

***Early Childhood Development Level 4  
Learnership: A qualitative study of the  
curriculum responsiveness to the  
needs of experienced ECD teachers.***

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A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Education in Adult Education

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## COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature:  Date: 8 February 2019

To my parents James Louw and Berenice Johannisen Louw, I dedicate this paper to your fervency and dedication to Community Development for the past 30 years. Your legacy lives on.

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*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul*

Hebrews 6:19

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**Love lives here.**

## Abstract

This study aimed to explore whether the curriculum and pedagogy of an Early Childhood Development (ECD) Level 4 Learnership recognized the informal knowledge of experienced practitioners. It focused on whether the curriculum and pedagogy considered the experiences of adult learners and to what extent adult education principles were followed in its delivery. A review of the literature in South Africa showed that there is a very limited amount of research on the training of ECD practitioners.

The study considered the experiences of adult students completing their Learnership at two TVET colleges in Cape Town and focused on practices that could potentially have followed principles of adult learning as well as the recognition of prior experiential learning. The research explored whether the ECD teachers who had gained entry to the Learnership felt that their prior experiential knowledge was considered in the delivery of the learnership.

The research adopted a qualitative and exploratory approach, using a conceptual frame drawn from the theoretical literature on adult learning, and on the Recognition of Prior Learning. The research design adopted a mixed methods approach involving interviews with the ECD managers at two TVET colleges and eight ECD teachers drawn from four different ECD centres in Mitchells Plain. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the research participants and semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face with each participant. In addition, data was collected via classroom observations as well as relevant policy and course documents.

The analysis of research findings revealed that although ECD teachers without formal training had considerable understanding of how to educate the young children in their classes, this rich experiential knowledge was not drawn on during the initial process of entry into the learnership, nor in the curriculum or teaching strategies within the ECD Level 4 Learnership. The thesis ends by noting that there are various ways in which ECD teachers could have been better assisted.

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# Chapter 1

## A story of an ECD Teacher

*Mary, a 46-year-old mother of three who left school after completing Grade 10 to help provide for her family, works at a crèche in the Mitchells Plain community, a township in Cape Town situated approximately 25 kilometres outside the city.*

*Mitchell's Plain was planned as a segregated, self-sufficient, dormitory suburb far removed from the City. Conceived as a "model township" by the apartheid government, it was built during the 1970s to provide housing for Coloured victims of forced removal due to the implementation of the Group Areas Act. As a child Mary remembers being removed from their much-loved family home in Salt River. Though Mitchells Plain is no longer officially a "Coloured township", the overwhelming majority of its residents remain Coloured. Mitchell's Plain is now one of the busiest nodal interchanges in the City of Cape Town with a population of close to half a million people. It is a community situated in a district that represents some of the most marginalised areas in the City of Cape Town which includes Crossroads, Khayelitsha and Philippi. The area has the highest population density, the highest rates of unemployment in the city and is listed second for the worst social fabric crime rates of all districts in the Western Cape (Crimestatssa, 2018) These factors have implications for regeneration, job creation and skills development.*

*Mary has ten years of experience looking after children age two to four years old but has no qualification or formal training. She works at a crèche within walking distance of her home. She enjoys her job and loves caring for children as well as counting and singing with them. One day the principal of the crèche tells Mary that she needs to go for training because the Department of Social Development has made it compulsory for all 'teachers' working in a crèche to have an Early Childhood Development (ECD) qualification. Mary feels anxious, but she knows that she will lose her job if she doesn't go for training. She decides to apply to attend the 18-month Level 4 Learnership at the local Technical and Vocational Education and Training centre. Her principal promises her ongoing support and mentorship. Mary loves her job, looking after children is her*

*passion but she is worried the Learnership will be too difficult for her. Mary represents one of very many ECD teachers who have worked for years in an ECD centre but have no formal qualifications in ECD. This thesis is about their knowledge and skills and about whether these are taken into account in the training of such teachers.*

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The research reported on in this thesis explored the curriculum responsiveness to the experiences of adult learners of the curriculum on the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Level 4 Learnership. Through exploring the curriculum and classroom teaching of the learnership I wanted to uncover whether Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges that deliver these qualifications take into account the prior knowledge of those who have been practicing for a long time in the field of ECD, but without any formal qualification. I also wanted to explore the degree to which the curriculum followed adult learning principles. The research was conducted through the engagement with two TVET institutions in Cape Town and through a comparison of intake strategies, learning materials, teaching methods and the experiences of ECD teachers. This chapter will provide the background to the study by exploring the history of ECD in South Africa, providing a background to the Level 4 Learnership in ECD and the policies that govern the delivery of ECD services, followed by the problem statement. I have worked in the ECD sector for the past ten years and as my involvement in the sector has me interested in the effective education of adults to better themselves and their community my own experience of ECD in the Mitchells Plain community is also drawn on in this study.

The key research questions are outlined and at the end of this chapter, the structure of the entire report is set out.

## 1.2 ECD in South Africa

The Department of Education defines ECD as “The processes by which children from birth to nine years of age grow and thrive physically, mentally, emotionally, morally and, socially” (DoE 2001b, 13–14). According to our Constitution, education is a human right and it is believed that it fundamental for children to start grasping concepts at a young age (Goswami 2015). It is

during this stage of children's lives that they develop receptivity and readiness for the education which follows. Children absorb knowledge at a rapid pace; at the mere age of two the connections that are being formed in a child's brain are happening about twice as fast as in an adult's brain (Stiles & Jernigan 2010). At this formative stage of their lives they develop critical thinking skills where they are able to pose questions such as why and how as well as understand what is true or untrue, develop stereotypes and 'question their meaning' (Jones & Mules, 2001:192). Hence early childhood development teachers play a critical role in creating a high-quality learning environment (Mathers et al 2011).

ECD highlights the value of early education of children. The qualities of teachers specifically are valuable for 'rich interactions' with children (Burr, 2006). Burr continues to note in her Review of ECD Research that ECD also provides guidance in how best to bring early childhood intervention to children and that this kind of early contact leads to high quality teacher-child relationships that help to buffer at-risk children from academic problems and later delinquency. (Burr, 2006)

ECD teachers play a pivotal role in guaranteeing that all children in their care are provided with quality early learning to meet their needs, and particularly in ensuring that learners with special needs receive appropriate care (DSD & Economic Policy Research Institute, 2014: 115).

ECD has become a priority sector within South Africa, particularly in respect of ensuring equity and high quality of care for children from age 0 to 6 years old in urban informal settlements where there are high rates of poverty, crime and unemployment (Mbarathi et al, 2016). In most cases teachers would require a qualification to teach. ECD remains a unique field as at grassroots level teachers were initially employed to take care of children with no formal qualifications or prior experience in childcare. There is inequality in government resource provision to ECD centres and programmes which compromises the full potential for early childhood development especially for children in urban informal settlements. Many parents in employment send their children to their neighbour, a day mother, child minders or ECD facilities during their working hours. In the case of ECD, parents leave their children with caregivers who have the facilities to ensure the safety and, in some cases, cognitive development for their child. Under current ECD policy (NELDS, 2009), it is expected that adequate formal and informal learning materials are

available to the children for stimulation in their learning experiences.

Poverty remains a huge challenge in South Africa (UNICEF, 2009). With more than half of South Africa's children living in severe poverty, the majority do not have access to an ECD programme as many parents cannot afford school fees. It is evident that ECD programs are of great importance to policymakers, service providers as well as to families. Over the last decade the Department of Social Development (DSD) has made it their aim to provide access to quality early childhood development centres, especially to disadvantaged children in poor communities. The belief is that this will be a breakthrough strategy for education and economic growth over the next five years (National Integrated Plan, 2015). For this process to work both human and financial resources are needed.

With more than 7 million children in our country between the ages of 0-6 years, the Expanded Public Works Programme Social Sector Plan (S.A Gov. 2004/5–2008/9) highlights the key role of government reaching these children through ECD programmes. In a national audit of ECD provisioning conducted by the Department of Education and the European Union in 2001 it was found that only 16% of 0-6-year olds were in formal or informal ECD provision. When survey staff visited the sites where these children were located it was evident that many of these sites had teachers or child-minders who had no form of training or materials to help children reach the appropriate development milestones (S.A Gov. 2004/5–2008/9).

Within DSD, government has created a subsidy for ECD centres of R15 per child per day, accessible only to registered ECD facilities (Ilifa Labantwana, 2011). This subsidy makes a significant difference in centres, sometimes providing up to 70% of the centre's monthly income. (Biersteker, Streak & Gwele, 2008). With ECD centres in urban informal settlements receiving little to no school fees, and not being able to fundraise adequately, it is not clear how these centres make ends meet, let alone employ quality staff. Another study (Biersteker & Hendricks, forthcoming) of the 164 registered and unregistered ECD sites in two poor districts in North West Province found that 40% of principals and 37% of practitioners earned no salary and a further 40% of principals and 53% of practitioners earned less than R 1000 per month. Thus, for many communities, making use of a Learnership for ECD teachers is seen as gift. Teachers can study in the field of ECD, allowing the centres to learn more about policies, keep updated with

laws and create not only a more professional atmosphere but also a better-quality facility at no cost to the site itself as stipends are provided to enable the teacher to pay for transport and meals etc.

Research shows that the development of important emotional, cognitive, and behavioral skills takes place early in life (McClelland, 2013). These foundational skills are not only important for a successful transition to school, but also for later academic achievement and social adjustment. The World Bank, The World Health Organisation, UNICEF and UNESCO have continuously emphasized the importance of good ECD programmes and their impact in promoting 'cognitive gains' in young children to eventually contribute indirectly or directly to combatting poverty (Penn, 2004).

