentations, printed publications and further research.</p> <p>I have the right to withdraw from the study at any point.</p> <p>I have the right to ask for clarification or more information throughout the study. I may contact the relevant administrative person or body if I have any questions with regard to the researchers conduct or procedures of the study.</p>	Initial
<p>2.3 Risks:</p> <p>I do not see any risk associated with this study</p>	Initial
<p>Possible benefits as a result of my participation in this study:</p>	Initial

The opportunity to share my experiences, challenges and coping strategies as the manager of an ECD centre and how my involvement in the ECD Forum has empowered me.	
Confidentiality: My identity will not be revealed in any discussion, description or scientific publications by the researcher.	Initial
Access to findings: Any new information/benefit that develops during the course of the study will be shared with me.	
Voluntary participation/refusal/discontinuation: My participation is voluntary. My decision whether or not to participate in this study will in no way affect me now or in the future.	Initial
3. The information above was explained to me by Mrs Barbara McLean in English and I am in command of this language. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and all of these questions were answered satisfactorily.	Initial
4. No pressure was exerted on me to give my consent to participate in the study and I understand that I may withdraw at any stage from the study without any penalty.	Initial
5. Participation in this study will not result in any additional cost to me.	Initial
<b>B. I HEREBY CONSENT VOLUNTARILY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ABOVE PROJECT.</b>  Signed/confirmed at _____ on _____ 20____  _____ Signature of participant	Initial       Signature of witness

## ADDENDUM C: STATEMENTS AND DECLARATIONS

<p><b>STATEMENT BY OR ON BEHALF OF INVESTIGATOR</b></p> <p>I, Barbara McLean, declare that I have explained the information contained in this document to _____ (name of participant)</p> <p>He/she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used.</p> <p>Signed at _____ (place) on _____ 20__ (date)</p> <p>_____</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Signature of investigator/representative                      Signature of witness</p>	
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<p><b>IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO PARTICIPANT</b></p> <p>Dear Participant</p> <p>Thank you for your participation in this study. Should at any time during the study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an emergency arise as a result of the research, or</li> <li>• you require any further information with regard to the study, or</li> <li>• the following may occur:</li> </ul> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>(indicate any circumstance which should be reported to the investigator), kindly contact me (Barbara McLean) at telephone number, 083 629 7556.</p>	
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## ADDENDUM D: THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

### Biological data of the interviewee:

Name	
Age	
Gender	
Nationality	
Education	

### Information about the ECD centre:

Are you the Owner, Manager or Principal of the ECD centre?	
How many children and how many staff members do you have at your ECD centre including yourself?	Children: Staff members:
Are your teachers and carers trained in ECD?	
Has your school been registered with?	Department of Social Development? Department of Education? As an NPO?

**Open-ended Interview Schedule:**

- Which of the ECD Forum interventions and activities did you participate in between 2014 and 2016?
- Which of these interventions and activities did you find most helpful/interesting?
- What have you personally learnt through your participation in the activities of the ECD Forum; what has your involvement meant to you?
- Is there anything else about your experience of participating in the ECD Forum you would like to share?
- What other interventions or activities do you feel the ECD Forum could introduce to enhance the learning experiences for ECD managers?
- What are the perceived threats or challenges facing you as a manager and the ECD centre?
- What has helped you to manage these threats or challenges?
- What are the three most common factors that you believe compromise the well-being of the children who attend your ECD centre?
- What important change or assistance do you, as the manager, feel is needed to improve conditions for yourself, the ECD centre, staff, the children and their families?
- Are there any other suggestions you would like to make to the ECD Forum Committee?



## ADDENDUM E: THE POINT AND INNER CITY EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT FORUM INTERVENTIONS 2011 - 2016

