

**AN EXPLORATION OF THE CURRICULUM IN THREE  
EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES IN THE PROVINCE OF  
KWAZULU-NATAL, SOUTH AFRICA:  
A CASE STUDY**

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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this dissertation is my own work, and has not been submitted previously for any degree at any university.

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DECEMBER 2012

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores the childhood curriculum in three early childhood centres in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, through a case study approach. The research is located within a critical pedagogical perspective of curriculum/knowledge, consistent with a transformational pedagogical view. The study engages with the curriculum as enacted and experienced by teachers within three different early childhood landscapes: Starfish Pre-Primary School, which is situated in a formal urban area; Siyazama Educare Centre, which is found in an informal urban area, and Zamani Crèche, which is located in a rural area. The experiences offered to children are a blend of both philosophy and practice, underpinned by issues of broader social and cultural values about what role education should play in society and how that role is best practised.

The focus is on the curriculum for the junior (three years) and middle (four years) groups at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre, and for the children aged three to five years at Zamani Crèche. Observation, interviews and documents analysis were used as tools for data collection. This qualitative study shows how past links, contacts and professional suitability can be used as three different strategies in negotiating access to early childhood centres. The study uses critical pedagogy to engage with the philosophy and aim of education, the curriculum goals, the curriculum planning, the curriculum content and the pedagogical practices at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche. It shows an expanding power base of ideological practices and functions of dominant ideas, values and beliefs in academic knowledge, as well as developmentally appropriate practices that present themselves in early childhood education and promote a description of truth, reality and knowledge that appears to be independent of cultural practices.

The findings are analysed from two perspectives: dominant curriculum knowledge and practices and disempowerment of teachers. The study argues that a transformational pedagogical view of knowledge within the existing philosophy underpinning early childhood curriculum and pedagogy, facilitates opportunities to transgress traditions and constitute spaces for possibilities of alternative curriculum enactment and experiences.

I argue for a socio-political approach to early childhood education, motivating for a move away from scientifically driven epistemologies which have been historically deemed to be valuable. A socio-political approach to early childhood education creates conditions that promote thinking towards critical consciousness, fostering the ability to recognise and critique structures of hegemony and identify possibilities for change.

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## **DEDICATION**

... in memory of my dearest Dad ...

## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

DoE	Department of Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ETDP SETA	Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
NAECS/SDE	National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education
NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children
NELDS	National Early Learning Development Standards
NEPI	National Education Policy Investigation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SAAECE	South African Association for Early Childhood Education
SACE	South African Council for Educators
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
TREE	Training and Resource for Early Education
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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## CHAPTER ONE

### EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: A CRITICAL REFLECTION

#### 1.1 Setting the stage

I keep looking back on the questions, ‘Who is the child? What type of child do you want? Do you want a child that just goes with the flow, or do you want a thinker and a doer and a changer?’ ... I’d never thought of that before. Then that made me start thinking ‘Well, am I a person who just goes with the flow or am I a doer and a thinker and a changer?’ That was a hard one. That also reflected in my question too. When I was looking at the word ‘curriculum’, I was thinking ‘Well, who do we do the curriculum for and how do we do them and what do we want as the end result?’ It got all the way up to the Department and Government policies and reflecting upon what type of children and adults they want produced at the end? And that’s scary as well because that’s a really big picture, rather than just focusing on one little centre and one little curriculum.

(Heather, Educator, Critical Teaching Project in Mac Naughton, 2005, p.12)

In the vignette above, Heather raises questions about the child, the teacher and the early childhood curriculum that provoke us to reflect on how we want to educate the child. Heather’s questions “Who do we do the curriculum for and how do we do them and what we want as the end result?” direct attention on the espoused, enacted and experienced curriculum. The questions relate to values, philosophies, approaches to early childhood and curriculum decisions within specific social and political contexts. Such elements influence the early childhood teacher’s selection and planning of activities for children. The early childhood pedagogical practices are influenced by complex cultural and historical issues and power in the teaching and learning context. The social and political context affects the relations between teachers and children, early childhood centres and the state, and early childhood centres and communities, and signals how and in whose interests knowledge is produced and conveyed.

There are various epistemological positions that view the curriculum in which knowledge is constructed. Multiple ways of theorising about the early childhood and

early childhood curriculum provide divergent and often contested views on the curriculum. Underlying these views are three broad positions of what the early childhood curriculum would constitute. The positions are conforming, reforming and transforming positions on the early childhood curriculum (Mac Naughton, 2003). They are built on the work of Habermas (1971b) on knowledge interests. Controversy among the conforming, reforming and transforming positions has stimulated adherents of each to develop increasingly powerful early childhood curricula. The works of Taylor (1911), Bobbitt (1918; 1928) and Tyler (1949) dominate a conforming to society position. This position is underpinned by knowledge interest that classifies the curriculum as product. Curriculum as product is supported by cultural transmission theories that prepare the child for society as it exists. A reforming position on education is based on the work of Dewey (1902; 1938), and Hill (1934). This position views the curriculum as process and is underpinned by a child-centred education that develops the child to reform society. Built on the work of Freire (1984), McLaren (1993) and Giroux (1985; 1990; 1994), curriculum as transforming society supports an education that challenges discrimination and values social justice.

In this case study, I explore the curriculum for three and four year olds as enacted and experienced by teachers at three early childhood centres within three differing landscapes in KwaZulu-Natal. I question the enacted curriculum and the experienced curriculum and relate these to the espoused curriculum. The espoused curriculum is the specified curriculum that has a focus on the aims and content of what is to be taught – that is, the curriculum which is expressed through curriculum frameworks and other formal documents, and which may have the authority of law. This curriculum is generally underpinned by an educational philosophy that concentrates on the societal values and principles that form the foundation for the curriculum offered. The curriculum frameworks, reflecting a broad political consensus, specify the purpose of the curriculum by way of stated aims. These aims are a common set of educational experiences that all children should have in order to participate successfully in the larger social and economic community. The enacted curriculum relates to what is actually selected and planned for children in the early childhood centres. This curriculum represents interpretations by the teachers of what is required in legislated curriculum documents. The curriculum content and pedagogical strategies are seen as being closely inter-related. The experienced curriculum refers to what actually happens

when the teacher and the children are together. This curriculum is more concerned with the children, what knowledge and perspectives they bring and their interaction with the curriculum. Such lived experiences are ongoing, unpredictable and unique to the local context in which the early childhood centres exist. Critically reflection makes visible consistencies and variances between the espoused, enacted and the experienced curricula.

In this study, I take the view that curriculum is a political concept, laden with ideological values. Using a critical pedagogy perspective, I take a transforming approach to education. Such an approach fosters pedagogy aimed at liberating human potential and democratic communities in the playroom and other contained areas (Soto, 2000; Mac Naughton, 2005). For the purpose of contextualising the study, I provide an overview of early childhood care and education in South African. In this contextualising process, I outline curriculum developments in the early childhood sector to show how the sector has developed over the years. I also provide a framework for the rationale, purpose, research questions, methodology and significance and limitations of the study. I conclude the chapter with an overview of the chapters that follow.

## **1.2 Definitions of early childhood and early childhood development**

Before examining early childhood care and education in a South African context, it is useful to define early childhood and early childhood development. In South Africa Early Childhood refers to the child from birth to nine years of age (DoE, 2001a). Early Childhood Development is defined as an umbrella term that applies to the processes by which children from birth to at least nine years grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially. This definition considers the importance of a holistic approach to child development and learning. Early childhood refers to a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to nine years of age with active participation of their parents and caregivers (DoE, 2001a). While children from six to nine years of age are provided for by the formal school system, private organisations provide care and education for babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers outside the home (DoE, 2001a).

### **1.3 Early childhood care and education in South Africa**

In this section, I discuss the initial attempts at establishing early childhood programmes in South Africa arising from social and economic necessities, initiatives by parents, community care and education, and the responsibility of the Departments of Education and Social Welfare. This section provides an overview for the purpose of contextualising the study.

The initial attempts at establishing early childhood programmes in South Africa, similar to industrialised countries (Europe, England and the United States of America), arose from socio-economic needs. Early childhood programmes in the early 20th century were introduced to reduce the number of infant deaths and disease in South Africa (DoE, 2001a). In 1908, the South African National Council for Child and Family Welfare researched the causes of life-threatening diseases and assisted families and communities with child care (DoE, 2001a). Subsequently, parent and community projects provided for children at care centres. By 1940, the Department of Social Welfare subsidised young children at care centres, while provincial Departments of Education funded nursery schools (DoE, 2001a). The Nursery School Association of South Africa established the standards for the services provided. This body, primarily an association of White nursery school teachers, subsequently became the South African Association for Early Childhood Education that was inaugurated in 1939 (DoE, 2001a).

In 1940, the committee of Heads of the Department of Education recommended that nursery schools become a component of education and that crèches should provide care, as an adjunct to the national system of education (DoE, 2001a). In 1942, the South African Association for Early Childhood Education submitted memoranda and reports in which it petitioned strongly for the recognition of nursery schools as educative institutions in their own right, their acceptance as part of the South African system of education, increased subsidies and the enhancement of the status of nursery school teachers (Verster, 1989). Welfare subsidies were available for White, Coloured and Indian but not for Black nursery schools. As the costs to maintain these schools escalated, without a concomitant increase in subsidies, the early childhood centres relied progressively on fees paid by the parents. As a result, centres with trained early



childhood teachers became privileged middle-class institutions while Black working class children were provided with only custodial care. Since White parents could afford the escalating fees, the quality of early childhood services at these centres improved. This was not the case in Indian, Coloured and Black early childhood centres (DoE, 2001a).

The Nationalist Government was not in favour of any form of early childhood provision and therefore government policy discouraged the development of such services during the period 1948 to 1969. A lack of desired state involvement resulted in the establishment of community and non-governmental organisations, such as Grassroots Educare Trust, Entokozweni Early Leading and Community Services, the Alexandra Childmind Project and the Association for Training and Resources in Early Education (Bridgemohan, 1996). The state accepted limited social responsibility for early childhood service provision. The National Education Policy Act (1967) resulted in an upsurge of early childhood services for White children in the 1970s (DoE, 2001a). The Department of Education remunerated qualified White early childhood teachers, subsidised private early childhood centres, established pre-primary classes in selected formal primary schools and introduced early childhood training at White teacher training colleges. In contrast, legislation limited the early childhood provisioning for Black, Coloured and Indian (DoE, 2001a). The De Lange Commission (HSRC, 1981) highlighted the importance of pre-primary education and recommended a one or two year school readiness bridging programme to prepare children for formal school.

Historical influences continue to shape early childhood programmes and their philosophical and theoretical underpinnings (Clasquin-Johnson, 2007). Coupled with poor resources are unqualified and/or underqualified caregivers and teachers in early childhood (Williams, 2001; Van Staden, Clasquin-Johnson, Johnson & Marais, 2007). Lack of state support for programmes for children younger than five years is evident, in that 80% of children enter programmes for the first time at the ages of six and seven years, when they begin Grade 1 (Clasquin-Johnson, 2007). In rural areas, children attend school regularly when they are older so that they are able to manage the physical challenge of getting to school. The services provided for children below Grade R are largely fragmented and neglected (Bray & Tladi, 2007), making this the most marginalised and neglected sub-sector within education and training.

The variation in early childhood education experiences, especially when correlated to ethnicity, rurality and socio-economic status, makes it inevitable that by the time children are ready to begin Grade R, individual, community and provincial differences that are likely to lead to long-term education disparities are well embedded (OECD, 2008). This is evident in the poor learning outcomes achieved by South African learners in national and international learner assessment tasks (OECD, 2008). In response to this, the Minister of Education launched a three year foundation for learning strategy in March 2008 (OECD, 2008). The foundation for learning strategy aimed at ensuring that quality education is provided to the child in the first few years at school. The strategy therefore focused on Grades R to 3 with the intention to consolidate learning in the intermediate phase in Grades 4 to 6. It aimed to lay the groundwork in languages and mathematics in the foundation and intermediate phases. One of implications of the three year foundation for learning strategy is that the pressure to deliver a curriculum focused on languages and mathematics may be cascaded down to pre-reception level. Another would be that broader areas of educational experiences in areas of aesthetic, practical, social, emotional or personal knowledge, would be minimal.

With increasing importance being placed on formal education, the government and early childhood centres are espousing, as part of their mission and goals, knowledge and skills that children need to acquire. The implications are directed towards reinforcing an academic culture of pedagogy that reproduce middle class dominance. This would thus continue to limit the educational opportunities for children from poorly resourced schools.

#### **1.4 South African early childhood curriculum developments**

The complex field of early childhood, which includes education, social development, health, employment and a myriad of other interests, calls for an integrated strategy to manage the care and education of children younger than four years (DoE, 2001a). This has proved to be challenging in South Africa and has led to the care and education for children younger than five years not being adequately and effectively provided. In the absence of a government-mandated curriculum for children younger than five years prior to 2006, the assumption is that early childhood centres in South Africa had

autonomy over the curriculum they planned. This study intends to explore how early childhood teachers conceptualised, enacted and experienced the curriculum for three and four year olds.

Although there are attempts by the South African government to develop the early childhood field through various legislation, policies and programmes ranging through health, nutrition, social welfare and education, development and interventions provide little benefits to children younger than five years, particularly in the area of curriculum. The White Paper on Provision of Education in South Africa (DoE, 1983) acknowledged and funded a bridging programme to facilitate school readiness. This programme included children in the year before formal schooling. School readiness is described in terms of children acting in ways that are consistent with school-like behaviour, helping them to make a smooth transition into kindergarten and to experience early school success (Ailwood, 2003; Wesley & Buysse, 2003; Scott-Little, Kagan & Frelow, 2006). In the White Paper on Education and Training (DoE, 1995), the Department of Education undertook to develop, within early childhood, appropriate curricula for pre-reception year programmes with a special emphasis on mathematical literacy, language and life skills. The National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS), a curriculum-related policy initiative focusing on the early learning needs of children from birth to four years (Department of Basic Education, 2009), was only developed in 2009.

The Education White Paper 5 (DoE, 2001a) claims that in the early years, the learning of concepts, skills and attitudes lays the groundwork for lifelong learning, and that quality Early Childhood provisioning in South Africa allows for basic concepts, skills and attitudes to be acquired for successful learning and development, therefore reducing the chances of failure. The document defines its purpose as ‘protecting the child’s rights to develop full cognitive, emotional, social, and physical potential’ (DoE, 2001a). The Education White Paper 5 (DoE, 2001a) specifies two areas, the expansion of provision of programmes for children from birth to four years and of Grade R (reception year) education in primary schools and community-based centres (DoE, 2001a). For the introduction of Grade R, the Education White Paper 5 announced a progressive roll-out aimed for all public primary schools to become sites for the provision of accredited reception year programmes. A subsidy mechanism and grants-in-aids are in place for

Grade R. There were no attempts made to expand the provision of programmes for children from birth to four years.

The three White Papers, White Paper on Social Development, White Paper on Education and Training and Education White Paper 5, and legislation concerning care and education for young children in South Africa, are aimed at contributing to citizenship and democratic education. However, the implementation and funding strategies focus on Grade R provisioning, marginalizing children below this level. Strong political commitment for improvement of early childhood care and education for Grade R has been demonstrated by increased budgetary provision and inclusion in programmes, while efforts to expand care and education for children younger than five years came in 2006.

The Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services (Department of Social Development, 2006) specify that young children should be able to acquire concepts, skills and attitudes that lay the foundation for lifelong learning such as the acquisition of language, perceptual motor skills required for learning to read and write, basic numeracy concepts and skills, problem solving skills, a love of learning and the establishment and maintenance of relationships. The Guidelines also focuses on the importance of the early years for instilling values. It states that active learning activities must be planned to ensure that children are provided with appropriate developmental practices.

NELDS (Department of Basic Education, 2009) is the curriculum-related policy initiative focusing on the early learning needs of children from birth to four years. The standards distinguish the early childhood approach to education from the formal school curriculum practices outlined for Grade R in the Revised National Curriculum Statement (Department of Basic Education, 2002). The Grade R curriculum (Department of Basic Education, 2002) is structured into learning areas with sets of learning outcomes developed in each learning area. Assessment standards for each learning area indicate what the learner will be doing in order to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcome. The learning domains indicate the basic concepts, skills and values that must be learnt. The scope, pace and sequence are formulated in the learning programmes. The activities are developed by the Grade R teachers based

on policy guidelines. The learning programmes for Grade R include work schedules, exemplars of lesson plans and assessment activities. They focus on literacy, numeracy and life skills.

NELDS (Department of Basic Education, 2009) is based on developmental milestones and is structured to improve the holistic development of children. This is similar to the White Paper for Social Welfare (Department of Social Welfare, 1997), for children from birth to nine years old, which is underpinned by developmental theory with particular focus on age-specific milestones. Holistic development of children is envisaged through the implementation of creative approaches towards children's learning, language, literacy and communication, cognition and general knowledge, physical and health well-being, as well as self-identity and awareness. The Developmentally Appropriate Practice guidelines developed for the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in the United States of America, are embedded in the South African policy and regulatory material for children younger than five years. The first edition of the guidelines was developed in response to a perceived overly academic curriculum in early childhood education (Bredekamp, 1987). A developmental curriculum is dominated by psychology and child development knowledge embedded in the elitist Western culture. Such a curriculum aims to reinforce particular ideological values, beliefs, traditions and knowledge in these areas. While the value of theories and scholarship in psychology and child development knowledge is important, theories and scholarship in early education and the socio-political milieu are constrained. The NELDS (Department of Basic Education, 2009) provides early learning standards (content and age appropriateness) expressed as desired results, indicators and competencies of expected learning achievements for young children in a designated age range.

The White Paper on Education and Training (DoE, 1995) and the Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood (DoE, 2001a) focus on the five year olds and the phasing in of Grade R into the formal schooling. Government strategies form part of the broader goal of improving the quality of early childhood for learners in the foundation phase, the six to nine year old group, with a focus on academic knowledge. The strategies exclude children younger than five years, the country's most marginalised and neglected group. NELDS (Department of Basic Education, 2009) focuses primarily on

the early learning needs of children from birth to four years, underpinned by developmental theory. The document distinguishes the early childhood approach to education from the formal school curriculum practices that are outlined for Grade R in the Revised National Curriculum Statement (Department of Basic Education, 2002).

The inequities and inadequacies within the provision of early childhood services for children younger than five years makes this sub-sector the most marginalised and neglected within education and training. The absence of an integrated strategy to manage the care and education of children from birth to four years, inadequate access to early childhood education, limited state funding for programmes for children below Grade R and by making education for these children a community and family responsibility, contribute to the variation in the quality of early childhood care and educational programmes, especially when correlated to ethnicity, rurality and socio-economic status. In the absence of a government-mandated curriculum for children younger than five years prior to 2006, it could be assumed that early childhood centres in South Africa had considerable choice over the curriculum they planned. The Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services and NELDS (Department of Basic Education, 2009) were developed in 2006 and 2009 respectively.

Both the Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services and NELDS (Department of Basic Education, 2009), underpinned by developmental theory, advocate for a developmentally appropriate practice that is associated with child-centred education. On the contrary, the foundation for learning strategy (OECD, 2008) draws attention to the need to deliver a curriculum focused on languages and mathematics. Although the strategy focused on Grades R to 3, the assumption is that the pressure to deliver a curriculum focused on languages and mathematics may be cascaded down to pre-reception level. The drive to deliver knowledge bound by definite subject areas, implies that programmes at pre-reception level would be designed to include pre-academic material and school-like activities to enhance school-related achievement skills. Child-centred education and developmentally appropriate practice influence the early childhood curriculum in countries outside the United States of America, such as Australia (Edwards 2005; Farquhar & Flear, 2007), and India (Hedge & Cassidy, 2009). Developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) has become a “signature pedagogy” (Ryan & Goffin,

2008, p.386) in early childhood, minimising trends where children were exposed to content and learning that was too advanced (Graue, 2008). Developmentally appropriate practice considers the developmental needs of young children through an individual and age-appropriate approach, substituting subject areas as a basis for early childhood curriculum.

Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services, NELDS (Department of Basic Education, 2009) and the foundation for learning strategy provide the grounding for the pedagogical practices influenced by ideology and understanding that there are multiple social systems. Consequently, we cannot speak of a pedagogy practice but must speak instead of pedagogical practices which respond to particular needs, interests and situations. The decisions made by early childhood teachers about how to enact the policy and the curriculum experienced have long-term consequences for children. The early childhood policy frameworks provide a context against which the early childhood curriculum is explored.

Challenges and transformation in the early childhood sector contribute to the rationale for my critical social and political stance in this study. An understanding of early childhood care and education as well as early childhood curriculum developments in South Africa, is useful in questioning the enacted curriculum and the experienced curriculum in the three early childhood centres in relation to espoused curriculum, the Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services and NELDS (Department of Basic Education, 2009), and national foundation for learning strategy.

## **1.5 Rationale for the study**

In addition to the challenges and transformation in the early childhood sector, my intention for this study emanates from a number of other reasons. A motivating factor for this study is personal experience and involvement in early childhood education since 1981, firstly as a college student in a pre and junior primary programme, and thereafter as an educator and lecturer in early childhood at a Further Education and Training Institution in the eThekweni area in KwaZulu-Natal.

My role as a lecturer in the early childhood field made it possible for me to network with other early childhood specialists in the early childhood field. I am in constant contact with parents, children and staff of independent pre-primary schools, Grade R classes in public primary schools, community-based care centres and in home-based settings in formal urban, informal urban and rural areas in eThekweni and the KwaZulu-Natal south coast.

My involvement in early childhood education also includes working with non-governmental organisations, early childhood forums and early childhood skills training programmes, and the South African Training Institute for Early Childhood in KwaZulu-Natal. My engagements within the early childhood sector have allowed me to observe and experience the struggles for equity and social justice in the early childhood field. The inspiration and commitment to make a difference in early childhood education and to further the goals of equity and social justice stemmed from such contexts. For example, the absence of an integrated strategy to manage the care and education, limited access to education and state funding for children in programmes below Grade R and the absence of clear legislation that supports early childhood practitioners, contributes to the disparity in the quality of early childhood education in South Africa, especially when correlated to ethnicity, rurality and socio-economic status.

My particular interest in exploring the curriculum that serve for children aged three and four years was not possible during my regular visits to the institutions, nor could it be done through examining the various policy and related documents. Such a study would involve observing, understanding and describing the early childhood curriculum as espoused, enacted and experienced in a specific setting. Given the national and global attention and work related to early childhood policies and curricula, there is always the need to interrogate the tensions, political agendas, and taken-for-granted notions about the espoused, enacted and experienced curricula. In particular, we need to be concerned about realising the potential of early childhood curriculum to contribute to a more meaningful and empowering education of young people.

Early childhood education for children below Grade R is most marginalised and neglected, and remains low in the development priorities of the South African government. The policy priority of Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood



Education (DoE, 2001a) is the implementation of the reception year programme (Grade R) for the five year olds and by the year 2010, all learners who enter Grade 1 should have participated in an accredited reception year programme (DoE, 2001a). This study will allow me to contribute to knowledge about curriculum and curriculum knowledge in the early childhood.

This study would also contribute to on-going scholarly literature, specifically to qualitative research in early childhood education for children younger than five years in South Africa. The Nationwide Audit of Early Childhood Provisioning in South Africa (Williams, 2001) was the first national study that focused on quantitative information on early childhood provisioning. Findings from this national audit reveal, among other studies, that an in-depth qualitative study of the quality and impact of early childhood programmes is necessary. The findings can inform legislation, policies and programmes for early childhood education and the curriculum for children in three and four year groups at early childhood centres.

Apart from the call to contribute to literature, there is a need to provide a voice for individuals rarely heard in the literature (Creswell, 2007). The voices of teachers and children in the early childhood sector have been silenced in a society that devalues both women and children (Kessler & Swadener, 1992; Soto, 2000; Kilderry, 2004). There is a struggle for legitimacy, respect, validation and dignity, in early childhood education which is, at times, dismissed as ‘glorified babysitting’. Teachers need to tell their stories, struggles and successes. Their voices become a mirror and window, both reflecting knowledge and understanding for a widening circle of teachers, and opening possibilities for all (Kessler & Swadener, 1992).

In other instances, early childhood centres are under pressure from the education system and parents to prepare children for formal schooling, and from politicians and policy-makers, to be accountable according to their terms. Studies (Clifford, Bryant, & Early, 2005; Howes, Burchinal, Pianta, Bryant, Early, Clifford, Barbarin, 2008) have examined children’s progress in school-related learning skills in the pre-preschool to prepare children for Grade R. Gains in academic skills in state-supported education programmes are greater, mainly as a result of classroom processes directly experienced

by children (Howes et al., 2008). The pressure to prepare children for formal schooling occurs in the larger context of dominant ideology, international competition, war and economic instability. We are in an era in which preschool programmes are required to address academic standards. The extent to which aspects of the pre-Grade R programme experience contribute to pre-academic skill growth makes the curriculum a critical focus for research.

The case study allows me to engage and reflect on critiques of research in early childhood education (Ebrahim, 2006; Bray & Tladi, 2007; Van Staden et al., 2007; OECD, 2008) and to theorise on early childhood curriculum. It will allow me opportunities to be able to share insights, to enrich a global knowledge base on early child research and curriculum.

## **1.6 Identifying the research purpose**

Policies, such as the three White Papers (White Paper on Social Development, White Paper on Education and Training, the Education White Paper 5) and legislation that relate to care and education for young children in South Africa, aim to contribute to citizenship and democratic education. Strong political commitment for improvement of early childhood care and education for Grade R has been demonstrated by increased budgetary provision and inclusion in programmes while children younger than five years were marginalized. In the absence of a government-mandated curriculum for children younger than five years prior to 2006, it could be assumed that early childhood centres in South Africa had considerable autonomy over the curriculum they planned. Efforts to expand care and education for children younger than five years came in 2006. The two guidelines, Guidelines for Early Childhood Development, and NELDS, established in 2006 and 2009, respectively, provide broad national goals for early childhood education underpinned by ideologies in developmentally appropriate practices and holistic development. Decisions about curriculum and the role of education are both philosophical and practical. These are also matters of personal and professional beliefs, as well as social and cultural values.

Against this contextual background, I undertake this case study to explore closely and to deeply understand the early childhood curriculum for three to four year olds at three

early childhood centres within three differing landscapes - a formal urban, an informal urban and a rural context. Recognising that curriculum is a complex phenomenon, I use concepts from critical pedagogy to interrogate the early childhood curriculum.

## **1.7 The research questions**

Evolving from the need to explore the early childhood curriculum, my research question is: How is the curriculum for three and four year olds conceptualised, enacted and experienced by teachers, including the principals<sup>1</sup>, at three early childhood centres? My sub questions are: How do the teachers make decisions for the type of curriculum enacted (planning and selecting the curriculum, content and pedagogical strategies), and how is the curriculum experienced (what actually happens when the teacher and the children are together)? How do the teachers' decisions about the curriculum and the curriculum experienced relate with the espoused curriculum (officially documented or state approved curricula frameworks)?

In this study I use critical pedagogy to problematise the enacted and the experienced curricula for three and four year olds at three early childhood centres and relate these curricula with the espoused curriculum. Critical pedagogy involves understanding curriculum as a political document. This calls for early childhood pedagogical practices to involve collaborative and collective production of knowledge grounded in the reality of children's lives. Critical pedagogy views collaborative and collective production of knowledge within elements of systems of belief and action that have collective effects within the power structures of society. Critical Pedagogy questions these systems of belief and action by asking who benefits. Critical Pedagogy primarily focuses on social injustice. I use ideology and hegemony to question and critically reflect on consistencies and variances between the espoused, enacted and the experienced curricula, with a focus to making visible why these exist.

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<sup>1</sup> Insertion of the principals is needed as some teachers are principals of early childhood centres, broadening the concept of teachers in the study.

## **1.8 Methodology**

In this qualitative study, I use a critical social and political stance to understand the complexities of early childhood curriculum. I employ a case study approach which presents an opportunity for me to concentrate on early childhood curriculum, and to critically reflect on the various interactive processes at work. The case study has been a method of choice because curriculum is not readily distinguishable from early childhood centres. The curriculum is best understood when it is explored in the early childhood setting in which it occurs. The setting has to be best understood in the context of the history of the institution of which it is a part. Critical pedagogy provides the theoretical framework as it is essentially concerned with investigating institutional and societal practices with a view to resisting the imposition of dominant social norms and structures. Critical pedagogy is primarily an educational response to oppressive power relations and inequalities existing in educational institutions. It focuses on issues related to opportunity, voice and dominant discourses of education and seeks more equitable and liberating educational experiences.

In this case study, I explore the curriculum for three and four year olds as enacted and experienced and relate these with the espoused curriculum. I take the view that the curriculum is a political concept, rich with ideological values. I selected three early childhood centres in the province of KwaZulu-Natal for the study: Starfish Pre-Primary School in a formal urban area, Siyazama Educare Centre in an informal urban area, and Zamani Crèche in a rural area. Supported by principles of democratic education and social transformation, critical pedagogy within a critical qualitative methodological framework offers the elements - ideology, hegemony and counter-hegemony, to critique the curriculum for three and four year olds as enacted and experienced by teachers and to relate these with the espoused curriculum. The detailed in-depth data collection involved interviews with early childhood principals and teachers about the curriculum provided opportunities for raising consciousness and perhaps critiquing ideology. Further data collections included observations of the early childhood centres, observation of the curriculum experienced, and document analysis.

Framework analysis or thematic analysis provided systematic and visible stages to the data analysis process. Case descriptions and case based themes are included in the

qualitative methodology. Acknowledging that the early childhood centres and teachers have historical, political, and cultural perspectives, my transformative position to education assisted me with decision-making, and to be critical of my own methodological positions in working with the three early childhood centres.

## **1.9 Significance of the study**

Theoretically, critical pedagogy was applied to enacted and experienced curriculum and foregrounded critical areas in curriculum planning, content and pedagogy, making it a worthwhile theoretical foundation. The study epitomises a significant move towards critically reflecting on policy, practice and research as strategic transformation processes to support efforts to change injustices and inequality within early childhood education. Future researchers wishing to repeat the study with different informants or in another geographical location or organisation may be able to do so, as they will have sufficient knowledge of how the processes in the study were conducted.

## **1.10 Limitations of the study**

The case study was limited to three early childhood centres, in three differing landscapes. The detailed and rich description of the contextual backgrounds, the early childhood centres, participants, data collection and analysis methods provided would enable the study to be contextualised for a deeper understanding of the curriculum for three and four year olds at the three early childhood centres as enacted and experienced by teachers. The intention was not to generalise, but to provide a comprehensive landscape of how the teachers make choices for the type of curriculum (content and pedagogy) to be implemented and evaluated, and how the teachers' choices relate with the espoused curriculum. It is envisaged that the study would contribute to the body of theory within the early childhood field.

## **1.11 Chapter overview**

Chapter One outlines the broad context of this study. An understanding of the provision of early childhood care and education in South African and an outline of curriculum developments in the early childhood sector, are extraordinarily useful in exploring and

understanding the curriculum for three and four year olds. It also provides details of the rationale, purpose, research questions, methodology and significance and limitations of the study.

Chapter Two explores early childhood curriculum from conformist to transforming perspectives, providing theoretical approaches underpinning early childhood curriculum and the application of these to practical situations.

Chapter Three motivates for critical pedagogy as the framework that allows me to explore unequal conditions in the early childhood environment. It directs me to critically reflect on curricular frameworks in more expansive ways that highlight dominant practices and beliefs. It provides the foundation on which to understand the research questions.

Chapter Four describes the research methodology selected for this study. It provides a description of the methods chosen. The application of the design and the methods appropriate to the research questions being explored are outlined, and the integrity in the conduct of the research is affirmed.

Chapter Five presents the social and political context in which the three selected early childhood centres, Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre, and Zamani Crèche operate. It provides a picture of the geographical areas, factual information of the early childhood centres and the individuals where the study was conducted. The chapter provides a daily schedule and the description of a typical day for the children in junior groups (three year olds) and the middle groups (four year olds) at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre, and a typical day for the children aged three to six years at Zamani Crèche.

Chapter Six provides a close examination of shared and specified curriculum for three and four year olds at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche, the three selected early childhood centres. It critiques the early childhood centres for their over-reliance on child development and academic perspectives based on Western ways of seeing the world. It interrogates and critically analyses assumptions and discourse about curriculum within the critical pedagogical

perspective, and challenges the hegemony of dominant knowledge in early childhood curriculum practice.

Chapter Seven presents an overview of the study on how the curriculum for three and four year olds was conceptualised, enacted and experienced by teachers at three early childhood centres. Using a critical pedagogy perspective, the chapter presents findings of the study and considers what these convey about the curriculum. The chapter discusses the implications and methodological value of the study and concludes with recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **CRITICAL PEDAGOGY PERSPECTIVE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In Chapter One I provide an overview of early childhood care and education in South Africa for the purpose of contextualising the study. I then outline the curriculum developments in the early childhood sector. I provide a framework for the rationale, purpose, research questions, methodology and significance and limitations of the study. I conclude the chapter with an overview of the chapters that follow. In this chapter, I examine a range of related literatures that have a bearing on the main research question: how is the curriculum for three and four year olds conceptualised, enacted and experienced by the teachers at three early childhood centres? I explore different perspectives on curriculum and highlight the contrast between conforming and reforming approaches with a transforming approach to curriculum by focusing discussion on educational philosophy and aims that inform curriculum practice, curriculum goals, curriculum planning, curriculum content and pedagogical practices.