### 1.3 ECD Policy Legislation

Much has been done in an attempt to standardize the quality of ECD in South Africa, with policies and plans to continually improve the services offered to children. The draft National Early Childhood Development Policy (NEP Policy) has attempted to ensure that children living in marginalised areas are able to access quality ECD services (Department of Social Services, 2015). Presently government departments have partnered with stakeholders who provide ECD services to create awareness and advance the importance of ECD (van der Merwe, 2015). A South African integrated programme on Early Childhood Education has been generated to encourage children to attend school, as well as to inspire teachers to teach (Mbarathi et al, 2016).

Learning programmes in ECD centres also need to conform to norms and standards stipulated in section 94(2) of the NEP Policy. There are six norms and standards to which ECD programmes must adhere (DSD, 2011b: 25). All of these standards refer to the importance of trained practitioners.

The first standard emphasizes that ECD programme provision needs to be provided by trained practitioners and should be delivered in an age and developmentally appropriate manner. The practitioners should value the diversity of the children and provide a learning experience which differs each day (DSD, 2011b: 25).

The second standard suggests that learning programmes should aim to facilitate the process of children realising their full potential (DSD, 2011b: 25).

The third standard relates to the care of children within ECD centres. Staff should be trained and knowledgeable about teaching, medical care and children (DSD, 2011b: 26).

The fourth standard requires that learning programmes should instill positive social values (DSD, 2011b: 26). The programme should harness respect for diversity through embracing a non-discriminatory approach to care. The role of parents should be emphasized in the development of positive values in the children and staff members should consistently role-model positive behaviour to the children (DSD, 2011b:26).

The fifth standard requires that practitioners should teach children to understand and value diversity in terms of culture and language and the learning programme should assist learners in establishing their own identity (DSD, 2011b: 26).

The final standard involves meeting the range of needs that children have such as the 'emotional, cognitive, sensory, spiritual, moral, physical, social and communication development needs of children' (DSD, 2011b: 26). Learning programmes should be developmentally appropriate, and emphasize the involvement of caregivers as well as train caregivers in how to care for their children in such a way that facilitates their child's holistic development (DSD, 2011b: 26).

These standards highlight the valuable input practitioners make in their involvement with young children daily. These ideals are also inscribed in several of our legislative documents namely the Constitution of South Africa, the National Early Learning Development Standards and the South African Children's Act No. 38 of 2008 (NELDS, 2009). These legislative documents and policies recognise the importance of inclusive and quality ECD practices by not only viewing it as a basic human right but also by recognising the short- and long-term benefits of ECD learning and growing experiences for children.

If we want to achieve high quality ECD in South Africa we will have to produce competent practitioners (Gustaffson, 2010). Regardless of the situation or the facility in which a child is placed, a quality teacher can provide a learning environment in which a child can develop in a holistic manner. In order to produce quality ECD teachers, various training and education opportunities are made available through short skills programmes, as well as through full ECD qualifications.

## 1.4 Training of ECD Practitioners

### 1.4.1 Training Requirements

For teachers to provide services that foster the holistic development of children, they need to be trained well (Govindasamy, 2010: 2). Experience and passion for children is insufficient for the provision of effective ECD services (Govindasamy, 2010: 2). Specialised knowledge in ECD that incorporates theories of child development, skills and knowledge is essential for professional practice (Govindasamy, 2010: 3; HSRC, 2009: 9). In South Africa ECD training is offered through a full ECD qualification or through short skills programmes or Learnerships which are established by SAQA through the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (Atmore, 2013: 157; Meier, Lemmer & Niron, 2015: 8).

The research in this study focused on the TVET component of the learnership. Learnerships are offered by either TVET colleges or through non-profit organisations. The ECD Level 4 Learnership is the minimum qualification needed for ECD teaching as determined by The Department of Social Development (DSD). The Further Education and Training Certificate: Early Childhood Development, NQF Level 4, SAQA ID 58761 is a credit-bearing National Qualification registered on the NQF (National Qualifications Framework). When various qualifications are also on NQF 4 level (academic level) and are properly Accredited, then they are called “Matric Equivalent” qualifications. A Learnership is a structured learning programme for gaining theoretical knowledge and practical skills leading to an occupational qualification registered on the National Qualification Framework (NQF), a learnership is also work based learning programme that leads to an NQF registered qualification. ‘Learnerships are directly related to an occupation or field of work, for example, electrical engineering, hairdressing or project

management' (SAQA, 2014). On completion the ECD Level 4 Learnership will enable recipients of this qualification to facilitate the all-round development of young children. The Learnership is an NQF Level 4.

A Learnership Qualification comprises of three learning components which are rolled out over a period of 18 months depending on the number of the credits of a specific qualification. These components are:

1. Core component: unit standard-based training directly related to the study fields, in this case ECD.
2. Fundamental component: unit standard-based learning components in Mathematical literacy and Communication.
3. Elective component: unit standard-based learning components related to the core element

The ECD Level 4 Learnership qualifies one to be a practitioner and teach children from birth to five years old and aims to equip teachers socially, physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and morally to ensure that children reach their full potential. (Please see Appendix A for the full details of the qualification as well as level descriptors and credits.) At this level, teachers possess the minimum requisite skills for effective teaching and optimal development of children (Atmore, 2013: 157).

The Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) ECD plan has rapidly increased the amount of training opportunities at NQF Levels 1, 4 and 5 and since 2002 there has been a great increase in accreditation of service providers. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's), private training providers and TVET colleges all offer formal training programmes for ECD practitioners on various levels on the NQF. Learnerships in ECD are quite popular as school leavers and child minders can now work full time and at the same time attend classes once per week for eighteen months, and they receive a stipend of approximately R1500 per month ([www.servicesseta.org.za](http://www.servicesseta.org.za)). With EPWP, "practitioners who have received stipends while

training is often required to return to salaries lower than these once they have qualified” (Biersteker & Motala, 2008).

### 1.4.3 Levels of Training amongst ECD Practitioners

In South Africa, community-based ECD centres sees a great lack of qualifications amongst ECD practitioners (DSD & EPRI, 2014: 3). The majority of ECD practitioners are unqualified and underpaid. In 2014, only 42% of ECD practitioners in South Africa had finished their matric (DSD, 2014). However, as a community worker and having had experience in the field of ECD, it became evident to me that teachers in community-based centres have a vast amount of experience despite many having no formal qualifications. With new regulations it is compulsory for them to obtain their Level 4 ECD qualification. According to the government’ ECD Sector Skills Plan 2013/2014 (updated by the ETDP/SETA) recent data is only available from smaller studies but indicates large skills gaps.

In 2008 an audit of all known sites in the Western Cape found that only 20% of ECD practitioners had completed Grade 12. In the same year 57% of ECD practitioners in the Western Cape had not acquired any of the occupational qualifications (DSD, 2009) though some may have completed older certificates and diplomas which were not included in the survey questionnaire. Subsequently in 2010, an audit of 4720 staff in unregistered sites found that 44 % of principals and 51% of practitioners have not completed high school. This means that a very large proportion of ECD practitioners would need training at Level 4 to meet the new requirements (DSD, 2010). The Public Expenditure Tracking Survey study in three provinces (UNICEF, 2010) indicated that 43% of practitioners had less than matric, though most of those had completed some high school.

### 1.4.4 Enrolments on ECD Qualification

The 2010 audit of unregistered sites (Biersteker & Hendricks, 2012) found that 32% of principals and 58% of practitioners have no formally recognised qualification. Level 1 (Basic

ECD Training) and Level 4 qualifications obtained in ECD are the most common ones that practitioners were enrolled for in 2012, as shown in Table 1.4.1

*Table 1.4.5 Percentage of principals and teachers enrolled on the various ECD qualifications.*

Level	ECD Qualification	Principals (%)	Practitioners (%)
<b>None</b>		32	58
<b>Level 1</b>	Basic Certificate: ECD	16	13
<b>Level 4</b>	National Certificate: ECD/TVET: ECD	21	13
<b>Level 5</b>	Higher Certificate: ECD	11	4
<b>Level 5</b>	National Diploma	4	2
<b>Other</b>	(e.g. N1-6, Diploma in Education, Pre-primary teacher's certificate, Nursery School Teachers' Certificate)	16	10
		100%	100%

Source: Biersteker & Hendriks (2012)

The Table above clearly shows that enrolments on the Level 4 Learnership are higher than other levels. The ECD Level 4 qualification has become the most popular ECD level to obtain as it serves as the equivalent of a Grade 12 and only a Grade 9 certificate is required for entry. Data from an audit of two rural districts of North West Province (Biersteker & Hendricks, forthcoming) indicates that 39% of principals and 24% of practitioners have matric while most of the rest have some high schooling thus allowing them entry into the Levels 4 and 5 qualifications. Older practitioners tend to have lower levels of formal education. However, providers at the provincial consultations indicated that learner's fundamental capacity was low even with matric and that many of them require matric as an entry to Level 4 because they struggle with the requirements of the qualification.

The Level 4 ECD qualification aims to provide ECD practitioners with the necessary skills to

facilitate the holistic development of young children, including those children with special needs. The question of whether or not training in these various qualifications actually produces outcomes of quality teaching, however, is not clear. While teacher qualification levels are often used as a quality indicator for ECD services, higher levels of qualification do not always predict higher levels of quality teaching. This has been found both in South Africa (e.g. Dlamini et al., 1996; Department of Education, 2001b), and internationally (e.g. Cassidy et al., 2005). In a study assessing the quality of ECD services in the Western Cape, researchers found that a qualification level was not always associated with higher quality outcomes such as quality of care and learning (HSRC, 2009). More specifically, it was found that the qualification level was positively associated with quality care in classes catering for infants and toddlers (HSRC, 2009).

### 1.5. Problem Statement

In the current climate in South Africa, ECD has received much attention. The importance of strategies to enhance the efficiency of the sector with regards to the proper education of young children and the formalizing of qualifications of those that educate in this sector are acknowledged. The policies introduced in this section show that steps are being taken to ensure that this happens and that as a country we know what needs to be done. However, with the formalizing of qualifications of teachers in the field who have been working with children for decades, the question remains: to what extent does the curriculum respond or consider the fact that some learners have extensive practitioner experience and how is this prior knowledge incorporated into the curriculum.