DATE	STAKEHOLDER - INTERVENTION/ACTIVITY - PURPOSE
2011 - 2016	Department of Social Development (DSD) were represented at all forum meetings during this period and provided extensive dialogue and information on non-registration and associated problems.
2011	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Children's Rights</b> - Awareness and Advocacy on children's rights and training on making educational toys from anti-waste</li> <li><b>Save the Children</b> - Introduced the Wentworth, Durban ECD Forum structure and vision.</li> <li>2. <b>Environmental Health Department; Clare Ellis Brown Pre-Primary School; and a Unisa social work student</b> – coordinated a project inviting all ECD Forum members to participate in a 'Cleanest Kitchen Competition' – an initiative to promote healthy practices.</li> <li>3. <b>Integrated Development Plan (IDP) City Hall inter sectorial meeting</b> - coordinated by the Point Community Policing Forum and Clare Ellis Brown Pre-Primary School aimed at putting ECD into the IDP of the eThekweni Municipality. Panel discussions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Senior Public Prosecutor – presentation on the new Children's Act</li> <li>○ Unisa Bright Site Project – presentation on the project vision and placement of social work students at ECD centres.</li> <li>○ Bright Site Project 4<sup>th</sup> level social work students – their experiences in relation to the young child in the Point and Inner City community.</li> <li>○ eThekweni Municipality – Head of Governance Relations – the need to profile ECD service providers in the Point and Inner City and collaborative efforts</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
2012	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Department of Basic Education – ECD Directorate for Umlazi</b> - Presentation on the National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS) for 0-4 year olds and distribution of the NELDS document to ECD centres.</li> <li>2. <b>Point Community Police Forum and SAPS</b> - Safety and security of young children in the Point.</li> <li>3. <b>The Methodist Church, Point Sewing Group</b> – facilitated a workshop on how to make 'Persona Dolls' for ECD centres in the city.</li> <li>4. <b>Children's Rights Capacity Building Workshop</b> - an art workshop for ECD practitioners.</li> <li>5. <b>Childline</b> - presentation on how to identify child abuse and distribution of information pamphlets.</li> <li>6. <b>eThekweni Municipality Environmental Health</b> - awareness on health requirements for ECD centres.</li> </ol>
2013	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Training and Resources in Early Education (TREE)</b> – An 'appropriate paper technology' workshop to train interested ECD practitioners.</li> <li>2. <b>Wonderlands Montessori Teacher Training Institute</b> – Student ECD teacher placements in city ECD centres.</li> </ol>
2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>An inter sectorial meeting of ECD educators, key role-players, interested stakeholders and Unisa Department of Social Work</b> - to exchange ideas and information on how to improve the lives of children accessing ECD centres in the city. Focus group discussion panel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ eThekweni Safer Cities and ITRUMP – what the municipality is doing in the city and how it can support ECD structures</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Principal Clare Ellis Brown Pre-Primary School – introduction of the Point and Inner City ECD Forum</li> <li>○ TREE – training and importance of stimulating environment</li> <li>○ Department of Social Development – registration requirements and challenges</li> </ul> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. <b>Soul Action South Africa</b> – launch of the Soul Action ECD training, monitoring and support volunteer programme over eleven weeks for ECD centres in the city.</li> <li>3. <b>Durban Teacher’s Centre inter sectorial meeting</b> - Department of Basic Education (ECD); South Coast and Mpumalanga ECD Forums; TREE, Caversham Teacher Training Institute, Children’s Rights Centre; ECD practitioners and Unisa social work students – presentations on Reggio Emilia approach to ECD and the idea of creating an anti-waste recycling centre.</li> <li>4. <b>KZN Children’s Hospital</b> - presentation by Dr Govender on children’s assessment criteria.</li> <li>5. <b>Zoé-Life and International Citizenship Service Programme</b> - nine week volunteer support programme to improve the vulnerability of children in ECD centres in the city.</li> <li>6. <b>KZN Children’s Hospital</b> - Mandela Day Initiative - an opportunity for assessment of health, eyesight, hearing and developmental needs by team of specialists.</li> <li>7. <b>The Department of Social Development</b> – registration process for ECD centres – presentation and distribution of documentation.</li> <li>8. <b>Department of Environmental Health</b> - presentation on health requirements for ECD centres including first aid box information and donation of basic first aid kit.</li> <li>9. <b>Soul Action South Africa</b> - Workshop on how to make musical instruments using waste materials.</li> <li>10. <b>College of Emergency Care KZN</b> - First Aid training workshop.</li> </ol>