#### **2.2 Perspectives on Early Childhood curriculum**

The debate on what early childhood curriculum is, how it became what it is, and how it is espoused, enacted and experienced, is on-going (Kessler & Swadener, 1992; Gonzalez-Mena & Stonehouse, 2008). Those who do use the curriculum have different conceptualisations about what it means. Others avoid the word ‘curriculum’ and think it is pretentious and inappropriate (Gonzalez-Mena & Stonehouse, 2008). I begin this chapter with some perspectives on the term ‘curriculum’, showing that it is not philosophically or politically neutral. I provide a dialogue between a team leader in a child care centre and a family child care provider to highlight the diverse perspectives of how curriculum is conceptualised, enacted and experienced:

Wendy, a team leader in a child care center, and Helen, a family child care provider, are chatting one day over coffee. “We just started using a new



curriculum at our center for the 3 to 5 year olds,” Wendy announces to her friend, looking pleased.

“Oh, what does it look like?” asks Helen. Then she adds with a quizzical look on her face, “What do you mean when you say curriculum, anyway?”

“Oh, you know a collection of themes and activities. There’s this kit and it comes with a whole year’s worth. Everything is there - activities, goals and outcomes, lesson plans, checklists. It even includes posters and some of the materials you need for the activities. They have books that go with each theme. It’s organised by seasons and holidays-very complete!”

Helen looks doubtful. “Well, if that’s a curriculum, then I already have one.” She perks up, “I just call it my program. But I guess I could call it my curriculum - I should sell it”.

“What do you mean?” Wendy looks curious. “I didn’t think family child care providers were supposed to have a curriculum.”

“Well, I never called it that, but I have group times all organised around themes and then I do follow-up table activities to reinforce them and give the children hands-on experiences with the concepts. I’ve been doing it for years. It makes it easy and keeps parents happy that their children are having structured learning times. I write it all up ahead of time on these forms that I borrowed from the local preschool, and I put those up for the parents to read. But, to tell you the truth, I’m not entirely happy with it.”

“It doesn’t work or what?” says Wendy.

“Well. You know, it works; but what I like best is the rest of the day after we get all that over with. I like hanging around the children while they play, or getting them to help me with some of the work in the garden, or walking to the shops with them to buy our snack. That stuff isn’t really part of what I plan for, but there are lots of, what do you call them, ‘teachable moments’, and I get to know the children really well. And it just seems more interesting and fun for them and for me.”

“Hmmm,” said Wendy, and then she changes the subject.

(Gonzalez-Mena & Stonehouse, 2008, p.1)

Wendy and Helen, in the vignette above, seem to think that a curriculum is a collection of activities organised around themes. When Wendy refers to the kit that comes with a whole year's worth of activities, goals and outcomes, lesson plans and checklists, the curriculum is classified as a product. This view of the curriculum resonates with Pratt's (1980) definition of curriculum as a written document that systematically describes goals planned, objectives, content, learning objectives, evaluation procedures. Tyler (1949) placed emphasis on the formulation of behavioural objectives, providing a clear notion of outcomes so that the content and method may be organised and the results evaluated. The attraction of this way of approaching curriculum is that it is logical and systematic and has considerable organising power. It relates to the enacted curriculum, to what is actually selected and planned for children at the early children centres. This may represent local interpretations of what is required in the espoused curriculum.

Cornbleth (1990) associates the curriculum classified as a product as technocratic, which decontextualises the curriculum conceptually and operationally. Conceptual decontextualisation implies separating curriculum as product from curriculum policy-making, design, and practice. Operational decontextualisation has meant treating curriculum as if it were independent of its location in an education system, society and history. This view of the curriculum is similar to the joint definition from the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in Statement Departments of Education (1990), which state that a curriculum is an organised framework that defines goals, objectives, content, teaching techniques, evaluation, and assessment resources. This state-approved or official knowledge that has to be taught is an example of an espoused curriculum.

Curriculum defined as content brings into question the terms 'syllabus', 'subject matter', 'themes' or 'topics', that will be studied. Schubert (1986) defines curriculum as the contents of a subject, concepts and tasks to be acquired, planned activities, the desired learning outcomes and experiences, product of culture and an agenda of reform society. This requires the teachers plan in advance and the children are told what to do. Parents are satisfied that their children have structured learning times. The success or failure of both the programme and the individual children are judged on the basis of whether pre-specified changes occur in the behaviour of the children. This is the

enacted curriculum, the curriculum which will be implemented and evaluated (Marsh & Willis, 2007).

On the contrary, some teachers like Helen refer to ‘teachable moments’ or the experienced curriculum, referring to what actually happens when the teacher and the children are together. Such moments can be anywhere - at play, in the garden, or walking to the shops where the focus is on the children and not on the activities. Some curriculum writers (Stenhouse, 1975; Grundy, 1987; Cornbleth, 1990; Petersen, 2003) define such a curriculum as a process which emphasises what actually happens and what people, like Helen, are prepared to do and evaluate. The curriculum is not a physical thing, but rather the interaction of teachers, students and knowledge. It is an attempt to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational proposal in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice (Stenhouse, 1975). The curriculum is not something you teach to children or give to children; instead, it is a living, on-going process (Petersen, 2003). The children are presented with the opportunities to employ and strengthen a variety of intellectual faculties such as the ability to solve problems, to visualise, to extrapolate, to synthesise, to conceptualise, to evaluate and to analyse (Eisner, 1985; Posner, 1992). They are provided with necessary skills or processes to help them learn how to learn, emphasising the learning process over content mastery (Eisner, 1985). When Helen and the children talk about the snacks they bought at the shop and shared, or what they found on the walk to the shop, or the fun they had while they played, or the words they learned while they worked with Helen in the garden, these experiences are evident of the curriculum on that particular day. Such authentic experiences (Gonzalez-Mena & Stonehouse, 2008) provide opportunities to use and strengthen a variety of intellectual abilities such as the ability to solve problems, to visualise, to generalise, to synthesise, to conceptualise, to evaluate, to analyse through active processes in which planning, acting and evaluation are all reciprocally related and integrated into social process.

Curriculum as a process ensures that the content and means develop as teachers and students work together (Grundy, 1987; Cornbleth, 1990). According to Grundy (1987), curriculum praxis is a social process that develops through the dynamic interaction of action and reflection. Curriculum is not viewed as a set of plans to be implemented, but rather as an active process in which planning, acting and evaluation are all reciprocally

related and integrated into the process. Cornbleth (1990) argues that curriculum emerges from the dynamic interaction of action, reflection, and setting, not action and reflection alone. Reflection and action could be directed towards context. The curriculum is viewed as a contextualized social process encompassing both subject matter and social organisation (teacher and student roles) and their inter-relations. This critical conception of curriculum emphasizes the continuing construction and reconstruction of curriculum in the classroom practice (Cornbleth, 1990). Given the uniqueness of each classroom setting, it means that any proposal, even at school level, needs to be tested, and verified by the teacher in his/her classroom (Stenhouse 1975, p. 143). It is not like a curriculum package which is designed to be delivered almost anywhere. Cornbleth (1990) states that prior planning, regardless of how it is undertaken, at best provides an inert curriculum skeleton. Curriculum comes to life as it is implemented.

Curriculum as a process within a practical context may lead to some possible problems. It does not cater for uniformity in what is taught. It places meaning-making and thinking at its core, and treats learners as subjects rather than objects which can lead to very different means being employed in classrooms and a high degree of variety in content. A major weakness or strength of this approach is that it rests upon the quality of teachers. If teachers are not up to much then there is no safety net in the form of prescribed curriculum materials. If the teacher does not focus on cultivating wisdom and meaning-making in the classroom, there will be severe limitations on what can happen educationally. The danger of developing materials and curriculum packages may result in the processes becoming reduced to sets of skills. As Grundy (1987, p. 77) comments, the actions become the ends and the processes become the product, and whether or not students are able to apply the skills to make sense of the world around them, is somehow overlooked.

The Early Childhood Education Forum, established in the United Kingdom in 1997 to produce a set of underpinning principles with regard to children's learning, outlined common principles which supported a process model (Curtis, 1998). The basis for a process model is that the curriculum is to be conceptualised in terms of activity and experience rather than knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored. The aim should be to develop in a child the fundamental human powers and to awaken him/her to the

fundamental interests of life, insofar as these powers and interests lie within the scope of childhood. When designing curricula based on activities and experience, the teacher needs to consider which activities and fields of knowledge are meaningful. Peters (1966) claims that a meaningful activity must be based on certain characteristics: it must engage the whole mind of the participant so that the individual is totally absorbed; meaningful activities are always extendable, with the main point being that the involvement is in the process, not the product. In designing a curriculum around interests and activities, the teacher must plan for co-constructive involvement of the teacher, the children and their families. Critical reflections of curriculum definitions and conceptions help to interrogate different perceptions of curriculum and to clarify our own positions. The perspectives on the early childhood curriculum bring three different ways of thinking about the early childhood curriculum – curriculum as product, content and process. Each offers a description of what curriculum is as well as what the curriculum should be. Implicit in the way we conceive curriculum are prescriptions for educational practice that are inter-related with curriculum ideology and hegemony – about power, discourses and relationships. These prescriptions are underpinned by the role of education in society making the curriculum, and pedagogical practices that are context-bound and value-laden.

In the next section, I examine literature that focus on conforming, reforming and transforming approaches to espoused, enacted and experienced curricular. I focus on educational philosophy and aims that inform curriculum practice, curriculum goals, curriculum planning, and curriculum content and pedagogical practices.

### **2.3 Early Childhood Curriculum Approaches**

Our approach to curriculum reflects our perceptions, values and knowledge. An approach expresses a viewpoint about development and design of the curriculum and the role of the teacher, child and curriculum specialist in planning the curriculum. In South Africa post-1994, developments reveal evidence of curricula changes through various legislation, policies and programmes. This is discussed in Chapter One. In the White Paper 5 on Early Childhood, the Department of Education undertook to develop, within the early childhood education priority group of the National Programme of

Action on Children, appropriate curricula for pre-reception year programmes, with a special emphasis on mathematical literacy, language and life skills (DoE, 2001a). In addition, the foundation for learning strategy (DoE, 2008) placed pressure on early childhood centres to deliver a curriculum that is focused on languages and mathematics with the possibility of cascading the burden to the pre-reception level. This comes at the expense of broader areas of educational experiences such as aesthetic, practical, social or personal knowledge. In contrast, part of the vision of the National Integrated Plan for ECD (DoE, 2005b) and NELDS (Department of Basic Education, 2009) is to provide a developmentally appropriate curriculum defined and organised by the dominant society (Apple, 1982; Giroux, 1981). The state departments, schools and the Western World views are part of the dominant society.

The daily programme offered to young children at the early childhood centres signifies broader social and cultural values about the role of education. An awareness of the roles of early childhood education in society and their equity implications, assist teachers to develop an explicit position on the role of early childhood education in society. In the section that follows, I focus on educational philosophy and aims that inform curriculum practice in conforming, reforming and transforming approaches to curricula.

### **2.3.1 Educational philosophy and aims**

Educational philosophy focuses on the societal values and principles that form the foundation for the curriculum offered. The aims focus on the purpose of the curriculum. The philosophy and aims explain why a particular approach to education is followed. These are developed at a system level such as an education department and are found in most government curriculum related documents – the espoused curriculum. In this section, I problematise conforming and reforming approaches to early childhood education.

When early childhood teachers have to work with mandated curricula through pedagogy based on a particular approach to education such as a government legislated curriculum, a Montessori programme or a Steiner programme, they undertake a conforming approach to curriculum. A conforming approach to education is based on

the assumption that social decision-making should be rational and that there is logical and universal order.

A conforming-to-society position on the role of education rests on the belief that education can and should achieve national social goals and that governments define the role and purpose within education in order to ensure that core national goals and values are maintained in and through education (Mac Naughton, 2003). The three year “foundation for learning” strategy (DoE, 2008) was intended to lay a solid foundation in languages and mathematics in the foundation and intermediate phases, with the intention of increasing average learner performance in languages and mathematics to no less than 50% in the three years of the campaign with which schools were required to comply. Early childhood centres applying a conforming approach to education would reproduce the desired social values, knowledge and skills needed to achieve national economic, social and political goals. Such an approach can reproduce the understandings and values that enable society to reproduce itself (Feinberg, 1983), by intentionally perpetuating inequalities and injustices.

We sometimes disagree about the most valuable and desired knowledge and skills that young children can learn. Multicultural, multi-ethnic and multipath societies such as New Zealand, Australia, the United States of America and the United Kingdom affirm diverse and often conflicting values about what early childhood education should achieve (Kessler & Swadener, 1992; Soto, 2000; Mac Naughton, 2003). Despite the presence of diverse views in our world, some ideas, values, assumptions and practices are more powerful and more prominent than others. For instance, in countries such as the United States of America, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, the ideas of European enlightenment thinkers are prominent in education, and Western World views dominate many early childhood curricula (Mac Naughton, 2003; Mac Naughton, 2005). These countries comprise a minority of the world’s population who are able to assert social sciences, in particular developmental psychology, and academic knowledge through school readiness programmes as factual and correct.

The Western Minority World views support a conforming approach to early childhood curriculum. The values, beliefs and understandings of elitist dominant minority groups are viewed as universal truths, marginalising the views of the Majority World (Mac

Naughton, 2005). Early childhood teachers within a conforming approach believe that we should ignore social differences such as class, race, and gender. They believe that equalities arise from talking about and focusing on such differences, and that if we regard all children as the same based on scientifically generated factual information, we will create equity between them (Mac Naughton, 2003).

Within a reforming approach to early childhood curriculum, educational aims that inform curriculum are underpinned by the progressive, child-centred and liberal Western philosophies of early childhood education (Spodek, 1988; Mac Naughton, 2003), and curriculum that have their roots in the liberalism and European enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This approach is underpinned on the belief that education can and should produce a rational individual capable of independent thought and self-discipline (Mac Naughton, 2003), reinforcing conservative social ideas and knowledge. A child-centred curriculum emphasises self-realisation, autonomy, individual growth and development in order to enable the child to achieve his/her full potential as a self-governing, rational being. The curriculum content is individualised and linked to each child's specific developmental requirements. NELDS (Department of Basic Education, 2009) is a child-centred curriculum based on developmental milestones. For example, by recognising and naming simple shapes and by classifying and matching objects, children in the three to four year age group are expected to learn mathematical concepts. Spodek (1988) argues that a developmental curriculum, with its focus on the development of the individual child, denies an implicit social and moral agenda where the curriculum content and teaching method have embedded dominant social ideologies within the curriculum. Developmentally appropriate programmes, developed within a Western context, prescribe how the teacher should teach and provides little guidance on the selection of appropriate curriculum content. A developmental or child-centred curriculum underpinned by Western Minority World view reinforces conservative social ideas and knowledge through teachers who are used as recipients or agents of what children should know. Anning (1998, p. 305) makes this point in relation to early childhood education in the United Kingdom:

... it is important to remember that so-called 'child-centred' education espoused by early childhood education in the UK has often been an idealised, teaching version



of what interests and motives young children. Before the advent of a National Curriculum, topics upon which the content of the curriculum based regularly included such themes as animals in spring, the Royal Family or People who Help Us. They rarely reflected on the real, consuming interest of many children – bikes, football, pop music, fashion, TV soap opera, commercially successful toys like Barbie doll or My Little Ponies, computer games or guns.

A reforming philosophical approach to education views formal education as inappropriate for young children. Information gained through careful observation of children should guide curricula decisions, and young children should be taught in ways that help them to become self-disciplining and self-regulating. These ideals are linked with contemporary understandings about developmentally appropriate early childhood education. For example, the second edition of the developmentally appropriate practice guidelines recommends teachers to consider child development knowledge, the child's strengths, interest and needs in conjunction with "knowledge of the social and cultural context in which children live" when planning the children's learning (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 36).

Within the transforming approach to education, educational aims that inform curriculum rest on the belief that teacher can work with children, their families and society to create a better world. Education, according to Giroux (1990), can transform the individual into a morally, intellectually and politically engaged being. It can transform society and its values to extend the possibilities for justice in society. Early childhood education equips children with the knowledge they require to recognise and confront injustice and to challenge oppression. Transforming teachers prioritise a particular ethnic-political attitude or social belief that provides the platform to challenge the world critically and contest power relations (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Such teachers are involved in socially reconstructing the world through education. They are placed in a position of leadership for progressive social change. Freire (1993) believed that when teachers give up this position their students are left without a voice. Freire (as cited in Darder, 2002) indicated that even polite teachers, through their lack of critical, moral leadership, influence students to disconnect from the personal and social motivation required for transformation.

Teachers who have a transforming philosophy of education believe that education can transform the possibilities for individuals and the groups of which they are a part. These teachers promote equality of opportunity and participation in education for children by assisting them to identify and address inequality in their world. The way in which teachers foster educational tasks for children are linked with specific social and political contexts within which they work. Teachers consistently critically reflect on how best to achieve their tasks with the specific group of children with whom they work. When critically reflective teachers constantly clarify their personal values and actions in all areas of their work with children, it becomes an enduring aim of early childhood education. Freire (1984) makes reference to conscientization, the process by which human beings participate critically in a transforming act. Such awareness is the core to building a philosophy to guide educational practice.

### **2.3.2 Curriculum goals**

Curriculum goals provide a point of reference for decisions and actions helping to prioritise what to do with young children (Mac Naughton, 2003). They are developed based on our philosophy and practice on the role of early childhood education in society. Curriculum goals can invigorate the teacher's work with young children by offering a sense of purpose. The teacher concentrates his/her efforts and resources on what he/she sees as important activities to do or what has been mandated to be done with young children. Curriculum goals help the teacher to have conversations with the management of the early child centre, colleagues, parents and the community to explore aspects of priorities. They assist the teacher to bring his/her philosophy of early childhood education alive in his/her work. Curriculum goals offer a basis from which to drive other key curriculum decisions. The teacher can draw curriculum goals to reflect and evaluate activities with young children. In the section that follows, I examine curriculum goals that inform curriculum practice from conforming, reforming and transforming approaches.

The conforming approach to curriculum has its origins in cultural transmission theories (Kemmis, 1986; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995) about the role of education in society, which is linked strongly with the modern industrial state. The core educational aim within a conforming position on curriculum is the adaptation of the

individual to society. Within early childhood education, this means developing goals that have direct social utility (Mac Naughton, 2003). The social utility of early childhood education is linked to two areas. First, it is intended to effectively prepare the children for school, thus giving them a 'head start', 'early start' or 'best start' in their schooling. Second, it can prevent crime and deviance in later life. Jungck & Marshall (1992) note that the fundamental belief is that education should be useful to society and should meet the needs of society. Early childhood education should prepare the child for school, thus giving him/her a head start in his/her schooling and for the adult world, preparing the child to contribute appropriately to that world. Early education teaches children about their society and about what that society decides is of most value or use. The curriculum goals are prescribed in advance before meeting the children and generally by the government, and are prescribed for all children.

A conforming-to-society position on early childhood curriculum goals rests on several assumptions drawn from behaviourist thinking about the child, cultural transmission theories of education and a technical approach to curriculum. The assumptions are that goal development is unproblematic and is essentially a technical process (Jungck & Marshall 1992; Mac Naughton, 2003). Scientific thinking, from behaviourists such as Pavlov, Watson and Skinner, and understandings of learning, offer teachers a ready source of knowledge about how to shape behaviour effectively and efficiently. This knowledge enters the education system through a technical approach to curriculum. Technical approaches offer formulae for teaching and for curriculum design that promise certainty in transmitting knowledge and values to children. Such rationality is believed to be essential to decisions about curriculum. Drawing on behaviourist principles of human learning and motivation and on scientific approaches to schooling seemed to offer the hope of building a more modern, efficient, and effective workforce.

The two main approaches to goal development in the technical orientated curriculum are the objective and rational approaches (Smith & Lovat, 1990). In the objective approach to goal development, goals are specified before teaching begins. This assumes that the teacher knows what knowledge he/she wishes to pass on to children prior to meeting them. The goals are technical, ensuring that children learn the desired skills, knowledge and attitudes. The objective approach assumes that there is a logical and obvious relationship between what the teacher intends to teach and his/her capacity to

find the best experience to teach it. This approach to curriculum goals is closely associated with the standardised curriculum (Mac Naughton, 2003). A behavioural objective is a statement of what behaviour the teacher wants the child to exhibit.

There are clear rules to follow when writing behavioural objectives (Mac Naughton, 2003). Firstly, objectives emphasise the behaviour the teacher expects from the children. Secondly, the rule is that the required behaviour should be specific and observable. Thirdly, the teacher should specify when the behaviour is to be achieved and where it is to be achieved. Within a technically-oriented early childhood curriculum, goals are specified in advance prior to meeting the children, based either on developmental norms for the child or on a set of skills or knowledge that the child at a particular age should know and written in behavioural terms so that their achievement can be observed and evaluated (Mac Naughton, 2003). For example, by engaging in activities such as recognising and naming simple shapes and classifying and matching objects, children in the three year group are expected to learn mathematical concepts (Department of Basic Education, 2009).

The core educational aim within a reforming approach is the growth and development of the individual child (Mac Naughton, 2003). Within early childhood education this implies maximising a child's personal growth and development and bringing out the child's inner capabilities for self-expression. The corresponding curriculum goals are developed through a process of reflection and interaction with children. The goals are holistic, focusing on the whole person, not just the cognitive, physical or emotional person. There is no time prescribed for their achievement and no specific outcomes are predicted in advance of meeting the children. Goals are generally derived from two areas, firstly on broad guiding principles and secondly, on practical judgement in action to ensure that wise decisions are taken as teachers attempt to enact their goals in practice with children. The broad guiding principles are that goals should always ensure that they are based on moral principles. The practical curriculum is a curriculum in which the content is not assumed and must always be justified in terms of moral criteria relating to the good, and not simply justified cognitively (Grundy, 1987).

Goals can be developed from any knowledge base in our society about young children's capabilities and about what knowledge our society values most highly. An adherent to

practical curriculum should think about why it might be good or bad to have a certain knowledge included in the curriculum. Knowledge in child development indicates that children can categorise colour, texture, sound and shape in the first few years of life. This knowledge could lead the teacher to have an objective to enable the young child to practise his capacity to categorise. Unlike in a technical approach to curriculum, the teacher would then select experiences that would lead to questions that focus on morality and for the benefit of the child. For example, creative activities would direct the children to explore and learn different textures. The list of materials that could be used may include rice and silk. A teacher who takes a technical approach to curriculum would think of ways to introduce these textured materials to children and to find ways to give them appropriate language with which to describe them. However, a teacher who takes a practical approach to curriculum will reflect on questions such as: Should children play with food (rice)? What does this teach children about the value of food? A reforming approach to early childhood curriculum goals assumes that questions of values are core to the teaching process and that goals are the practical engagements with values. In contrast with the technical view, education, curriculum and teaching may be considered as practice. Adherents to a practical approach to curriculum believe that curriculum is complex and unpredictable, that it cannot be reduced to a series of objectives or goals (Mac Naughton, 2003). For example, a centre that has an active motor development programme and a technical approach to curriculum development, will ensure that teachers use knowledge of child development norms to decide what children can and should be doing. The teacher decides that the children need to practise their ability to balance. She is aware that research on child development indicates that children's ability to balance is related to their literacy. The teacher sets up a set of balancing boards in the outdoor area and encourages all the children to use them. The teacher faces a series of dilemmas about it and how to intervene in the activity:

- All the boys want to use the balancing boards, but none of the girls. What does the teacher do? How does the teacher encourage the girls? Should the teacher formalise who has a turn?
- One child has a physical disability that makes it difficult to balance. If the teacher insists that all the children must use the balancing boards, what is she saying to this child?

- One child gets angry with another child's success and pushes him off. What does the teacher do and say?
- How important is it for the children to succeed at balancing?

In this scenario, the objective creates several dilemmas for the teacher who seeks to achieve it. For instance, what would it mean to specific children who participate in the balancing board activities and those who do not want to? What would the children learn from the teacher's reactions? Adherents to a practical approach to curriculum argue that such dilemmas are part of a normal daily programme and demonstrate that curriculum is a complex process in which the teacher's understandings of children's behaviour is at the heart of what the teacher says and does. Teachers need to use practical reasoning (Mac Naughton, 2003) to make wise judgements in situations where ends and means are open to question. Reflection about the curriculum goals and actions is at the heart of practical curriculum (Kemmis, 1986). Practical curriculum is about moral defensible choices about practice and the teachers' capacity to assess situations makes sound practical decisions that are realised in and through teaching and not by teaching. In a practical early childhood curriculum, goals are based on this form of practical reasoning, developed through 'wisdom in action', and emphasise the processes of education rather than its products (Mac Naughton, 2003). Curriculum goals do not describe what you want to achieve but state intentions developed by evaluating the comparative wisdom of various options. Practical approaches to curriculum in early childhood are placed in some developmental approaches, which have been most widespread in early childhood education (Anning, 1998; Yang, 2001). Developmentally appropriate curriculum is associated with progressive child-centred education. It emphasises the process of learning and the development of the individual, rather than the acquisition of pre-specified knowledge and skills. Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services (Department of Social Development, 2006) and NELDS (Department of Basic Education, 2009) emphasise the process of learning and the development of the individual, the Revised National Curriculum Statement (Department of Basic Education, 2002) and "foundation for learning" strategy (OECD, 2008), draw attention to the need to deliver a curriculum focused on languages and mathematics.

Much of the developmental knowledge of the child is ethnocentrically narrow, so a developmental approach may result in curriculum goals that are culturally narrow (Mac Naughton, 2003). Knowledge upon which child development is based is associated with scientifically generated information, a Western World social science that seeks to build universally applicable, factual and correct statements about how children develop. In much of the United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and Europe, developmental psychology is established so well that it is a foundational discipline of study for early childhood teachers and other professionals who work with young children, and it is a pervasive influence on early childhood pedagogies (Bloch, 1992; Fler, 1995; Cannella, 1997; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999; Yang, 2001).

Developmental statements of the child have produced programmes for young children that can facilitate, enhance and maximise children's normal development (Woodrow & Brennan, 2001). For those children whose development does not meet the norm, special educational programmes, often referred to as early intervention programmes, are designed (Mallory & New, 1994). Internationally, early childhood policy, curriculum and training documents demonstrate persistently this close link between developmental truths of the child and early childhood pedagogies (Alloway, 1997; Grieshaber, 1997; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999), as in, for example, the United States National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) guidelines on what is developmentally appropriate and developmentally inappropriate (Bredekamp 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). There has been international debate over the developmental truths that underlie this document's view of appropriate and inappropriate practices (Fler, 1995; Mallory & New, 1994).

Bloch (1992) tracked the links in the United States of America between the scientific study of children's development and early childhood pedagogies. She showed that during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, scientifically generated factual information about children's development was seen as accurate data from which to build early childhood pedagogies. Bloch argued that this desire for scientific data about child development with which to generate early childhood pedagogies linked directly with the field's desire at that time to be seen as a profession. Early childhood teachers and researchers' century-old desire to legitimise their pedagogies using scientific data continues (Soto, 2000; Mac Naughton, 2005).

In a transforming approach, early childhood curriculum goals contribute to the interests associated with emancipatory struggle and the creation of a more enabling, democratic, just and wise society that offers diverse possibilities for who we can become (Jungck & Marshall, 1992; Mac Naughton, 2003). This requires teachers to analyse critically their current goals and to be open to developing goals that include the voices of the oppressed, silenced and marginalised. Selecting goals implies linking specific children's experiences and issues, exploring alternative ways to see issues and to think about them, and giving children respectful power in their world. Teachers working within a transforming approach view curriculum goals as political (Kemmis, 1986; Cornbleth, 1990), whether or not teachers acknowledge this (Mac Naughton, 2003). The point in taking a transforming position is to consciously set the politics of the goals so that they contribute to a more socially just and wise society now and in the future. This would mean setting goals that include subordinate groups' skills and knowledge and enable them to change their power relations with the dominant groups in their society (Rivera & Poplin, 1995). Such change-orientated goals work on several ways simultaneously. The goals enable children and teachers to analyse critically their daily lives, to highlight the ways in which they contribute to or experience oppression; enable children to think about their daily lives in different ways that would challenge dominant stories or narratives about what subordinate groups can accomplish. Such goals are intended to make changes through critical analysis and new narratives about the world.

A transforming approach to curriculum, like the practical approach, assumes that teachers can build meaningful curriculum goals by reflecting critically on their teaching (Mac Naughton, 2003). Critical teachers argue that a teacher's critical reflection can be constrained by a series of political and social conditions. For instance, a teacher's own class, race, gender and ability may limit his/her capabilities to reflect on the ways in which his/her own biases influence their choice of curriculum goals. A teacher's ways of seeing and understanding the world other than his/her own also may restrict his/her ability to develop goals that are transforming for particular groups of children.

Curriculum goals help the teacher to bring his/her philosophy of early childhood education alive in the experienced curriculum. However, some teachers may find themselves in an untenable position in education systems where other priorities demand



that they as teachers focus on academic performance. When a teacher's personal philosophy clashes with system-wide demands, it becomes difficult for the teacher to be reflective about his/her work and he/she can feel marginalised and disillusioned, which can shape the way in which he/she plans the curriculum. Curriculum planning is a process central to teacher activity and responsibility.

### **2.3.3 Curriculum planning**

Planning involves thinking about what the teachers want to happen and what they think will happen and how to blend the two (Gonzalez-Mena & Stonehouse, 2008). Teachers will have to be prepared for what they have planned, as well as for what has not been planned. The way in which curriculum planning and selection of resources occur in early childhood centre is based on the centre's view on the role of education in society.

A conforming approach to the early childhood curriculum links directly with a technical approach to curriculum planning. This approach to curriculum planning consists of formulation of behavioural objectives, providing a clear notion of consequences so that the content and method may be planned and organised and the results evaluated. Pedagogies are generally based upon a conforming to culture (behaviourist) model of the child as a learner.

Within a conforming approach to the early childhood curriculum, curriculum planning is viewed as a rational process (Mac Naughton 2003). Time is reflected in blocks on the daily programme and tightly organised, with its use and flow controlled by the management of the early childhood centre (Clasquin-Johnson, 2007; Gonzalez-Mena & Stonehouse, 2008). The planning decisions are usually 'top-down' ways for the teacher to answer pre-determined questions such as: What do I want to achieve? What steps do I need to take to get there? Which steps should I take first? How will I know when I have achieved my goals? The teacher is expected to plan to teach specific skills and knowledge to the children. Indoor and outdoor space is tightly structured by the teacher to ensure that the objectives can be achieved. Teaching resources are generally forcefully geared towards learning that is associated with specific objectives. Knowledge is generally pre-packaged and organised in ways (such as themes or subject areas) that make sense to the teacher.

In following a behaviourist approach to curriculum planning, the focus is on directing children to follow set procedures in physical care activities. For instance, children gather for snacks at a specific time; children are seated; snacks are distributed in a predetermined way and clean up procedures are followed. The members of staff plan all other activities in a similar way. Children are encouraged to stay on task and use materials in a specific way. Formal group lessons are part of the daily plans. The programme schedule and daily plans are to ensure that teachers and children conform to a particular programme.

Child-centred education within a reforming approach makes the assumption that each child grows and develops naturally. This requires early childhood teachers to understand the child and to contribute towards the child's development through this knowledge. In a child-centred approach to curriculum, the teacher follows a practical approach to curriculum planning. The teacher's curriculum decisions are linked with his/her developmental observation and assessment of the child. Child-centred pedagogies at the core of early childhood education are based on an ethic of individualism and aspire towards democratic harmony (Walkerdine, 1992). This implies that the teacher knows each child individually to allow the teacher to plan for the child's learning.

A transforming approach to early childhood curriculum relates directly with a critical approach to curriculum planning and is driven through critical reflection on action. Within this approach, pedagogies are generally based on a social constructionist perspective of the child. Time is used flexibly in response to children's needs. The teacher collaborates with children and structures indoor and outdoor space in response to children's needs and interest. Knowledge is developed in and through children's changing interests while reflecting on equity implications (Cornbleth, 1990; Mac Naughton, 2005). Changes to the programme are made in response to the daily happenings, making provision for teachers to reflect, plan, act, gather data on actions and their implications, review and re-plan in a series of cycles driven by critical reflection.

Teachers within a transforming approach to curriculum planning do not design a set of techniques to drive learners towards expected outcomes, as in a technical approach to curriculum planning. Instead, they plan to direct children in ways that are spontaneous, flexible and sensitive to the changes and responses in the learning context. The teachers are alert to the effects of their curriculum on particular groups of children and who might be silenced or marginalised through their intention as teachers. For this reason, a critical approach to curriculum planning also highlights children's voices, and teachers draw on children's knowledge in their planning. In the transforming approach to curriculum planning the teacher's curriculum is planned through reflecting critically on what he/she has learnt by adopting different perspectives on the child (Mac Naughton, 2003). Establishing processes of curriculum debates which are genuinely democratic, that is, which do not marginalise particular voices, is central for curriculum decision-making during planning (Johnson and Reid, 1999).