The EPWP and The Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA) established ECD Learnerships in order 'to increase employment prospects for the unemployed but also to produce suitably qualified ECD practitioners with a recognised qualification' (<http://regqs.saqa.org.za>). In essence this means that there are two groups of people currently entering this Learnership; first there are unemployed school-leavers or school 'drop outs' who have been at home for some time and have successfully completed grade 9; and secondly there are current practitioners who enter these Learnerships with years of experience in community ECD. Many youth portals and government advertisements invite the youth and school leavers to apply for these learnerships. On the other

hand, the Department of Social Development has made it compulsory for teachers who are working in ECD centres to be qualified and to access these learnerships by providing documentation that they are full time employed at the site. It could be argued that two different approaches need to be taken for their training as the first group has no prior knowledge of ECD teaching, while the second group have some idea of what works in practice even if they have no formal qualification.

It is this reality that led to my interest in exploring the curriculum and pedagogy used in the training programmes and in particular exploring whether the Level 4 ECD Learnership curriculum and/or pedagogy is responsive to and draws on the prior knowledge of those teachers who have significant years of experience as ECD practitioners. My questions were: are the materials used appropriate for experienced adult learners? And are these teachers able to draw on the prior experiential knowledge which they bring into the formal course to enrich the learning experience for others in the class with less or no experience? I also wanted to briefly explore the extent to which the practitioners felt that the learnership added to their existent knowledge as this would explain how the coursework and the training was responsive to their prior experience and where they needed to perhaps acquire more knowledge and skill.

## **1.6. Research questions**

*My research question therefore became:*

Main Question: To what extent is the Learnership level 4 curriculum and pedagogy responsive to the experienced ECD practitioners?

Sub questions:

- To what extent does the Level 4 Learnership curriculum – the way in which it is presented as well as through its entrance assessments – provide opportunities to recognise and draw on the prior knowledge of practitioners?
- To what extent are the programmes managers involved in the delivery of the Learnership aware of the prior experiential knowledge of some of the participants and to what extent do they ensure inclusion thereof?
- Are adult learning principles followed in the delivery of the learnership?

- To what extent do those with significant practitioner experience in the field feel that the curriculum adds to their existing knowledge?

The study sought to answer these questions by focusing on:

1. The entrance testing used.
2. Curriculum documentation.
3. Observed pedagogy.
4. The explored views of managers and teachers.

It is my hope that the study will benefit ECD training managers, teachers, parents, policy makers and children. The findings of the study will hopefully provide information which could contribute towards good practices that promote the relevant adult education approaches to ensure that children's rights to quality education and care are met. I would also like to add knowledge to a field that is quite under researched.

## 1.7. Outline of dissertation

This dissertation is made up of five chapters:

Chapter One: Introduction has discussed the background of the study; the significance of the study; the research topic, the main questions and provides an outline of the structure of the whole report.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature presents a review of the research literature as well as the conceptual framework that guided my study.

Chapter Three: Methodology discusses the research design and methodology through which the study was carried out. Here I will explain my research design, choice of methods of data collection, how the data was analysed as well as limitations of the research process.

Chapter Four: Presentation and discussion of research findings presents and discusses the findings according to the various themes which emerged through data analyses. A table of data shows the curriculum layout as well as the themes which emerged from the data.

Chapter Five: The final chapter presents the main conclusions and recommendations of the study.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW & CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 Overview

As introduced in Chapter 1 this thesis involves a study of whether the ECD Level 4 Learnership curriculum responds to the prior experience of teachers with practitioner experience in the field. In this chapter I will argue that my question is essentially one related to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and in particular in-curriculum RPL. I will then introduce adult learning theories that combined with this conceptualization of RPL will identify the key areas of interest I have with regards to the curriculum responsiveness to the experienced teacher. There is very little research literature on ECD (as seen in Chapter 1). This chapter will focus on research literature and conceptual frameworks from the field of RPL.

#### 2.2 Research Literature on RPL

“Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)” means the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed for the purposes of alternative access and admission, recognition and certification, or further learning and development. (SAQA, 2013). Although my study is not one of RPL in its purest form in the sense of formally recognising informal knowledge, what it does raise is the question of acknowledging informal knowledge during the process of entry and the delivery of a learnership.

According to SAQA:

‘Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in South Africa is critical to the development of an equitable education and training system. As such a policy to develop and facilitate implementation of RPL across all sectors of education and training is critical and should be carefully constructed. An RPL policy should meet the needs of all the role players, including Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies (ETQAs), providers of education and training, constituents of Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and most importantly, the main beneficiaries of the process, the learners.’

Looking at the research literature in the field of in-curriculum RPL in teacher training, it has been difficult to locate concise literature pertaining specifically to my study. There are, however, vast amounts of research on RPL as well as analyses of different attempts to realise and implement RPL around the world, such as in Australia, Europe and South Africa. There has also been research that has raised serious questions, especially in areas where more instrumental forms of RPL have been implemented, such as RPL for accreditation (e.g. Butterworth, 1992; Castle & Attwood, 2001). However, given the study at hand I would like to present research which focused on the use of diverse methods of RPL used during acceptance of participants from the community into a programme as well as the use of RPL during a programme.

RPL tends to be seen as a policy instrument with deep and intricate histories within the United Kingdom and North America (Ralphs, 2016). First proposed through agendas for social inclusion and the need for greater access to post-secondary education, in the 1970's and 1980's, it became recognised that knowledge and skill acquisition does not only take place in formal education and it should not be necessary to repeat such learning when seeking admission to college or a university study programme. In this way RPL was proposed as an assessment led practice for establishing the validity of skill and knowledge without risking the academic standards in the institutions offering these qualifications. RPL was first introduced in the South African education and training system as a reformatory system after 1994 (Ralphs, 2010).

Ralphs describes RPL as a deceptively technical procedure for 'mapping' prior learning and fitting it into the specifications of a qualification and then making judgments as to whether it complies with these specifications or not. Ralphs conceptualizes RPL as not only an assessment process to gain access to a course or to fast-track 'certification in an outcomes-based system', but rather highlights its value 'as a specialised pedagogy for mediating knowledge, learning and assessment practices across different contexts and pathways is certainly worth further exploration' (Ralphs, 2012).

In a collaborative study of practices in RPL through a four-year research project in South Africa, Alan Ralphs and Linda Cooper present a well written overview of the RPL story as it evolved over 50 years. Chapters of the book are written by various authors providing a theoretical

framework defining RPL as a specialized pedagogy that provides a conceptual language for describing RPL practices across various contexts.

Cooper (2011) sees RPL in South Africa being closely aligned to three key elements:

1. To attempt to close the gap on the past injustices of apartheid through a political discourse of transformation;
2. The discourse of lifelong learning; to certify knowledge acquired experientially; and
3. To enhance flexible and articulate compatibilities for national credit accumulation as part of the National Qualifications Framework.

Tschannen-Moran (2008) defines two main reasons as to why a teacher's prior skills needed to be recognised before entering a learning programme. Firstly, it is to recognise the value of the skills, knowledge and experiences gained within and beyond formal education that could be beneficial for those entering education, and secondly, to provide flexible learning opportunities to ensure that a wider group is able to access programmes of study. Similarly, as explained in Chapter 1, I have come to understand that there are different groups entering the ECD Level 4 Learnership; with some having practitioner experience and others without any practitioner experience, so I wished to ascertain whether the informal knowledge of the experienced teachers is recognized and incorporated to the Learnership's curriculum and pedagogy.

In 1997 the Department of Education launched a National ECD Pilot Project and it was noted that one can never over emphasize the importance of RPL or other assessment exercises before placing practitioners on training. It also highlighted that if the prior competencies of teachers are not considered, providers might waste time training practitioners in what they already knew and not focus on what they need to know. (Department of Education, 2001).

In South Africa, there is no document or policy that ensures that this happens before ECD practitioners gain access to the Level 4 Learnership. If they have considerable work experience, surely there needs to be some sort of prior knowledge recognition when they are trained? According to Harris and Wihak (2011) in relation to RPL: the knowledge and skills gained through experiential and self-directed or informal learning needs to be reviewed, evaluated and acknowledged. In addition to the curriculum and pedagogy it was therefore important for me through this study to also explore how the teachers were interviewed or assessed before they started the course and what the entrance requirements were.

Schwartz (2004) suggests that sometimes the entrance requirements or admissions criteria might exist in order to make the course unattractive to the 'mature' learner with the aim of excluding them.

I will now present four case studies of RPL as "specialised pedagogy", three of which are based on studies in South Africa and one based on a study in Sweden.

## 2.3. Case Studies of Good Practice

### 2.3.1 "Sweeper to Teacher"

Alan Ralphs does an enlightening study about two different routes for access to undergraduate study. Retrenched in 2004 working as a volunteer with some contract work as a cleaner at local schools, Peter Hendriks, age 45, graduated with a degree in teaching. This came after Hendriks completed a Portfolio Development Course (PDC) in 2006 as part of an RPL application to university.

He completed the assessment successfully and entered university to study a B.A degree and graduate in 2012.

The study explained the RPL policy of a university in South Africa. The university had an RPL policy in place since 2001 that adopted two forms of RPL routes for those who wish to study and were 23 years of age and older. The two routes were as follows:

1. Tests for Access and Placements (TAPS)

The TAPS included a combination of the standardised National Benchmark Test (NBT) as well as a reading and writing test designed specifically for RPL candidates.

2. Portfolio Development Course (PDC)

The PDC was a process that took place over three months to complete various aims. This process aimed to provide learners with 'specialised tools to navigate boundaries between work-based experiential learning and the text-based practices of study at university level' (Ralphs 2016:56-57). This method of access provides a platform for applicants to provide evidence of their knowledge and skills acquired informally.