2015	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>We Are Durban Social Upliftment NPO</b> - donation of Stationery Buckets to all participating ECD Forum centres.</li> <li>2. <b>Persona Doll Training</b> - for Unisa social work students placed at ECD centres in the city for their practical training - a workshop on the use of the Persona Doll, a tool to address issues of diversity and inclusion.</li> <li>3. <b>eThekweni Municipality Office of the Deputy City Manager and Hands on Technologies Lego SA</b> – launch of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) Project and training by Lego Sa for ECD practitioners in the use of the blocks and donation of Lego kits to fifteen participating ECD centres.</li> <li>4. <b>ECD Forum Committee - Draft National ECD Policy of the Republic of SA gazetted by the Minister of Social Development</b> – presentation on the draft policy followed by focus group discussions with the purpose of providing feedback to the Department of Social Development.</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. <b>Mennonite Central Committee – Learn through Play Training</b> - social work students and ECD practitioners participated in a ten session programme focusing on learning through play from different cultural points of view.</li> <li>6. <b>eThekwini Safer Cities and ITRUMP</b> - a presentation by the municipality on the safety and security of young children attending ECD centres in the city.</li> <li>7. <b>eThekwini Municipality Imagine Durban</b> – visit to The Birches Pre-Primary School and The eThekwini Aquaponics Research Centre for ECD centres from the Point and Inner City to encourage eco-awareness and discovery learning.</li> <li>8. <b>eThekwini Municipality Imagine Durban Sustainable Living Exhibition</b> – ECD centres invited to participate in a three day exhibition by creating and displaying children’s mobiles that had been made out of ‘waste’ or ‘repurposed junk’. This was an opportunity to place ECD on Durban’s ‘green map’.</li> <li>9. <b>Childline KZN and Point SAPS</b> - awareness and advocacy – a presentation on child protection and how to identify child abuse.</li> <li>10. <b>Department of Social Development</b> - workshop on ECD minimum norms and standards and registration processes.</li> <li>11. <b>Food for Life and eThekwini Safer Cities and ITRUMP</b> - poverty alleviation food and nutrition presentation and support programme.</li> </ol>
2016	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>We Are Durban Social Upliftment NPO</b> - nutritional support through donation of soup mix for ECD centres.</li> <li>2. <b>ECD Forum Committee</b> – a presentation on young children’s behaviour to create awareness of behavioural issues amongst young children followed by group discussions on identifying special needs or problems amongst children attending city ECD centres.</li> <li>3. <b>eThekwini Municipality Department of Parks and Gardens</b> – ECD centres invited to participate in a Nature Based Play awareness training programme at the Durban Botanic Gardens</li> <li>4. <b>KZN Children’s Hospital Educational Psychologist and Addington Hospital Psychology Department Clinical Psychologist</b> - presentations and small group discussions on identifying special needs or problems and assessment and therapeutic processes available for young children.</li> <li>5. <b>Ethekwini Municipality Department of Environmental Health</b> - presentation and discussion on the new Child Care Facilities By-Laws, 2015.</li> <li>6. <b>UKZN School of Arts and Music</b> – presentation on the UKUSA Performing Arts Programme and discussion focusing on the value of music and musical concepts that could be taught to children in ECD centres.</li> <li>7. <b>Gandhi Development Trust, Durban University of Technology</b> - in collaboration with the ECD Forum this stakeholder is investigating opportunities for training in the “values education programme” for ECD centres in the city.</li> <li>8. <b>eThekwini Municipality Imagine Durban</b> - proposed Pilot Demonstration Project – Dalton Road ECD Resource Centre – a project to promote and support long term</li> </ol>