For critical teachers, a lack of opportunity to reflect with others places particular strains and challenges on their efforts to plan in ways that are consistent with the principles of critical pedagogy. It also makes it difficult to be critically reflective on what occurs with children. It is not unusual for teachers in this position to find opportunities for speculation; discussions and sustained exploration have to be abandoned in favour for more 'transmissive' modes of teaching and learning (McGuinn, 2002).

Critical curriculum necessitates that children have opportunities to explore multiple understandings and possibilities for themselves and others with their social contexts (Cornbleth, 1990; Kessler & Swadener, 1992; Mac Naughton, 2003). This requires a flexible curriculum schedule to allow for diverse possibilities to emerge and for children to explore those possibilities individually and in groups. In the South African context such flexibility would allow teachers to plan a schedule loosely before they meet the children. However, they will re-evaluate and alter it as required throughout the day. They would be sensitive to diversity within learners and will attempt to acknowledge it in how they schedule activities in the curriculum. South African children need a balance of teaching about traditions, values and languages.

### **2.3.4 Curriculum content**

The way in which curriculum is conceived influences how the content is selected, organised, treated and enacted (Cornbleth, 1990). Within a conforming approach, curriculum content is perceived as either vocationally orientated or neo-classical (Kemmis, 1986). A vocationally orientated curriculum emphasises learning skills and knowledge that will lead to success in the workplace. A neo-classical curriculum emphasises learning knowledge of the Western World. A reforming approach to curriculum content emerges through the children's needs and interests and it is generally seen holistically, rather than in units or areas of study (Mac Naughton, 2003). From a critical perspective, decisions about what children can and should do are based on several inter-related principles. Among these principles are that knowledge is socially constructed and that problematic, meaningful content is generated while collaborating with children; further, that meaningful content helps children to transform their world.

Traditional knowledge is the knowledge that has been organised into specific disciplines or fields of inquiry which are often used to build the curricula. It provides a basis for curriculum development because it offers a way for all children to learn what is considered to be intellectually significant (Spodek & Saracho, 1994). This idea has influenced a number of early childhood teachers who believe that young children should be introduced to knowledge from key fields of inquiry of the Western World, including science, the arts (for example literature, music, drama, painting and collage) and mathematics (Bloch, 1992; Fleeer, 1995; Cannella, 1997; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999; Mac Naughton, 2003). The content is generally prepared by the teacher and shaped into distinct units or blocks for learning, which generally result in units linking ideas and concepts that the child needs to learn. The content is grouped into themes and linked to specific months or times of the year and subjects, with emphasis on children learning specific types of knowledge. The teacher does not focus on cultivating wisdom and meaning-making in the classroom, and instead uses curriculum packages or pre-packaged lesson plans which contain detailed descriptions of what is to be achieved, how and by when. A commercial curriculum package is likely to include a set of activities and materials based on specific themes such as the family, people in community, plants and animals, and growth. It may also include worksheets,

workbooks, stories and/or posters to teach counting and foster memory or pre-reading skills. The child has to show that he/she has learnt simple skills before moving on to more complex activities. In practice, the content in programmes based on behaviourist and scientific educational principles often concentrates on cognitive tasks to the exclusion of other areas of development (Weber, 1984). The teacher's technical competence in delivering the pre-set curriculum is an indication of teacher competence. In this context, the teacher is in control of learning and therefore decides what is to be learnt. The pedagogical relationships are controlled by specific teacher-directed lessons or activities, with each having an introduction, middle and a conclusion, while seeking to achieve specific objectives with children. The teacher determines how to use the resources depending on the selected theme, unit of study or subject area. The teacher sets up clearly defined spaces within the room for specific types of learning and/or skills development.

The content within a reforming approach to curriculum is developed through experiential learning based on children's interests and on practical reasoning that considers wisdom in action and attempts to take content decisions. A practical approach to curriculum content in early childhood education is expressed as emergent, integrated and project-based curricula approaches to content. In an emergent curriculum, used by the Reggio Emilia schools, the children's needs and interests drive curriculum content.

Knowledge within a transforming approach is socially constructed and problematic (Cornbleth, 1990), aimed at serving the needs and interest of particular groups of people. Because knowledge is culturally limited and culturally bound, critical teachers engage analytically with knowledge rather than focus on its consumption. This leads to building critical knowledge and making greater contributions to social justice and emancipation. Critical knowledge directs us to consider whether the information we have received is reliable, whether we are in a position to learn or not to learn through it, or whether we might not be controlled somehow by forces of propaganda which surround us: this helps to satisfy our interest in being free (Smith & Lovat, 1990).

Habermas (1971b) embraces critical knowledge as true knowledge, because true knowledge allows us to be free from the ideological and structural constraints perpetuating inequalities. The information which comes from any subject can become a

means of bondage rather than emancipation, a way of oppressing people. Critical teachers see all knowledge as value-based. Sleeter and McLaren (1995) argue that all pedagogical efforts are infiltrated with value judgements and cross-hatched by vectors of power serving particular interests in the name of certain regimes of truth. Against that background, critical teachers seek to build curriculum by knowing from the inside (Smith & Lovat, 1990) and by developing knowledge that is critical and reflective (Mac Naughton, 2003). As part of that process, critical teachers challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about what early childhood curriculum content should look like, asking: Whose knowledge is in my curriculum and whose knowledge should be in my curriculum?

Critical teachers build curriculum content by questioning what they are doing and why, reflecting critically on the values in their curriculum. Meaningful content is generated through interaction with children. By critically reflecting on the knowledge content of their curriculum, critical teachers work at developing curriculum content that advances from children's knowledge, their cultural experience and knowledge, and their involvement in their own learning (Mac Naughton, 2003). In the critical approach, curriculum is not 'unplanned'. Instead, teachers seek to focus on curriculum within the children's experiences and to reflect critically on those experiences. Meaningful content helps children to transform their world. In a transforming approach to early childhood curriculum, teachers ensure that the curriculum is transformative for the specific children with whom they work (Mac Naughton, 2003). For example, children from socially, culturally and economically privileged groups should learn how to work towards the production of a less unjust society (Thompson, 1999) and to build positive attitudes towards diversity. Similarly, children from socially, culturally and economically subordinate groups should gain the 'primary goods' (Thompson, 1999) that give them social, cultural and economic privileges. These might include critical literacy and numeracy skills. Such knowledge should not be merely 'transferred' to children. Critical teachers should always teach content that enable children to think and to act. Freire (1993) indicated that we should teach how to think through teaching content.

Critical curriculum requires that children have opportunities to explore multiple understanding and possibilities of themselves and others (Mac Naughton, 2003). Such

exploration requires a flexible curriculum schedule, to allow for diverse possibilities to emerge and for children to explore those possibilities individually and in groups. Teachers can plan a schedule loosely before they meet the children, but will re-evaluate and alter it as required throughout the day. Feedback from children, using questions, unexpected events in the day or from observation, is an important indicator of the necessity to change. Teachers will be sensitive to diversity and will attempt to acknowledge it in how they schedule activities in the curriculum.

Critical teachers reflect on how they use space and materials to further children's reflection in their world and their capacity to act to transform injustices in it (Mac Naughton, 2003). To do this, they need to structure space and materials in ways that enable children to explore their own and other diverse ways of understanding and being in the world. Critical teachers choose materials that reflect social action themes, culture diversity, and topics that interest children (Sleeter & Grant, 1999), and reflect on curriculum goals and intent associated with the language and cultures of the children. They critically reflect on their work by asking questions. Critical teachers use materials about controversial issues and materials from popular culture to critically engage children to reflect on their worlds.

### **2.3.5 Pedagogical practices**

A day in an early childhood centre is not divided into different lessons but into time blocks for different activities suitable for the young child (Clasquin-Johnson, 2007). The different activities on the daily schedule are grouped as routine, teacher-directed and free play.

Within a conforming approach to pedagogical practices, the pedagogy based on a behaviourist understanding of the child and use of teacher rewards and reinforcement as key motivators of children's learning (Mac Naughton, 2003). The teacher reinforces desirable outcomes and attempts to extinguish unacceptable learning and behaviours. For instance, an early childhood teacher teaches a group of four year old children about the weather. The teacher's objective is for the children to recognise the symbols for the clouds, rain, and sunshine that she has made and for them to choose the correct symbol for that day's weather. Jasper, one of the boys in the group, has been tugging at the hair

of the child in front throughout the lesson. The teacher decides to ignore this behaviour and to praise the children next to Jasper who are attending her lesson. She tells the children that those children sitting quietly and listening carefully will be the first to go outside today and they may choose which equipment they want to use. She knows that Jasper likes a particular bike that is a high status toy that the other children are likely to choose first. Active behaviour management programme, based on behaviour principles, uses rewards and punishment to control and manage children's behaviour in the classroom. They may use time-out for children who are not behaving in socially acceptable ways.

The teacher takes the lead role in directing children to specific tasks, moving them on to new tasks and deciding when tasks should be complete (Decker & Decker, 1992). Learning episodes/periods are seen to be an effective way to teach because teachers do not have to wait for children's interest to teach something, and teachers can introduce new knowledge and skills to children in an ordered way. The teacher may use a bell or a specific sound to signal to the children the end of a particular activity and to call them to a group activity.

Meaningful and respectful relationships with children are a core part of the teacher's role. For Freire (as cited in Darder, 2002), collaborative dialogue is at the core of respectful and transformative relationships. Such conversations characterise a powerful and transformative political process of interaction between teachers and the children and among the children themselves. This presents opportunities for the teacher to acknowledge children's cultural interest and learning styles. Dialogue within the transformative curriculum forges shared social action in the interests of an emancipatory political vision (Darder, 2002). It is necessary for the process of seeing what is fair and unfair, challenging unfairness and finding new possibilities for being and thinking and acting, that offer dignity to all children (Mac Naughton, 2003). Teachers use dialogue with children to build their capacity to reflect critically on and act in the world, and can do this in several ways (Mac Naughton, 2003).

I discuss four ways in which this can be done: firstly, teachers will attempt to teach children how to deconstruct different ways to understand the world. A critical approach to curriculum assumes that children develop knowledge as they negotiate their way in



the world and that, therefore, children will know and understand something without the educator knowing it. From this perspective, the teacher's task is not to impart knowledge, but to ensure that children learn knowledge that empowers them and that children can evaluate what they learn. Secondly, critical reflection can be built by speculating with children about what might happen if we did things differently. For instance, critical early childhood teachers choose what to do in interaction with children and, as they do so, they continuously explore the political and social consequences of their curriculum content, as Rivera and Poplin (in Mac Naughton, 2003) explain: critical pedagogy seeks to draw out voices of children and put these voices in dialogue with others in a never-ending cycle of meaning-making, characterised by reflection/action/reflection/new action and so forth. In this process, teachers can invite children to think about how they can rethink or reorganise what they do to make just and more equitable choices. Thirdly, critical reflection is encouraged by asking how we know what we know and what the consequences of our actions would be. For instance, teachers will support children to recognise the real inequities in their classroom and to challenge them through their own actions and that of others. Critical pedagogical approaches assist children to develop an engaging knowledge based on their background experiences as a self-empowerment tool (Mac Naughton, 2003). Early childhood teachers can help children to talk about what they know about fairness and unfairness and use this knowledge from their own experiences to talk about how to change what is not fair (Brown, 1998). Stories, discussion groups and informal conversations can help young children to think about what to do when someone is unfair to them, their friends and people that they do not know well (Mac Naughton, 2003). They can learn how to take action to transform what is unfair in their lives with each other. Fourthly, critical reflection is built by determining what can be achieved by engaging children in the process of praxis in project action, collaborative learning in groups helps to build their capacity to reflect critically on and act in the world. Freire's method of praxis is a process using theory to guide action and using action to build theory. Theory and action inform and reform each other as new theory builds through action and reflection and new actions are taken based on reflection and theory (Mac Naughton, 2003). Praxis means that curriculum is made through active process in which planning, acting and evaluation are all reciprocally related and integrated into the process (Grundy, 1987). Children can be taught how to plan, act and evaluate with each other in collaborative ways. Such projects centre on collaborative dialogue in which the

goal is bringing participants' focus on critical engagement of similar, differing, and contradictory views in order to understand the world together and forge collective social action in the interests of an emancipator political vision (Darder, 2002). If the projects are praxis-based, the process will be one in which children and teachers exchange ideas and meanings about a particular issue or idea. They then go through a process in which they reflect, critique, affirm, challenge, act and ultimately transform collective understanding of the world (Darder, 2002).

A transforming approach is based on the belief that teachers can work with children and their families to create a better world (Mac Naughton, 2003). Education can transform the individual into a morally, intellectual and politically engaged actor and transform society and its values to extend possibilities for justice in public life (Giroux, 1990). Within the transforming society approach, education provides individuals with the knowledge they require to recognise and confront inequality and to resist domination. The transforming teachers place significant importance on ethico-political attitude to be able to engage the world critically and challenge power relations (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Teachers who hold a transforming philosophy of education believe that education can transform the possibilities for individuals and the group of which they are a part and transform society to create greater social justice and equity (Mac Naughton, 2003). Such teachers see their work as a platform to change beliefs and practices towards promoting equality of opportunity and participation in education. The activities are linked to the specific social and political contexts in which they work. The early childhood educator is required to be critically reflective about how best to achieve his/her tasks with the specific group of children he/she works with. Freire (as cited in Darder, 2002) argues that "the progressive educator must always be moving out on his or her own, continually reinventing me and reinventing what it means to be democratic in his or her own specific cultural and historical context". Within a transforming position, early childhood curricula goals should contribute to the creation of a more just and wise society that offers diverse possibilities for who we can become (Mac Naughton, 2003). This requires teachers to analyse critically their current goals and to be open to developing goals that include the voices of the oppressed, silenced and marginalised. The transforming approach to curriculum, like the practical approach, assumes that teachers can build meaningful curriculum goals by reflecting critically on their teaching.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I explored different perspectives on curriculum. When the curriculum is perceived as a product, it specifies the dominant modes of describing and managing education conveyed in the productive approach. Curriculum understood as content focuses on planning what content or body of knowledge needs to be transmitted. These perspectives of the curriculum are implicit within the conforming approach on curriculum that they underpin, and are committed to a technical curriculum design. When curriculum is perceived as a process, it emphasises what actually happens through an on-going social process.

Curriculum definitions and conceptions provided an understanding of different perceptions of curriculum. In this study, I take the view that curriculum is a political concept. Using a critical pedagogy perspective, I take a transforming approach aimed at the liberation of human potential and the fostering of democratic communities in the playroom and in other contained areas.

In a critical review of the early childhood curriculum within conforming, reforming and transforming approaches, I focus on educational philosophy and aims that inform curriculum practice, curriculum goals, curriculum planning, curriculum content and pedagogical practices. A reforming approach on early childhood education rests on the belief that a child-centred curriculum can and should produce a rational individual capable of independent thought and self-discipline. The curriculum content is individualised and linked to each child's specific developmental needs and interests. Such an approach denies an implicit social agenda where the curriculum content and teaching method have embedded dominant ideologies within the curriculum.

The transforming approach calls for moving away from an emphasis on narrowly conceived outcomes and the activities to reach them with meaningful and respectful relationships and experiences. This approach reaches out to teachers to work with children, their families and society, to equip individuals and groups with the knowledge they require to recognise and confront injustice and to resist it. They are required to be critically reflective on how best to achieve their tasks with the specific group of

children they work with. The opportunity to critique can be used to reflect on curricular decisions and practice and through the various possibilities, different ways are available for teachers to rethink their pedagogical discourse and practice. This perspective can strengthen practice and research by offering a critical view, yet be productive at the same time.

In Chapter Three, I motivate for critical pedagogy as the framework that allows me to explore the curriculum for three and four year olds as enacted and experienced by teachers at three early childhood centres. The framework provides both the means to critique and the possibility of prospects to contest the inequitable and to theorise possibilities for justice strengthening practice and research in early childhood curriculum.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In Chapter Two, I provide a literature review that has a bearing on the main research question: how is the curriculum for three and four year olds at three early childhood centres conceptualised, enacted and experienced by teachers. I explore different perspectives on curriculum and highlight the contrast between conforming and reforming approaches with a transforming approach to curriculum by focusing discussion on educational philosophy and aims that inform curriculum practice, curriculum goals, curriculum planning, curriculum content and pedagogical practices. In this chapter, I discuss critical pedagogy as the theoretical platform for the study. I use critical pedagogy to question how the curriculum for three and four year olds conceptualised, enacted and experienced by teachers at three early childhood centres within three social contexts: Starfish Pre-Primary School in a formal urban area, Siyazama Educare Centre in an informal urban area, and Zamani Crèche in a rural area. Finally, I provide an overview of critical pedagogy and the theoretical underpinning it provides for the study. I discuss how critical pedagogy can be applied to components of the early childhood curriculum that perpetuate dominant discourses and practices.

#### **3.2 Critical pedagogy and this case study**

Critical pedagogy is a perspective supported by theoretical foundations of critical theory. Critical theory is underpinned by neo-Marxist philosophy of the Frankfurt School, developed in Europe in the 1930s, that engaged the work of mainly German, French and Italian intellectuals. The view of modern critical theory arose from the anti-positivist sociology and Marxist theories. Critical theory is used to expose practices of dominant understandings and inequalities experienced in society. It is an over-arching term for a range of perspectives that assume knowledge is socially constructed,

culturally mediated, and historically situated. From a critical theory perspective, therefore, no universal truths or set of laws or principals can be applied to everyone (Ryan & Grieshaber, 2004).

Before examining the principles and practices of critical pedagogy, I examine the meanings inherent in the words themselves. Pedagogy, in an educational context, specifies relations between its elements: the teacher, the classroom or other context, content, the view of learning and learning about learning (Watkins & Mortimore, 1999). In this view, pedagogy appears as a relatively technical concept that reflects a fixed inter-relationship between various components of an educational setting (Keesing Styles, 2003). It takes on a conforming approach to pedagogical practices. A conforming approach to pedagogical practices is in contrast to educational practices where the intricacies and particularities of a specific context may define the meaning of pedagogy. There is more acknowledgment of dynamic inter-relationships between the teacher and children in the educational context and various influences on their learning. Despite the potential differences in approach and utilisation, pedagogy may be described as a deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge and identities are produced within and among particular sets of social relations (Giroux & Simon, 1989). Such a perspective goes beyond the traditional view that education should impart skills to function with the workplace. In any learning context, there is an expectation that some kind of exchange will occur, so that the practice of pedagogy relates to the production of knowledge (Keesing Styles, 2003). In examining pedagogy, questions must be asked about educational philosophy and aims, curriculum practice, curriculum goals, curriculum planning, curriculum content and pedagogical practices.

If knowledge is required to empower children to recognise and confront injustice, the teacher must continuously critically reflect on his/her role in relation to the children and critical aspects, such as the social milieu that influences and is subsequently influenced by, the educational experience. Such reflective practices demand that teachers are inquisitive and sceptical (Mac Naughton, 2005). Inquisitive practices lead to critical reflection and questioning by teachers about what is happening in the classrooms and/or other educational contexts, and to be sceptical about answers they provide to questions. Such inquisitiveness and scepticism practices to scrutinize specific educational context

and to build pedagogical theories, can inform teachers' daily professional judgements about how best to act in their educational contexts (Carter & Halsall, 1998).

Reflective practice occurs as teachers actively build and transform their pedagogical knowledge. Such practice requires teachers to take control of their own learning and meaning making about being teachers, about education and about pedagogy (Wroe & Halsall, 2001) and innovation in their classrooms (Mac Naughton, 2005). To this extent, reflective practice is a means to discover and transform an individual's understandings and practices (Bleakley, 1999; Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985; Mezirow, 1990; Brookfield, 1995; Cranton, 1996). This is a critical step towards working for equity and social justice.

Critical pedagogues (Freire, 1996; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Giroux, 1991) argue that critical reflection requires ideology critique of educational goals, processes and effects, to examine the social and political factors that produce dominant educational knowledge and practices, and to ask whose interests they serve. In this way, ideology critique can create the platform for emancipation and just transformations in social relationships and practices. Critical reflective practice therefore links education to a wider social project to create social justice, emancipation and freedom for all through education. While critical reflective practice may encourage judgment in relation to social conditions and makes links, it does not specifically demand social action. Critical pedagogy, however, is concerned with social injustice and examines and promotes practices that have the potential to transform oppressive institutions or social relations, largely through educational practices. This expectation of action or social change clearly distinguishes critical pedagogy from critical reflection.

Critical pedagogy, advanced by principles in transformation of society and democratic education, provides both the means to critique and the possibility of prospects to contest the inequitable, and to theorise possibilities for justice, thereby strengthening practice and research in early childhood curriculum. In doing so, it encourages us to understand the socio-political contexts of pedagogical practices and the importance of radically democratising both the educational site and broader social realities. In such a process, we adapt to resist and challenge educational philosophies, curriculum and pedagogical practices.

### **3.3 Critical pedagogy and key concepts**

In this section, I discuss ideology, hegemony and counter-hegemony and show how these provide theoretical foundations for this study. From a critical pedagogy perspective, these concepts can be applied to the early childhood educational context. Critical pedagogy can be used to critique the social, political and equity issues within the structures and activities in pursuit of equity and social justice in early childhood education.

#### **3.3.1 Ideology**

Ideology is a set of ideas that constitutes goals, expectations, and actions. It structures our views and gives meaning and direction to all that we experience (Donald & Hall, 1986). From a critical pedagogy perspective, the notion of ideology defines how individuals or groups make sense of the world. McLaren (2007) defines ideology as:

...production and representation of ideas, values, and beliefs and the manner in which they are expressed and lived out by both individuals and groups...[I]deology refers to the production of sense and meaning. It can be described as a way of viewing the world, a complex of ideas, various types of social practices, rituals, and representations that are accepted as natural and as common sense. It is the result of the intersection of meaning and power in the social world (p. 205).

Ideology can be a comprehensive vision, a way of looking at things or a set of ideas proposed by a dominant class of society to all members of this society. For some authors (Giroux, 1981; Pinar et al., 1995), major concepts such as complexities and priorities about power, interactions and relationships are at the forefront. Within the critical pedagogy framework, is the notion that ideology provides individuals with a means for critique (Darder, 1991). This critique occurs through its own thought processes and practical activities.

Ideology becomes a critical pedagogical tool used to interrogate the power, interactions and relationship between the dominant culture and the contradictory lived experiences



that mediate reality. Within this context, Giroux (1983) argues that important distinctions provide the foundation for a theory of ideology and practice. Giroux (1983, p. 67) classifies “theoretical ideologies used to shape and interpret the pedagogical process, while practical ideologies refer to the messages and norms embedded in classroom social relations and practices”. A theory of ideology provides early childhood teachers with tools to critically reflect on how their views about knowledge, human nature, values, and society are mediated through the common sense assumptions they use to structure experiences in playrooms and other contained areas.

The concept of ideology provides a starting point for asking questions and critically reflecting on social and political interests and values that inform pedagogical assumptions, which early childhood teachers take for granted in their work. This provides a context for teachers to evaluate critically their assumptions about curriculum, teacher-child relations, objectivity, and school authority. The concepts of ideology recognise the existence of power as infused and located within pedagogical contexts.

### **3.3.2 Hegemony**

Hegemony refers to the maintenance of domination not by the sheer exercise of force but primarily through consensual social practices, social form, and social structures produced in specific sites such as the church, the state, the school, the mass media, the political system, and the family (McLaren, 2007, p. 203). Hegemonic practices include endeavours by a dominant class to obtain control of the resources of society through the education system. A dominant class can obtain control over other classes, such as subordinate groups, so that the preferred view of the world becomes universal. This form of control is achieved through winning the consent of the subordinated to the authority of the dominant class (Darder, 1991). A dominant society does not need to impose hegemony by force, since the oppressed actively subscribe to values and objectives of a dominant class without being aware of the source of those values or the interests that inform them. From this perspective, knowledge in schools is not questioned, analysed or negotiated. Instead, it is accepted as fact and has to be managed and mastered. Schools are part of a dominant society. They reproduce the cultural

values and social relationships of a larger social order linking it with the social status of the communities that use it.

Critical pedagogy embraces Gramsci's (1971) interpretation that teachers require to understand how the dominant worldview and its social practices are produced throughout society in order to disintegrate existing power relationships and social arrangements that sustain them. Gramsci (1971) uses his theory of hegemony to argue that there exists a powerful interconnection between ideology and curriculum. Relations of power are established at various levels and therefore grant privilege to some groups over others. Given this view, teachers practise hegemony when they fail to teach their children how to question the prevailing social attitudes, values, and social practices of the dominant society in a sustained, critical manner. Thus, the challenge for teachers is to recognise, critique, and attempt to transform those undemocratic and oppressive features of hegemonic control that structure classroom experiences in ways that are not readily apparent (McLaren, 2007).

Gore (1992) argues that some critical pedagogues construct abstract theories that lack applicability. Giroux and McLaren's approach to promote a pedagogical project is through the articulation of an abstract political insight and should not be called critical pedagogy, but critical educational theory (Gore, 1993). The main concern is the failure to prescribe specific practices for use in classrooms. Empowerment, a central concept in critical pedagogy characterised by abstract theories, imposes a requirement on teachers to do the work of empowering, to be agents of empowerment, without providing much in the way of concrete guidance for such an act.

Hegemony, in whatever form that it manifests in society, must be identified. This, however difficult, is most successfully accomplished through various forms of forces that are constantly at work in the classroom and the society at large. Giroux (1981) argues that a theory of hegemony can serve as an important pedagogical tool for understanding both the prevailing modes of domination and the ensuing contradictions and tensions existing within such modes of control. In this way, hegemony can function as a theoretical basis for helping teachers to understand not only how domination is produced, but also how they may be overcome through various forms of resistance, critique, and social action (Darder, 1991).

### **3.3.3 Counter-hegemony**

Counter-hegemony ideology helps to understand and challenge the hegemonic knowledge, practices and relationships. Contesting dominant ideologies requires critical reflection as “identities and representational forms of the dominated are formed through an engagement with the hegemonic projects of the power bloc” (Jones, 2006, p.76). This is dependent on the individual or groups’ understanding of the manifestation of power evident in the form of an ideological struggle (Golding, 1992). While we acknowledge that all people have the capacity to make meaning of their lives and to resist oppression, we are also aware that the capacity to resist is limited and influenced by forces of power. Giroux’s (1983) notion of resistance points to the need to understand how people mediate and respond to the interface between their own lived experiences and the structures of domination and hope, an element for transformation.

An understanding of counter-hegemony serves a critical function in analysing behaviour based on the specific historical and relational conditions from which it develops. This is vital to the process of critical pedagogy, for without this process of critical inquiry, resistance could easily be allowed to become a category indiscriminately assigned to all forms of oppositional behaviour. It is the notion of emancipatory interests that must be central to determining when oppositional behaviour constitutes an instant of resistance. A point to note is that people may sometimes display oppositional behaviour that is based firmly on their hegemonic views of the world. Having internalized the values, beliefs, and even worldview of the dominant class, they resist seeing themselves as oppressed, and so they willingly cooperate with those who oppress them by maintaining social practices that perpetuate their subordinate position (Darder, 1991).

In view of the way in which resistance impacts on the lives of oppressed individuals, the starting point of any counter-hegemonic practice must involve the world of these individuals. The fight for counter-hegemony and an undertaking toward more democratic relationships and alternative value systems, are based on a critical reflection of the world and a strong commitment to the inherent emancipatory nature of human beings.

### **3.3.4 Interplay between concepts: Ideology, hegemony and counter-hegemony**

The importance of understanding and transforming pedagogical practices and social realities points to the vital relationship between education and achieving national economic and political goals and reproduction of ideology and hegemony. Gramsci (1971) conceptualised ideology as static and agreed-on ideas to the concept of ideology as embodied, lived, and dynamic sets of social practices. In this conceptualisation, ideologies connected to a broader system that contribute to the development of hegemonic relations and regimes and are dialectically co-constructed by individuals and the social classes, groups, and institutions of which they are a part.

According to Gramsci (1971), a dominant class requires two forms of control - coercion (sustained by politically regulated repression) and consent - in order to achieve hegemonic status. These forms of power dominate as allied practices that stipulate a moral dimension. Each country has an obligation to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level which corresponds with the needs of the productive forces of development, and hence to the interests of the ruling classes (Gramsci, 1971, p. 258). One such example is the state response to the poor learning outcomes achieved by South African learners in national and international learner assessment tasks (OECD, 2008). The Minister of Education launched the three year “foundation for learning” strategy (DoE, 2008) intended to lay a solid foundation in languages and mathematics in the foundation and intermediate phases, with which schools were required to comply.

Hegemonic relationships not only play a moral role but also a pedagogical one. Gramsci (1971, p. 350) made it clear that “every relationship of hegemony is necessarily a pedagogical relationship” because a class is dominant in two ways, i.e., ‘leading’ and ‘dominant’. It leads the classes which are allies, and dominates those which are its enemies. We should not depend solely on the power and material force to exercise hegemony. Early childhood centres operating within a conforming position would reproduce the desired social values, knowledge and skills needed to achieve the national economic and political goals. When transforming teachers challenge these goals, the state would play a dominant role.

Gramsci (1971) conceptualised power as a dynamic process and affirms that dominance is exerted when it is evident. The power can dominate either with or without an individual's consent (Golding, 1992). Institutionalised power is a product and process of politics, manifested and revealed in the process of power (Golding, 1992). Power relations are derived from discursive practices from which discourses are formed, and can control what is said and what remains unsaid, who can speak with authority and who must listen. An understanding of such power dynamics is essential within critical pedagogy.

Critical discourse underpinned by critical pedagogy aims to resist dominant discourse and practices that have worked systematically to silence the voices of oppressed groups. Critical pedagogy holds the view that knowledge is socially constructed, culturally mediated, and historically situated, therefore dominant discourses function to determine domains of truth and relevancy. It considers truth as relational, based on the relations of power operative in a society, early childhood sector or institution. Discourses aligned to the power relations prescribed by the dominant discourse are generally acknowledged and practised. Giroux (1985) calls for a process of schooling in which teachers as transformative intellectuals recognise their ability to transform the world. In so doing, teachers can carry out a counter-hegemonic project as they work to challenge economic, political, and social injustices, both within and outside schools.

### **3.4 Critical pedagogy and the early childhood curriculum**

From the above discussion of critical pedagogy, it is clearly evident that the theoretical concepts that constitute a critical perspective of education are also useful to early childhood education. In this section, I discuss how critical pedagogy can be applied to components of the early childhood curriculum that perpetuate dominant discourses and practices.

Critical pedagogy offers essential elements (ideology, hegemony and counter-hegemony) to expose the discursive structures within which the dominant discourses prevail. Early childhood teachers have the option to use ideology to question and critically reflect on the curriculum and pedagogical practices. These processes move teachers beyond the role of being receivers and users of dominant ideologies to that of

being transforming agents. Embracing a critical stance helps teachers to understand the complexities of the curriculum, distinguishing these teachers from teachers who simply do their work in technical or prescribed ways. Such early childhood teachers take the more challenging and complex role of critically engaging with their curriculum, instead of adopting a passive role by claiming that they are only doing what the curriculum says. Taking a critically engaging stance with curriculum implies taking on a role that delegitimises the culture of positivism and a capitalist structure. The teachers use counter-hegemony to foreground the insidious nature of such hegemonic forms of control to shift the power from the advantaged to the disadvantaged.

Postmodern theorists argue that it is unethical to position the teacher in the powerful role of liberator. Rickert (2001) is of the view that teachers cannot just stop teaching as they have been. Given the state institutional and cultural commitment to school readiness, omitting this from the curriculum may be impossible. Instead, particular pedagogy may be infused into the early childhood curriculum to the extent that teachers and children are granted with possibilities for their own 'acts' in the curriculum. This approach requires some level of control to be relinquished to the teacher and children. Not only should teacher and children's knowledge be incorporated into the pedagogy, it should be incorporated into the pedagogic structure itself, so that both content and method become intermeshed with knowledge and experiences of teachers and children. Nowhere is this more pertinent than in early childhood based pedagogies that seek at this level the dissolution of hierarchies of power and privilege.

Critical pedagogy provides the opportunity for raising of consciousness, critiquing, valuing the voice of teachers to reflect on dominant ideology that legitimises and perpetuates dominant values in the curriculum that have advantages or disadvantages within certain groups (McLaren, 2003; Kilderry, 2004). Consciousness-raising among teachers provides a means to interrogate theory, research and practice in curriculum. The interrogation is not intended to disapprove practices based on dominant ideologies, but to acknowledge theories and scholarship in early education. Over the years, the use of dominant ideologies such as developmentally appropriate practice and school readiness have been so deeply embedded in the field of early childhood that they have become invisible and seem to be accepted as normal steps towards economic and cultural assemblage. The high status devoted to developmentally appropriate practice is

evident by the particular reference to it as “the Bible” (New & Mallory, 1994, p.2), and as an “engine-development” that it is “simultaneously a theoretical frame and the foundation and outcome of practice” (Graue, 2008, p.443). The argument is not that psychological and school readiness theories, practices or research are without value, but that an undue reliance on the assumptions, traditions, and contributions of these fields over time has become entrenched, preventing transformation in the field of early education, scholars associated with it, and young children (Bloch, 1992). The use of philosophical, socio-cultural, and psychological perspectives for planning an early childhood curriculum would benefit the early childhood field.