The study conceptualized the PDC as a special form of 'boundary pedagogy' (Ralphs 2016:75). This form of pedagogy provides tools to navigate between the discourse and practices within experiential learning and formal education.

The study did an in-depth comparison of admission and success rates of students through both routes of RPL. In the initial findings the PDC provided better success rates as PDC students performed better in their subsequent studies than those who gained access through the testing.

This study allowed me to see PDC as a specialised way of mediating access and acknowledging adult learning prior to entering a programme.

### 2.3.2 RPL for access to postgraduate study

A study by Linda Cooper, Judy Harris and Barbara Jones (Cooper et al, 2016) focused on RPL into postgraduate studies at one of the oldest universities in South Africa. The study questioned whether it was possible for RPL candidates to gain access to postgraduate studies without the usual undergraduate degree in that particular field. The study was aimed to understand the implications of RPL through the distinction between:

1. Pure and applied knowledge
2. Discipline-specific and cross-domain knowledge
3. The difference between 'hard' and 'soft' sciences

This was in order to ascertain whether it was easier to access certain courses through RPL in some fields of study (Cooper et al, 2016:4).

Through researching RPL models of pedagogy the study looked at case studies of RPL as entry into three programmes in different domains:

1. Postgraduate Diploma in Management Practice (PDMP) in the commerce faculty. The coursework in this faculty focuses on enhancing professional practice through personal mastery.
2. Postgraduate Diploma/MPhil in Disability studies in the Health Sciences faculty. Disability studies places emphasis on conscientising and social transformation purposes.

3. Postgraduate Diploma/Masters in Adult Education in the Humanities faculty.  
A faculty where academia and research orientation deepen knowledge.

The RPL process of the PDMP and Disability Study Programmes were similar in respect of having a focus on the developing academic literacies, and prior learning and new learning were integrated into the curriculum via this component. However, the Adult Education programme was more aligned to the mainstream curriculum and did not focus much on the learning or development academic literacies.

In the PDMP, experienced and academic knowledge were equally important. Hence, the RPL portfolio process ran in parallel with the mainstream programme and was also fully integrated.

Disability studies crossed traditional disciplinary boundaries and the programme involved prominent disability organisations in its curriculum development.

In Adult Education Studies the RPL portfolio development process took place prior to the programme and was mainly directed at documenting experiential knowledge that aligned with the conceptual abilities and skills required to enter a master's degree programme. Candidates were expected to cope with the demands of master's level.

The three models of RPL practice presented by Cooper et al illustrate the various methods and approaches to in-curriculum RPL. The study highlighted crucial factors that need to be included in the approach to RPL:

1. The Mainstream Curriculum: should look a) towards academic discourse and b) professional practice. It is also favourable the curriculum to have a transformative purpose.
2. Institutional Authorities needs to allow for admission processes to be flexible to enhance the implementation of RPL.
3. The knowledge base needs to be fluid with a strong link between formal knowledge and every day knowledge.
4. Flexibility in evaluation needs to see RPL not only including prior knowledge and skills but also 'potential to succeed' (Cooper et al 2016:48).

### 2.3.3 Workers College

When exploring the in-curriculum model of RPL in South Africa an enlightening study is that of the Workers College (Bofelo, Shah, Moodley, Cooper and Jones, 2013). The Workers College was established in 1991 initially as part of the University of Natal on the basis that there was a great need for a worker education organization that met the community educational needs of South Africa. The College acknowledged that experiential learning is often seen as being less important than the conventional knowledge that resides in formal institutions. The Workers College believed that peoples' experiences and personal reflections could be a source of learning through debates, group work and texts. According to Bofelo et al 2013, learners entering the diploma courses were selected through a variety of processes as is needed in the education of adults.

The research had aimed to investigate the ways in which the college enhanced the integration of RPL processes into their diploma programmes. It found that it did so in 3 ways:

1. From the perspective of participants  
It built their confidence and allowed them to draw on prior experiential learning as a valuable resource for new learning. This created greater participation and dialogue with peers and facilitators.
2. From the perspective of the curriculum  
It engaged everyday knowledge as a resource in the programme.
3. From the perspective of the institution  
It continually improved the process of RPL and ensured that the level of quality of RPL allowed for articulation with access to university study.

The College not only relied on the content and teaching practices being related to participants' experiences but also aimed at achieving responsiveness to the experiences of labour and community organisations from which the learners came, and of which were part as a collective (Bofelo et al, 2013).

### 2.3.4 RPL Care Workers in Sweden

Andersson & Fejes (2012) write about how in Sweden care workers for the elderly who had

limited education opportunities had to upskill themselves. A programme was designed for care workers of the elderly to receive certified training, the completion of which was required for employment. The important goal of this 18-month programme was to relate their formal training more closely to the workplace in order to focus on the knowledge for this specific occupation.

The programme was designed by including an RPL process through activities that although ensuring the acquisition of new knowledge, continued to recognize the participants' prior learning. Teaching was conducted through lectures, and participants were required to discuss the lectures among themselves and their supervisors in 'learning conversations'. Reflection was encouraged on issues being discussed, with the supervisor guiding the conversation to involve everyone.

Participants' knowledge was assessed through discussion and assignments. This ensured that participants were examined orally and in writing. Although the process was focused on prior learning, it also highlighted the gaps in their learning. When these gaps were highlighted participants would read course literature and take a written exam. The result of this in-service RPL program included:

1. That the participants welcomed new knowledge
2. Their self-esteem increased, and they developed a more professional attitude toward work when their own knowledge was acknowledged.
3. Managers became more interested in the use of new training methods which were promoted through the project.

The primary focus of RPL is often the certification and accreditation, but this case study shows that processes of RPL during training can enhance self-awareness and self-confidence which helps adults learn better through worthwhile learning experiences (Whittaker et al. 2006).

## 2.4. Theories of adult learning and experience

This chapter will now explore adult learning theories, adult learning as well as the adult learning

environment before presenting a conceptual framework which guided how I conducted the research for this thesis. It will also position my work within the larger field of research.

### 2.4.1 Experiential Learning Theory

Most RPL literature draws on a liberal humanist framework of experiential learning theory. This framework is based on educational theories such as that of Weil and McGill's Village One of experiential learning theory (1989), or Boud, Cohen and Walker's Training and Efficiency tradition of experiential learning theory (1993). Kolb's learning cycle theory of experiential development (1984) is the basis of this perspective. Other models of RPL falling within this perspective include Harris' Learning and Development RPL (1999a), Lockett's Hermeneutic Paradigm (1999), and Butterworth's Development model (1992). The liberal humanist perspective postulates that prior experience must be transformed into learning that can meet the demands of hierarchically structured academic knowledge. The learner undergoes a process of self-reflection to extract the general learning required for this transformation.

In their discussion of Adult Education Kolb and Roger Fry (1975) created an experiential learning model. This model included four interesting elements that I will refer to when looking at the Level 4 Learnership curriculum:

1. Concrete Experience – feelings and responses
2. Observation and experience – watching and analysing
3. Forming abstract conclusions – critical thinking
4. Testing in a new situation

Kolb and Fry believe that the model is approached as a continuous spiral and that learning can begin at any of the four points (Kolb & Fry, 1975). In my study I wanted to see if and how the concrete experience of the teachers was incorporated into the learning materials and whether observations and experience in the field were acknowledged as a resource for those new to the field.

## 2.4.2 Experience for social change

Adult education is a practice in which adults engage in systematic and sustained self-educating activities in order to gain new forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, or values (Merriam, Sharan B. & Brockett, Ralph G.,1997). This study was anchored in an interest in approaches to adult learning which views experiential learning as important. In terms of the pedagogy used in the training of ECD teachers, it is evident that the participants are all adults. Many have been child-minding at ECD facilities; in some cases, they have been doing so for decades. There are a number of theorists who have grounded critical reflection on experience as the source of knowledge and learning.

### 2.4.2.1 Lindeman

Eduard C. Lindeman's vision of adult education was that the education of adults could not be confined to the classroom or formal curriculum. He saw the great significance in educational possibilities of everyday life and peoples experience. He favoured a committed and action-oriented form of education (Lindeman 1951b). It:

*is not formal, not conventional, not designed merely for the purpose of cultivating skills, but... something which relates [people] definitely to their community... It has for one of its purposes the improvement of methods of social action... We are people who want change, but we want it to be rational, understood. (Lindeman 1951b: 129-130)*

Lindeman believed that adults learn better when their needs, interest and life experiences are taken into account. "None but the humble become good teachers of adults", in an adult class the participants experience is as important as the teacher knowledge. His key assumptions about adult learners includes that adults' orientation to learning is life-centred and that their experience is the richest source for adult's learning. Lindeman saw the education in the possibilities of everyday life. Education is life. He felt that too much emphasis was placed on classrooms and curriculum, in conventional education the student is required to adjust to an established curriculum; in adult education the curriculum is built around the students' needs and interests.

Dewey saw Lindeman's term of adult education as one that allows participants to share what was common to them and that dialogue enhanced their ability for critical understanding in experience and situations. Dewey argues that education and learning are social and interactive processes. He strongly believes that students need to experience and interact with their curriculum, taking part in their own learning. He notes that "to prepare him for the future life means to give him command of himself; it means so to train him that he will have the full and ready use of all his capacities" (Dewey, 1897:78).

In this research I wished to ascertain what methods were used in the classroom. Did the practitioners feel that the facilitator took a hierarchical approach to education? Or were relations between educator and learner more participatory? As adults who in most cases did not finish their matric, were they patronized and taught as children would be taught? Or treated as adults?