	<p>sustainable planning initiatives by using shipping containers to develop an inexpensive ECD resource centre.</p> <p>9. <b>eThekweni Municipality and the ECD Forum Committee</b> - on-going discussions with senior municipal management to promote the need for a Political Champion for ECD; a need for a budget and the need for official and coordinated services in terms of the Children's Act and ECD Policy.</p>
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**ADDENDUM F: POINT AND INNER CITY ECD FORUM  
RESPONSES TO VOLUNTARY QUESTIONNAIRE AND FOCUS  
GROUP DISCUSSIONS, 27 FEBRUARY 2014**

On the 27 February 2014 UNISA's Bright Site Project, a Service Learning Site for 4<sup>th</sup> level Social Work Students facilitated a Focus Group Discussion with key role-players, educators and interested stakeholders in the field of Early Childhood Development.

Social Work Students placed at the Bright Site Durban for their final year of practical training have been placed at various ECD sites in the Point and Inner City in 2014. They will be engaging individuals and organizations working with the Point and Inner City community in order to learn from one another, share insights and find solutions. The purpose of the Focus Group Discussion was to:

1. Increase awareness and understanding of the challenges and problems experienced in meeting the norms and standards for ECD
2. Provided a platform for the exchange of information on how together the various role-players could mobilize, develop and share resources to ensure that the basic we can improve the lives of our children.

**Nineteen voluntary questionnaires were completed by ECD sites and key role-players in the field of ECD and 9 focus groups responded.**

**Responses to the questionnaire**

- 18 of the 19 ECD sites were interested in joining an ECD forum
- 14 of the 19 sites indicated they would like to meet on a monthly basis

**Information on the composition of schools**

- There were between 9 and 120 learners attending the different schools
- More female learners than male
- A mix of local and foreign children attended the schools
- The age range of children in the school was between 0 and 6 year olds with the majority being between 3 and 6 year olds
- There were between 3 and 12 teachers per school with an average of 5 teachers per school

**School Services:**

- Schools open between 5 to 6 days a week with the majority open 6 days of the week
- Open for an average of 11 hours per day
- Majority provide breakfast and lunch

- Some provide 1 to 2 snacks during the day

### **Registration status of the schools:**

- With Town Planning: 6 yes 10 no
- With City Health: 7 yes 9 no
- With Department of Education: 2 yes 14 no
- Is the school registered as an NPO: 11 yes 4 no

### **School level challenges faced by ECD Centres**

#### **\*\*Lack of space\*\***

- Within the facility (overcrowding & constraining active learners)
- Outdoor play space limited or non-existent
- Outdoor play equipment limited or non-existent

#### **\*\*Lack of funds\*\***

- Creates a lack of materials and staff

### **Staffing:**

- Insufficient staff numbers
- Insufficient training of staff to meet registration requirements and provide a quality education

### **Needed Caregiving Materials**

- **\*\*Food\*\***
- Nappies
- Refrigerator
- Security gates and cameras
- First aid kit

### **Needed Educational Materials:**

- **\*\*Toys\*\***
- Books
- Mattresses
- Blankets
- Chairs
- Tables
- TV

### **Needed Administrative Materials:**

- Stationery
- Computers

- Copying machines



### **Health Problems amongst Learners:**

- Physical disabilities (e.g. blindness, deafness)
- Learning disabilities
- Autism
- Mental illness
- Malnutrition
- Skin problems

### **\*\*POVERTY\*\***

- Parents unable to pay school fees
- Schools unable to pay teachers
- Schools unable to purchase supplies
- Schools unable to pay registration fees
- Children exploited as a source of income
- Poor nutrition
- Children at crèche for many hours due to parents' work schedule.

### **Community level challenges faced by ECD Centres**

### **\*\*SAFETY\*\***

- Neighborhood safety (e.g. walking to and from school)
- Safety at school (e.g. who can get into the school and parents who don't lock the gate)
- Transport issues/road safety
- Safety in the home

### **Social:**

- Language barriers (e.g. parents, children, staff)
- Long parental work hours
- Parents fetch children late
- Violence in the home traumatizes children
- Domestic Abuse
- Substance Abuse
- Pornography
- Racism and xenophobia between refugees and Southern African children
- Orphans
- Parental involvement/buy-in
- Parents just drop and go
- Little parental involvement at home (e.g. playing, reading, singing, homework)
- Parents engage in irresponsible behavior
- Behavioral problems with children not addressed at home

## **Municipal Level Challenges faced by ECD Centres**

### **Regulation:**

- Who should ECD centers turn to for help?
- Problems of zoning (e.g. crèches too close to shelters)
- Regulation expectations out of touch with reality of the neighborhood (i.e. parents are poor and many are refugees and cannot pay high fees)
- Insufficient funds to pay for qualified teachers or materials to meet educational standards
- Lack of enforcement of regulations

### **Registration:**

- **\*\*Fees too high for low-income neighborhood\*\***
- Access to needed subsidies too challenging
- Bureaucratic barriers
- Department of Education unresponsive
  - Departments provide misinformation
  - No follow-through

### **Safety:**

- Need more policing
- Need safe corridors to greenspace

### **Infrastructure:**

- Lack of safe indoor space for ECD centers especially those with access to an outside area
- Lack of outdoor play space