Critical pedagogy supports teachers to consider the social purposes of early childhood education and, more particularly, the curriculum content, especially in terms of the invisible prejudices and possibilities (Kessler & Hauser, 2000). Within a positivistic perspective, uninterrupted play can transmit culture, beliefs and practices and can reinforce unequal power and authority. For instance, free play can offer few opportunities for the children to challenge their conventional social identities, and stereotypical roles can be reinforced if play is left uninterrupted. There are benefits for children experiencing uninterrupted play, but these should be reviewed in relation to the perpetuation and reproduction of stereotypes and undesirable behaviours during play, helping to create and re-create hegemony in a disguised manner.

Critical pedagogy provides a critical theoretical perspective to rethink teaching and learning situations, with the view that educational environments can advantage and disadvantage children and teachers in the way the educational setting is established and managed. It pushes teachers to move beyond the boundaries of their current knowledge base and to question and critically analyse knowledge that serves as truth. In doing this, they understand how subjectivities are produced and sanctioned within the early childhood centre (Giroux, 1988). The teachers recognise means by which to resist or accommodate these discourses. For instance, a study (Soto, 2000) shows that some teachers are dependent on child development paradigms, cognitive psychology and exclusive Western World views of seeing the world, and pay little or no attention to their critique. This view of early childhood education creates the framework for early childhood teachers to see the early childhood centre within a particular perspective. Kilderry (2004) pointed to how a 'child-centred' curriculum within a reception class

limits our understanding of children from different contexts. Children who are conditioned by parents to be passive learners in preparation for a formal, direct-transmission style of education are at a disadvantage in an early childhood centre that implements a 'child-centred' curriculum. Teaching and learning methods within the 'child-centred' philosophy differ from a formal, direct-transmission style of education. For instance, in the areas of assessment, a 'child-centred' philosophy focuses the children's involvement in play and their independence skills which are not the focus during the assessment in a formal, direct-transmission style of education.

Critical pedagogy has challenged the hegemony of dominant practices and beliefs (McLaren, 2003). Examples of these are school readiness and the child-centred approach, based on the construction of childhood from the Western cultural experience, that inscribe power and privilege to the Majority World. In examining curriculum, questions must be asked about educational philosophy and aims, curriculum practice, curriculum goals, curriculum planning, curriculum content and pedagogical practices. When interrogating who selects which knowledge in early childhood education, it is necessary for teachers to critically reflect on their role in relation to the children and critical aspects, such as the social milieu, that influence and are subsequently influenced by, the learning experience. This calls for reflective teachers to question and critically reflect on educational environmental contexts and to enter into dialogue with others. It calls for theorising on curriculum and pedagogy that can inform teachers daily professional judgements about how best to act in educational contexts. Reflective practice occurs as teachers actively build and transform their pedagogical knowledge. The teachers take control of their own learning and concept about being teachers, education and pedagogy. This implies that they know how to drive innovation in their educational contexts (Mac Naughton, 2005). To this extent, it calls further for discovery and transformation of an individual's understandings and practices.

In educational relationships, such as between the teacher and the children, critically reflective teachers analyse their implication of oppressive and inequitable power relationships with children and then use their analysis to work against that oppression and inequity. Thus, critical reflection is a process of questioning the way in which power operates in the processes of teaching and learning and then using that knowledge to change oppressive or inequitable teaching and learning processes (McLaren, 1993).



There is no single, correct way to be a teacher. All teaching and learning can either contribute to or contest oppression and inequity. Critically aware early childhood teachers believe that knowledge is socially constructed and mediated and cannot be separated from its cultural and historical understandings (Jipson, 2000). These understandings, according to Jipson (2000), can privilege a certain group of people, the knowledge-makers, who can use their knowledge in action to forward their own ideas. The questions that require attention are: 'Who are the "knowledge-makers" in early childhood education?' and 'Who should be included in the "knowledge-making" discourse?' Critical pedagogy offers the essential elements to question these pedagogical assumptions about knowledge and pedagogical practices.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have explained that critical pedagogy provides both the means to critique and the possibility of prospects to contest the inequitable and to theorise possibilities for justice strengthening practice in early childhood education. I justified the use of ideology, power, hegemony and counter-hegemony as critical pedagogical tools to interrogate theory, interactions and relationship between the dominant cultures. Ideology provides the means to questioning and critically reflecting. It recognises the existence of power and challenges power aiming to replace dominant discourses and practices. Hegemony provides a pedagogical tool for understanding domination, contradictions and tensions that exist within such modes of control. In this way, hegemony functions as a theoretical basis to understand not only how domination is produced, but also how they may be overcome through various forms of resistance, critique, and social action. By restructuring power, critical pedagogy works to transform discourses that rigorously unite means of critique with possibility of prospects. Consciousness-raising is a means of enabling teachers to resist power effects and to critique the social, political and equity issues within early childhood curriculum. Critical pedagogy provides the space for me, as a critical researcher, to be more authentic, and culturally responsive. It certainly provides the space within this case study to foreground the voices of the teachers.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCHING THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In Chapter Three, I discuss critical pedagogy, ideology, hegemony and counter-hegemony and indicate how these provide theoretical foundations for this study. I focus on how critical pedagogy can be applied to early childhood curriculum. In this chapter, I explain the design of this case study to show how the curriculum for three and four year olds is conceptualised, enacted and experienced by teachers at three early childhood centres. I use a qualitative approach to collect detailed, in-depth data through interviews with early childhood principals and teachers; observations of the early three childhood centres; observation during the implementation of the daily programme, document analysis and photographs. In exploring the curriculum, I focus attention on my own role as a researcher, and interrogate it.

#### **4.2 Approach to the study**

The critique of early childhood curriculum for its technical practice, over-reliance on and privileging of child development paradigms, psychology and Western World views is on-going (Soto, 2000; Mac Naughton, 2003; Mac Naughton, 2005; Hatch, 2007). This universal view of the early childhood curriculum and the growing focus on school readiness aims at accelerating childhood. The focus is on objectives and outcomes and a disregard of a centre-based curriculum (Gonzalez-Mena & Stonehouse, 2008). Linked to this illusion of progress, is a façade of scientific objectivity firmly connecting knowledge and power. Scientifically based knowledge has been generated by studies done in the positivist tradition, where the political right has effectively elevated a certain kind of inquiry to the status of “real science” and made it possible to dictate policy and pedagogy for schools and early childhood centres, based on its narrow definition of scientifically based research. By challenging the Western World’s taken-for-granted belief in continuous progress, critical pedagogy has made it possible to question curriculum policies and practices in term of the consequences of implementing

those policies and practices. Multiple ways of thinking about and doing scholarly inquiry are generally seen as possible and valuable.

Researchers in the early childhood field (Soto, 2000; Jipson, 2000; Kessler & Hauser, 2000; Soto & Swadener, 2002) have claimed that critical pedagogy can be applied to early childhood education to foreground various critical issues. In this study, I use the critical pedagogy perspective to interrogate the curriculum for three and four year olds as enacted and experienced by teachers in three early childhood centres within three differing early childhood landscapes. Underpinned by principles of democratic education and social transformation, critical pedagogy within a critical qualitative methodological framework offers us the elements (ideology, hegemony and counter-hegemony) with which to critique the curriculum for three and four year olds as enacted and experienced by teachers. A transformative stance helps me as the researcher with decision-making, and to be critical of my own methodological positions in working with the three early childhood centres. Critical aspects of this study are connected to social and political context and I link this with power, minority/majority worldviews, silence, and voice. These connect to representation, positioning and communication (Rhedding-Jones, 2007) in my research methodology and method. Critical pedagogy provides a platform to critically reflect on my methodology by providing unique and rigorous ways to conduct the research.

#### **4.3 Case study: Theoretical methodological focus**

When research in the social sciences takes the form of case study, particular cases or issues or institutions are studied from the past or the present. In early childhood education, a researcher works with a case study, or several case studies, when she/he researches, for example, particular kindergartens, particular examples of play (Rhedding-Jones, 2003), or particular documents that inform pedagogical practices (Rhedding-Jones, 2002). In this research, I use a case study methodology to explore the curriculum for three and four year olds as enacted and experienced by teachers at three early childhood centres: Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche. The research is a qualitative study which involves critical reflection on the curriculum in the context of individual centres and the natural settings in which it occurs. In this respect, I provide the required level of detail and explore the curriculum

for three and four year olds as enacted and experienced by teachers. I question the teachers' choices for the type of enacted curriculum (planning and selecting the curriculum, content and pedagogical strategies) and how the curriculum is experienced (what actually happens when the teacher and the children are together). I relate the enacted and experienced curriculum to the espoused curriculum (officially documented or state approved curriculum).

A case study methodology enables me to spend three months in the early childhood centres, working with the staff, interviewing early childhood teachers, observing the three early childhood centres and the implementation of the daily programme, and conducting document analysis. The methodology makes it possible for me to understand the individual centres in the context of the history of each childhood centre of which it is a part. At the same time, the anonymity of the centres had to be protected. I therefore used pseudonyms for the three early childhood centres, the teachers and others individuals referred to in the study. A detailed description of the early childhood centres is presented in Chapter Five, which helps to understand where, how and under what circumstances Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche developed into the current centres. The chapter foregrounds the importance of context of the three centres in this study. Providing such descriptions can be a challenge because contexts are complex and dynamic (Hatch, 2007). They move and change as time passes, participants move in and out, and activities are enacted differently. Dealing with this kind of complexity is one of the features that make qualitative work real in relation to the static settings assumed in most quantitative studies.

The three centres were selected on the basis of their typicality, their geographical location and accessibility (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). The nationwide audit of early childhood provisioning in South Africa (Williams, 2001) categorised early childhood centres in South Africa according to their geographical location in formal urban, informal urban and rural settings. Based on the categorisation used by audit, I selected Starfish Pre-Primary School, located in a formal urban area in Glenwood, Siyazama Educare Centre, in an informal urban area in Cato Manor and Zamani Crèche, in a rural area on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. The locations of the early childhood centres in these three settings are local, temporally and historically situated, fluid, and context-specific (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The reason for this purposive

method of sampling is to collect information which will provide a wealth of detail that is unique and individual to each of the centres selected. At the same time, the three early childhood centres provide adequate scope for a broad representation of the curriculum for three and four year olds as it is enacted and experienced by teachers in three early childhood education centres, within the different social and political contexts in KwaZulu-Natal. The case study provided specific contexts in which the data were collected.

Research rarely involves the use of conventional procedures (Bryman & Burgess, 1994). Instead, the researcher has to move in different sequences in the research process. There is no distinction between different aspects of the research process in practice. The attention is on the connections between the research design, research strategy and research techniques, as well as the relationship between aspects of the research design, the data collection, and the data analysis. In the section that follows, I explain how the data were gathered using qualitative approaches.

#### **4.4 Data collection**

The way most qualitative researchers collect data is to go to the subjects and spend time with them in their territory (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). I selected a methodological case study focus to interrogate the curriculum for three and four year olds as it is enacted and experienced by teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche, early childhood centres in formal urban, informal urban and rural settings respectively. The formal data were gathered over a three month period, in these natural settings. I bring in critical dimensions of how power relations position those involved in the research and myself. I begin with gaining entry to the three early childhood centres: Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche.

##### **4.4.1 Entering the Early Childhood Centres**

There are a number of ways to negotiate access to an institution. In negotiating entry, it depends on who the researcher is in the area of study, and the purpose of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). One of the most pressing research concerns for me, similar

to many qualitative researchers, was in ‘gaining access’ (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Creswell, 2007). My success in this regard will have a significant effect on the nature and quality of the data collected, insight into the early childhood centres, its staff members and the children that I was able to gain access to, and, ultimately, the trustworthiness of my findings. I implemented the overt approach, which was to make my interests known and to seek the cooperation of the personnel, in gaining access to Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche. The overt role gave me greater access to the range of people in the early childhood settings – the secretary (Starfish Pre-Primary School), the security guard (Siyazama Educare Centre), and the governing body chairperson (Zamani Crèche), principals, teachers, cooks and the children. I used past links, contacts and professional suitability as three different strategies in negotiating access to the early childhood centres.

In gaining access to Starfish Pre-Primary, I used my past links with the centre. My initial contact with Starfish Pre-Primary School was established when I visited the centre as an early childhood education specialist tutor of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. As a specialist tutor, my formal visits were to Grade R classes in which student teachers were placed. The principal, staff and the school governing body were willing to allow me access as a researcher, as I had established good working relationships between the early childhood centres’ staff and myself. I gained access to Siyazama Educare Centre through a contact, Ms P Shezi, a college council member at the further education college at which I lectured (in early childhood education and business studies), who assisted in the process of negotiating access to the Centre. Ms Yeni, the principal, met with the teachers involved in the research to inform them of my visit and to outline the study, which was necessary in gaining approval. This proved to be invaluable groundwork for gaining rapport with the staff.

In negotiating access to Zamani Crèche, I implemented a strategy where I demonstrated professional suitability. During my telephonic and personal preliminary discussions with the centre’s governing body chairperson, my experience and knowledge in the early childhood field and awareness of the trends within the field, served as a motivation during the process of negotiating access. Gaining access through past links, contacts and professional suitability enabled me to avoid re-negotiation of access as the research progressed.

As a researcher wishing to undertake fieldwork in early childhood centres, the safety of the children with whom I will come into contact is likely to be a significant concern. I made personal visits to each of the three centres and provided additional details regarding the study. I also noted the suggestions made by the staff at the centres. This was followed by formal written permission outlining the focus of the study and my method of data collection to the centres concerned, informing each centre that I had been given ethical clearance (with the ethical clearance number) by the University of KwaZulu-Natal to conduct the study, and outlining the focus of the study and my method of data collection. I stated that I would need to conduct site tours at each centre, observe the implementation of the daily programme in the junior and middle groups in early childhood centres, interview the teachers assigned to the junior and middle groups in early childhood centres, and study documents that related to curriculum (internal and external documents of the centre, portfolios of children). I also asked for permission to take photographs of the centre and the children and to audio-tape the interviews. I use pseudonyms in the writing up to ensure that the identities of the centres and the subjects are protected, so that the data collected do not embarrass or in any way harm them (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

The principals responded in writing, allowing me to conduct my study at their centres. Initially, the staff members at Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche viewed me as an 'outsider'. My institutional power affiliations were complex. My position as lecturer and researcher in early childhood education was a vestige of my affiliation with a university and the further education and training sector, compared with the staff. Although I used my institutional power affiliations to gain access, I down-played my power once access was gained. My intention was to critically engage with the curriculum for three and four year olds as it is enacted and experienced by teachers in the three early childhood centres. My actions to down play power were strongly influenced by the work of Freire (1984), who calls for us to be truly humanising agents of the world. Critical pedagogy incorporates Freire's (1984) notion that social practices through which knowledge is appropriated, have to be seen as an ongoing effort of empowerment.

My visits to the centres before the official data collection allowed me to establish a relatively close relationship with the teachers involved in the study and to blend into the

setting, becoming more or less a 'natural' part of the scene. My knowledge and experience in the early childhood field made this easier. At the same time, I did not display too much knowledge, particularly in the early childhood field, while interacting with my subjects, as I did not want to be represented as a source of power for them to feel uncomfortable, inferior or threatened; I did not want to create an atmosphere of inspection (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). I also did not use educational jargon as I did not want to scare or turn off the staff members (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

My acceptance by the principal and the staff members at the three early childhood centres made it possible for me to gain a reputation as a trustworthy person, an important point to note when conducting research involving children. I assured the teachers at the centres that I would not interfere with the routine and work at the early childhood centres. I also indicated that it was important in my area of study to be unobtrusive and non-interfering with what the children and teachers normally do. I assured the staff members that I would not make excessive demands on them and would be sensitive to their requirements. I did not want to assume more power than the centres. I united with the teachers in special relationships that provided opportunities for discussion with a view to consciousness-raising and critique (Hatch, 2007). To understand teachers' conception, enactment and experience of the curriculum within their cultural space requires respect and legitimisation of their discourses. Legitimising teachers' resources establishes the groundwork to relate their narratives and histories to the enacted and experienced curriculum, and to locate themselves in the realities of their current lives.

Transformation is part of the ethos for this approach to research, so trusting relationships between the staff and I are necessary to recognise and throw off domination. When I disseminate my findings with the three collaborating centres and offer to share knowledge and skills related to the early childhood field, as I agreed to do so, I will be putting the emancipatory potential of knowledge to the test. I also offered to link Zamani Crèche with business institutions for funding purposes. Gaining access to the early childhood sites and placing emphasis on equality and closeness in relationships (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) set the tone for the data collection process.



#### **4.4.2 Site visits**

At first I collected data widely, pursuing a general, broad overview of the centre, exploring the physical spaces to get a broad understanding of each early childhood centre within its context. I made two visits to Starfish Pre-Primary School, as I have been to the pre-primary school prior to the study, and four site visits each to Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche over a three month period. As a researcher, I entered the three early childhood centres to get to know the centres, be introduced to the staff members and to gain their trust. During this process, I kept detailed written records of my observations. I supplemented these records with other data such as school documents and photographs. I took inventory photographs of the various indoor and outdoor areas at each centre. The site visits to each centre were scheduled before participant observations.

#### **4.4.3 Participant observation**

I had no better way than to observe the activities for three and four year olds at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche, other than as a participant-observer within these natural settings. My role as a participant-observer allowed me to observe the curriculum once per week in each early childhood centre over the three month period of time from August to October. My observations commenced from the time the children arrived at the centre and ended at departure time.

I simply observed and made detailed records of activities, which I referred to as ‘my field notes’ (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), as the natural series of events that unfolded in the real-world setting. I colour-coded the data that emerged during the reflection and analysis sessions. My observations and critical self-reflection enabled me to understand the context of programmes, to be open-ended and inductive, to see things that might otherwise be unconsciously missed, to discover things that the teachers might not freely talk about in interviews, to move beyond perception-based information, such as opinions in interviews, and to access personal knowledge should it be necessary (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

My first observations of each early childhood centre commenced when I met with the principals during the process of negotiating access. Thereafter, I began with the observation proper. I was introduced to the teachers as a researcher and to the children as a visitor wanting to learn about their centre and to see what they do every day. As a participant observer, I attempted to interact with the children and staff in a natural, unobtrusive, and non-threatening manner. Since I was interested in how the curriculum was enacted and experienced by teachers, I observed how teachers and children interacted in their own settings. I endeavoured to blend into their environment and to act as normal as possible so that the activities that occurred in my presence did not differ significantly from those that occurred in my absence.

I was critically reflective of myself as an object of scrutiny (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). I was aware of my own behaviour and assumptions. During my initial visits to the early childhood centres, I interacted with the children/groups I planned to observe. The children and the staff became familiar with my presence. They were then less conscious of my presence during my group observations, which allowed me the opportunity to become more reflective. My recorded field notes were converted into research protocols at the end of each day. This allowed me to reflect on the evolving analysis and to plan for my next observation.

#### **4.4.4 Semi-structured interviews**

In this study, I had semi-structured interviews with the teachers of children aged three (junior group) and four years (middle group). At Starfish Pre-Primary School, I held interviews with the teacher for the middle group, Ms P Naidoo, and the teacher for the junior group, Ms N Bengu. Interviews at Siyazama Educare Centre were conducted with the teacher for the middle group, Ms L Mlongo, and the teacher for the junior group, Ms C Zulu. At Zamani Crèche, I interviewed Ms N Mbambo, the teacher for the children from three years to Grade R. I gathered descriptive data in the teachers' own words so that I could develop insights into their interpretation of the curriculum.

My role as participant observer gave me the opportunity to interact with interviewees prior to the interviews. Whenever the teachers had a few minutes to spare, I used these to hold discussions. I did not tape record. I took field notes after such sessions. I set up

specific times to meet with the interviewees for the purpose of the formal interviews. The interviews were more like conversations between the interviewees and myself. I displayed interest and attention towards the interviewees by being attentive, nodding my head, and showing appropriate facial expressions to foster communication.

Semi-structured interviews presented me with the opportunity to freely adjust the order of the questions, to change, explain or include words (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). These interviews were guided by my research questions as I listened, prompted and asked follow-up questions that developed from the interview interaction (Hatch, 2007). The use of prompts enabled me to clarify matters or questions, while probes allowed me to ask respondents to extend, elaborate, add to, provide detail for, clarify or qualify their response, thereby adding richness, depth of response, comprehensiveness and honesty (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). The interviews were fairly conversational and situational.

I conducted the interviews in an informed manner, ensuring that I did not make the principals and teachers feel threatened (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). At the interviews I also noted the suggestions made by Tuckman (1972) in Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000), in that I briefed the principals and teachers on the purpose of the interview in a candid manner. I wanted to produce rich data filled with words that revealed the principals and teachers' perspectives, so I made them feel at ease to talk freely. I did not control the contents too rigidly because when the principals and teachers cannot tell their stories in their own words, the interview falls out of the qualitative range (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). I explained to the principals and teachers that I would be audio recording the interview sessions as well as taking down hand-written notes. The audio recorded interviews allowed important selective contextual factors to be filtered. Audio recorded data captured the tone of voice and instances of hesitation by the principals and teachers but neglected non-verbal, visual aspects and body expression that would allow responses to be developed and clarified (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Therefore, I had taken down hand-written notes when necessary, which allowed for further probing. After each interview session, I completed field notes to facilitate data analysis.

I transcribed the interview recordings immediately after each interview session. The draft transcripts were shared with the interviewees for review and comment, and correction of errors and revisions were incorporated into the final versions. Interviews provided important data; however, these revealed only how teachers perceive what happens, not what actually happens (Bell, 1993). I used the interviews to triangulate data gathered through site visits, participant observation, documents and photographs to gain different insights into the curriculum.

#### **4.4.5 Documents and photographs**

During the site visits, participant observation and semi-structured interviews outlined above, I gathered the data for the purpose of this research. These techniques intrude as a foreign element into the early childhood setting they describe and are limited to those who are accessible and will co-operate (Webb et. al., 1981). Documents, in contrast, are usually produced for reasons other than research (Merriam, 1988). They are unobtrusive data (Hatch, 2007) and a ready-made source easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator which can be used to supplement or triangulate data gathered through site visits, participant observation and interviews.

I grouped the official documents into four categories, viz. policy documents, internal documents, external communication (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) and children's portfolios. Internal documents included memos and other communications that are circulated within the early childhood centre. External communication refers to materials produced by the early childhood centre for public consumption, such as newsletters, news releases and notes to parents. This material is useful in understanding official perspectives of the curriculum. The child's portfolio is a record of all activities done by the child. Photography aligned with qualitative research provided strikingly descriptive data of the early childhood centres and were used to understand the curriculum. Photographs were taken in conjunction with observation, which provided a means of remembering and studying in detail what might be overlooked if photographic images were not available for reflection (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Since my study concerned exploration of curriculum, I had to find a way to minimize the distortion of routines, and the photographs helped me to achieve this. By being 'always' present and familiar, I eventually ceased to be a special stimulus (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). This indifferent

familiarity to have photographs taken ceased to be novelty by the end of the observational site tour visits. I noted this during the designing stage.

#### **4.5 Analysing the data**

One of the major criticisms of qualitative inquiry is that the research processes undertaken are described in insufficient detail and are not truly transparent (Hatch, 2007). This oversight often seems to be levelled at the data analysis phase in particular. Another major issue in qualitative research revolves around the tension between structure and flexibility (Hatch, 2007). The detailed material I gathered through the qualitative methods was invariably unstructured and unwieldy. As a qualitative researcher, I have to provide some rationality and structure to the data while maintaining control of original accounts and observations from their source. Ritchie and Spencer (as cited in Bryman & Burgess, 1994) claim that qualitative data analysis is essentially about detecting the tasks of defining, categorising, theorising, explaining, exploring and mapping which are fundamental to the analyst's role. Framework analysis, often called thematic analysis, as a method of qualitative data analysis that I use, is an analytical process which involves a number of distinctive yet highly interconnected stages. The well-defined procedures and processes make it possible to reconsider and rework ideas.

In this section, I outline the processes and procedures of the data analysis. This will contribute towards conceptualising the processes of qualitative data analysis. The process of data analysis involves a process of clarification, to make procedures more explicit (Bryman & Burgess, 1994). During the data analysis process, I systematically searched and arranged the interview transcripts, field notes, and documents that I collected to increase my understanding of them and to enable me to present what I have discovered to others (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). My analysis involved organising the data, breaking them into manageable units then synthesising them, probing for patterns. This process enabled discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what I would report on. The analytic task, interpreting and making sense of the collected materials, appeared monumental.

While analysis is complicated, there are distinct theoretical approaches to undertaking qualitative analysis that makes the process less daunting. There is a conventional method to analyse qualitative data, providing the option for several approaches. Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2009), framework analysis by Ritchie & Spencer (as cited in Bryman & Burgess, 1994), interpretational analysis (Tesch, 1990), and structural analysis (Tesch, 1990) are some approaches. In this section, I employ framework analysis to analyse the qualitative data gathered to explore the curriculum for children in the three to four and the four to five year age groups.

Framework analysis provides systematic and visible stages to the data analysis process. A detailed data analysis process will ensure that a proper assessment of the procedures followed is clear. Future researchers wishing to repeat the study with different informants or in another geographical location or organisation, may be able to do so as they will have sufficient knowledge of how the processes in the study were carried out. Thus comparisons that are ultimately made between the findings of the studies may be soundly based. Researchers in the early childhood field looking to design their own projects will find sufficiently detailed data analysis phases particularly useful. Novice researchers and especially students with no previous research experiences may be grateful for a 'real' context study and welcome the opportunity to make on-going comparisons between the strategy advocated in this study and what may be appropriate in their own studies, in view of the differences between the nature of my study and what they intend.

Framework analysis makes provision for the inclusion of a priori as well as emergent concepts, for example, in coding. It has fundamental stages which can be undertaken in a linear approach, and therefore all data can be collected before analysis begins, although it can equally be used when data collection and analysis occur concurrently. I began part of my data analysis in the field, referred to as formative analysis, but left the formal analysis until most of the data were collected, referred to as summative analysis.

#### **4.5.1 Analysis in the field**

During analysis in the field, I constantly engaged in preliminary analytic strategies. I forced myself to narrow down the focus of my study - limiting my study to exploring

curriculum for three and four year olds as enacted and experienced by teachers at three early childhood centres. Analysis in the field allowed me to assess my research questions in terms of relevance and to use them to direct my study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). My continual review of my field notes helped to determine whether I needed to ask new questions. I planned my data collection sessions after having reviewed previous observations. The periodic review of my field notes and completed transcripts helped me to plan and to pursue specific leads in my next data collection sessions. I was able to focus on what is it that I do not yet know. I was also able to detect recurring patterns.

Analysis in the field helped me to record observer comments which are records of my thoughts and feelings (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Whenever I felt strongly about an event observed or a dialogue engaged in, I noted the images that came to mind. When something occurred that reminded me of incidents in other setting/s, I recorded these mental connections (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). While gathering data in the field, I began exploring the relevant literature. After being in the field for a while, reviewing literature enhanced my analysis. Where data within my transcripts and field notes reminded me of past research findings, I made notes to this effect, thereby expediting, at a later stage, more formal attempts to compare the finding of my study with those of previous studies. During data collection, I coded categories which assisted with identifying themes. Developing analysis from field notes was not a self-conscious attempt to analyse, but more an attempt to record information coherently (Bryman & Burgess, 1994). It is here that I begin to realise how involvement in the field made me almost too close to the data itself to make any broader sense of it.

#### **4.5.2 Analysis after data collection**

Reviewing and selecting techniques of working with the data proved to be invaluable because they provide me with direction to my post field work efforts, thus making manageable a potentially anxious period. I employed the five strategic stages to framework analysis outlined by Ritchie and Spencer (as cited in Bryman & Burgess, 1994), providing methodical and visible stages to the data analysis process, to which I included transcription and organisation as two additional stages.

In the transcription stage, I transcribed the taped interviews recorded during the data collection phase. I ensured that the different kinds of data were recorded in the transcripts of the audiotape: what was said, the tone of the voices, the inflection of the voices, emphases placed by the interviewees, pauses and silences, interruptions, the moods of the interviewees, the speed of the speech, and who was speaking to whom (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). After the transcription, I moved to the organisation stage when I separated the pages of descriptive materials into interview transcripts, field notes and documents. I numbered each interview transcript. The field notes were coded according to the date and the name of the early childhood centre. I gave the early childhood centres and interviewees' pseudonyms and ensured that the data remained confidential. I made several copies of the data. During the familiarisation stage, an on-going process, I once again familiarised myself with the field notes, transcripts and documents I collected at the three early childhood centres. This time I took long undisturbed periods and read over the data several times in order to get a sense of the totality of my data. I then proceeded to identify a thematic framework. I once again familiarised myself with the data. During this process, I engaged in the initial/preliminary coding framework while noting concepts and themes, some of which I developed during my informal analysis in the field.

The thematic framework was developed and refined during the subsequent stages. I grouped other data into these new revised themes. Several units of data were grouped into more than one theme. I identified themes. Setting/context codes provided useful descriptions of the three early childhood centres. This data allowed me to place my study in a larger context, of which I provide a detailed description in Chapter Five. Definition of situation codes helped to categorise the teachers' view of early childhood education and the curriculum (separate coding categories for each). What do they hope to accomplish? What is important to them? Do they have a particular perspective that affects how they define curriculum? I categorised the children's influence of the curriculum. I used activity codes to determine regularly occurring activities that are a formal part of the early childhood setting. These included routine activities, adult directed activities and free play activities, with separate coding categories for each. Strategy codes were used to refer to methods and techniques the teachers used, such as themes or integrated approach. Research method codes helped me to isolate data pertinent to research procedures and research experiences in early childhood.



During the indexing process, commonly referred to as coding, I applied the thematic framework, using numerical codes to identify specific sections of data which correspond to the different themes. I used headings from the thematic framework to generate tables in my data so that I could easily read through the complete data set. I included both thematic (for each theme across the three cases) and case tables (for each of the three sites across the themes).

#### **4.6 Power relations**

This study is not aimed at challenging the enacted and experienced curriculum, but at seeking to understanding what influences the teachers' decisions regarding enacted and experienced curriculum. In researching how the curriculum for three and four year olds in three early childhood centres is enacted and experienced by teachers, issues of power and authority surfaced. Throughout the research process, I was sensitive to power imbalances at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche (Creswell, 2007).

Strategic actions on my part to down play power and gain access to the centres were informed by the principles of social justice. Gramsci (1971) conceptualises power as a dynamic process. Power relations are derived from discursive practices from which discourses are formed, and can control what is said and what remains unsaid, who can speak with authority and who must listen. I did not want my presence at the three early childhood centres to marginalise the teachers and the children. I respected teachers as individual participants in my study and protected the anonymity of the centres and the teachers, as I provided a voice for the teachers.

Critical pedagogy works at power relations and practices by providing spaces for individuals with a voice capable of speaking one's own terms, a voice capable of listening, retelling, and challenging the very grounds of knowledge and power (Freire & Macedo, 1987). By reinvention of power, critical pedagogy addresses transformative requirement through a discourse that rigorously unites the language of critique with the language of possibility. Critical pedagogy holds the view that knowledge is socially constructed, culturally mediated, and historically situated, therefore dominant

discourses informed by individuals and groups in power function to determine domains of truth and relevancy. It considers truth as relational, based on the relations of power operative in a society, early childhood sector or institution.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter I described the approach used to collect detailed, in-depth data through interviews with early childhood principals and teachers; observations of the three early childhood centres; observation during the implementation of the daily programme; document analysis and photographs. In exploring and critiquing the curriculum, I focus attention on my own role as a researcher, and interrogate it.

The curriculum for three and four year olds as conceptualised, enacted and experienced by teachers is considered in relation to the espoused curriculum. The curriculum at each centre is influenced by complex cultural and historical issues within its broader social context. Since understanding the multifaceted, social and historical contexts of Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche is essential to interpreting the findings of the qualitative research, reducing these to a few words can distort important meanings generated in the study. Chapter Five exposes the dimensions of economic, social and political settings within which the three early childhood centres are situated. The chapter also describes the ethos of each centre, provides detailed descriptions of the learning environment, the apparatus and materials available for both indoor and outdoor activities, and concludes with a description of a typical day for children in the junior (children aged three years) and middle groups (children aged four years).