#### 2.4.2.2 Freire

Freire's work as an educator was optimistic. Paulo Freire toiled to help men and women overcome their sense of powerlessness and opposed education forms that treat people as objects rather than subjects; and explored education as cultural action (Freire, 1995). Freire's work is significant to my research in terms of four of his main concepts:

- Freire opposed what he called the "banking" concept of education. This concept sees participants as an empty account filled by the teacher or facilitator. He goes on to highlight the importance of transforming students into 'receiving objects' so that they are able to control their own thinking and action. (Freire, 1970:77).
- Freire also highlights that praxis-action dialogue not only deepens understanding but was part of making a difference in the world.
- The idea of building a 'pedagogy of the oppressed' or a 'pedagogy of hope' was important elements to conscientise and develop peoples' minds to empower them to transform their own reality (Taylor 1991:52)
- More importantly in my research, Freire's belief in situating educational activity through

sharing real experiences would help those who educate to approach educational practices differently so that participants may learn from each other.

Using this approach of Freire, I would like to explore whether the ECD Level 4 Learnership emphasises an experiential and interactive teaching approach between the facilitator and the participants.

#### 2.4.2.3 Brookfield

Brookfield (1985) defines adult education as an “activity concerned to assist adults in their quest for a sense of control in their own lives, within their interpersonal relationships, and with regard to the social forms and structures within which they live” (Brookfield, 1985:46).

Brookfield suggested six principles of effective practice in facilitating learning:

- 1) Participation is voluntary; adults are engaged in learning as a result of their own choice or circumstance. It may be the circumstances prompting this learning are external to the learner (job loss, bereavement etc.). Hence, excluded are settings where adults are threatened or intimidated into learning.
- 2) Respect for self-worth; an attention to increasing adults’ sense of self-worth underlies all educational efforts. This does not mean that criticism is absent from educational encounters. Foreign to adult education, however, are practices which belittle participants.
- 3) Adult education is collaborative; teachers and learners are engaged with one another as equals. This collaboration is seen in curriculum development, in methodological aspects, and in generating evaluative criteria.
- 4) Praxis is at the heart of adult education; participants are involved in a constant process of activity, reflection on activity, collaborative analysis of activity, new activity, further reflection and collaborative analysis.
- 5) Adult education fosters a spirit of critical reflection; through education, learners come to appreciate that values, beliefs and behaviours are culturally constructed and transmitted, and

that they are provisional and relative. Adult educators are concerned, therefore, to prompt adults to consider ways of thinking and living alternative to those they already inhabit.

6) The aim of adult education is the nurturing of self-directed, empowered adults; such adults will see themselves as proactive, 'initiating individuals engaged in a continuous re-creation of their personal relationships, work worlds, and social circumstances, and not as reactive individuals' (Brookfield, 1985: 48).

### 2.4.3 The Adult Learning Environment

According to Wikipedia, learning environments are educational approaches, cultures, and physical settings for all types of learners and activities (Wikipedia, 2018). The learning environment has many definitions and is used in a variety of contexts. The study of learning environments focuses on all components of a classroom including the conduct and the beliefs of educators and students.

Andragogy (adult learning) is a theory that holds a set of assumptions about how adults learn. It promotes approaches to learning that are problem-based and collaborative rather than didactic. Andragogy originated in Europe in the 1950's with Malcolm Knowles as a key figure. This approach defined andragogy as "the art and science of helping adults learn" (Zmeyov 1998; Fidishun 2000). In his book *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species* he looks at traditional theories of learning and teacher practices and he argues the fact that most theories of adult learning are based on research on the learning of children, which in turn is based upon theories of animal learning. He sees these theories as being artificial as they are not complex enough to be applied to the learning of adult human beings and more importantly instructors should take on the role of facilitator rather than lecturer.

Knowles four main principles on adult education had a great impact in the field of andragogy:

1. Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.
2. Experience provides the basis for learning activities.
3. Adults are more interested in subjects that have relevance to their job.

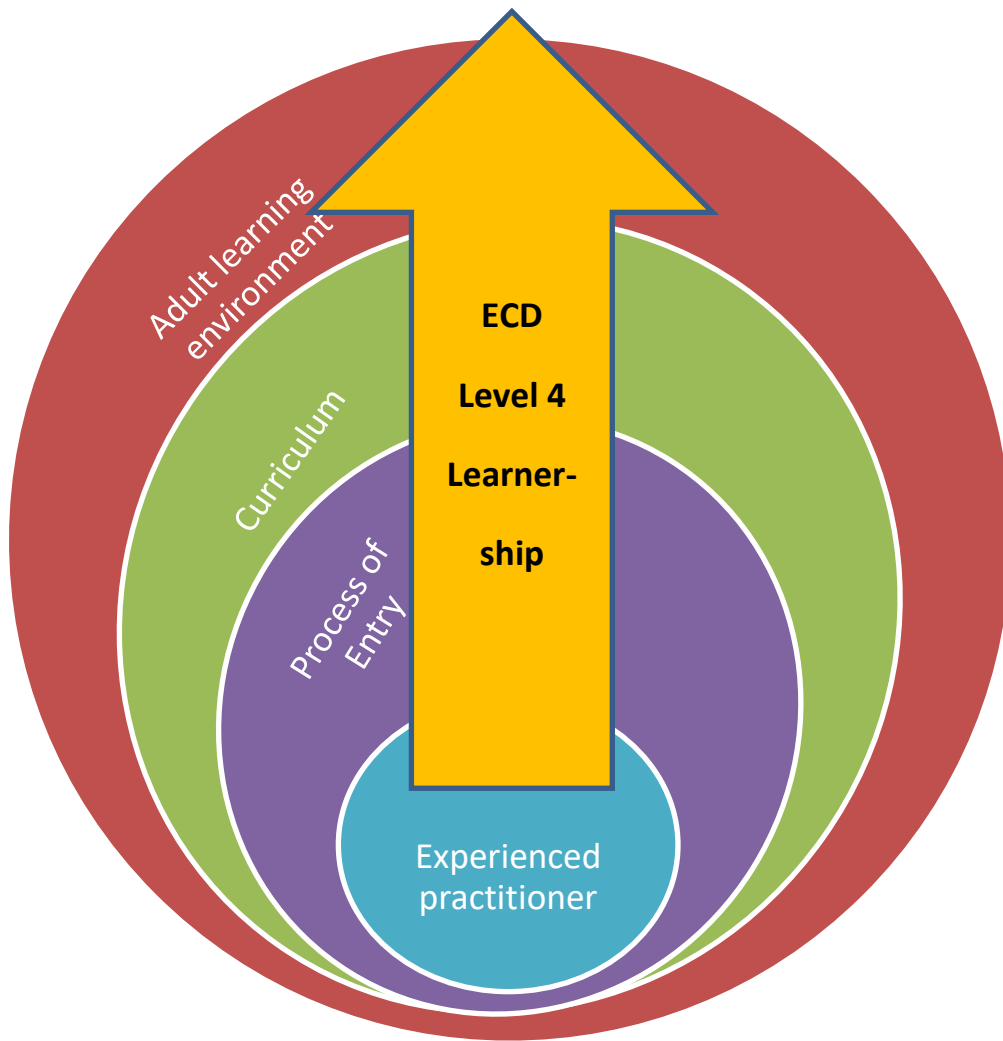
4. Adult learning is problem-centred rather than content related.

(Knowles, 1984)

In my study I wanted to explore the psycho-social nature of the learning environment by focusing on the participants' experience and views of the course. Knowles (1973) recommends various strategies for teaching adults, one of which is, the reminder that learning should be experiential. Adult learners bring a great deal of experience to the learning environment which educators and facilitators can use as a resource. Adult learners require a climate conducive for learning (Knowles, 1973:33). The setup of classroom and learning space can motivate or create barriers when educating adults (Fulton, 1991). Learning environments have an impact on the success of adult education (Knowles, 1973). Andragogy promotes informal classroom setups where classroom layouts are set out more welcoming and in a way that promotes participation and the equality of the teacher and the learner. This could mean for example chairs are perhaps in a circle instead of in rows so that open discussions are encouraged (Knowles, 1973).

## 2.5. My Conceptual Framework

In the diagram below, I illustrate my conceptual framework drawing on the theories discussed above. The experienced practitioner is at the center and in order for me to understand whether the curriculum of the Level 4 Learnership is responsive to the needs of these practitioners I conceptualized three main areas of interest; 1) I wanted to ascertain whether the TVET colleges firstly, conducted RPL assessments on entry 2) Then I explored the curriculum and 3) the adult learning environment to ascertain whether the education programmes themselves were informed by, and related to, the experience and practices of these experienced practitioners.



My conceptual framework assumed that the experienced teacher is a subject through the above three aspects of the Level 4 ECD Learnership: process of entry, curriculum and adult learning environment. Using this lens, based on the above-mentioned theories I could then answer my research questions on whether the learnership recognizes these teachers and their prior experience with in these various processes.

The next Chapter presents my research methodology before the research data is presented in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 3

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the research design and methodology used in this study. The research design, sampling, data collection, data analysis, data verification as well as the ethics and limitations of the study are presented.

#### **3.1. Research design**

The research design is the overall strategy that I chose in order to effectively research the topic at hand; in other words, “it constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data” (De Vaus, 2006).

The aim of this study was to investigate whether adult learning principles were followed and whether the experience of teachers was taken into account in the delivery of the Level 4 ECD Learnership. Thus, a qualitative research approach was used to explore the views and perceptions of locating these within the background of the curriculum documentation and observations of the classrooms of the various processes concerned. Using this approach, I could inquire better into social and behavioural perspectives whereas quantitative studies emphasize measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, rather than processes (Denzin et al, 2000). In adopting a qualitative design for this study, the participants were interviewed in their own natural setting, rather than under artificially created conditions. A qualitative approach also allows for questions that are unstructured and open-ended as well as for in-depth information to be gathered from the research participants.

The research design involved carrying out in-depth interviews with the heads of department at two TVET colleges, as well as four participants at each college. I also looked at the curriculum documentation so as to see how the learnership was set up on paper. Finally, I observed 2 classes in order to document various aspects of the classrooms.