## **Recommendations to Municipality**

### **Provide ECD Facilities:**

- Reclaim abandoned buildings
- Build ECD Centers in problem areas

### **Provide Outdoor Play Space:**

- Reclaim abandoned lots
- Provide transport/security escort to playgrounds
- Provide equipment for all ages (e.g. People's Park)
- Lock public spaces at night

### **Provide Staffing Support:**

- Workshops and training for grade R teachers—invest in hot spots
- Salary subsidies for qualified teachers



**Provide Feeding Schemes:**

- Distribute food via schools

**Remove Registration Barriers:**

- Sliding-scale registration fee based on school income
- More flexible requirements based on capacity
- One stop centre with home affairs offices, police officer, welfare officer, ECD Centre and possibly grants officer (satellite branches) instead of different offices

**Improve Safety:**

- Better policing/security
- Cameras around ECD centers
- Ensure buildings have fire escapes, fire hydrants, burglar bars
- Hire child/equipment minders in the parks
- Regular health visits to schools
- Address issues of child abuse, domestic violence, and trauma at home

**Additional Suggestions:**

- Database for all ECD sites
  - The services they deliver to the community
  - Challenges they face
- Create a Forum where ECD centers can raise their concerns to the municipality
- Liaise with province and community
- Make Pre-Primary Education (Grade R) compulsory and free
- Accommodate ECD into town planning schemes

**Civil-Society Solutions/Resources****Ethics:**

- Community must be responsible for children's rights
- Each citizen must ensure their space is child friendly
- Build a strong relationship between ECD and the community
- Make the child the focus of the society: flat, office, street, shopping centre, parks, buses
- Promote children's rights issues so all people, despite different parenting styles, protect children

**Access to Green space:**

- Volunteers do road-crossing patrols to escort children to the parks/beachfront
- Park watch - parents take in turns to watch play

- Play associations- groups to develop play spaces (e.g. parents, shopkeepers, churches)
- Urban Management Zone accompany children to parks
- Park Keepers or Play Pods maintain parks

**Food:**

- Liaise with NPO Feeding Schemes
- Create a breakfast club

**Educational Resources:**

- Create community anti-waste depot
- Training on making toys from Anti-Waste
- Teacher training from stakeholders
- Liaise with local seamstresses to provide low-cost mattresses/ blankets

**Increase Parental Involvement:**

- Parent's committees in every school increases accountability
- Collect parents' signatures and take it to DSD to petition for the school's registration
- Recruit parents to help raise funds for schools at local businesses

**Educate Society and Parents:**

- Posters, drama / plays with learners acting
- Promote family life style (family unity and quality time with children)
- Parenting programs on
  - Reading at home
  - Homework
  - Violence
  - Pornography
  - Substance abuse

**Safety:**

- Make friends with the street children
- Liaise with the NPOs who serve the street children
- Create a referral system to appropriate institutions (e.g. Bright Site, KZN Children's Hospital) to follow up on concerns about abuse, violence, or special needs

**Report compiled by UNISA's Department of Social Work Bright Site Project**

## ADDENDUM G: LETTER OF CONSENT FROM COMMITTEE

01 June 2017

Mrs Barbara McLean  
UNISA Student Number: 34021469  
Masters of Arts in Social Science

Dear Chairperson

### **Point and Inner City Early Childhood Development (ECD) Forum – Permission to conduct research**

I hereby request your informed voluntary consent as the Committee of the Point and Inner City ECD Forum to conduct:

1. Pilot testing – a pilot test with two of the ECD managers who are members of the forum and who have participated in at least six of the ECD Forum interventions between the period 2014 and 2016.
2. Sample - I request assistance from the Committee in selecting the sample of six managers from six different ECD centres for this study.

The research project that I have chosen is:

### **Learning Experiences of Inner City Early Childhood Development Managers who participated in an ECD Forum: A Social Work Perspective**

Please see attached:

- Addendum A – A letter requesting the individuals’ participation in this research project
- Addendum B – Information and informed consent document
- Addendum C – Statements and declarations

I appreciate your assistance and support in my research endeavour.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Regards

Mrs Barbara McLean

**Approved by:**

**Witnessed by:**

Name: .....

Name:.....

Designation: .....

Designation:.....

Signature: .....

Signature:.....

Date: .....

Date:.....