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In Chapter Four, I describe the approach used to collect detailed, in-depth data through interviews with early childhood principals and teachers, and through observations of the early three childhood centres, during the implementation of the daily programme; document analysis and photographs. In exploring and critiquing the curriculum, I examine my own role as a researcher, and interrogate it. In this chapter, I focus on each early childhood centre and explain how it is part of society, and is affected by its immediate and broader social, political and economic contexts. The centres are open systems in continuous interaction with other systems outside them, including the local and the broader community, and the social system as a whole (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002). Curriculum practice in the early childhood playroom needs to be explored in relation to the context within the early childhood centre and the broader social context within which the centre operates (Cornbleth, 1990; Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002). The context greatly influences curriculum practice in early childhood centres and classrooms (Kessler & Swadener, 1992). The contextual variables provide a window to the curriculum practice. The three early childhood centres, Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre, and Zamani Crèche, all fictitious names, are similar to any other organisation. They are in continuous interaction with systems outside each of them, at local and broader community levels. These have both positive and negative influences on the centres. In this chapter, I present the specific framework for understanding the dimensions of social and political settings within which the centres are situated. An overview of Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre, and Zamani Crèche captures the elements within, and their interdependence and continuous interaction with one another. The practices in the playroom in early childhood centres are deeply affected by what happens in the early childhood centres as a whole (Cornbleth, 1990; Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002). I provide daily schedules and the description of a typical day for the children in junior groups (three year olds) and the middle groups (four year olds) at Starfish Pre-Primary School and

Siyazama Educare Centre, and a typical day for the children aged three to six years at Zamani Crèche.

## **5.2 Contextual background**

The three early childhood centres selected for the study are in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Starfish Pre-Primary School is situated in a formal urban area, Siyazama Educare Centre is in an informal urban area and Zamani Crèche is in a rural area. The two urban centres are in the eThekweni Metropolitan Region, Starfish Pre-Primary School in a former White area in Glenwood, and Siyazama Educare Centre in a former Indian area in Cato Manor. Zamani Crèche is in Malangen, a rural area on the south coast of KwaZulu-Natal.

This chapter concentrates on the early childhood centre as an organisation in terms of the physical, economic, social and cultural environment within which it operates. A brief synopsis is provided of KwaZulu-Natal, one of the eleven provinces in South Africa, followed by a description of each of the three early childhood centres.

KwaZulu-Natal is the most populated province in South Africa, with more than 20% of the country's total population. The majority (80%) of the population is Black, and speak isiZulu. Poverty and the apartheid legislation resulted in inequality for the majority of its citizens. More than half (61%) the Black population live in rural parts of the province in fragmented and harsh conditions, with minimum access to basic resources. The wave of migrants from rural areas to urban areas resulted in informal settlements, such as those in the Cato Manor area. The informal settlements, located close to cities, were engineered by apartheid to keep Black people segregated and economically impoverished.

The Nationwide Audit of Early Childhood Provisioning in South Africa (Williams, 2001) indicates that the majority (84%) of the children at identifiable early childhood centres are Black (Williams, 2001). The study shows that there are more early childhood centres in rural areas (62%) than in formal urban (32%) and informal urban (6%). The impact of colonisation and apartheid in South Africa resulted in fractured,

uneven patterns of living which reinforced the fragmented and inequitable early childhood provisioning in respect of infrastructure, support, programmes, and teachers.

The early childhood centres are not static; they tend to have a life of their own, with their own cycles and phases of development (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002). An exploration of the curriculum calls for an understanding of the three early childhood centres, Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre, and Zamani Crèche, selected for the study. The centres are unique, with their own contextually specific history. This holistic approach contributes towards understanding the three early childhood centres.

### **5.2.1 Starfish Pre-Primary School**

#### ***5.2.1.1 An overview of Starfish Pre-Primary School***

According to the principal, Ms A Smith, of Starfish Pre-Primary School, the following vignette illustrates the centre's approach to curriculum practice at Starfish Pre-Primary School:

A friend was walking down a deserted Mexican beach at sunset. As he walked along, he saw another man in the distance. As he drew nearer, he noticed the local kept leaning down, picking something up and throwing it out into the water. Time and time again he kept hurling things out into the ocean. As our friend approached, he noticed that the man was picking up star fish that had been washed up onto the beach and, one at a time, he was throwing them back into the water.

Our friend was puzzled. He approached the young man and said, "Good evening friend, I was wondering what you are doing."

"I'm throwing these starfish back into the ocean. You see it's low tide right now and all of these starfish have been washed onto the shore. If I don't throw them back into the sea, they'll die up here from lack of oxygen."

"I understand," my friend replied, "but there must be thousands of starfish on this beach. You can't possibly get to all of them. There are simply too many. And don't you realise this is probably happening on hundreds of beaches up and down this coast. Can't you see that you can't possibly make a difference?"

The local smiled, bent down and picked up yet another starfish, and he threw it back into the sea, he replied, “Made a difference to that one!”

(Canfield & Hansen, 1993, p15)

Ms P Naidoo, the middle group teacher, indicated that Starfish Pre-Primary School has been making a difference to children’s lives for the past fifty-five years:

We grow and nurture our young children, during these most precious and crucial period when little people are learning all about themselves and the world around them. With just 100 children in our care, our task is not nearly as impossible as the man on the beach and we dedicate ourselves to providing a safe and secure environment in which individuals flourish while learning to work and play.

The vision of Starfish Pre-Primary School, displayed alongside the mission in the principal’s office, is to be a world class centre for early childhood education, characterised by educational innovation and excellence, effective and efficient management and financial independence.

The mission of the centre is to:

Provide a child-centred approach to early childhood education which is directed towards the realisation of the individual potential of each child

Ensure optimal social, emotional, physical and academic development of the children through the employment of committed and well-trained educators and involvement of parents, families and the community in all aspects of the child’s development and school life.

Offer a friendly, supportive, caring atmosphere, within which parents and educators operate as partners in engendering a sense of stability and security in the children which will lay a firm foundation for their later development into effective and responsible adults.

Promote tolerance, respect and understanding of the diverse values, cultures and belief, which form part of the South African society and the school community.

Guarantee a well-managed and financially sustainable organisation which is committed to accountability and transparency.

Starfish Pre-Primary School marks its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2010. It offers childcare and education to 95 children from two-and-a-half to six years of age from different racial groups.

In 1950, the present Starfish Pre-Primary School was opened in the Meyrick Bennett Park in Chelmsford Road, Durban. It occupied a few rooms in the old Bennett family homestead, a building which was approximately 120 years old and which was bequeathed by the last member of the Bennett family to the City of Durban. The property was supposed to be used in perpetuity as a park and playground for White children and the house was to be used as a museum or any other purpose at the discretion of the Durban City Council. During this period, the school shared the premises with the Meyrick Bennett Child Guidance Centre, with whom the school initially worked in close liaison, using the pre-school children as an observation group for research purposes.

The pre-primary school initially began as a small play group for four to six White children which operated three mornings per week. In August 1950, a fully qualified nursery school teacher was appointed, who was assisted by a few mothers. The school depended on public support and school fees. In July 1951, the school was registered with the then Natal Department of Education with an enrolment of sixteen children. It also received a certificate of recognition from the Nursery School Association of South Africa. During the 1970s, Starfish Pre-Primary School received funding from the then Natal Department of Education. This included teacher salaries for three groups as well as the principal's salary. In July 1975, Starfish Pre-Primary School became provincially controlled and it changed to an integrated programme with qualified teachers and gradually built up a good selection of educational toys and equipment.

In January 1986, the pre-primary school moved from Chelmsford Road to its present venue. During that period the then Director of Education, Mr W. Van Rooyen, opened the school on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1988. In January 1992, an aftercare facility was introduced to cater for the increasing number of working mothers.

The present venue is a new custom built brick premises in Manor Gardens, Glenwood, in an urban formal setting. The front of the centre has a well displayed graphic designed sign board indicating the name of the centre, its logo, address and telephone number. The centre is fenced and has two remote controlled gates (with intercom services), one used as the entrance and the other as an exit, with the appropriate signs displayed on each. This prevents traffic congestion, especially during the children's arrival and departure times. Separate tarred parking facilities are provided for staff and visitors. There is a second intercom with an access control facility at the main entrance to the building which is linked to the secretary's office. An awning outside the main entrance to the building serves as a protection from inclement weather. The centre has an alarm system and is linked to a security company which provides monitoring and armed response services. The entrance to the building and areas within the building are accessible to children and adults with physical disabilities and wheelchairs. The centre is approximately one hundred metres from the main road on which public transportation facilities, taxis and buses, are available. The building and garden are maintained by a full-time worker and with the help of parents. The trees around the centre are well positioned to ensure that the area around the centre receives sufficient shade which helps to keep the area cool in summer. The administrative section, equipped with all necessities, includes a reception area, a secretary's office, two store rooms, and a principal's office. The centre has two staff toilets, a change room for the cleaning staff and a kitchen where the meals for the children are prepared.

The multi-purpose hall has audio visual equipment (a television, a video machine, a DVD player, a radio, a CD and cassette player). It has a carpet in the centre of the room and an area for theme displays. There are four home bases for the three to four age group, the four to five age group and two Grade R groups. A store room adjoins each home base. Each home base has a number of charts, pictures and posters on the wall – a welcome chart, and birthday chart. There are activity areas within each home base such as the theme table, and a book area. The teachers are required to set up theme tables based on the theme. They complete a table preparation sheet a week in advance. The



book area has approximately fifteen suitable, well-illustrated books placed on a low book shelf for easy access by the children. Most of the books are selected according to the theme and are replaced when the theme changes either weekly or fortnightly. The children are encouraged to respect books and to turn the pages correctly. The teachers select books from this area to read to children. The children are also allowed to borrow library books from the centre. Parents are encouraged to read these books to their children.

The creative activities are catered for in the creative room known as the orange room where the teacher on duty prepares the activities a week in advance on preparation sheets. She selects activities that are included in six broad categories - drawing, painting, modelling, cutting and pasting, baking and or anti-waste activities, and integrates these with the theme. All creative activity areas are set out on the day before, after the children depart for home/after care which is offered at the centre. The children and parents place the anti-waste contributions in a collection box, which the teachers transfer to the creative room in the afternoon. The baking ingredients are collected from the secretary on the Monday before these are required and other items, such as paint, glue, crayons, required for creative activities, must be noted in the shopping book. The teacher also makes the play dough for the modelling activity.

The cognitive room known as the green room is set up weekly by the teacher on duty. The activities include a variety of puzzles, educational games, such as lotto, dominoes, matching and board games, which vary both in type and degree of difficulty. The teachers are required to record activities set up for the week to avoid repetition. The teacher appointed on duty for the week checks the cognitive file for activities that have been put out for the children in the previous weeks. She then selects and records her choice of cognitive activities for the week. The cognitive room also includes activities for fine muscle development such as threading beads, using pegs and small construction sets. The train sets and construction toys cater for large motor development.

The fantasy room is occupied by the junior group as home base. The fantasy play area is set up weekly and a record is kept of the special activities in the fantasy file. The domestic area has a kitchen, with the necessary utilities. The bedroom has a nursery where the children have opportunities to play with female dolls that are culturally

diverse. The lounge and dining areas cater for those children who wish to dine and socialise.

The outdoor play area has a variety of activity areas. The sand pit is erected with bricks and cement and has a variety of suitable toys. The awning above the sand pit makes it possible for the children to use these areas even during inclement weather conditions. A water tray with suitable accessories and plastic aprons for children is part of the outdoor play area. At the end of each day, the teacher on duty empties out the water so that fresh water can be filled each morning. A tarred area for wheeling toys which include bicycles, tricycles, scooters, and climbing apparatus such as a jungle gym, a commando net, and swings, caters for the more energetic and boisterous children. A sensopathic tray has one of the following tactile media: jelly, starch, mud, sawdust, pebbles, stones, and coloured water. In the interest area, an outdoor play theme for the day is set up by the teacher in charge of the outdoor play area. Examples of outdoor play themes include At the farm, In the jungle, I am in space, Ironing for mum, Cowboys and Indians, In the sea, and Dinosaurs. This may not necessarily coincide with the main theme. Adjacent to the outdoor play area is the garden. The teachers and children plant and take care of plants. All activity areas are set out the day before, after the children depart at 12:30.

Toilets and washroom for the children are adjacent to the home base for the junior group. The toilets are cleaned by the janitor immediately after each routine session.

Starfish Pre-Primary School relies on school fees of R746.50 per month per child, which does not include the fee for aftercare service. It depends on fundraising activities for its operations which include administration, maintenance, services, supplies, resources, the principal, four teachers and three support staff salaries. In the late 1990s, the salary subsidisation from the department of education discontinued. According to teachers, the centre is well-equipped with “everything a child needs - from books to playground equipment and education resources”. Ms Naidoo, the middle group teacher, mentioned that the teachers are free to submit a ‘*wish list*’ (a list of resources they would like to have) to the principal towards the end of each year.

The centre operates a five day programme from Monday to Friday, from 7:30 until 12:30. Starfish Pre-Primary School offers after-care facilities from 12:15 until 17:15.

During this time, the children enjoy activities such as free play, drawing, painting, story-telling and a rest period. Since 1993, a number of additions have been included in the curriculum such as a life skills programme, design technology activities, and MATAL (an Israeli science programme), isiZulu, outcomes based education, curriculum 2005, and the revised national curriculum statement.

The parents are required to provide lunch for their children daily. Parents receive regular updates on their child/children's physical, social, and mental development through parent/teacher interviews, which take place in the first and third school terms, and receive written reports at the end of the second and fourth school terms. On the written report, the first section is based on the child's general development (social, emotional, physical and cognitive); the second section focuses on the child's participation in the daily programme (free play, teacher-directed periods and routines sessions), and the third section allows the teacher to write general remarks about the child.

The current staff members include the principal, Ms Smith, the secretary, the two Grade R teachers, the teachers for the middle and junior groups, the cook and the general maintenance person. The teacher assigned to the middle group, Ms P Naidoo, has a three year diploma in early childhood education which she completed at the former M L Sultan Technikon, and Ms N Bengu, assigned to the junior group, who has completed a one year certificate course at a non-governmental organisation. Both teachers earn monthly salaries between R4000 and R5000 each. They also receive birthday bonuses. The conditions of service, which include the staff recruitment, orientation of new staff members, job descriptions, salaries, and leave conditions, are clearly communicated to all staff members.

### ***5.2.1.2 The daily schedule for junior group***

07:15 - 08:00	Arrival/Activities in Classroom
08:00 - 08:20	Greeting Ring
08:20 - 09:30	Free Play (Fantasy and Outdoor Equipment)
09:30 - 10:00	Snack
10:00 - 10:20	Ring
10:20 - 11:00	Free Play (Outside)
11:00 - 11:30	Creative Activities (Skill Session of Some Kind)
11:30 - 11:45	Cognitive Session (Skill Session of Some Kind)
11:45 - 12:00	Tidy Up and Note Books
12:00 - 12:15	Story
12:15	Home Time

### ***5.2.1.3 A typical day for junior group***

The morning begins at around 7:30 when the children arrive at school and proceed to home-base where Ms Bengu, their teacher, receives and welcomes them. The children are occupied with a selected number of indoor activities such as drawing, construction toys, puzzles, library books. During this session, they play and socialise with the other children. Generally, all the children arrive by 8:00. From 8:00 to 8:30, the children engage in a greeting ring directed by Ms Bengu. Ms Bengu and the children discuss the weather, days of the week, current news initiated by the children, and a topic of the selected theme in English. They sing a few songs, some in Afrikaans, at regular intervals during the discussions, which breaks the monotony of just talk. Ms Bengu issues the server badges, a template printed on the computer, to the servers. Each child has a turn to serve snacks for the day and is recognised by his/her name badge. The greeting ring is followed by an hour of outdoor free play. During free play, the children are free to select any activity/area they wish. They are free to engage in individual or co-operative play. During this time, Ms Bengu supervises and observes the children. Free play is followed by the toilet and snack routine. Children have their snacks which are peanut butter sandwiches, juice and a piece of fruit while seated on chairs at their tables in social groups at home base. Children pray before they eat. The school provides the snack which is prepared by Ms K Zuma, who is the helper at the school. At 10:00,

the children join Ms Bengu for the ring which is a choice of either a life skills lesson, discussion on theme, show and tell, drama, or music/movement activity. At 10:50, the children engage in outdoor/indoor (in the fantasy room, creative room, and cognitive room) free play until 11:30, followed by toilet and wash routine. The children join Ms Bengu at home base for story and language extension from 11:50 to 12:10. Thereafter, the children get ready to depart for home or aftercare, an additional facility provided by the centre. They pack their school cases, tidy their lockers and put on their shoes. At 12:15, they depart with their parents or attend the aftercare programme.

#### ***5.2.1.4 The daily schedule for middle group***

07:15 - 08:00	Arrival/Activities in Classroom or Outdoors
08:00 - 08:30	Greeting Ring
08:30 - 09:00	Skills development
09:00 - 09:30	Free Play (Outdoor Equipment)
09:30 - 10:00	Toilet and Snack
10:00 - 10:30	Ring (music or life skills)
10:30 - 11:30	Free Play (Creative, Fantasy, Cognitive and Outdoors)
11:30 - 12:15	Tidy Up, Toilet, Note Books and Story
12:15	Home Time

#### ***5.2.1.5 A typical day for middle group***

The children arrive at round 7:30 and proceed to meet Ms Naidoo, their teacher, at home base. From 8:00 to 8:30, the middle group engages in the greeting ring, a teacher-directed activity. They remain at home base for a further thirty minutes for a skills development activity. At 9:30 the middle group joins the junior group for free play, until 10:00. Free play is followed by the toilet and snack routine. The children follow the same snack routine as the children in the junior group. The snack routine is followed by music or life skills development (10:00 to 10:30). At 10:30, the children have their second free play session for the day. This is followed by the tidy-up and wash routine from 11:30 to 11:45. Story and language development begins at 11:45. The children rest for about five minutes and then depart with their parents/guardians or go to the aftercare facility at the centre.

## **5.2.2 Siyazama Educare Centre**

### ***5.2.2.1 An overview of Siyazama Educare Centre***

Siyazama Educare Centre is located in one of the six informal settlement areas in Cato Manor, Mayville, 5km away from the eThekweni Metropolitan Region in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Cato Manor is an area of approximately 1800 ha and presently accommodates about 93 000 people (Odendaal, 2003). A large number of the population live in informal settlements that were created in the early 1990s during the disintegration and dismantling of the apartheid state (Odendaal, 2003). Cato Manor was once a vibrant multi-cultural community. During the apartheid period, thousands of people were removed from the area following the implementation of the notorious Group Areas Act in which Cato Manor was designated a 'White' group area in the 1950s. After three decades, the area has not been fully redeveloped.

Siyazama Educare Centre was established in 1995 for two reasons. Firstly, working parents required a place of care for their children, and secondly, there was a need to prepare children in Grade R with school readiness for formal schooling. In 1999, the existing structure was built by the Cato Manor Development Association with funds from the European Union. The centre was officially open in January 2000. The centre was managed by the Cato Manor Development Association, without an appointed principal. Ms B Yeni was appointed in February 2001. According to Ms Yeni, the centre had no furniture and equipment and was dirty. There were 58 children enrolled in that year. St Thomas Anglican Church donated a toy kit of R500 in 2001. In 2002, the centre received a conditional grant for the Grade R group from the provincial department of education. In March 2003, a research based study on the quality of early childhood education was conducted on the pre-schools in the Cato Manor area by the Cato Manor Development Association, and Siyazama Educare Centre was placed first.

Siyazama Educare Centre is situated on the main road in Cato Manor. The taxi rank is located outside the entrance of the centre, which makes it convenient for the children to be dropped off at the centre. The centre has a security guard who is on duty during the day. The centre is fenced and the entrance of the centre has a gate which is kept locked. The hollow block building has an asbestos roof, cemented floors and no ceiling. There

are two playrooms. The one, approximately fifty-five square metres in size, is utilised by the thirty Grade R children and forty-six children in the middle group. Ms Yeni the supervisor is also the Grade R teacher and Ms Mlongo is the middle group teacher.

A three metres high maisonette partition separates the playroom, approximately thirty square metres, utilised by the thirty-eight children in the junior group and their teacher, Ms Zulu. The playroom is divided into a creative area, a fantasy corner, and toys for indoor free play.

The office is a small room, approximately fifteen square metres, with a small window, approximately one by one metre and permanently shut. It is cluttered with two cupboards, a table, a computer, a printer, a chair, and a cot (the office is also used as a sick bay) with limited space to work. Adjacent to the office is a playroom, approximately fifteen square metres, which is used for the toddlers (ten). The centre has eight toilets, and a washroom, with basins, tap water, soap and a bath size towel available for the children. This area is clean and well ventilated. The cook/cleaner, Ms T Zama, disinfects the toilets twice a day. The kitchenette, approximately fifteen square metres, is where Ms Zama prepares breakfast and lunch for the children. Ms Zama follows the menu cycle planned by Ms Yeni and the teachers, which makes the planning and preparation of the meals easy. Ms Yeni claims that the menu cycle is based on the available budget. The vegetables from the vegetable garden at the centre are used in the preparation of meals.

Ms C Zulu has been appointed the teacher for the junior group in 2004. Prior to this, she has been taking care of the toddlers at the centre since 2000. Her highest school leaving level is Grade Seven. She has attended a two week orientation course and a five week basic course at a non-governmental organisation Training and Resource for Early Education (TREE). Her monthly salary is R600. I did not ask for salaries to be disclosed. The principal was willing to disclose this. Ms L Mlongo, the middle group teacher, has worked with the babies from 1999 to 2002 and then with the junior group until 2003. She has been with the middle group since 2004. She has passed Grade Eleven and has attended a one week orientation course at TREE. She receives R650 as her monthly salary. Ms Yeni has been with the centre since February 2001 as a Grade R teacher and principal. She has attended the early childhood skills development

programme at NQF Level Four, offered by the ETDP SETA (Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority). According to Ms Yeni, she attended the course twice, offered by two different service providers, and was eager to complete a qualification in early childhood education on a level higher than NQF Level Five. Ms Yeni receives the conditional grant of R1000 from the provincial department of education and an additional R250 from the centre as her monthly salary. Ms Mlongo works closely with Ms Yeni. She follows the daily lesson plans for Grade R prepared by Ms Yeni. Ms Zulu follows the daily programme for the junior group displayed in the playroom. Both Ms Mlongo and Ms Zulu have exemplar lesson plans which they have in readiness for reference purposes.

#### ***5.2.2.2 The daily schedule for junior group***

06:00 - 08:00	Welcome
08:00 - 08:10	Breakfast/Inspection
08:10 - 08:15	Toilet Routine
08:15 - 08:45	Morning Ring
08:45 - 09:45	Indoor Free Play
09:45 - 10:00	Toilet and Snack
10:00 - 10:45	Outdoor Free Play
10:45 - 11:00	Tidy Up and Rest
11:00 - 11:45	Indoor Free Play
11:45 - 12:00	Tidy Up and Toilet/Wash Routine.
12:00 - 12:15	Story Ring
12:15 - 12:45	Lunch
12:45 - 16:00	Aftercare

#### ***5.2.2.3 A typical day for junior group***

The children arrive at the centre with their parents, guardians or siblings, between 7:00 and 7:45, and are welcomed (in isiZulu) by Ms Zulu, their group teacher. Ms Zama is at the centre at 6:00 each week day for those children who arrive earlier than 7:00. During the arrival session, the children are inspected by Ms Zulu. Breakfast, which is mealie-meal porridge with milk and sugar, is served between 8:00 and 8:15. This is followed



by the first toilet routine for the day. The children return to home base and join Ms Zulu for the morning ring from 8:15 to 8:45. The children and Ms Zulu discuss (in isiZulu) the weather, days of the week, sing songs, and recite rhymes (some in English). From 8:45 to 9:45, the children engage in indoor free play supervised by Ms Zulu. At 9:45, the children help to tidy up, visit the toilet and return to home base for snack time. They bring their own snacks from home. These include milk, chips, fruit juice, sandwiches with cheese, and polony. From 10:00 to 10:45, the children engage in outdoor free play supervised by Ms Zulu. The outdoor free play area has a sand pit (without accessories/sand pit toys), a jungle gym, a slide and a few old cars. Children return to home base at 10:45 and calm down. They sing a few songs, in English and isiZulu. From 11:00 to 11:45, the children play indoors supervised by Ms Zulu. This is once more followed by tidy up and toilet/wash routine. Story ring is at 12:00. At 12:15, lunch is served. The lunch is provided by the centre and the menu includes samp and beans, cabbage and rice, beans and rice, canned fish and rice or chicken/beef/mutton stew prepared by the cook, Ms Zama. The vegetables from the vegetable garden at the centre are used in the preparation of meals. Aftercare facilities are available from 12:15 until 16:00.

#### ***5.2.2.4 The daily schedule for middle group***

06:00 - 07:45	Welcome/Inspection
07:45 - 08:00	Breakfast
08:00 - 08:30	Greeting and discussion ring
08:30 - 08:45	Toilet Routine
08:45 - 09:30	Music/Movement Ring
09:30 - 10:00	Small Group Time
10:00 - 10:30	Tidy Up, Toilet, Snack
10:30 - 11:10	Outdoor Free Play
11:10 - 11:25	Tidy Up and Toilet
11:25 - 11:40	Story Time
11:40 - 12:15	Indoor Free Play
12:15 - 12:30	Toilets
12:30 - 13:00	Lunch
13:00 - 14:00	Rest or Departure

#### ***5.2.2.5 A typical day for middle group***

The children arrive at the centre between 7:00 and 7:45 and are welcomed, in English and isiZulu, by Ms Mlongo, their group teacher. The children who arrive before 7:00 are supervised by Ms Zuma. On arrival, Ms Mlongo physically inspects the children. The children then settle down with a toy, a puzzle or a library book to keep them occupied. The middle group shares home base with the Grade R group and follow the Grade R daily programme. The children are served breakfast from 7:45 to 8:00. Breakfast is followed by a greeting and discussion ring. At 8:30, the children visit the toilet and return to home base for a music/movement ring. The children sing songs, mainly in isiZulu. From 9:30 to 10:00, is small group time. The children are placed in social groups. They engage in Grade R skills development activities such as colouring in and cutting and pasting activities directed by Ms Yeni. The children then help to tidy up, then visit the toilet and return to home base for a snack. From 10:30 to 11:10, the children engage in outdoor free play. The outdoor free play area has a sand pit (without accessories), a jungle gym, a slide, and a few old tyres. They return to home base for story time, a story told or read by Ms Yeni or Ms Mlongo. At 11:40, the children engage in indoor free play which ends at 12:15. They tidy up. This is followed by a visit to the toilet and lunch which is provided by the centre. Between 13:00 and 14:00, the children either rest or depart with their parents/guardians or siblings.

### **5.2.3 Zamani Crèche**

#### ***5.2.3.1 An overview of Zamani Crèche***

Zamani Crèche is located in the rural area, Malangini, a rural area approximately 60 km south of the coastal city of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Most of the population is of low socio-economic status. Access to the centre is a dirt road, fifty metres away from the main road. The centre was established in 1985 to provide care for children. It occupied a prefabrication donated by the Sezela/Scottburgh Rotary Club. The context of early childhood provision at that time was one of inequality. The apartheid government has provided virtually no early childhood services for Black children. The present building, built in 1992, has brick walls and no

ceiling with a zinc roof. The building has an office (twelve square metres) which Ms Zulu, the principal-cum-teacher occupies; a kitchenette (ten square metres), and a playroom (fifty five square metres) which caters for the thirty-one children, twenty-two children in the Grade R group and nine children in the three and four age groups. The floors in all three rooms are cemented and certain areas of the playroom (morning ring and library areas) have moveable carpets. The playroom has four small windows on the west side of the building. The playroom therefore has little natural light. On cloudy days, without electricity, the playroom is gloomy and dark. The building is poorly maintained; for example, it has not been painted since it was built and four broken window panes have not been replaced. The playroom is divided into different areas: a morning ring area, carpeted and with chairs donated by St Anne's Convent (Umzinto) and the Sezela/Scottburgh Rotary Club; a book area; a fantasy area; a creative area with four tables and sixteen chairs; a block area and a manipulative area. The puzzles and beads are supplied by the Department of Education and the tables and chairs were purchased by the parent committee. In 1999, the centre received paints, crayons, story books and drawing paper from St Anne's Convent (Umzinto).

The children's outdoor playground, approximately 80 square metres, is poorly maintained without any play equipment. The children have four balls, a set of skittles, and six car tyres which they play with during outdoor free play. On the southern section of the playground, there are two toilets built from tin with a pit latrine system. The outdoor area is maintained by parents on a voluntary basis. The centre has a vegetable garden. The centres employed a gardener to plant vegetables, such as lettuce and cabbages. Some vegetables are used for the children's meals. The balance of the vegetables are sold to the local residents. Ms S Khumalo prepares breakfast and lunch for the children on a daily basis. The meals are subsidised by the Department of Social Welfare. The kitchenette has just the essential items: a small table, a cupboard and a few utensils. The centre has no tap water, so tank water is used. In addition to poor and unequal facilities and resources in this rural context, the area is characterised by high levels of crime and poverty. Water is supplied from the old tank, approximately 50 metres away from the building. The new tank which was positioned just outside the building was stolen only a few days after being purchased.

Ms N Mbambo, the supervisor/teacher at Zamani Crèche, has completed Grade Ten and level four in early childhood development in terms of the national qualifications framework. She stated that she is very happy with the teaching skills she has acquired and this makes her feel more confident to work with young children. Ms Mbambo receives the conditional grant of R1000 from the provincial department of education and an additional R200 from the centre as her monthly salary.

As in Montessori schools, the children at Zamani Crèche are placed in a mixed-age-group. This is not out of choice, as in the Montessori programmes, but as a result of Ms Mbambo being the only teacher/supervisor at the centre. In Montessorian terms, such an environment provides infinite opportunities for role playing within a real setting with real activities.

The children in early childhood centres such as in Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche are a marginalised group who have significantly lower incomes, lower rates of life expectancy, a higher incidence of health problems, including high maternal mortality rates, and who are poorly nourished (UNESCO, 2010). These are children who could gain most from efforts to improve their literacy from being enrolled in schools. These children, however, are often the ones who lose out most in terms of accessing education programmes. Marginalised children not only receive fewer years of education, they also tend to receive a lower quality learning experience through having less qualified and inexperienced teachers, attending schools with inferior infrastructure and having fewer learning materials.

### ***5.2.3.2 The daily schedule for three to five year olds***

09:00 - 09:30	Arrival and Individual Choice: Early arrival activities
09:30 - 09:40	Whole group: Greeting Activity
09:40 - 10:00	Breakfast
10:00 - 10:30	Small Group Activity
10:30 - 10:50	Individual Choice: Indoor Free Choice
10:50 - 11:00	Whole Group: Toilet and Snack
11:00 - 11:30	Whole Group: Music/Movement
11:30 - 11:50	Individual Choice: Outdoor Free Play
11:50 - 12:00	Whole Group: Toilet
12:00 - 12:30	Lunch
12:30 - 12:45	Story
12:45 - 13:45	Rest
13:45 - 13:00	Departure

### ***5.2.3.3 A typical day for three to five year olds***

The children arrive at the centre between 9:00 and 9:15 are welcomed in isiZulu by Ms Mbambo. Supervised by Ms Khumalo, they settle down with a toy to keep them occupied while Ms Mbambo attends to administrative duties. She begins the greeting and discussion ring at 9:15, which ends at 9:45. The children visit the toilet and return to home base for a music/movement ring. The children sing songs, mainly in isiZulu. From 9:30 to 10:00 is small group time for the Grade R group. They engage in skills development activities such as colouring in and cutting and pasting activities directed by Ms Mbambo. The children below Grade R all engage in indoor free play. At 10:00, the children help to tidy up, then visit the toilet and return to the playroom for a snack. From 10:30 to 11:10, the children engage in outdoor free play. The outdoor free play area has a sand pit (without accessories), a jungle gym, a slide, and a few old tyres. They return to home base for story time, a story told or read by Ms Mbambo. At 11:40, the children engage in indoor free play which ends at 12:15. They tidy up. This is followed by a visit to the toilet and lunch, which is provided by the centre. Between 13:00 and 14:00, the children either rest or depart with their parents/guardians or siblings.

### **5.3 Understanding the contexts of the Early Childhood Centres**

This chapter has provided a useful base to understand the early childhood curriculum within three diverse social contexts. It has offered a valuable lens to reflect critically on curriculum for three and four year olds as it is conceptualised, enacted and experienced by teachers at the three early childhood centres. I described the realities of the three early childhood centres as organisations within specific social, political and economic environments, providing the quest to understand the complexities of each centre. Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche, in a formal urban area, an informal urban area and a rural area respectively, articulate the contractions of apartheid in KwaZulu-Natal. The challenges in areas of finances, facilities and human resources at Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche, are obviously related to the effects of inequalities, divisions, and fragmentation from the apartheid past, a major challenge for the early childhood centres.

In this chapter, I provided the immediate and broader social, political and economic contexts to understanding the curricula as they are espoused, enacted and experienced at the three early childhood centres. By foregrounding the daily schedules and descriptions of typical days for children aged three and four years in three early childhood education centres, I have highlighted dominant practices useful for critical reflection. I have unravelled the technical practice, over-reliance on and privileging of child development paradigms and academic school knowledge. This indicates the hegemony of the psychologically driven models and school readiness. This is embedded in the construction of childhood from the Western cultural experience through the South African national education policy frameworks that inscribe power at the three early childhood centres. The daily schedules have shown that the activities within the three early childhood centres are categorised in the broad components of routine activities, free play and teacher-directed activities.