#### **3.2. Gaining entry**

I had made a list of four TVET colleges who to my knowledge delivered the majority of these learnerships in Cape Town. I contacted the various institutions via email and communicated with the departmental heads themselves introducing myself and explaining my intended research. I received a response from two institutions who gave me permission to observe two classes in each institution so that I could see the interaction between the lecturer and practitioners as well as peer relations on this particular Learnership programme.

I then made contact with five ECD centres through random selection on a DSD database in the Mitchells Plain area and requested whether I could interview two teachers from each; out of the five only four centres accepted. Understanding that these facilities' main priority was the safety of the children and that they needed the teachers to be on duty, I had to be creative in scheduling time with these teachers to be interviewed. The teachers were chosen based on the fact that they had to have completed or started the learnership in the last two years at one of the two TVET colleges and had been teaching in ECD without any formal qualification for more than five years.

When I made contact with interviewees, each interviewee received an informed consent document to complete and sign. The research project was explained in depth and understood by all parties before signing (Please see Appendix B).

### 3.2. Data collection

#### 3.2.1. Documents

I collected a large number of curriculum guides and student manuals which consisted of various modules as well as the teacher's guide.

#### 3.2.2. Observations

I carried out observations at two classes at each TVET college lasting 2 – 3 hours in each of the four classes. Please see observation schedule below:

## Classroom Observations

### 1. Main Features of the Observed Class:

- Physical Facilities
- Location of the class
- Shape of the class
- Students' Sitting System
- Facilitator's Table and chair
- Teaching aids

### 2. Features of Facilitator's Proficiency:

- Teaching Methods
- Student Involvement and Participation
- Learning environment
- Facilitator student Relationship
- Voice and Tone

### 3.2.3. Interviews

I carried out in-depth, semi-structured interviews with two ECD Course Managers and eight ECD teachers who were past or present participants of the ECD Level 4 Learnership.

### 3.2.4. Sampling

It is the selection of a small number of cases that will yield the most information about a particular phenomenon (Teddlie and Yu, 2007). This research study used purposive sampling. The purposive sampling technique allowed for the selection of a sample of participants based on specific reasons associated with them answering a study's questions. According to this sampling method, which belongs to the category of non-probability sampling techniques, sample members

are selected on the basis of their knowledge, relationships and expertise regarding a research subject (Freedman et al., 2007). In the current study, the sample members who were selected had special relationship with the phenomenon under investigation because they were HOD's or they had more than five years' experience teaching in ECD without any formal qualification and had entered the Level 4 Learnership with a vast amount of experience in ECD.

The interviews ranged from 30 minutes to an hour. According to Gubrium, Holstein, Marvasti and McKinney (2012:209) "the place of the interview should be convenient to the participants, private and familiar to him or her". The interviews of the TVET managers were done in their offices and the practitioner interviews at their workplaces, in tea rooms or small waiting areas. My approach was to allow the participants to decide on a convenient date and time and then go out and meet with them.

### 3.2.5. Data collection instrument

In collecting data from the participants, I used a semi-structured interview schedule (See Appendix C). This interview schedule guided me and the participants during the interviews. There were times when I had to deviate from the sequence of questions in order to allow for the flow of information. As a practitioner in the field of ECD I had to ensure that questions were not leading and that I allowed the interviewee to express themselves without putting words in their mouth.

The interview schedule was segmented into four themes derived from the research objectives.

1. The process of entering a learning institution.
2. Content of the ECD Level 4 curriculum.
3. How prior experience of teachers are included in the learning process,
4. Adult friendly environment

Each theme had a list of open-ended questions. Please see Appendix C.

The recordings were transcribed, passing from the original oral form into written form. The purpose of the conversion into a written account is to allow the detailed to-and-fro reading required in the analysis of the qualitative data.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

Raw data generated from this study was obtained from ten in-depth interviews, this may seem voluminous. However, in adopting Tesch's (1990) eight steps of data analysis I was able to complete this process competently.

Tesch (in De Vos, 1998: 343-344):

- Step 1: The researcher ought to read the entire transcript carefully to obtain a sense of the whole and to jot down some ideas.
- Step 2: The researcher selects one case, asks "what is this about?" and thinks about the underlying meaning in the information. The researcher's thoughts can be written in the margin.
- Step 3: A list is made of all the themes or topics. Similar themes or topics are clustered together.
- Step 4: The researcher applies the list of themes or topics to the data. The themes or topics are abbreviated as codes, which are written next to the appropriate segments of the transcripts. The researcher tries out this preliminary organising scheme to see whether new categories and codes emerge.
- Step 5: The researcher finds the most descriptive wording for the themes or topics and categorises them. Lines are drawn between categories to show the relationships.
- Step 6: The researcher makes a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetises the codes.
- Step 7: The data material belonging to each category is assembled and a preliminary analysis is performed.
- Step 8: The researcher recodes existing material if necessary (De Vos, 1998: 343-344). As the researcher I needed to guard against distorting the direction of the interview. With the high level of support from my supervisor I dispelled any anxieties that I had with regards to biasing the research results.

In the beginning of the analysis I found myself being judgemental as a practitioner. I reminded myself to step back and look at the data objectively.

Content analysis was used to analyze the data which was gathered from personal interviews. According to Moore & McCabe (2005), this is the type of analysis whereby data gathered is categorized into themes and sub-themes, to make it comparable. A main advantage of content analysis is that it helps in the data collected being reduced and simplified, while at the same time producing results that can be compared across variables. Content analysis also gives the ability to researchers to structure the qualitative data collected in a way that it aligns with research objectives. However, human error is highly involved in content analysis, since there is the risk for researchers to misinterpret the data gathered, thereby generating false and unreliable conclusions (Krippner & Bock, 2008).

After all interviews were typed up and saved onto computer, I read through each of the transcripts carefully and gained an overall picture of the data collected. Going through each interview I read in order to understand the participant's responses in relation to the objectives of the study. This process was critical for one cannot analyse the data unless one reads it thoroughly (Dey, 1993). Once the themes were identified I started to make notes on the margins next to relevant texts.

The themes were grouped under major topics that aligned with the research objectives and this helped me to discard what did not relate to the objectives as well as hone in on what was relevant. Lists were compiled to identify what would be important for this study and I then clustered all the colour coded text from each of the interviews under the heading of the relevant themes and categories. Once all relevant data belonging to each category was assembled, the data was ready for analysis. A preliminary table was used to record the main themes and categories and was used as a framework for discussing the findings. I made comparisons and contrasts of the participants responses contained in the data, according to Mange (1995) this process of double-checking highlights possible contradictions in participant's responses which enhance a better understanding of the issue. Subsequently, the data was compared with literature contained within Chapter Two.

#### 3.4. Data verification vs Trustworthiness

Verification is the process of checking, confirming, making sure and being certain of the trustworthiness of the research process (Creswell, 1997; Kale, 1989). In quantitative research, validity and reliability are two terms that are applicable in verifying findings. Due to the difficulty in applying these terms in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1995) propose that the key criterion of good qualitative research is found in the notion of trustworthiness – neutrality of its findings or decisions. Lincoln and Guba (1995) both put forward four constructs, which they believe reflect the assumptions of trustworthiness:

1. Credibility - confidence in the 'truth' of the findings.
2. Transferability - showing that the findings are applicable in other contexts.
3. Dependability - showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated.
4. Confirmability - a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest.

### 3.5. Ethical considerations

The current study followed ethical guidelines and I received ethical clearance from The University of Cape Town (UCT) and the Department of Education (DoE). All participants reported their written acceptance regarding their participation in the research, through a signed Consent and Briefing Letter. The aim of the letter was to reassure participants that their participation in the research was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from it at any point and for any reason. Through this, participants were fully informed regarding the objectives of the study, while they were reassured that their answers would be treated as confidential and used only for academic purposes and only for the purposes of this particular research. I attempted to create and maintain a climate of comfort.

Each participant has the right to privacy in which they are able to decide the level of information they would like to share (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:522). Anonymity in this research refers to the procedures adopted to protect the participant's identity in the research findings (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 522). Confidentiality and anonymity can be achieved by giving the participants alias names and this was the technique adopted in this research.

### **Limitations of the study**

In this study the researcher faced certain limitations pertaining to the design and methodology of the study. The limitations of the study are discussed in relation to the research design, data collection apparatus, data collection instrument, data capturing, the competence of the researcher and language barriers.

The study is embedded in a qualitative paradigm which has been criticized for being over reliant on the subjectivity of participants (Babbie and Mouton, 2007). However, since a key aim of this study was to gain an understanding of the perspectives of the ECD Managers and teachers within the ECD centres and investigate the curriculum, it was the most appropriate paradigm to adopt for this study.

The use of the digital voice recorder during the interview posed a challenge. Some of the participants were initially not comfortable with the digital voice recorder, and this aroused some anxiety. The researcher was able to help participants disregard the digital recorder and this allowed her to be attentive in hearing what the participants were saying without worrying that important information would be missed. It also allowed the researcher time to observe the nonverbal cues of the participants.

It has been argued that using interviews to collect data is expensive and time consuming (Communication for Research, 2017). I had to travel to the four ECD centres and by the end of the time allocated for the interviews I had incurred some unanticipated expenses. The semi-structured interview allowed for the collection of a greater volume of information, but five interviews ran over time and impacted on the other scheduled interviews. Two interviews had to be postponed to another date. With all the unforeseen contingencies I still managed to interview all eight participants.

As mentioned earlier, this study was conducted in English. There were times when participants struggled to express themselves in English. The researcher acknowledged that her lack of understanding of the Afrikaans language was a stumbling block because it would have been easier for the participants to express themselves better.

### 3.6. Summary

This chapter has presented a detailed description of the research design and methodology chosen for this study including the sampling type and process, data collection methods and

research instruments. A description of the data analysis and data verification processes was presented, and the chapter concluded with describing the limitations of the study. The next chapter presents and discusses the research findings informed by the objectives of the study.

## Chapter 4

### FINDINGS

The policies that govern ECD have highlighted the pressing need for ECD teachers to become more trained and qualified. For years many ECD teachers in poorer areas were childminders working at creches taking care of children with little or no formal knowledge of what needed to be taught and what the development milestones were pertaining to the age of the child. The Level 4 ECD Learnership was advertised inviting these grassroots level teachers from ECD centres to acquire a formal qualification. Simultaneously, the advertisement also invited school leavers or unemployed youth wanting to enter the field of ECD.

The aim of the study was to investigate the responsiveness of the curriculum and delivery to the experiences of ECD teachers.

The findings will be discussed through the following three main themes:

1. RPL - Process of entry as an adult returning to study
2. Learning materials – sequencing, pacing, new knowledge
3. Adult friendly environment

For each objective, data from observations, curriculum documentation and in-depth interviews will be presented and discussed as to how responsive the curriculum was to the experienced practitioner.

#### 4.1. RPL - Process of entry as an adult going back to study

Data from in-depth interviews with Departmental Managers revealed that the learnerships were advertised through local newspapers, community meetings and the Department of Social Development databases and that there was an equal amount of applications from matriculants/school leavers and current ECD practitioners.

According to managers;

*We advertise through the Social Development ECD database as well as in the local newspapers. The learnership is open to current teachers who need to obtain their levels for work purposes, as well as to the youth who have chosen ECD as a career path. (Manager 1)*

And

*Our courses are on the websites and are run at various community campuses. We also use the ECD community meetings to get the news out. We have equal amounts of those who have chosen this as a new career path, like your school leavers or matriculants and then the older ladies who are teaching in the community for many years. (Manager 2)*

This highlights the fact that there are two defined group of students entering the learnerships; one being newcomers to the field of ECD and second being the more experienced ECD practitioners. Through interviews with the eight ECD teachers on the entrance requirements, many found that they easily met the initial entrance requirements as listed by the TVET on the intake form:

*It was easy for me as I had already done level 1 and I could immediately do my level 4 once I was competent in level 1. (ECD Teacher E).*

*The principal told me that I meet the requirements and that I must go. (ECD Teacher F).*

*They said if you have grade 10, you can apply for level 4, I know in 2011 if you couldn't find your grade 10 certificate you could get an affidavit at the police station, but I have grade 11 so it was easy for me. (ECD Teacher G)*

It is evident that grade 12 was not a requirement and that teachers could access the level if they were working at a facility, or if they had Level 1 in ECD or Grade 10. With this being said, it is also interesting to note that in the advertisement there was no requirement for a

minimum level of years' experience in order to enrol, something which might have indicated the value of the experience that the experienced teachers did have in ECD.

#### 4.2. Entrance Testing

According to the departmental managers of both institutions, entrance testing was done through a computerized system. The entry assessment is a written test which covers literacy and mathematics and is the same for all participants entering the Learnership. The entrance test allowed me to briefly explore two main issues: computerized testing and the content of the testing, especially the mathematics section. This was relevant to my research as I wanted to ascertain whether any prior knowledge or portfolio of evidence was required from teachers as part of the entrance assessment.

Computerised testing is not as familiar to more mature ECD teachers who completed school some time ago within disadvantaged communities as it is to those who recently completed high school. One of the teachers expressed this:

*I cannot use a computer so good, it was hard having to do the test on the computer, it took me very long to complete the test (ECD Teacher H).*

The departmental managers of both institutions explained that the computerized test allowed them to recruit according to a minimum pass rate of 40% on the entry assessment test, but leeway was given at times when a student had obtained 35%.

One of the managers argued that:

*We have an entrance test that the students do on computer for us to see what level they are on with literacy and basic mathematics. You need 40% to pass so you have to get 40% in the literacy and 40% in mathematics. Sometimes students get 35% then we use them as buffer students', so this means they are extra in class and don't receive a stipend until someone drops out. (Manager 1)*

Computerised testing was used for all participants and could last up to three hours. The test came across as rigorous and posed as an obstacle to the older experienced teacher who might not be computer literate.

It was also evident that testing was lengthy, and the multiple-choice method allowed for guessing whether the candidate had low or high literacy levels. According to the managers it was evident that the tests covered general literacy and mathematics and that the testing went smoothly, but being multiple choice, the managers did feel that “the testing goes okay, but because it is multiple choice sometimes it’s like they are just lucky in their guesses” (Manager 2)

One of the managers added:

*To be honest if it was only based on the computerised testing there would not be so many learners, we also have them write a motivational letter and if need be come for an interview. (Manager 1)*

The required pass mark coupled with the use of a computer as well as a timeframe of 3 hours could possibly cause anxiety as well as discouragement for experienced teachers most of whom had not completed 12 years of schooling and had not been in a formal learning setting in years.

The testing focused on literacy and numeracy. Considering that many of the experienced practitioners had not completed formal schooling (Grade 12) and the fact that the tests were based on literacy and mathematical components closely related to high school syllabi, this could lead to misleading results when referring to the experienced practitioner as the test is not related to ECD but only to numeracy and literacy. The findings suggest that literacy and numeracy aspects of the testing would be more familiar to school leavers, but it did not confirm or predict whether they were likely to succeed in ECD.

*Sometimes they score quite high on the pace testing, especially those who matriculated, but it does not mean they will be better at ECD. (Manager 2)*

*Current practitioners score lower, but it's probably because most of them have an average of a grade 8, they would be between the ages of say 35 and late 50's.*

(Manager 1)

Data from in depth interviews revealed that participants had found the testing to be challenging, with many of them highlighting that the mathematics segment was difficult and that the use of a computer was different:

*The maths was the worst, they had x and y and stuff that I see my son doing, I think its algebra, it was very difficult, I just guessed the answers, but I passed so I am happy.*

**(ECD Teacher B).**

Two of the teachers had felt the need for a calculator to complete the mathematic questions and that many of the mathematic questions were quite difficult, in some case even new to the practitioners.

*The testing was okay, I got through the literacy part well, but I really struggled with the maths, we could not use a calculator, I really needed a calculator. (ECD Teacher A).*

*They gave us a page to work out the sums on, no calculator, it was big numbers I had to add and stuff. (ECD Teacher F).*

This section has shown that the entrance testing process was not very responsive to the experienced practitioner. Some of the teachers entered the testing based on entrance requirements that allowed experienced practitioners to enter with a grade 8 or a Level 1 in ECD, but the entrance exam did not relate to their experience as much as it did to the school-leavers who had just completed grade 12. It could be said that there was no relation between the entrance requirements and the entrance testing to the experienced practitioners entering the Learnership.

The next section will explore data from curriculum documents in particular, sequence and pacing of the modules and unit standards.

#### 4.3. Curriculum: Sequencing and Pacing

All learning materials are written by the Department of Education and produced by Eduwrite, an online professional learning and training academy. These learning materials are given to TVET colleges so both colleges in this research used the same manuals, and user guides and conducted the same assessment tasks. The positive aspect about using the same manuals and learning tools is that it creates uniformity amongst colleges and training centres with regards to the unit standards. To some extent it ensures that there is some uniformity in what colleges delivering the Learnership coursework to include in a module and what needs to be understood as well as assessed in order to obtain competence. Consistency of the materials is also important considering the fact that the experienced learners teach in the same communities and often at the same school but study through different colleges, so their training needs to be consistent.

That said, it needs to be noted that the learning materials are sent by the Department electronically and have to be printed, copied and bound by the TVET college. Thus, the documentation is editable and open to changes before being taught by lecturers, as will be shown later in this chapter.

As mentioned before Learnership curriculum is divided into three main parts:

1. Core: The mainframe of the learning programme, core skills and requirements.
2. Fundamentals: Communication, mathematics, Afrikaans/ Life orientation
3. Electives: Specialised areas, application of skills in defined work situations.

This section looks at the sequencing of sections of the curriculum at the two TVET colleges.

According to my own observation of the hardcopy modules bound by the institution, I noticed certain pages were not in the order of their pre-printed page numbers. I thought this was interesting and asked the management about it. The table below shows the

sequencing of modules within the Level 4 Learnership at the two different institutions who were running the learnerships and selected for this study:

<b>Code</b>	<b>Unit Standard</b>	<b>Core/Fundamentals</b>	<b>TVET1</b>	<b>TVET2</b>
<b>244472</b>	Preparing early childhood development programmes with support.	Core	1	12
<b>244468</b>	Preparing resources and setting up the environment to suit the development of babies, toddlers and young children.	Core	2	11
<b>244485</b>	Designing activities to support the development of babies, toddlers and young children.	Core	3	13
<b>13643</b>	Developing learning programmes to enhance participation of learners with special needs.	Core	4	10
<b>244469</b>	Providing care for babies, toddlers and young children.	Core	5	
<b>244259</b>	Supporting children and adults living with HIV and AIDS.	Core	6	15
<b>114942</b>	Managing reactions arising from a traumatic event.	Core	7	14
<b>244484</b>	Demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the development.	Core	8	
<b>244480</b>	Facilitating holistic development of babies, toddlers and young children.	Core	9	
<b>244475</b>	Observing and reporting on child development.	Core	10	
<b>244462</b>	Working with families and communities to support early childhood development.	Core	11	6
<b>242816</b>	Conduct a structured meeting.	Core	12	5
<b>119472</b>	Oral communication.	Fundamentals		1
<b>119465</b>	Writing for a wide range of contexts.	Fundamentals		2
<b>119457</b>	Reading and analysing texts.	Fundamentals		3
<b>119467</b>	Using language and communication in occupational learning programmes.	Fundamentals		4
<b>7468</b>	Using mathematics to plan and control.	Fundamentals		7
<b>9016</b>	Representing, analysing and calculating shape and motion in different contexts.	Fundamentals		8
<b>9015</b>	Applying knowledge of statistics and probability.	Fundamentals		9
<b>119472</b>	Mondelinge Kommunikasie.	Fundamentals		16
<b>119465</b>	Skryf vir 'n wye verskeidenheid van	Fundamentals		17

	kontekste.			
<b>119457</b>	Interpertering en gebruik van inligting.	Fundamentals		18
<b>119467</b>	Taal en kommunikasiein beroepsleerprogramme.	Fundamentals		19

Table 4.5.1a clearly indicates that there are vast differences in how the modules are sequenced at the two colleges. Through interviews with the manages it was evident that the Learnership could start with teaching any of these parts first and that the sequencing was sometimes based on the lecturer's personal preference as well as on the availability of lecturers.