This chapter has accentuated that within each of these three broad components, the curriculum intention in each centre differs, depending upon its location, management and resources. For example, Starfish Pre-Primary School is influenced by urban rationality, implying that the influence of finance, resources, parental expectations, recognition, marketing and other urban ways of life impacts on what happens in this

early childhood centre. It is clear that Starfish Pre-Primary School in this urban setting offers more diverse activities for children in the junior and middle groups that are intended to meet the needs of formal schooling and beyond. The history of power relationships advantages the centre. In contrast, in Zamani Crèche, located away from an urban setting, such advantages are far from reality and have fewer curriculum intentions for children younger than Grade R.

Nevertheless, the thread that runs through the three early childhood centres is the focus on linking their activities closely to that of the formal school. The management of the early childhood centres, depending upon who they are and what they wish to privilege, also play dominant roles in the curricula that are enacted. The kinds of activities that the children are exposed to differ from centre to centre. For example, at Siyazama Centre, Ms Yeni the principal/teacher, who is a qualified Grade R teacher, plans activities in line with formal school activities focused on preparing the children for Grade 1, while at Zamani Centre Ms Mbambo, principal/teacher, also qualified as a Grade R teacher, attempts to include childhood development activities within the planned activities for children below Grade R. The availability of resources at each of these centres also plays a significant role on the kinds of activities that are offered to the children.

A more detailed elaboration of the analysis of curriculum at these centres is presented in the next chapter, in which I use critical pedagogy as a useful tool to highlight and problematise dominant beliefs in curriculum and bring silenced issues to the forefront.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **UNCOVERING CURRICULA AT THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

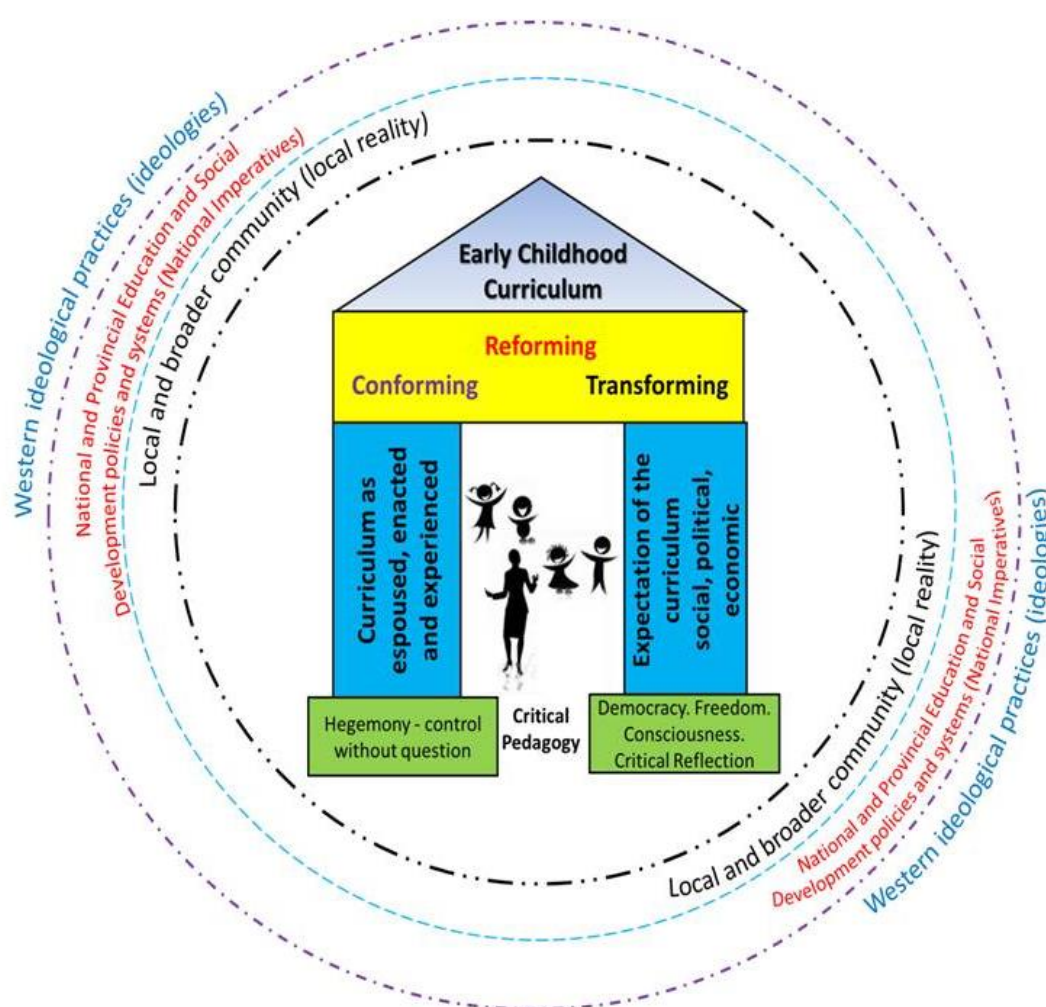
In Chapter Five, I described the context in which the three selected early childhood centres, Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre, and Zamani Crèche operate. The curriculum for children aged three and four years in three early childhood centres was influenced by various contextual variables within and beyond the centres. An understanding of the contextual variables is fundamental to exploring the enacted and experienced curriculum for children aged three and four years at these centres. In this chapter, I use critical pedagogy as the framework to explore how the curriculum for three and four year olds at three early childhood centres is enacted and experienced by teachers. The chapter signifies the complexity of the enacted and experienced curricula in the three early childhood centres. The curriculum practice and the social and political contexts of the playrooms and the early childhood centres are examined in relation to the regulated curriculum. Using critical pedagogy, I unravel how the teacher makes choices for the type of enacted curriculum, that is planning and selecting the curriculum, content and pedagogical strategies, and how the curriculum was experienced, or what actually happened when the teacher and the children were together. I question how the teachers' choices relate to the espoused curriculum (officially documented or state approved curriculum).

#### **6.2 The enacted and experienced curricula**

The early childhood centres are in continuous interaction with socio-political constructs that characterise the larger society. I show how the curriculum for three and four year olds is shaped by levels of socio-political constructs in Figure 6.1 below: the innermost circle represents the local and broader community within which the early childhood centre is situated; the subsequent outer circles represent National and Provincial Education and Social Development policies and systems, as well as Western ideological practices. Each level relates to how the curriculum for three and four year olds is



espoused, enacted and experienced. This claim is significant to studies in over a decade of critical scholarship and debate (Kessler & Swadener, 1992; Mallory & New, 1994; Cannella, 1997; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999; Soto, 2000; Mac Naughton, 2003; Mac Naughton, 2005; Hatch, 2007) in the early childhood sector, that make reference to the demands placed and control exerted on the early childhood enacted and experienced curriculum, through the espoused curriculum. Such demands are embedded in dominant, conservative philosophy and the goals of early childhood education such as psychological and child development knowledge and school readiness, representing Western ideological and hegemonic practices, as in Figure 6.1. The benefits of critical pedagogy are that it provides tools to identify, critique and contest such practices.



**Figure 6.1: Levels of Socio-Political Constructs**

Ideological and hegemonic practices are reflected in the way in which early childhood curriculum content is selected, planned and organised, as well as in the arrangement of the playroom and other confined areas. When teachers and children are the slaves to a belief system which is an integral part of a dominant culture, it is likely that there is congruency between the espoused (curriculum), the enacted (selected content and pedagogy) and the experienced curriculum, to maintain the *status quo* and support the privileged and powerful. This is related to the epistemological position that conceptualises knowledge as product and a disinterested search for universal truth. The concept of teacher in the enacted and experienced curriculum is that of a delivery agent of knowledge, with the child as the passive receiver. Controls and cultures are in place to ensure that teachers know what is expected of them and how desired behaviours are expected to be enforced through sanctions applied within the centres. The demands are controlled by economic and social benefits for those in privileged and powerful positions, depicted by levels in Figure 6.1; in so doing, they maintain unequal conditions.

Ideology and hegemonic practices are connected to the broader economic and social system that contribute to the development of hegemonic relations and regimes. Such practices are co-constructed by individuals and the social classes, groups and institutions of which they are a part. The reality is that South Africans, the Departments of Education and Social Welfare and the three early childhood centres included, legitimately claim oppression from apartheid domination while simultaneously oppressing others. In this study, the oppressed are the early childhood teachers and the children. This study signifies the relationship between education and the achievement of national economic and political goals, thus reproducing ideology and hegemony. The Departments of Education and Social Welfare dominate the early childhood centres in order to achieve hegemonic status. The Departments use coercion through the policy frameworks which the early childhood centres accept. In the three early childhood centres, both forms of power dominate as allied practices that stipulate a moral dimension.

Using a critical pedagogy analytical framework, this chapter presents arguments that support the notion that the early childhood curriculum within the South African political history is largely driven by head start and competitive rationality, underpinned

by child development theories and behaviourist thinking about the child, as well as cultural transmission theory. The purpose of the enacted curriculum is to a large extent to enable children to gain knowledge and skills that will set the foundations for their formal schooling at the expense of social development. There are variations to this claim that are dependent upon the location of the early childhood centres within social and political contexts and the resources available.

### **6.2.1 Educational philosophy and aims that informed curriculum**

The enacted and experienced curricula in each of the three centres are matters of philosophy and practice. These are influenced by issues of broader social and cultural values about what role education should play in society and how that role is best practised. This is indicated by the innermost circle in Figure 6.1, representing the local and broader community within which the early childhood centre is situated. A critical reflection of the role of early childhood education in society and its equity implication helps to develop an explicit position on the purpose of early childhood education in society. In the section that follows, I focus specifically on educational philosophy and its aims in relation to the enacted and experienced curriculum for three and four year olds at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche.

The teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre embraced academic knowledge as a critical building block for the four year olds, attempting to prepare the children for formal schooling. The hegemonic relationship of ‘leading’ by the Department of Education and the Management of Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre, form allies in controlling the teachers at these centres. This is an instance of institutionalised power, product and process of politics that controls the enacted and experienced curricula. The teachers actively subscribe to values and objectives of the Department of Education and the Management of Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre, the dominant class, by operating within a conforming position to reproduce the desired social values, knowledge and skills required to achieve the national economic and political goals. From this perspective, knowledge is not questioned, analysed or negotiated by the teachers. Instead, it is accepted as fact and has to be managed and mastered.

By underpinning academic knowledge as the knowledge that is required, the status of school readiness knowledge was privileged and made it dictate values and principles that formed the foundation for curriculum at the centres. This is evident in the priority given to the Grade R programmes (DoE, 1995; DoE, 2001a; Clasquin-Johnson, 2007), which focus on the five year olds with little attention to children younger than five years. The Grade R curriculum (Department of Basic Education, 2002) forms part of the broader goal, a national imperative (Figure 6.1), of improving the quality of early childhood for learners in the foundation phase (Grade 1-3). While the Grade R curriculum is geared towards preparing the child for formal schooling, the Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services (Department of Social Development, 2006) and NELDS (Department of Basic Education, 2009), focus on appropriate developmental opportunities, another dominant social ideology. The Grade R curriculum for the middle groups in both Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre was the curriculum that was followed. The teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre theoretically supported a holistic development of the child in terms of what the Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services (Department of Social Development, 2006) suggest; however, the actual curriculum as experienced through the daily programme did not reflect this intention. The curriculum for children in the middle groups focused predominantly on preparing the child for formal schooling.

Preparing the child for formal schooling was so deeply embedded in the programmes that the teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche did not refer to other curriculum-related documents. They were not aware of NELDS. The teachers agreed that early childhood education should achieve the national goals: acquiring concepts, skills and attitudes that lay the foundation for lifelong learning, as outlined in the Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services (Department of Social Development, 2006). They accepted the aim of the early childhood curriculum as facilitating the social, emotional, physical, intellectual and cultural development of children; however, in practise, they placed greater emphasis on preparing the children for formal schooling. For example, the mission of Starfish Pre-Primary School is to use a child-centred approach to early childhood education directed towards the realisation of the individual potential of each child and to ensure optimal social, emotional, physical and academic development of the children (Chapter Five).

However, the curriculum for the middle group focused largely on preparing the children for Grade R. The enacted and experienced curriculum focused predominantly on school readiness, with particular areas for the children to excel in numeracy, literacy and life skills, with little consideration of the social purposes of early childhood education.

This was made clear by the junior group and middle group teachers, Ms Bengu and Ms Naidoo respectively, at Starfish Pre-Primary School, as Ms Naidoo indicated:

We used every opportunity to make the children learn and believe that this is an important step towards reading and writing.

School readiness was integrated through the daily programme for the middle group where two of the four hours were spent on teacher-directed activities (greeting ring - 30 minutes; skills development activity - 30 minutes; music/life skills development/discussion on theme/drama/ show and tell - 30 minutes, and story/language development - 30 minutes). The purpose of such activities was to consolidate and impart new school readiness knowledge and for children to participate in skill development activities. In addition, attempts were made by the teachers during the two hours allocated to free play to direct the children toward activities, such as alphabet puzzles, intended to develop the children cognitively.

Although the curriculum for the children younger than five years at Zamani Crèche did not embrace such an academic focus, the teachers at all three centres strongly believed that programmes should provide fundamental knowledge required for the transition between pre-school and formal school. By doing so, unequal power and authority towards the school readiness as part of early childhood education is maintained. The teachers considered economic and social benefits important, losing sight of the oppression experienced by themselves and the children. The curricula for the middle groups at both Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre were based on the Revised National Curriculum Statement (Department of Basic Education, 2002) for Grade R, raising the status of its knowledge and giving it a prominent place on the political agenda in South Africa. The teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche were content to use the Grade R contained in the Revised National Curriculum Statement (Department of Basic Education, 2002). The

principals at the three centres were expected to manage the programmes for Grade R and the pre-primary phase (junior and middle groups), and were accountable to the Department of Social Development and to their communities. The teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre based their curricula on the Revised National Curriculum Statement for Grade R (Department of Basic Education, 2002) for the pre-primary phase (junior and middle groups), and regarded it as a survival kit for the pre-primary phase.

The junior and middle group teachers at both centres depended on Grade R teachers for curriculum support and direction. The teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary indicated that they used a “tailored down version” of the Grade R curriculum for the children in the middle and junior groups. Ms Naidoo, the middle group teacher at Starfish Pre-Primary, claimed:

We implement a ‘watered-down’ version of the Grade R curriculum and piggy back off the Grade R teachers’ experience. We have always based the activities for the middle and junior groups on the Grade R curriculum.

At Siyazama Educare Centre, the Grade R curriculum was used for the middle group. Ms Mlongo, the middle group teacher at Siyazama Educare Centre, stated:

My group joins the children in Grade R. We share the same classroom and do the same work. The reason for this is that we do not have an extra room for the middle group to use. The children will also learn the work completed by the Grade R group. Ms Yeni is also qualified and attends workshops.

Ms Mlongo worked as an assistant to the principal, Ms Yeni, who organised the learning areas, planned, prepared and taught the teacher-directed activities to the Grade R group, which the middle group also completed. Ms Mlongo indicated that she felt more confident when she worked with Ms Yeni. Ms Mlongo sees herself as “nurturer-caretaker” and Ms Yeni as the “expert”, embedding the hierarchically imposed relationship.

In getting the children ready for formal schooling, the middle group teachers' voices were marginalised, eroding opportunities for personal values and creative approaches, as envisaged in NELDS, to be integrated into curriculum. The teachers were involved in a passive and reactive role, taking a conformist position to curriculum. This is linked to a social utility perception where early childhood education is seen to effectively prepare children for school, focused at providing them with a head start, an early start or the best start in their schooling. At both Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre, the top-down pressure from national, institutional and community levels on school readiness for children in the middle group was politically motivated, and a harsh form of rationalisation devoid of an evolving socially constructed curriculum existed.

At Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre, the transmissive curriculum enacted for children in the middle group level was intended to prepare them for Grade R. The teachers, like staff in other similar early childhood centres (OECD, 2008), continued their passive/reactive roles by claiming that they were only doing what the curriculum dictated. The increasing focus on school readiness accelerated childhood and was aimed at achieving the learning outcomes. The three year foundation for learning strategy (DoE, 2008) is a clear example of such acceleration with a focus on improving languages and mathematics. Teachers were made constantly made aware that unless basic skills (school readiness) were acquired, many children would find the increased number of learning programmes after Grade 3 a challenge (OECD, 2008). This influenced what was taught at the early childhood centres and became normalised during the teacher-directed activities. The notion was that a watered-down version of the Grade R curriculum (curriculum for the middle group at Starfish Pre-Primary School), or a repetition of the Grade R activities (curriculum for the middle group at Siyazama Educare Centre), would address this challenge. The government policy of raising standards has led to an over-concentration on school readiness. The enacted and experienced curriculum is guided by behaviourist principles and scientific theory, with a focus on readiness activities as preparation for formal schooling and ultimately the desire to build a more modern, efficient and effective workplace. With such pressure, the teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche operated within a conforming approach to curriculum. The education philosophy and curriculum aims of early childhood curriculum for the middle group are

compromised by external demands of conformity to formal school education, especially in urban and semi-urban areas, driven largely by head start and competitive rationality.

The head start and competitive rationality seems to emerge at various levels – the state through its demands and policy statements; the early childhood centres through its teacher-directed activities, and from parents who contribute to the early childhood learning programme in ways that support the head start and competitive rationality, purposefully directed to give the children educational exposure in preparation for formal schooling. The head start and competitive rationality appears to be more prevalent in urban settings than in rural settings. A major reason for this is perhaps that it is largely driven by competitiveness as a core feature of modern, urban and Western lifestyle that is reflective of a conforming society, a society conforming to globalisation that privileges competitive edge, choice and opportunity. In a capitalistic driven society, competitive edge is vital. Hence children in Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre are exposed to a competitive environment that promotes and rewards competition.

In the Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre, children are exposed to broader ideological goals. The ideologically intended curriculum is also reinforced through hegemony of the psychologically driven models and school readiness. These Western ideologies have influenced the development of South African national policy frameworks which inscribe power and privilege to the three early childhood centres. Such hegemony is largely as a result of mixed messages of preparing the child for formal education by closely aligning the intended curriculum offered at the early childhood centres with that of school education. At the same time, it espouses reforming agendas through its development programme. It then seems clear that the early childhood centres and their philosophical aims promote an educational experience that is complex, with expectations, and driven by an intersection of Western and developmental agendas, the results of which are highly predictable and quite evident in the poor outcomes of school education within South Africa.



### **6.2.2 Curriculum goals**

Curriculum goals are based on philosophy and practice on the role of early childhood education in society. The goals provide a reference point for decisions and actions assisting to prioritise activities for young children. Curriculum goals influence the teachers to explore intended priorities in the early childhood centre. Teachers are required to bring the selected philosophy of early childhood education alive in their work. The goals offer a basis from which to pursue other key curriculum decisions driven politically. The position from which the teacher views knowledge, influences the enacted and experienced curriculum.

The curriculum goals of Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre suggest that children were directed towards achieving in school readiness or school-related subject areas and excelling through planned and structured experiences in numeracy, literacy and life skills, as specified in the National Curriculum Statement. The values around academic success of children were more important at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre than Zamani Crèche, and these influenced the identities of both centres. The political nature of the curriculum goals which was to achieve in school readiness or school-related subject areas, was agreed upon by the centres. Achievement in school readiness was influenced by the collective support provided by Western ideology and perpetuated by the South African government and primary schools. The collective influence compelled the early childhood centres to provide teachers with guided schedules, appropriately planned content, and evaluation strategies.

The teachers accepted the pre-specified curriculum goals that indicated the knowledge and skills they had to pass on to children. In the case of Starfish Pre-Primary School, the management had decided on academic goals. The teachers were required to select and prepare activities, assisted by Grade R teachers and reviewed by the principal fortnightly or when there was a need. The absence of such monitoring at Siyazama Educare Centre owing to staff shortages (see 6.2.3 Curriculum Planning), suggests that Starfish Pre-Primary School, located in an élite, urban area, has more demands and control exerted to promote an academic orientated curriculum for fostering readiness for Grade 1. This centre is vulnerable to political influences such as developmentally

appropriate practice and school readiness affecting the curriculum, and an increase in public pressure for accountability. The academic goals perceived as major goals focused on the mastery of basic skills. The enacted and experienced curriculum took the form of teacher-directed activities that focused on developing pre-writing and pre-reading skills, academic knowledge and task completion. This aligned to national requirements for Grade R. For example, Ms Naidoo, the middle group teacher at Starfish Pre-Primary, mentioned:

At our centre activities are based on an alphabet selected for the week. The alphabet is integrated with show and tell activities, pre-writing skills (writing and tracing letters), and worksheets. Show and tell gives the children opportunities to express themselves verbally and develop skills needed for Grade R.

While the middle group teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre focused on academic goals, the teachers for the junior groups affirmed social and personal goals. They also concurred that the development of these goals fostered self-confidence, especially during routine sessions, in preparation for academic learning. Ms Zulu, the junior group teacher at Siyazama Educare Centre, stated:

Routine helps the children to learn good habits important for school.

The primary goals were enforced by the repertoire of behaviours and attitudes demanded by the teachers as appropriate to children in school. These goals had a direct social utility towards preparing the children for Grade R and formal school. The activities that promoted academic goals, such as learning the letters of the alphabet, pre-writing skills (writing patterns, colouring, tracing letters, and completing worksheets), concentrated on preparing children for Grade R and formal school. Such demands forced the teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre to work within the technically orientated early childhood curriculum. The goals were specified prior to meeting the children and were based on knowledge that the children were expected to know. These were indicated in behavioural terms to allow the teachers to observe and evaluate the children. Each centre had to maintain an image that included school readiness programmes to promote competitive behaviour. The activities that were reported to parents and the community had to reflect school

readiness in order to showcase these centres as excellent sites, a competitive feature of early childhood centres.

The curriculum goals for the junior groups were based on a child-centred approach. It focused on encouraging the children to talk, listen and develop the children's confidence and to develop positive relationships with their peers. Work simplification was reflected in activities allocated to the junior group teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre. For instance, the focus on routine activities in the junior group was intended to prepare the children to cope with academic activities when they progressed to the middle group, which in turn would prepare them for the activities in Grade R. The children in the junior group acquired knowledge of roles, sequences of action and language for events, and this shaped their self-confidence through independence. The middle group teachers focused on instruction, guidance and support to master the basic literacy and numeracy skills believed to be necessary for Grade R and ultimately, for a good start to later academic achievement.

Curriculum goals, from observations and the teachers' perspective, are largely conformist in nature. The teachers conform to the early childhood centre's competitive edge in promoting a curriculum that concentrates on school readiness. Conformist tendencies are more evident at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre, which are located in urban settings, than at Zamani Crèche in the rural setting. The difference in the activities provided at these locations reinforces power and authority towards a dominant, conservative philosophy of early childhood education. At Siyazama Early Childhood Centre, children are given puzzles to occupy themselves, while at Zamani Crèche, such activities are not made available. The children at Zamani Crèche are not directed to any kinds of activities; instead, they choose what they want to engage with. The kind of activities that the children are allowed to engage with appears to be related to the curriculum goals of the early childhood centres. These curriculum goals are largely influenced by the centre's settings or location. For instance, the urban based centres are seen to be more aligned to the urban influence of Western hegemony, and rural centres are seen to be influenced by the local realities of the community and its society.

### 6.2.3 Curriculum planning

The way in which curriculum planning occurs in early childhood centres is based on the curriculum goals that have been prioritised. The early childhood teachers shape their resources into a plan for their work with the children, according to an epistemological view on knowledge and the role of education in society. For example, a conforming approach to early childhood curriculum planning connects with a technical approach. In a child-centred, practical approach to curriculum planning linked to a reforming approach, the individual teacher's curriculum planning will be based on his/her developmental observation and assessment of the child.

A conforming approach to curriculum planning was observed at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche. The teachers in all three centres followed fixed, structured daily, weekly and annual schedules. The daily schedules (programmes) indicated activities for a day and when those activities should occur, starting from the time the children arrived at the early childhood centres until they departed from the centres. The daily schedules for junior and middle groups at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre and for the children three to six years at Zamani Crèche are outlined in Chapter Five.

At Starfish Pre-Primary School, ring preparations such as morning ring, life skills, music ring and story-telling, were completed by the teachers on a daily or weekly basis and were rigorously reviewed by the principal fortnightly. The principals ensured that the activities at Starfish Pre-Primary School were based on written planning. The teachers' plans included activities that were aligned to the daily programmes. The teachers attended workshops (music ring, creative activities and other early childhood related topics) presented by the teacher union, which the teachers were expected to use when planning and preparing lessons. Similar supervision and support were not observed at Siyazama Educare Centre. The principal, Ms Yeni, at Siyazama Educare Centre, was mindful of supervision and support that need to be provided to staff in support:

I am aware that the teachers need more support but please realise that I am the supervisor, the Grade R teacher and the clerk at this centre. I am called to meetings

very often. When I am unable to be in class I have a contract teacher to take my Grade R class. I don't have the time to supervise the teachers. I did orientate Ms Zulu when she moved from being with the toddlers to the three to four year group. But since then there has been no time for further supervision. I know that this is not right. But the government needs to help us.

Ms Yeni acknowledged the need to use planning to continually improve the teaching and learning environment in order to raise standards and improve the quality of early childhood education at the centre. She highlighted the need for additional support by the Department of Education for teachers and children in groups below Grade R. Ms Yeni indicated that the lack of national funding provision, particularly in areas of educator qualification and resources, had created a situation where the focus in the junior group was more on care.

The teachers at Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche concluded that planning was affected by limited funding and staffing shortages. The teachers at both centres were concerned that these challenges would stifle the children's progress, which was not a concern at Starfish Pre-Primary School. The variation in early childhood education experiences for the children at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche based on urban/rurality and socio-economic position or location, would make it inevitable that, by the time children would be ready to begin Grade R, the differences would likely lead to long-term education disparities that would be well embedded.

Another area of curriculum planning at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche, involved themes. Themes were planned in advance and aligned to events or activities, with intended outcomes, that were completed on specific day. In all three centres, annual schedules were linked to themes or areas of content and activities to specific times of the year. Themes were arranged in particular order, from the beginning to the end of the programme year which the teachers believed were a meaningful framework for learning and which formed the foundation for academic success. At the Starfish Pre-Primary School, parents were informed to notify the teachers of birthday rings at least a week in advance and confirmed dates were recorded

in the teachers' diaries. The teachers planned for these rings. Birthday rings were not held at Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche.

Linked to curriculum planning was the organisation of the learning areas and planned activities with appropriate materials, outlined in Chapter Five. At Starfish Pre-Primary School, the learning areas were planned and activities were completed by the teachers. At Siyazama Educare Centre, the principal, Ms Yeni, used the materials available to organise the learning areas, and to plan and prepare the teacher-directed activities for Grade R. The middle group also completed these activities. The middle group teacher, Ms Mlongo, assisted Ms Yeni. The junior group teacher, Ms Zulu, planned and organised the learning areas and selected the activities. The teachers at the three centres planned and prepare for ring activities for the following day after the children were dismissed. The teachers interpreted planning as thinking about and preparing for the activities before the activities and when the children are not around.

At Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare, the enacted curriculum (content and pedagogical strategies selected, planned and organised by teachers) links directly with a technical approach to curriculum planning based on a conforming model. Once again, the influence of formal school education dictated planning requirements. Creating a work plan, scheduling activity times and reporting are central to formal schooling. These are technical exercises based on the over-reliance on and privileging of Western ideological practices. The early childhood centres conform to the requirements of formal schooling, and therefore the affiliation between the early childhood centres and formal school education makes the early childhood centres vulnerable to the political factors that influence the curriculum at formal school level.

#### **6.2.4 Curriculum content**

The way in which curriculum was conceived at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche influenced how the content is selected, organised, and managed. At Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre, the selection of the curriculum content for junior and middle groups was based on the Revised National Curriculum Statement (Department of Basic Education, 2002) and on the Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services (Department of Social

Development, 2006). For example, at Starfish Pre-Primary School, activities for the middle group were closely monitored by the principal, while at Siyazama Educare Centre, these were planned and prepared by the principal/Grade R teacher. At Zamani Crèche, the activities for the children between two and five years concentrated only on routine activities and free play.

The curriculum content for junior and middle groups at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare followed a rigid structure which catered for the children progressing from junior to middle groups in preparation for Grade R and formal schooling. The teachers agreed that it progressed from a process approach with a focus on nurturing foundational competencies (personal and social) to a knowledge-based approach predominantly directed at fostering foundational knowledge and skills in preparation for formal schooling. The programmes for the junior groups at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre and for the children below Grade R at Zamani Crèche were inclined towards the process approach that focused predominantly on developing personal and social skills. The curriculum content for the middle groups at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre consisted of knowledge where learning of factual knowledge and literacy, numeracy and life skills aligned to the Revised National Curriculum Statement (Department of Basic Education, 2002) for Grade R, were of most importance. Such knowledge and skills were valued by the teachers and perceived as integral in preparing the children for formal schooling and ultimately, the world of work. Ms Naidoo, the middle group teacher at Starfish Pre-Primary, remarked:

We believe that academic knowledge and skills development are important. It prepares the children for Grade R.

At Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre, knowledge was organised into music, art, skills development (such as colouring in and cutting and pasting activities) and creative activities based on a neo-classical curriculum from the Western World. The content was subdivided into units or segments that the children needed to learn. Activities were skill-based and focused on counting, memory or pre-reading skills considered by the teachers, parents and society as the most valued and significant knowledge.

The pre-set curricula offered at the centres were largely fact-based and aligned to the behaviourist and scientific education principles, concentrating predominantly on cognitive tasks. The themes and activities at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre were influenced by Western ideas and concepts that the children needed to learn. These were selected and prepared by the teachers, supported by the Grade R teachers, supervised by the principal and monitored by the parents. For example, one of the outdoor play themes at Starfish Pre-Primary School was Cowboys and Indians, taken from the American West. There was little integration of the curriculum content with the immediate environment, daily living experiences, interactions and relationships, special opportunities, or play. The two urban early childhood centres, Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre, offer curricula based fundamentally on pre-reading and pre-writing activities, largely devoid of local contextual realities, and instead placed major emphasis on building a competitive edge and adopting a capitalistic philosophy. The technical competence at delivering such a pre-set curriculum was a sign of teacher competence conforming to the early childhood centre's competitive edge in promoting a curriculum that is seen as progressing towards school readiness.

At both Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre, the children's interests were not considered as important. The teachers focused on completing the activities as indicated on the daily programme and did not want any disruption to the rigid proceedings. For instance, by integrating the curriculum with daily living experiences and play would appear to be inappropriate and disorderly. An example of such an experience at Starfish Pre-Primary School is the show and tell items that children bring from home that had to be something educational and not a toy. The teachers were instructed by the principal to devote attention to 'formal' education. Another example was the vegetable gardens at both Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche. These gardens operated in isolation and were not integrated as projects within the curricula. Some of the vegetables served in the hot meals were picked from the vegetable gardens within the centres. The vegetable garden at Siyazama Educare Centre was adjacent to the outdoor play area. The vegetables were usually picked by the cook, Ms Zama. In my observation during one of the free play sessions, I noticed a group of children watching curiously, while communicating among themselves, while



the vegetables from garden were being picked for their meals on the following day. The children's conversations (in isiZulu) related to the vegetables that were picked. They were happy to see the vegetable from their garden as a source of their food. I discussed this episode with the principal, Ms Yeni, at Siyazama Educare Centre.

I shared this concept with Ms Mbambo at Zamani Crèche, who initially did not want to disrupt her daily programme. This effort to inform the teachers at Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche helped them become change agents, a strategy helpful but not enough to bring about substantial changes in the curriculum. The teachers at both centres questioned theoretical and practical aspects of vegetable production. Ms L Mlongo stated:

Now we enjoy asking questions. It is useful for us. It got us listening to ourselves and thinking about the soil preparation, fertilizers, planting and sowing, plant spacing, watering, weeding, and harvesting. Through questioning we understood that the children can learn a lot about nutrition and health education, and the children can learn gardening skills and about food production... all this just by thinking and questioning ourselves. It is important to listen to the children.

During other times, the responsibilities of the teachers and the activities provided for the children in the three early childhood centres link directly with a technical approach to curriculum planning, based on a conforming model. Knowledge at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche was placed in separate compartments. Work and play were not complementary. The centres not only provided opportunities for learning certain academic knowledge and skills but also minimised opportunities for learning through play and routine. For instance, at Starfish Pre-Primary School, the junior group teacher, Ms Bengu, stressed that the items selected for the show and tell had to be something educational and could not be toys. Toys were not regarded as educational. The children made choices and decisions within limits provided by the centre, and the teachers communicated what was considered to be important and had to be taken seriously by both themselves and the children.

The teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche regarded the teacher-directed activities as more important than free play, while

the routine sessions were observed as essential to support the teacher-directed activities. Further, the compartmentalisation of the programmes into separate sessions suggested that academic knowledge was separate and more important than routine and free play. Knowledge was handed down in the form of learning programmes in numeracy, literacy and life skills for schooling set out in the National Curriculum Statement (Department of Basic Education, 2002). Knowledge considered important was also influenced by the sequencing of activities. The teacher-directed activities were programmed before free play. Children who had not completed their academic tasks during the allocated time in teacher-directed period were required to complete these tasks during free play.

At Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre, decisions on the curriculum practice were made by the principal and Grade R teachers based on the Grade R curriculum, and the middle and junior group teachers were the ultimate implementers. Knowledge was purposefully selected and organised into teacher-directed periods, with children learning what was considered to be ‘intellectually significant’ knowledge from key fields of inquiry in the Western World such as music, art and drama. The content was fact-based and aligned to the behaviourist and scientific education principles concentrating predominantly on cognitive tasks and, to a lesser degree, on other areas of development. The teachers were observed to be technically competent in delivering the pre-set curriculum.

Decisions for content selection were made by the management teams of the three centres based on the National Curriculum Statement (Department of Basic Education, 2002). At Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre, the curriculum content followed a rigid structure that prepared the children to progress from junior to middle groups in preparation for Grade R. The centres proceeded from a process approach to a knowledge-based approach. For children in the junior groups, the process approach emphasised personal and social skills. The selection of the content for the middle groups focused on a knowledge-based approach where learning of factual knowledge was of paramount importance. This was highly valued and was important in preparing the children for formal schooling. The curriculum for the children below Grade R at Zamani Crèche focused on personal and social skills. The teachers found themselves in positions in centres where priorities outlined in the Revised National

Curriculum Statement (Department of Basic Education, 2002) and three year “foundation for learning” strategy (DoE, 2008) demand that they as teachers focus on academic performance, making it difficult for the teachers to be reflective about their work experience and marginalising their voices. The curriculum content focused on preparing the children for their roles as productive individuals of society using knowledge of the Western World. The children are expected to develop knowledge, skills and values that would lead them to be confident, responsible and active citizens, with the intention that they would become informed, enterprising adults in the workplace. This orientation is reinforced in the structure of the fundamental learning areas that are divided into subjects such as society and environment, history, geography and economy and society.

#### **6.2.5 Pedagogical practices**

A day in an early childhood centre is divided into time blocks for different activities grouped as routine, teacher-directed and free play. The daily schedule is one of the ways that curriculum ideas take the form of written planning, indicating the teacher's plan for the regular events of a programme day and when those events should occur, starting from the time the children arrive at the early childhood centre until they leave. In this section, I outline the experienced curricula at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare and Zamani Crèche within the context of each of its broader social and political realities. The curriculum for the junior and middle groups at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare catered for three broad categories of activities: routine activities, teacher-directed activities and free play periods. At Zamani Crèche the children between two and five years engaged only in the routine and free play. The two and five year olds at this centre were accepted to make up the numbers so that the centre could receive the social grant provided by the Department of Social Development.

Lessons were completed as indicated in lesson plans. Each lesson plan specified the activities and the learning outcomes which exist prior to and outside the learning experiences of the children. The children were told what to do without much choice. The success or failure of both the activities and the child was judged on the basis of whether pre-specified changes occur in the behaviour and the children (meeting of

behavioural objectives). In order to meet the behavioural objectives, the children at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare and Zamani Crèche followed set procedures during the routine sessions, teacher-directed activities and free play.

At all three centres, there was a sequence and flow of the activities for the day, from the time the children arrived at the early childhood centres and until they departed. There was a flow in an alternative active-to-quiet-to-active pattern throughout the programme, with periods of routine in between. Songs sung during the transition from one activity to another assisted both the teachers and children in this process. The transition from one activity to the next usually did not last for more than five minutes, although this was a very busy time for both teachers and children. The activities were practised according to time, which was segmented and tightly organised, with its use and flow controlled by the teachers. The activities at Starfish Pre-Primary School were monitored by the principal. Although keeping the periods in more or less the same sequence gave the children a sense of security and trust in the environment because they could predict what would happen next, the daily programmes ensured that all the children conformed to a particular routine based on a behaviourist understanding of the children.

Typical days for junior and middle groups at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre, and for the children three and four years old at Zamani Crèche, are discussed in Chapter Five. In the section that follows, I provide a critical analysis of the curriculum for the junior and middle groups at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare during routine activities, teacher-directed activities and free play periods, and at Zamani Crèche for the children between two and five years during routine activities and free play.

#### ***6.2.5.1 Routine activities***

Routine activities are generally scheduled at a fixed time and include activities such as arrivals and departures, mealtimes, nap times and toileting. Such activities are intended to help children feel secure and give them a sense of having some control over their own experiences, while fulfilling basic needs. In Chapter Five, I provide an overview of routine activities for the children in junior groups (three year olds) and the middle

groups (four year olds) at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre, and for the children aged three to six years at Zamani Crèche.

The routine sessions at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche comprised arrival and opening activity, toileting, snack/lunch, rest and departure time. During the arrival and opening activity, the children at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre, and Zamani Crèche wished their parents/guardians goodbye and were welcomed by their teachers. The children, from observation, were generally happy and showed no signs of insecurity. They placed their bags in the spaces allocated to them and settled down with either individual or group activities. The junior group teacher, Ms Zulu, at Siyazama Educare Centre stated:

The opening activity is an important period. The children and parents/guardians separate from each other and it sets the tone for the rest of the day. This is important in the preparation for the progress into middle group.

The teachers argue that arrival and opening activities of wishing their parents/guardians goodbye and putting their bags in particular places, is a pedagogical strategy that allows the separation between the children's home and the place of learning. This idea of a need for separation seems to permeate the three early childhood centres, in which the taken-for-granted routine and essential preparation for formal learning is promoted actively.

During the toilet routine, the children at all three centres first visited the toilet, and used soap to wash their hands. They dried their hands using their own face towels. Each child had his/her own symbol, and below these the face towels hung. It was a time when the children gained independence not only in toileting themselves but also in mastering activities such as fastening and unfastening buttons, taking off and putting on clothes. In addition, it provided an opportunity for children to acquire good personal habits like washing hands. The children at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre, and Zamani Crèche were not allowed to communicate with their peers. They received their teacher's attention only in cases of need, should this be decided by the teacher. In this example of routine activity, the curriculum intentions focus on two broad areas: healthy living and independence. Healthy living, as part of the life skills

curriculum, is presented to these children through their newly acquired independence in toilet training. Most children had developed a sense of their toilet training in their home-based learning and this learning is reinforced at the early childhood centres through their daily routine activity. It includes health issues. The pedagogy that promotes this kind of learning is located within a pedagogy that promotes learning from familiar to unfamiliar concepts. The communal way in which this happens reinforces the need to do things in a health-conscious way. All children are expected to do this in the same, routine way and they therefore learn within a group. To some extent, this kind of pedagogy, while overtly categorised as routine learning, is in fact a transforming activity, especially within the context of social development that has been privileged as one of the core values treasured in the South African Constitution. The ability and the promotion of a life task such as toileting in a healthy manner, independently by the child, is another important pedagogical strategy. Although this is a routine activity, the “independence” of this learning is useful for their confidence-building learning opportunities. Children need to be exposed to opportunities to demonstrate the capabilities and capacities, and routine activities like this contribute to their self-worth.

At Starfish Pre-Primary School, the children prepared the tables just before snack time. They were encouraged to count the plates, cups and other items required for each table. By integrating mathematics into the activity, the children learned the everyday uses of mathematics. The servers then led the other children in prayer, which was selected by the server, who thereafter served the snacks to the children. The children were encouraged to have the food that was served unless they were allergic to it. Towards the end of the snack period, the servers excused themselves from the tables to clear and wipe the tables. At Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche, the children were seated on the floor during their meals as there were insufficient tables to accommodate all the children. After prayer, the children either had the sandwiches that were prepared by the centre or the snacks brought from home. The children were able to open their own containers, food packets and un-wrap their sandwiches on their own. They disposed of their unwanted wrappings in the bin. They further practised their self-help skills by assisting with serving the meal and showing their independence by pouring their own water into their cups. The teachers encouraged the children to clean up mishaps and spills themselves. They encouraged, reassured and praised the children.

The children and teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School, as observed, used meal times to hold social conversations. This provided the children with opportunities to reflect on the conversations and language familiar with them. At Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche, the teachers' role in developing social skills was minimal. They adhered to pre-specified goals and their written plans, turning the teachers into technicians. The teachers overlooked learning that can occur as a result of interactions with the children and between the children themselves. Similar to the toilet routine period, the teachers discouraged children from talking with other children and only communicated with children when they needed something. It did not seem important to the teachers that meal times were a good time for social conversations between the children themselves and with the teacher. They emphasised that meal times provided opportunities for developing children's independence, in that they were able to eat on their own, a pre-specified goal. Within a technically oriented early childhood curriculum, such a goal is specified in advance, prior to meeting the children, based either on developmental norms for the child or on a set of skills or knowledge that the child should know. The goal is written in behavioural terms so that their achievements can be observed and evaluated (Mac Naughton, 2003).

In the above example of the meal time routine activity across all three centres, it is clear that in each centre, the intentions are different. In the urban early childhood centre, the meal time is used to encourage communication between the children to develop their age-appropriate communicative skills and to use every opportunity to encourage dialogue and discussions, while at the other two centres, communication amongst the children is not encouraged. There are also differences in approach to other routine activities. At Starfish Pre-Primary School, opportunities are not lost but used to promote an attitude of capitalisation, while at Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche, unitary learning is framed and privileged.

Rest time, as another routine activity, provided opportunity for the children to sleep. Alternate quiet activities were available for children who did not want to sleep. Just before departure, the children and the group teachers ensured that all the children's bags were packed and that no loose clothes were left lying around. The teachers encouraged the children to put on their own shoes. The teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School ensured that children tidied their lockers before they left their playrooms. Again, for the

teachers at Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche, such social values were not associated with education and were not demanded of the children.

During the routine periods, the junior group teachers, Ms Bengu at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Ms Zulu at Siyazama Educare Centre, provided good care and displayed love and affection towards the children. The middle group teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare and Ms Mbambo, the supervisor/teacher at Zamani Crèche, guided the children and made general requests such as "...it's time to go to the toilet" to them. Unlike Helen in the vignette in Chapter Two, who looked forward to those 'teachable moments' (not planned but what actually happens when she and children are together), the teachers at Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche claimed that routine activities were not 'teaching sessions' and indicated that no cognitive demands were made to stimulate the children. The teachers at Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche believed that teaching happened during teacher-directed activities. They associated the routine activities with care and thought them to be different from education, which involved planned educational activities to enhance learning. They viewed the routine activities and free play as inferior to the activities enacted during teacher-directed activities.

The junior groups at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre and the children between two and five years at Zamani Crèche received more activities on routine and procedures than about the content of learning. They acquired knowledge of routine events, sequences of actions, and language for such events. The teachers claimed that consistency and predictable patterns of the routine sessions made the children feel secure and comfortable. They indicated that this is a period of considerable importance in shaping the child's self-confidence and preparing him/her for an easy transition from junior level to middle level. The teachers at Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche observed and acknowledged the children's move towards fostering independence but did not see the routine sessions as opportunities for socialisation. The teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School encouraged the children to interact with teachers and peers.

In the three centres, the children acquired knowledge of routine events. These were important periods in the day when the young children required assistance with basic



physical-care tasks and activities that enhanced children's independence. The teachers claimed there was 'no teaching' during routine periods and indicated that no cognitive demands were made to stimulate the children. They believed that teaching happened only during teacher-directed activities. The teachers at Siyazama Educare Centre realised that conversations such as those associated with the vegetable garden can encourage social interaction during mealtimes. This is an example through which the teachers can connect to the children, to context and to social justice. Recognising areas for improvement/change in the daily programme is vital to the language of critique to make the daily curriculum experiences meaningful and infused with social justice.

#### ***6.2.5.2 Free play***

A free play period is when the children have a choice of indoor and outdoor activities and can select activities themselves with the aim of making independent discoveries and solving problems (Davin, Orr, Marais, & Meier, 2007). In Chapter Five, I provide a brief outline of free play for the children in junior groups (three year olds) and the middle groups (four year olds) at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre, and for the children aged three to six years at Zamani Crèche.

Free play at Siyazama Educare Centre, Zamani Crèche and Starfish Pre-Primary School was freely chosen play within structured settings supervised by the teachers. The free play sessions catered for indoor and outdoor free play separately, to ensure that the teacher is available to supervise the children. During free play, the children focused on play in specific areas. Some children engaged in solitary play while others played in social groups with their peers. There were rare encounters of fights, quarrels, upsets or accidents at all three centres.

The children in the middle group at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre showed a higher level of involvement in play, and engaged in more complex play than the children in the junior groups. For instance, at Starfish Pre-Primary School, the outdoor play themes such as The farmyard, In the jungle, I am in space, Ironing for mum, Cowboys and Indians, In the sea, and Dinosaurs, encouraged children in the middle group to play co-operatively with other children, to solve problems and to spend more time on an activity than children in the junior group.

At Starfish Pre-Primary School, the children had a wider selection of toys and equipment for both indoor and outdoor free play than those offered to the children at Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche. The centre provided a different set of sand pit toys for each day of the week. Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche had limited toys and equipment due to lack of funds. At Zamani Crèche, Ms Mbambo and members of the school governing body did not invest in outdoor equipment due to the high crime rate in the Malangini area. The Crèche had lost a number of items as a result of several break-ins. During free play, the children played with balls and skipping ropes that the provincial Department of Education provided for Grade R. The boys enjoyed rolling a few tyres on the bare ground while the girls skipped and played with the small balls and skittles. The teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School selected materials and activities for free play. They set these out and allowed the children to choose what to play with. They focused on supervision and seldom interacted with the children. There were rare discussions by the teachers to extend the child's knowledge. This happened only when they were reminded by the principal that they were not child minders. The teachers sometimes suggested activities to under-occupied children. The teachers supervised an average of twenty-five children per group. As a result, there were limited opportunities for interaction and conversations between the teacher and the children on a one-to-one basis and in small groups between the children and the teacher. The teachers were also required to observe particular children on specific days. The importance of observing the children during free play was stressed by the principal. The teachers claimed that the teacher-child ratio (1:25) made it difficult to observe the children during free play, and that their priority during free play was to supervise their groups. The teachers indicated that they needed to be free to interact and to have conversations with children on a one-to-one basis and/or in small groups. They further indicated that this would assist them to observe children closely and to use the information to complete observational reports on the children.

While the need for children's freedom of action was acknowledged by the teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School, there was also a conscious demand on the children for rules to be followed. The teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School were serious about the school rules during outdoor free play. Ms Naidoo outlined the rules to be followed by the children during free play:

At our centre, we are very particular about rules. Children at the water trough and at any 'messy' sensopathic activities, must wear aprons. The children are encouraged to help one another and hang up the aprons when they are finished; no boxes and ladders to be used on top of jungle gyms or the fort; children may only go down the slide, not up; no shoes may be worn while any child is climbing; only one child is allowed per swing; no one standing close to swings when it's moving; children must sit on the swing, no running on the activity area, no chasing and dangerous games; no standing on the swings; don't hurt anyone; no throwing sand on other children, no removing sand from the sand pit. Wheel toys are to be parked in appropriate spaces when children are finished with them. The rules of the road are encouraged on the cycle track (pedestrians are to cross only at pedestrian crossings); no deliberate crashing into other cyclists or barriers, follow directions of arrows. Games with large ball are to be played in the open area next to the cycle track. The forbidden areas are down the bank, the general assistant's room, the teachers' toilets, the kitchen and the storerooms and climbing up and over the gates. The children must remember to be kind and loving. The rules are not compromised. The parents are told about our rules.

Ms Naidoo ensured that ground rules in the form of behavioural or procedural regulations were explicitly followed during the routine periods. She stressed that rules and orderly flow of activities benefited the children. It helped them to become self-disciplining and self-regulating. The emphases on order and control differentiated super and subordinate teacher and children roles. The teachers at Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche were neither too concerned about rules nor were they engaged in observation of the children. They believed that they just needed to 'keep an eye' on the children and that there was not much need for close adult attention. The children chose their own activities from a limited range. The teachers did not direct the play nor did they interact with the children. Free play at both Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche was not stimulated by teachers. The teachers believed that their main task was to provide available toys and equipment to occupy the children. The lack of challenging activities and the inclusion of mere repetition during free play activities were noticeable.

During free play, the teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School observed particular children on specific days. Teachers were required to complete standard checklists to assess children's learning, overlooking the knowledge of each child. Observations distanced the teachers from the child. The teachers focused on children's weaknesses, the things children cannot do rather than on what they could do. They provided sessions for children to practise on their areas of weaknesses.

During free play activities, Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche teachers supervised children within limited instances of communication. Reflections into this indicates that the intentions would be to observe the children's integrated growth in terms of, amongst others, communications, selection processes, interaction with peers, ability to work on their own and levels of perseverance. However, none of the teachers in each of these centres mentioned or acknowledged such learning moments. This suggests that meaningful learning as conceptualised by the teachers is related to teaching skills and knowledge connected with formal schooling.

#### ***6.2.5.3 Teacher-directed activities***

Teacher-directed activities are large/whole and small group discussions and presentations, directed and led by the teacher. During teacher-directed group discussions, the teacher initiates the set theme for the day and introduces any new activity. Group discussions focus on imparting new knowledge and present opportunities for children to participate in skill development activities.

The teacher-directed activities at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre, with the large/whole group (junior and middle), included the greeting ring, life skills, discussion on theme, drama, music/movement activity and story lesson. The show and tell as a teacher-directed activity was only done at Starfish Pre-Primary School. Small group teacher-directed activities, with approximately five children per group, were done at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre, and generally last for about 10 to 15 minutes. Such activities were focused on skills development and conveying knowledge. During small group teacher-directed activities, the teachers focused on the attainment of academic goals such as pre-reading and pre-

writing activities. The first teacher-directed activity with the whole group at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre, and Zamani Crèche, was the greeting/morning ring. The teachers at the three centres began this session by marking the attendance registers. This was an official identification of children present at the centre. I observed that marking the registers had both ceremonial and practical significance. As ceremony, it enhanced the importance of the children meeting one another and helped to create a sense of group identity and unity by making each child aware of his/her peers within the group. More practically, the function of the roll call was to identify absentees. The teacher called out each child's name and the child responded if s/he was at the centre. The children learnt the names of other children in the group. They were also aware of the children who were at the centre and those who were absent. If a child was absent, his/her peers called out his/her name. Children learnt familiarity and identity and experienced a sense of belonging in preparation for formal school. During greeting/morning ring, the children and the teachers discussed the weather and current issues. Ms Bengu, the junior group teacher, at Starfish Pre-Primary School) claimed:

At the beginning of the year, most of the children are quiet. Not many children are eager to speak. We encourage them to talk by asking questions. The children also watch other children talk. By the end of the second school term, the children gain self-confidence and are eager to talk. Each child is encouraged to face the group when speaking and the others are encouraged to listen.

At all three centres, discussions about the weather and current issues provided children with opportunities to interact with their teachers and peers with the intention of promoting the children's self-confidence. During the greeting/morning ring, the teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School appointed the children who were to serve the snacks during snack time. They were referred to as 'servers' for the day and had to place their name cards on the snack time chart. The children developed a sense of self-worth and leadership skills. There were no servers appointed at Siyazama Educare Centre, and Zamani Crèche.

During the greeting/morning ring, the teachers in all three centres discussed an aspect of the planned theme. The teachers believed the themes provided a meaningful

framework for learning. The themes were selected for the year. Ms Naidoo at Starfish mentioned:

Our themes that are selected are based on topics that would enrich the children's lives and broaden their horizons. We integrate the themes with lessons within the daily programme. We write up table preparation a week in advance and set up the table as planned. This is checked by the principal.

The teachers accepted the idea that the thematic approach was the best way to organise the learning content to which most of the lessons and activities were linked. They did not see the themes as limiting opportunities to build on children's interest and follow up on what they want to do (such as the opportunity linked with the vegetable garden at Siyazama Educare Centre). The teachers conformed to engaging with the theme because this would be inspected by the principal.

From observations of the greeting/morning ring at the three early childhood centres, it seems that the purpose of the activity was to do role call and to set the tone for the day. The discussions with the children during this activity were directed at getting the children to know who was present, what aspect of the theme will be covered and to invite children to talk about their observations on the weather and any other news items that the children wanted to share with the group. The main purpose of the greeting/morning ring was to provide a structure to the daily activities of the early childhood centres. There was little difference across the three early childhood centres, suggesting that this curriculum act is a taken-for-granted curriculum feature and its roots are located within a formal school curriculum of register taking and news items. The correlation of the school curriculum with that of the early childhood curriculum suggests that early childhood centres are highly influenced by formal education activities.

The three centres offered ring sessions with the whole group in life skills and music/movement and story. In addition to these, Starfish Pre-Primary School offered show and tell and drama sessions. Ms Bengu was particularly eager to explain the show and tell:

Once a week, on a Friday, we have a show and tell session. The children bring items from home. The children are introduced to a letter of the alphabet. The child chooses an item that coincides with a letter of the alphabet selected for the week. If for example the letter for the week is the letter “B” then the children bring items that begin with the letter “B”. Both the parent and the child may decide on the choice of item. The child associates items that begin with the letter which helps children to learn and make connections between concepts and letters in the alphabet. It must not be a toy but something educational, otherwise the children bring Barbie dolls and Barney. Each child who has brought an item shows it to the group and tells the group something about the item. The show and tell sessions also provide the children with opportunities to express themselves orally, take initiative, teach them to impart knowledge and build their levels of self-confidence.

Ms Bengu and Ms Naidoo integrated the show and tell lessons with other activities. Ms Naidoo gave the children opportunities to write or trace letters in various ways during the skill sessions. The children completed join-the-dots worksheets and creative activities like finger and starch painting. During free play, they were offered a variety of alphabet puzzles. During story telling/reading, Ms Bengu and Ms Naidoo exposed the children to the letters. This further exposed the children to the printed letters. The teachers initiated discussions about the meaning of words, which created an additional context for presenting the alphabet. Through this approach, teachers believed that they helped the children learn about the letters of the alphabet, an important step towards reading and writing. This is an example of the pressure to deliver a curriculum focused on languages and mathematics aligned to the three year “foundation for learning” strategy (DoE, 2008) and Outcome 3 of the Language Learning Areas of the Grade R curriculum, which specifies that the learner will be able to read and analyse the information (Department of Basic Education, 2002).

During life skills, the teachers at the three centres focused on the topics such as ‘respect for me’, ‘respect for others’, ‘respect for the environment’, and ‘responsibility for our actions’. Ms Bengu, the junior group teacher, claimed:

The life skills topics are integrated with other ring activities such as music/movement, drama and story to constantly and consistently reinforce standards.

The life skills topics provided the basis for conformity and were primarily concerned with reinforcing the rules and principles through control that guided and shaped the children's thinking and actions. To the teachers, the reinforcement of standards was based on the requirements for formal schooling and seemed the natural and right thing to do.

Teacher-directed activities with small groups of children were done with the junior and middle groups at Starfish Pre-Primary School and with the middle group at Siyazama Educare Centre. The middle group at Siyazama Educare Centre shared the playroom with Grade R, where the same activities were done by both groups. Ms Mlongo indicated that the children in the middle group would repeat the activities when they move to Grade R. At Zamani Crèche, there were no adult-directed, small group activities for the children below Grade R. Ms Mbambo commented as follows:

There are twenty-one children in the Grade R group. I do teacher-directed activities with these children. There are ten children between two and five years. The centre provides only care services for these children. We have accepted these children to make up the numbers so that we can to receive the social grant.

I observed that children between two and five years received very little attention from the teacher and were almost “invisible” to the teacher during the teacher-directed sessions with the Grade R. Ms Mbambo at Zamani Crèche focused on the good, care-based provision for the children between two and five years. Activities during routine periods emphasised encouraging these children to fasten buttons, opening bags, tying shoe laces and serving lunch.

The middle group teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre focused on development of physical skills with minimal development of meta-cognitive processes, such as problem-solving. During the teacher-directed sessions, the children depended on the teachers' instruction, guidance and support to master the basic



literacy and numeracy skills. The activities focused on isolated skills through drill and the completion of worksheets. The teachers focused on the academic knowledge and skills necessary for Grade R, and ultimately for a good start for later academic achievement. Ms Naidoo claimed:

The stress is more on skills development, development of fine motor muscles with activities such as cutting, drawing, threading, block building and large motor development. I also include pre-writing and pre-reading skills. This is done to get the children ready for Grade R.

The teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre supported a more academic curriculum for the middle groups. The teacher-directed activities for the middle groups at both centres were based on a technical approach using a rational process. The skills development activities were the core of the pre-set curriculum. Success was determined by the extent of efficiency and effectiveness achieved by the children. For example, at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre, during teacher-directed activities with small groups of children, the teachers observed what the children understood and did not understand. The teachers believed that technical and objective knowledge would assist the children to achieve academically. They considered various intervention programmes to support this. The middle group children at Siyazama Educare Centre, who were unable to complete tasks as expected, were given the tasks again. The preparation for the tasks was done by Ms B Yeni, based on the expected outcome set for Grade R. The intervention strategy at Starfish Pre-Primary School called for parental assistance. Ms Naidoo indicates:

We meet with parents twice a year. In the first term, we meet all the parents and in the third term we meet parents whose children need development. I observe which children are not coping with activities such as cutting and sticking, listening and concentration that are planned for the group. I meet with their parents in the third term. I ask the parents how their children cope at home then we work together to get the children to cope with the school environment.

The teachers believed that academic knowledge was the most appropriate knowledge for the children. They viewed learning as a rational process that embraced predication

and control. The activities were performed rigidly according to the time slots indicated on the daily programmes. The periods were practised in more or less the same sequence and flow from the time the children arrived at the early childhood centre, until they departed. The teachers claimed that it was important for the children to learn to sit quietly, display good manners, and to follow instructions. The teachers also placed great emphasis on the need for the children to complete their tasks. Ms Naidoo indicated:

The children need to sit and finish their tasks within the time slot. If the children go over the time, it affects the programme. We try as much as possible to get the children to finish, otherwise children complete their work during free play.

The teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School were expected to teach the regular curriculum and any such changes were difficult and limited by rigid arrangements. This demonstrates how hegemony inhibited possibilities for change. The teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre focused on orderliness, task orientation and acceptance of authority as institutionally sanctioned core of values. They managed the playrooms and the outdoor activity areas by maintaining a strict, orderly social order. The teachers emphasised order and control and ensured that the children followed the rules and directions, indicating clearly differentiated super and subordinate teacher and children roles. Ground rules in the form of behavioural or procedural regulations were more explicit during the routine periods and free play sessions. The junior groups at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre also learnt and applied these rules in preparation for the next level. The teachers at the three centres indicated that the rules and orderly flow of activities benefited the children. They valued and pursued certainty, control and predictability. Routines, prescribed best practices, and predetermined outcomes and process had taken precedence over critical reflection and collaborative and dialogical relationships.

At Starfish Pre-Primary, show and tell, drama sessions, birthday rings, resources (toys and staff), infrastructure and wish lists reinforce the existing culture of teaching that reproduced middle class dominance. This will continue to limit the educational opportunities for children at Siyazama Educare Centre, and Zamani Crèche with its poor resources. In all three centres, the purpose of the knowledge was a matter of

accumulation and categorisation in preparation for the next academic hurdle. Academic knowledge and developmentally appropriate practice based on Western influence rooted in the modernist worldview, had a strong hold over the enacted and experienced curriculum at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche.

### **6.3 Power effects**

I have illuminated how the early childhood enacted and experienced curricula are embedded in ideologies that contribute to social/cultural, political and economic domination. The findings indicate that the teachers and the children in the three centres are controlled by the system which is an integral part of a dominant culture to maintain the *status quo* and support the privileged and powerful. This is related to the epistemological position that sees knowledge as product and a disinterested search for universal truth. Within this frame, knowledge is disconnected from the processes under which it is produced. This division denies any concept of knowledge as an evolving process, and in this denial, reduces the roles of teachers and children as active contributors of new knowledge.

In the three centres, the pedagogical practices portray the children as passive subjects – what education activist Freire (1984) called the banking approach to education. Such practices are oppressive and dehumanising. While the Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services (Department of Social Development, 2006) and NELDS (Department of Basic Education, 2009) endorse a child-centred and learning through play approach, the teaching practices at the Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre favour a transmission approach, placing the teachers at the heart of the learning experiences. The curricula are based on the Revised National Curriculum Statement (Department of Basic Education, 2002) for Grade R and experienced by means of structured activities within a conforming approach. The centres focused on transmitting information and performance standards from Grade R level to lower levels in an attempt to carefully steer children and teachers to conform to dominant practices.

As a critical researcher, I produce critiques that expose the inequalities that keep the powerful in control and limit the opportunities of those who are oppressed (Hatch,

2007). In presenting the curriculum practices at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche, I highlight issues of power and authority. I apply critical pedagogy to explore dominant educational knowledge and practices and the disempowerment of teachers.

### **6.3.1 Relationships: Connecting knowledge to experiences**

In this section, I disclose the pressure within which the centres operate within a larger context of dominant ideology. The values, beliefs and understandings of dominant minority groups are viewed as universal truths, marginalising the views of the Majority World (Mac Naughton, 2005). Such hegemony demands that the curriculum content and teaching method are embedded dominant ideologies.

Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre conformed to the Grade R curriculum as normal practice. The curriculum for Grade R was used to plan what and how to teach the children in the middle and junior groups. The Grade R curriculum was based on developmentally appropriate practice that dominated the curriculum at the early childhood centres. The knowledge within these practices combined to produce shared (ideological) language, concepts and methods of educating the child that are circulated in different texts, government policies, and daily practices across the three centres. The curriculum enacted and experienced at the early childhood centres, embedded in developmentally appropriate knowledge and practices, have settled so firmly into the structures within the three centres that teachers regarded these as normal. The Grade R curriculum was regarded as the most reliable knowledge woven into systems of management that governed the centres. This knowledge was held as normal and desirable ways to think, act and feel about the curriculum, at all three centres. It disciplined and regulated the early childhood centres. The Grade R curriculum was treated as a supreme hegemonic source of knowledge, leading the centres to practise a bureaucratic, hierarchical, centralist approach to curriculum. The Department of Education, through the Grade R curriculum, has the power and control over the early childhood centres and has silenced and marginalised the teachers and children.

Hegemonic practice was evident when the teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre demanded that the children sat quietly, displayed good manners, and followed instructions. The teachers' language included directions and general requests to the children. The teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School were more serious about the school rules during indoor and outdoor free play activities than the staff at Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche. The teachers observed the children to ensure that all the rules were followed, and the principal in turn observed the teachers. Children who did not follow such rules were given time out and teachers were reprimanded if they failed to observe the children. The teachers at Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche were not too concerned about rules. They just kept an "eye" on children. Ground rules at the three centres were more explicit during the routine periods and free play sessions, especially for children in the junior groups.

Routine sessions were consistent and followed predictable patterns. The teachers believed that this made the children feel secure. The children acquired knowledge of routine events, sequences of actions, and language for such events. During free play and routine sessions, the teachers encouraged the children to conduct themselves in socially acceptable ways. At the same time, learning opportunities were constrained. Priority was given to an orderly flow of activities than to grab opportunities that engaged the children in divergent thinking. The teachers followed a technical approach to teaching and learning. The monitoring, regulating and controlling of teachers and children sustained hegemonic practices.

Hegemonic practice was exercised when the early childhood centres used the Grade R curriculum to establish the boundaries of what is normal. For instance, the teachers believed that teaching happened only during adult directed activities and not during routine and free play. The teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School perceived playing with toys as non-academic/non-educational. They did not allow the children to use toys in their show and tell presentations. Developmental truths were used to differentiate activities presented to junior and middle groups. For instance, the junior groups received more messages about routine and procedures, whereas the middle group focused more on academic content. Routine and free play periods were not considered as 'teaching sessions'; therefore, the teachers did not see the need for cognitive stimulation. Teaching only happened during teacher-directed activities.

The teachers followed child development perspectives and a school readiness programme in preparation for formal schooling. Hegemonic practices that governed the three early childhood centres produced and reproduced inequity. The centres focused on developing pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills and marginalising learning through play. This position privileged academic homogeneity and marginalised play diversity.

### **6.3.2 Disempowerment of teachers**

In this section, I uncover how teachers are positioned by policy and within institutional structures. Concepts of power, responsibility and obligations and constraint influence how teachers perceive knowledge, which in turn influences the enacted and experienced curriculum.

The teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre had limited power. They made choices and decisions within boundaries set by the principals and the Grade R teachers. The junior and middle group teachers felt that their knowledge was inferior to that of principals and the Grade R teachers. The feelings of inferiority created hierarchical relationships among the teachers, which made it difficult for principals, teachers and support staff to communicate equitably. The state affirms the teacher expert/teacher non-expert relations based on hierarchical knowledge-power relationships between them. The National Curriculum Statement envisions teachers who are qualified and competent and have other personal qualities which will enable them to fulfil the various roles outlined in the Norms and Standards for Educators of 2000 (Department of Basic Education, 2002). The teachers are seen as mediators of learning, interpreters and designers of learning programmes and materials, leaders, administrators and managers, scholars, researchers and lifelong learners, community members, citizens and pastors, assessors and learning area/phase specialists (Department of Basic Education, 2002).

The teachers at the three centres perceived care and instruction as their primary responsibility and conformed to rules and regulations. For instance, the teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School followed the guidelines provided by the principal and worked closely with the Grade R teachers. They accepted the manner in which the

principal supervised their work. The teachers attended weekly staff meetings. They completed ring preparations on a daily or weekly basis and submitted these to the principal for review fortnightly.

Inadequacy and fear of getting it wrong or being under/unqualified showed up on numerous occasions. At Siyazama Educare Centre, the sharing of the playroom resulted in the middle group teacher, Ms L Mlongo, functioning as a teacher aid. The junior group teacher, Ms Zulu, focused primarily on care-based provision. They indicated that only 'experts' in child development knew the 'right ways' to teach children. The assumption led the teachers to disregard their knowledge of the curriculum and children, and to feel that once they gain the appropriate knowledge, they can relate to the children appropriately. They dismissed their own knowledge as inadequate and promoted traditional knowledge-power links in which they saw themselves as non-experts.

The teachers claimed that the curriculum practice at their centre was influenced by staff qualifications. The teachers acknowledged the need to continually improve the teaching and learning environment and the curriculum. They felt strongly about raising standards and improving the quality of early childhood education, and never had reason to challenge the hegemony of academic schools' knowledge and developmentally appropriate practice. They believed that this would have ensured better quality services at early childhood centres. They stressed the need for on-going additional support by the Department of Education for teachers and children in groups below Grade R. The teachers were particularly concerned that they did not have the necessary early childhood teaching qualifications, although they claimed that they had the passion for teaching young children. The middle group teacher, Ms Mlongo, indicated:

I feel confident and work better when I work with Ms Yeni, who is qualified.

The teachers were enthusiastic about engaging in early childhood training to improve their qualifications. They indicated that their meagre salaries made it impossible. The reason for the low remuneration of early childhood teachers was linked to the issue of parents' affordability of child care and government funding. The teachers indicated that they remained in their jobs because they derived great satisfaction from working with

young children. The responsibilities of the teachers at Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche were extended to include chores such as sweeping and mopping the floors, opening and shutting windows and general tidying up of the indoor and outdoor areas. The teachers indicated that specific training in early childhood education would make them confident to provide better curriculum-related activities, particularly in numeracy and literacy; they would also be able to engage the children in activities with higher intellectual challenges. Ms Mbambo at Zamani Crèche and Ms Yeni at Siyazama Educare Centre emphasised the negative impact of limited funding and under staffing on curriculum practice. The teachers were denied the real character of professionalism. Opportunities for debates and reflection were rare events.

Teachers were seen as technicians delivering a pre-set curriculum, supervised and managed by the principal and Grade R teachers. They had no power to decide broad curriculum goals and their values had little place in the curriculum. They maintained the *status quo* and supported the privileged and powerful by accepting knowledge as a product. This notion of knowledge reduces the roles of teachers to that of recipients or agents of dominant ideologies.

To summarise, in this section, I firstly show the expanding power base of ideological practices and functions of dominant ideas, values and beliefs in academic knowledge and developmentally appropriate practice that present themselves in the early childhood curriculum. These ideological practices promote a description of truth, reality and knowledge that appears to be independent of cultural practices. Secondly, I focus on power effects with the intention of exposing inequalities that keep the powerful in control and limit the opportunities of those who are oppressed. Exhausting these themes leads logically to my concluding comments.

## **6.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I used critical pedagogy to interrogate the curriculum for three and four year olds as conceptualised enacted and experienced by teachers at three early childhood centres within three diverse social contexts. In doing so, I foregrounded dominant practices underpinned by child development theories and behaviourist thinking about the child and cultural transmission theory from Western cultural



experiences. Powerful and privileged developmentally appropriate practice and school readiness have dominated the early childhood education at the three centres, penetrating the curriculum and disempowering teachers and children.

The enacted curriculum (the curriculum content and pedagogical strategies selected, planned, organised and managed by the teachers) and the experienced curriculum (what actually happens when the teacher and the children are together) are influenced and constrained by the protocols within each early childhood centre. The enacted curriculum and the experienced curriculum are ultimately influenced by politicians, policy-makers, parents and community, making the centre accountable according to their terms. This pressure occurs in the larger context of dominant ideology and a social utility concept of education. The implications of these beliefs are profound in the way teachers are positioned in the educative process, limiting professional identities to the level of conformists. The teachers see the curriculum as product. Within this frame, curriculum is disconnected from the processes under which it is produced and regarded as pre-packaged. This division between curriculum and the teachers denies any concept of curriculum as an evolving process and therefore reduces the roles of teachers as active constructors and co-constructors of the curriculum. In Chapter Seven, I extend the possibility for a critical early childhood curriculum through empowerment of teachers, engaging teachers to critically reflect deeply within the environment in which they work.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **SPACES FOR POSSIBILITIES**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

In this study, I bring the curricula that serve three and four year olds at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche into discussion from a critical pedagogical perspective. Using rich descriptions, explanations and interpretations, I offered critical analysis of how the curricula for these children were conceptualised, enacted and experienced by the teachers at the three early childhood centres.

#### **7.2 Findings of the study**

In the absence of a state curriculum for children younger than five years prior to 2006, the assumption is that early childhood centres in South Africa had considerable autonomy over the curriculum. The Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services and NELDS were developed in 2006 and 2009 respectively. Considering that decisions about curriculum are philosophical, practical, matters of personal and professional beliefs as well as social and cultural values, how was the curriculum for three and four year olds enacted and experienced by teachers at three early childhood centres?

It is against this context that I draw on critical pedagogy to explore how the curriculum for three and four year olds is conceptualised, enacted and experienced by teachers at three early childhood centres. My sub questions are: How do the teachers make decisions for the type of enacted curriculum (planning and selecting the curriculum, content and pedagogical strategies) and how is the curriculum experienced (what actually happens when the teacher and the children are together)? How do the teachers' decisions about the curriculum and the experienced curriculum relate to the espoused curriculum (officially documented or state approved curriculum)? I interrogate the espoused, enacted and the experienced curricula to explore consistencies and variances among these curricula, with a focus on understanding the reasons for these.

Critical pedagogy provided tools to interrogate the curriculum within the three diverse social contexts. In doing so, I foregrounded dominant practices underpinned by child development theories and behaviourist thinking about the child and cultural transmission theory from the Western cultural experiences. Developmentally appropriate practice and school readiness have dominated the early childhood curriculum at the three centres, disempowering teachers and children. The enacted and experienced curricula for three and four year olds were based on hegemony of what is scientifically known about children's development and on social utility and reproduction, without adequate attention to a socially and culturally constructed curriculum. There is an expanding power base of ideological and hegemonic practices and functions of dominant ideas, values and beliefs in developmentally appropriate practices and academic knowledge that present themselves in early childhood education. Such practices and functions promote a description of truth, reality and knowledge that marginalises cultural practices.

### **7.2.1 Enacted curriculum**

Curriculum planning and selection of content and pedagogical strategies at Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche were informed by the infrastructure and resources available, and the national imperative of improving the quality of early childhood for learners in the foundation phase. The Grade R curriculum forms part of government's broader goal. The early childhood centres were answerable to the Department of Education system and community for preparing the Grade R children for formal schooling. The pressure to deliver on the Grade R curriculum impacted on the curriculum offered to the three and four year olds.

The teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre embraced academic knowledge as a critical building block for the four year olds. A major section of the curriculum content for the four year olds comprised of skills development and knowledge in preparation for Grade R and formal schooling. At Starfish Pre-Primary School, particular efforts were made for the children to excel in traditional knowledge (numeracy and literacy isolated skills through drill and the completion of worksheets) and life skills. The emphasis on factual knowledge and technical skills disconnected knowledge achieved from practical problem-solving in daily life. The time allocated to

promoting academic knowledge acquisition emphasised its importance. In addition to the two hours allocated to teacher-directed activities daily, teachers used the two hour free play session to encourage children towards selecting cognitive activities.

The curriculum content for the junior groups at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre and for the children below Grade R at Zamani Crèche, consisted of personal and social skills. At Zamani Crèche, due to resource constraints, the teacher focused on personal and social skills for the three and four year olds. The curriculum content consisted of activities that linked mainly to an individual child's growth and development. The skills activities were underpinned by developmental theory with particular focus on age-specific milestones and behavioural attributes of the child. The activities focused on reproducing the values and attitudes that were required to 'get the children ready' for the next level.

Curriculum decision-making at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre was the responsibility of the principals. The teachers were required to plan and prepare activities. At Starfish Pre-Primary School, planned activities and preparations for teacher-directed activities, routine and free play, were reviewed by the principal. The lesson plans for the teacher-directed activities at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre were more detailed than the plans for routine periods and free play. At Siyazama Educare Centre, the teachers believed that 'teaching' happened only during teacher-directed activities and not during routine and free play periods. The teachers in all three centres used the thematic approach and regarded this approach as the best way to organise the learning content. The teachers at all three centres planned activities according to fixed, structured daily, weekly and annual schedules. The teachers interpreted planning as thinking about and preparing for the activities before starting the activities and when the children are not around. Planning for teacher-directed activities was prioritised and intended to promote knowledge acquisition. The principals acted as gatekeepers of knowledge and the teachers saw themselves as receivers and implementers. This indicated that individuals or groups in power were able to determine largely what counts as knowledge.

### **7.2.2 Experienced curriculum**

During free play, the teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School supervised the children and completed formal observations of children for developmental patterns based on developmental standards. The teachers identified the children's weaknesses and provided sessions for the children to 'practise' on their areas of weaknesses. At Starfish Pre-Primary School, there was a conscious demand by the teachers for the children to follow rules. The teachers at Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche were neither too concerned about rules nor were they engaged in observation of the children. Repetition of free play activities was noticeable at the Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche. Although teachers in all three centres seldom interacted with the children, children were most eager to engage in play.

At Starfish Pre-Primary School, the teacher-directed activities (show and tell, drama sessions, birthday rings) and free play as a result of resources (for both children and teachers) and infrastructure, reinforced the existing culture of education that reproduced middle classes' dominance. This is an example of social reproduction in a paradigm of class analysis capable of explaining persistent inequalities in educational stratification, despite the South African government's efforts at educational expansion nationally.

The curriculum, cultivated towards knowledge acquisition that would prepare the children for Grade R, was underpinned by child development theories and behaviourist thinking about the child. The children needed to acquire skills that would make them adapt to society and the early childhood centres were used as socialising agents. The teachers at Starfish Pre-Primary School and Siyazama Educare Centre focused on orderliness, task orientation and acceptance of authority as sanctioned core of values. This relates to the epistemological position that sees knowledge as product, disconnected from the processes under which it is produced. The teachers followed a technical approach to curriculum within a conforming to society position. The prescription for teachers and the early childhood centres were fed by the needs of the modern industrial state, to produce a qualified labour force and to reproduce society. This ideology is linked strongly with the modern industrial state underpinned by cultural transmission theory.

The teachers accepted that knowledge was an important means towards progressing and had to be mastered in contexts that made no provision for questions, evaluation or negotiation. From this perspective, the early childhood centres were part of a dominant society reproducing the cultural values and social relationships of a larger social order, linking it with the social status of the communities that use it.

The dominant ideology, school readiness, was linked to the Revised National Curriculum Statement for Grade R curriculum, and developmentally appropriate practices controlled the enacted and experienced curriculum for children aged three and four years at the three centres. The prescription on the curriculum for teachers and the early childhood centres were fed by the needs of the modern industrial state, to produce a qualified labour force and to reproduce society. Dominant practices were underpinned by child development theories and behaviourist thinking about the child and cultural transmission theory from the Western cultural experiences.

In the section that follows, I develop the argument of how stakeholders can transgress traditions, and constitute areas of possibilities for alternative thinking and actions on espoused, enacted, and experienced early childhood curriculum.

### **7.3 Critical insight and implications**

In this section, I discuss critical insights into and implications arising from the findings in two areas. Firstly, I offer insights into promoting a socio-political approach to early childhood education with particular relevance for policy developers, regulatory authorities, leaders and teachers in the early childhood sector. Secondly, I provide critical reflection on the implications in relation to the methodology of the study.

#### **7.3.1 Towards a socio-political approach**

I argue for a socio-political approach to early childhood education, motivating for a move away from scientifically driven epistemologies historically deemed to be valuable. A socio-political approach to early childhood education creates conditions that promote thinking towards critical consciousness fostering the ability to recognise and critique structures of hegemony and for possibilities of change. Critical

consciousness embraces the possibility for a replacement of ideological discourses and practices with a voice of multiple players as collective agency (policy developers, regulatory authorities, leaders, teachers, parents and children), within the African context capable of speaking, listening, retelling, and challenging the very grounds of knowledge and power in early childhood education. The concept of voice refers to the inter-relating set of meanings built upon the active engagement of multiple players. Voice alerts multiple players to the fact that early childhood discourse is located historically and mediated culturally, and derives its meaning from interaction with others. In this way, role players can recognise the need and their ability to conduct counter-hegemonic acts as they work to challenge economic, political, and social injustices, both within and outside the early childhood centres.

A counter-hegemonic action would involve review of current early childhood education policies and strategies. A significant finding that arises from this study was the extent to which dominant ideology (developmentally appropriate practices and school readiness discourse), embedded in the early childhood policies, is inherent in the enacted and experienced curriculum. For instance, the word ‘development’ in the term “Early Childhood Development” in the Education White Paper 5 (DoE, 2001a) and NELDS (Department of Basic Education, 2009), is based on developmental milestones affirming developmentally appropriate practices as the dominant discourse. NELDS (Department of Basic Education, 2009) is underpinned by curriculum decisions drawn on development and learning theories, and research within these areas. Philosophy (the nature of knowledge and what knowledge is worthwhile), sociology and culture (philosophy set in the context of the curriculum developers’ understanding of society, culture and future social needs), that are marginalised in the early childhood curriculum, must be given greater focus.

Critique of early childhood education policies and practices will confirm the complexities within the curriculum that inform possibilities to recognise and oppose injustice and to challenge control and power through collective political and practical action. Considering that early childhood education is a collaborative undertaking policy developers, regulatory authorities, leaders and teachers must collectively venture to prioritise the ideological stance that they wish to construct. Such a stance must be used to provoke the world critically and question power relations. The use of collaborative

and dialogical relationships informed by critical reflection is a strategic change-oriented process to transform injustices and inequalities in curriculum.

Policy review and development in early childhood education requires strategic investment in teacher education, teacher research and development projects that consider pedagogical challenges within early childhood education. Such investment would contribute towards early childhood teacher education informed by a range of theories, including developmentalism, behaviourist and sociocultural theories. Furthermore, national government needs to support curriculum implementation processes and make resource available. Such provision would empower teachers to become critically consciousness to be able to recognise and evaluate the structures of hegemony and to see themselves as change drivers. At this level of consciousness, teachers will be able to identify and create conditions for the possibility of transformation in oppressive contexts.

Teachers who acquire and use their critical thinking abilities will be able to share their curriculum experiences with others (including educators, teachers, parents, and children). When teachers critically reflect on conceptual frameworks within their enacted and experienced curriculum and on the choice of other frameworks, they can question their curriculum planning, and selection of content and pedagogical strategies. The teachers can compare the enacted curriculum with their experienced curriculum and link these curricula with the espoused curriculum.

Critically engaged teachers with philosophical ideology are able to better understand the nature of curriculum debates that inevitably take place. They would critique and challenge the curriculum discourses and practices and engage in inquiry that is intended to transform the curriculum offered to children. When teachers understand and critically reflect on the way in which language is used within ideologies, it can assist them in more effectively communicating and negotiating curriculum decisions with colleagues, in curriculum committees, at early childhood centre meetings, and within their communities.

Varied perspectives and critical reflection on the differences between early childhood curriculum frameworks and other curriculum frameworks influencing



current public dialogue about education, stimulate teachers to contribute to the public debate about educational issues, particularly in the field of early childhood. Critically reflection on the ideological pressures exerted on teachers by levels of socio-political constructs, which are the local and broader community, National and Provincial Education and Social Development policies and systems and Western ideological, empowers teachers to put those pressures in perspective and reduce their influence.

When working with others on curriculum, teachers can acknowledge and clarify the conflicts and tensions that exist among colleagues who hold different beliefs about early childhood curriculum. Developing collaborative and dialogical relationships with colleagues by challenging and working through the curriculum provides opportunities for collaborative networks to enhance curriculum knowledge and knowledge about curriculum. This would lead to capacity building in the early childhood education field, and encourage reflection and action for a more equitable society. The teachers would have a voice and space for collaborative and critical inquiries about early childhood education. For example, in early childhood centres where the teacher works alone or with one or two teacher/s members, these teachers can greatly benefit from utilising networks and associations to engage in discussions with other early childhood centres. Formal and informal opportunities for collaborative dialogue would create an atmosphere where curriculum can be discussed routinely, where people are encouraged to trust and support one another, while working to understand curriculum issues. Though conversation with colleagues is not always easy, it can be made less difficult if trust is created.

Integration of curriculum content with daily living experiences would inspire teachers to engage in inquiry towards activism and social justice. Linking curriculum content with daily living experiences is an example of a socio-political approach that uses curriculum knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to address equality and justice within a South African context. This connects with the post-apartheid South African curriculum reforms aimed at building a new sense of citizenship and commitment to human rights, equity and social justice.

### **7.3.2 Critical insight and implications for methodology**

In this section, I discuss the merits of the case study approach in establishing collegial relationships that benefitted the study and that would assist in further research and projects. I discuss different strategies used to gain access to the three selected early childhood centres.

The special relationships between the teachers and myself that were established, provided opportunities for consciousness-raising and critique, both for me and the teachers, and was used to develop critical consciousness among other teachers and children. Transformation is part of the ethos of consciousness-raising and critique, so trusting relationships between the teachers and myself in recognising and throwing off oppression, is considered relevant in this type of research.

This case study provides the framework for addressing aspects in the early childhood curriculum in a collaborative way. It leads to pursuing further research and the creation of action plans for transformative, participatory projects that exemplify critical pedagogic in action, leading to reflective teaching practices. This study has created opportunities for the teachers of Starfish Pre-Primary School, Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche to engage in early childhood curriculum projects that aim to work in collaboration with colleagues (curriculum specialists and curriculum theorists, critical researchers and government), and alongside children to co-theorise pathways which are empowering for teachers and children within the early childhood sector. Such projects would provide a voice for teachers and children on their reflections and experiences of the curriculum.

The teachers are encouraged to generate their own meaning and develop projects with frameworks for social justice and social transformation in the playroom and elsewhere with children, to give themselves and the children opportunities to develop knowledge and understanding of cultural heritages. Curriculum specialists and theorists, critical researchers and South African government departments are encouraged to be of direct, practical help to teachers and early childhood centres. Teachers must be participants and knowledge producers in curriculum projects, not the recipients or curriculum agents of state-endorsed curriculum frameworks. Such involvement should seek to document,

explore and theorise experiences of curriculum decision-making and practice consistent with the values of human interest and social justice.

Raising consciousness through the integrating of the curriculum content with the vegetable garden and daily living experiences at Siyazama Educare Centre and Zamani Crèche promoted the possibility of future project work. Such consciousness goes against the grain, conscientising and interrupting political dialogue and decisions. Through an understanding of ideology and hegemony, the early childhood teachers can create environments where they will be able to identify different ways that domination and oppression have an impact on the curriculum. Through a process of dialogue, the teachers can examine and compare curriculum content with their own personal and cultural contexts. In this way, teachers can experience democratic participation.

This case study draws out the voices of the teachers and puts these voices in dialogue with themselves, the children and myself. The teachers can use routine sessions, free play and teacher-directed activities as opportunities to allow the curriculum to emerge and invite the children to reflect critically. This would support the children in constructing knowledge based on their socio-political experiences. In this respect, each child enters the early childhood centre with preformed ideas of what is “normal” to their environment and experience.

I used past links, contacts and professional suitability as three different strategies to gain entry to each of the early childhood centres. To gain access to Starfish Pre-Primary, I used my past links with the centre. I had established good working relationships between the early childhood centres’ staff and myself. I gained access to Siyazama Educare Centre through a contact who served as a college council member at the further education college at which I lectured (in early childhood education and business studies), who assisted in the process of negotiating access to the centre. In negotiating access to Zamani Crèche, I implemented a strategy where I demonstrated professional suitability. My telephonic and personal preliminary discussions with the centre’s governing body chairperson, my experience and knowledge in the early childhood field and awareness of the trends within the field assisted in the process of negotiating access. Gaining access through past links, contacts and professional suitability enabled me to avoid re-negotiation of access as the research progressed.

Gaining access and involving children in the fieldwork in early childhood centres were of significant concerns to me. In addition to the formal written permission acquired for the study, my personal visits to each of the three centres and providing the centres with additional details on the study proved to be an advantage, especially during the data collection stage. I also overtly displayed to the staff that I took their suggestions into consideration. This helped to counter-act power and authority issues that may have surfaced. I also did not want my presence at the three early childhood centres to further marginalise the teachers and the children. I did not want to place them at further risk as a result of the study. I respected teachers as individual participants in my study and protected the anonymity of the centres and the teachers as I provided a voice for the teachers.

Critical insights and implications that have resulted from this qualitative case study contribute towards the move away from scientifically driven studies towards contextualised studies with a voice within Africa and a counter-hegemonic act to challenge economic, political, and social injustices, both within and outside the three early childhood centres. The next section is a call for further research and projects.

#### **7.4 Recommendations for further research**

In this section, I make recommendations for further research for policy, practice and research.

A review of policy in the area of early childhood education should consider the place of philosophy, sociology and culture and psychology when deciding on the curriculum. Project work in the area of early childhood curriculum is required. To this effect, the creation of action plans for transformative, participatory projects that show critical pedagogy in action, leading to reflective teaching practices, is necessary. There is a need to conduct research from multiple perspectives into the espoused, enacted and experienced curriculum for children younger than five years.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

I explained how dominant ideology, school readiness, was linked to the Revised National Curriculum Statement for Grade R curriculum, and that developmentally appropriate practices controlled the enacted and experienced curriculum for children aged three and four years at the three centres. These have become internalised to the point where the teachers classified knowledge as product and have, to a large extent, worked within a technical approach to curriculum within a conforming to society position. The prescription for teachers and the early childhood centres was fed by the needs of the modern industrial state, to produce a qualified labour force and to reproduce society. This ideology is linked strongly with the modern industrial state underpinned by cultural transmission theory and developmental theories. In this chapter, I have argued for a move away from scientifically driven epistemologies towards a socio-political approach to early childhood education. Using critical pedagogy as a framework, I provide possibilities for transformation within the African context. This calls for multiple players (policy developers, regulatory authorities, leaders and teachers) to recognise the need and their ability to conduct counter-hegemonic acts as they work to challenge economic, political, and social injustices, both within and outside the early childhood centres. Such an ideological stance towards early childhood education works towards engaging in meaningful activities, which can be anywhere – playroom, outdoor areas, or real world knowledge opportunities. The intention is to create a context or make use of opportunities where knowledge will not be constrained and where the individual (the teacher and the child) control is more powerful. This position calls for teachers and children to be active constructors of the knowledge they require to recognise and confront injustice and to resist oppressive ways of becoming a democratic society.

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## APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



UNIVERSITY OF  
KWAZULU-NATAL

RESEARCH OFFICE

29 APRIL 2004

MRS. T. MOODLEY  
EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

Dear Mrs. Moodley


ETHICAL CLEARANCE NUMBER : 04083 "AN EXPLORATION OF CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT  
PRACTICES AT EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT CENTRES"

I wish to confirm that ethical clearance has been granted for the above project, subject to:

1. Provision of letter from the Department of Education and School Principal granting permission to conduct the study
2. Written informed consent being obtained from parents/guardians in line with standard ethics requirements (see attached), a copy of the form should be sent to the Research Division

Kindly submit your response to undersigned as soon as possible

Yours faithfully

  
.....  
MS. PHUMELELE XIMBA  
(for) MANAGER: RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION

## APPENDIX 2: LETTER TO EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRE

T. Moodley (Ms)  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
School of Educational Studies

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Sir/Madam

### **Research on the Early Childhood Curriculum – Data Collection**

I am a doctoral student at the above University. My research focuses on the “*Exploration of Curriculum Practices (in particular for children aged 3 to 5 years) at Early Childhood Centres*”. I have been granted ethical clearance by the University to conduct the study (Ethical clearance Number - 04083).

My sample includes Early Childhood Centres in urban, peri-urban and rural areas. It would be greatly appreciated if I could engage in data collection at your centre. This would include a site tour of the centre, observation of activities, interview with principal, interview with teachers, and review of documents (brochure, year-plan, daily programme, theme, reports and other curriculum related documents).

Written consent granting permission to conduct the study at your centre would also be required. My contact details are as follows:

Tel.: (031) 2699907/11 (w)

(031) 2607677

084-517-0430 (cell)

Fax. Nos. (031) 2607001 / (031) 2691050

Email: [moodleyjp@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:moodleyjp@ukzn.ac.za)

Thank you.

Yours faithfully

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T.Moodley (Ms)



### **APPENDIX 3: LETTER FROM EARLY CENTRE**

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T. Moodley (Ms)  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
School of Educational Studies

#### **Research on Early Childhood Curriculum – Data Collection**

We hereby grant you permission to conduct your research at our Early Childhood centre.

Yours faithfully

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The Principal

## APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE - PRINCIPAL

### AN EXPLORATION OF THE CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM IN THREE EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES

#### Interview Schedule – Principal of the Early Childhood Centre Principal

**The purpose of this interview is to:**

- Understand the Early Childhood centre.
- Establish how the curriculum content for children aged 3 to 5 years is selected, planned, organised and managed.

#### **Confidentially**

- You and the centre will not be identified in any way.
- All information is confidential and will be only be viewed by the researcher.

#### **A General Information about the centre**

1. Is the centre registered as an Early Childhood provider?

Yes	
No	

2. With whom is the Early Childhood centre registered?

Department of Education	
Department of Welfare	
Local Authority	
Other	

3. Who funds the Early Childhood centre?

Department of Education	
Welfare and service organisation	
Private owner	
Community organisation	
Religious organisation ( <i>church, mosque, temple, etc</i> )	
Other	

4. How long has the Early Childhood centre been in operation?

Less than 1 year	
1-2 year	
3-4 years	
5 years and over	
Don't know.	

5. How often does the Early Childhood centre operate?

5 days a week	
4 days a week	
3 days a week	
2 days a week	
1 day a week	
Seasonally	

6. What are the hours per day?

Less than 3 hours	
3 to 4 hours	
5 to 6 hours	
8 to 10 hours	
10 to 12 hours	
24 hours when needed	

7. Does the centre receive support from?

	Clinic / health personnel	Department of Education	Welfare Department	Local authorit y Health inspecti on	NG O	Othe r
Monthly						
Quarterly						
Half- yearly						
Annually						
Never						
Don't know						

Please explain type of support provided

8. What is the vision of the centre? (*Purpose*)

9. What is the mission of the centre?

10. What is current teaching staff compliment?

Full Time/Part Time <i>F/P</i>	Qualifications	Years of Relevant Experience

11. How are the children are aged 3 to 5 years grouped?

## CURRICULUM

### **B The curriculum for children 3-5 years**

1. What are the curriculum goals? Why are these goals selected?
2. To what extent have the South African National documents on early childhood development influenced your curriculum?

Who developed the curriculum?

Department of Education	
Welfare and service organisation	
Private owner	
Community organisation	
Religious organisation (church, mosque, temple, etc)	
Teachers at ECD site	
Principal / Manager at ECD site	
Other	

Please explain

3. What theory/s (principles/beliefs) inform/s the teaching approach?
4. What are the curriculum goals? (*Specifically for children aged three to five years*) Why are these goals selected?
5. How does the centre fulfil these curriculum goals?
6. What are your plans to achieve the curriculum goals?
7. How is the curriculum content organised?
8. How is the curriculum content managed?
9. How do you support curriculum practice?
10. How is the process of decision making with respect to the curriculum completed?
11. Would you like to change the way in which the curriculum is practiced? Please explain.

**Thank you for your time**

## **APPENDIX 5: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE - EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER**

### **AN EXPLORATION OF THE CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM IN THREE EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES**

#### **Interview schedule - Early Childhood Teacher**

**The purpose of this interview is to:**

- Understand the Early Childhood centre
- Establish how the curriculum content for children aged 3 to 5 years is selected, planned, organised and managed

#### **Confidentially**

- You and the centre will not be identified in any way.
- All information is confidential and will be only be viewed by the researcher

#### **A General Information about the Early Childhood centre**

1. How long has the Early Childhood centre been in operation?

Less than 1 year	
1-2 year	
3-4 years	
5 years and over	
Don't know.	

2. How often does the centre operate?

5 days a week	
4 days a week	
3 days a week	
2 days a week	
1 day a week	
Seasonally	

3. What are the hours per day?

Less than 3 hours	
3 to 4 hours	
5 to 6 hours	
8 to 10 hours	
10 to 12 hours	
24 hours when needed	

## **B The curriculum for children aged 3-5 years**

1. Who developed the curriculum?

Department of Education	
Welfare and service organisation	
Private owner	
Community organisation	
Religious organisation (church, mosque, temple, etc)	
Teachers at Early Childhood centre	
Principal / Manager at Early Childhood centre	
Other	

*Please explain*

2. To what extent have the South African National documents on early childhood development influenced your curriculum?

3. What curriculum (activities/experiences) do you offer to the children?

*Refer to daily programme*

4. What theories (principles/beliefs) inform the teaching approach?

5. What are the curriculum goals?

6. Who selects the curriculum content?

7. How is the curriculum planned?

8. How is the curriculum organised? Why is it organised in this way?

9. How is the curriculum managed?

10. How appropriate are the curriculum experiences to achieve the curriculum goals?

11. Are the curriculum expectations realistic and attainable? *Please explain.*

12. How relevant is the curriculum to the children's lives? *To what extent is curriculum content close to the child's experience?*
13. How sensitive is the curriculum to cultural diversity?
14. To what extent does the curriculum allow children to make meaningful choices?
15. How does the curriculum promote and encourage social interaction among children and adults?
16. To what extent does the curriculum permits flexibility?
17. Is there some content more important (included) than other content (not included)?
18. Would you like to change the curriculum? What would this be? Why?

**Thank you for your time**



## **APPENDIX 6: SITE VISIT AND OBSERVATION**

### **AN EXPLORATION OF THE CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM IN THREE EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES SITE VISIT AND OBSERVATION**

#### **A. The early Childhood centre**

##### **1. Location of Site**

Urban - formal	
Urban - informal	
Rural	

2. Appearance - Type and condition of building
3. Is there water available?
4. Is there electricity available?
5. What is the child - teacher ratio?
6. What specialised facilities and equipment are available (indoors and outdoors)?
7. What facilities are available for the staff?

#### **B. Facilities for Children aged three to five years**

1. What resources in the playrooms are available?
2. How are the playrooms organised?
3. What outdoor resources are available?
4. How is the outdoor area for children organised?

## **APPENDIX 7: OBSERVATIONS OF ACTIVITIES**

### **AN EXPLORATION OF THE CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM IN THREE EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES**

#### **Observation of Activities**

1. What activity/experience is offered to the children? *Refer to daily programme*
2. How does the activity/experience relate to the curriculum goals?
3. How does the activity/experience relate to what has been planned?
4. What content is selected?
5. How is the activity/experience organised?
6. How is the activity or experience approached (for example opportunities for problem solving and inquiry, memorisation, etc?)
7. How sensitive is the activity or experience to cultural diversity?
8. To what extent does the activity/experience allow children to make meaningful choices?
9. How does the activity/experience promote and encourage social interaction among children and adults?
10. To what extent does the teacher cater for flexibility during the activity/experience?

## **APPENDIX 8: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS SCHEDULE**

### **AN EXPLORATION OF THE CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM IN THREE EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES**

#### **DOCUMENT ANALYSIS SCHEDULE**

##### **A. National Policies for Early Childhood education for children aged three to five years**

1. What National Policies pertaining to early childhood curriculum are in place?
2. What curriculum knowledge is privileged in these policies?
3. What underpinning theory/s inform/s the policy.

##### **B. Documents on curriculum for children aged three to five years at the Early Childhood centre**

1. Does the early childhood centre have its' own internal policy on curriculum for?
2. If yes, who was involved in the formulation of these policy/principles/guidelines?
3. What curriculum knowledge is privileged in these policy/principles/guidelines?
4. What underpinning theory/s inform/s the policy/principles/guidelines.

##### **C. Curriculum Planning Documents**

1. What curriculum planning documents are available?
2. What form do these take?
3. What are the content of these?
4. To what extent are these aligned with policies and principles? (National/the early childhood centre)
5. What other resource materials do teachers use when planning activities?

## **APPENDIX 9: DECLARATION OF EDITING**

### **Declaration of Editing**

#### **TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

17 December 2012

This thesis, entitled *An Exploration of the Childhood Curriculum in Three Early Childhood Centres in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa: A Case Study*, has been edited to ensure technically accurate and contextually appropriate use of language for this level of study.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'CM Israel', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**CM ISRAEL**  
**BA Hons (UDW) MA (UND) MA (US) PhD (UNH)**  
**Language Editor**

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

20 February 2014

This dissertation, entitled **An exploration of the curriculum in three early childhood centres in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa: A case study**, has been edited to ensure technically accurate and contextually appropriate use of language for research at this level of study.

**Yours sincerely**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'CM Israel', with a stylized flourish underneath.

**CM ISRAEL**

**BA Hons (UDW) MA (UND) MA (US) PhD (UNH)**

**Language Editor**






## APPENDIX 10: TURNITIN REPORT

### Turnitin

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