*Some facilitators start with fundamentals which is ideal, but because many facilitators are from ECD centres, they prefer starting with the ECD core module. (Manager 1)*

*I would personally start at fundamentals so that I will have time to teach how to punch and how to file, because many of the students struggle with this. (Manager 1)*

*The elective lecturers are all brought in on smaller contracts, so it is sometimes the lack of availability of lectures that forces us to start with core or vice versa.*

**(Manager 2)**

It is evident that teaching the unit standards in a particular order was based on either facilitator's preference or the availability of lecturers. The order of knowledge did not seem to be prioritised as being significant in this Learnership. The fact that major parts of the learnership curriculum could be swapped around and sequenced in any order was related to the availability of lecturers as opposed to planned sequencing with the TVET college controlling the selection in relation to their contracts with facilitator.

It was evident that the management found huge amounts of repetition in the coursework and would change the order where they felt changes needed to be made.

*The learning materials are sometimes very repetitive, so sometimes we group certain parts together to be clearer, we also sometimes change the assignment instructions to be clearer or to suit the lesson. (Manager 1)*

*There is lots of repetition of similar assignments with similar outcomes, so we can eliminate some of the repetition if we take some out. (Manager 2)*

Management felt that changes in sequencing needed to be made constantly; sometimes the changed order did not work in which case they would meet and discuss what further to change.

*We change the order every year, if you work with children, you will know how to work with adults, but not everything works, so we need to constantly make changes.*

**(Manager 1)**

*We have two meetings per week to discuss curriculum challenges and also what we need to perhaps change or adapt, we use the time to give feedback on what we need to do and if we have problems. (Manager 2)*

Manager 1 also noted that 18 months is a limited time for the amount of theory that needs to be taught.

*Eighteen months is far too short for the amount of information we're introducing to them, there are also many theoretical assignments that we expect them to do on their own. (Manager 1)*

Considering the fact that the sequencing of the modules was different across the two institutions for reasons discussed earlier, it was important for me to obtain the views on sequencing from the participants as well.

One interviewee felt that:

*The sequencing of modules was well ordered but certain parts could have been kept together, like if we do health and first aid, we could have included communicable diseases. (ECD Teacher A)*

Another felt:

*The modules were placed in a certain order, but I would have put numeracy first as it is very hard, and I have heard many students say that they teach that last because it's so difficult. (ECD Teacher D)*

While another said:

*They should have put the research modules first, we had to do so many assignments and at times would need to grasp new concepts. (ECD Teacher H)*

Finally, one mentioned that:

*If we had to start with the core, we would have been able to see who in the class knows much about ECD, the younger students were good at fundamentals, but the core was hard for them. (ECD Teacher B)*

It is evident through the teachers' answers that they would have grouped and ordered the modules differently; some would have preferred that the 'difficult' or 'research' modules come first. ECD Teacher B made important reference to the fact that the younger learners understood fundamentals better and that the core was harder for the youth. In my view this suggests that the course was more responsive to the school leavers.

Teachers also experienced repetition of information. ECD Teacher A found the pace slow but also understood that there were students who were new to some of the subject matter.

ECD Teacher E, referred to how much she personally learnt from the module on observing and reporting on a child's development.

Others did not mind the repetition:

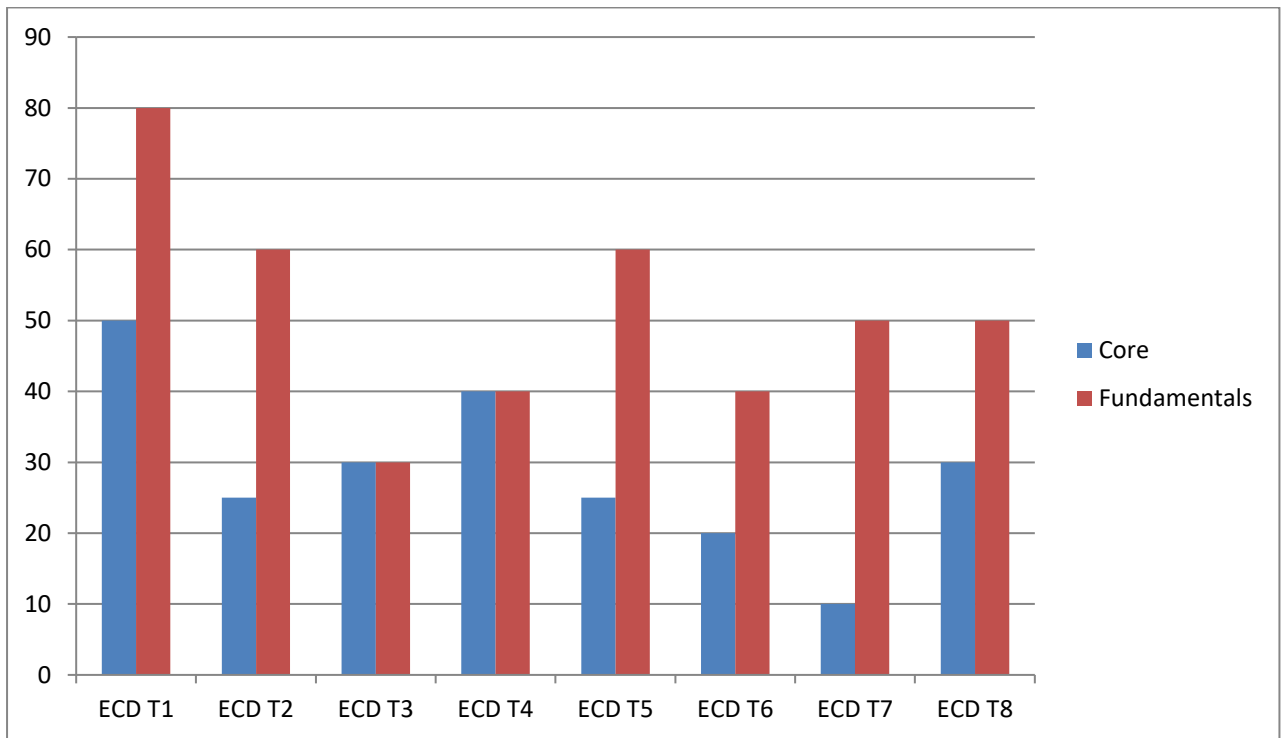
*the pace was slow, but I understand that there are students new to these topics and we must go slow for them. Maybe the maths was a bit difficult. I didn't like the part about interest on appliances and loans. (ECD Teacher A)*

*the pace was okay, some things were always being repeated, I enjoyed the module on observing and reporting on a child's development, that was something new for me. I know a lot about ECD and the classroom but now I can also report better on the children. (ECD Teacher E)*

This illustrates the importance of certain modules for the experienced teacher who would need help with how to do formalities like reporting on a child's progress. This brings me to the next section which looks at an estimate of how much new knowledge was attained by experienced practitioners on the Level 4 ECD Learnership.

#### 4.4. New Knowledge

During the interviews I asked the teachers to estimate a percentage of how much of the knowledge in the two areas of core and fundamentals they would see as new knowledge. Based on the amount of new knowledge that was learnt on the Learnership I formulated the following two bar graphs. For each participant the following figure shows the relation between the percentage of new knowledge they thought they obtained in core and the percentage of new knowledge they thought they obtained in the fundamentals part of the curriculum. The core is the body of knowledge which focused on ECD and the work that happens in the classroom setting while the fundamentals are made up of literacy and mathematics.



The figure shows two bar graphs depicting the answers in percentage terms for each of the eight participants. The first percentage is the estimated percentage of new knowledge in core and the second percentage is the estimated amount of new knowledge in fundamentals.

The graphs show that in most cases the experienced practitioners felt that the new knowledge they gained in the core was below 50% in comparison with what they already knew. It also shows that for most of them the new knowledge was gained in the fundamentals. This is significant considering many of the experienced participants did not have a Grade 12 certificate and the majority of the new learning happened in these areas.

This graph led me to the conclusion that there was some new knowledge that the experienced practitioners learnt in core areas that could enhance the way they teach and understand a child. It also however pointed out that they did know much of the core and had more to learn in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

The next section looks at the classroom environment of the educational institutions and whether the institutions had an adult friendly environment that was appropriate for dealing with experienced practitioners.

#### 4.5. An adult friendly environment

My observation included two different classes at each TVET. Through these observations it was noted that the number of students varied between 22 and 27 participants in each class at each campus.

In the field of adult education, it is important to note the classroom setup and understand the dynamics of the classroom as well as the power relations. Classroom dynamics in this study involved observing the interaction between the participants and the facilitator in a classroom community. The purpose of observing the classroom dynamics was to explore whether adult learners were in a positive classroom atmosphere where they felt comfortable learning and communicating with other participants and with the facilitator and felt respected as adults.

##### **Layout of the classroom**

Two of the classes were based at satellite campuses in the community where the TVET college had rented space in school facilities or learning centres while the other two were based on the main campus. Generally, the classrooms were well furnished with chairs and desks and facilitators rearranged the furniture as needed.

Two of the classes had tables set out for groups to sit around. It was evident that open discussions were being encouraged here and a more learner-centered approach was being promoted with the emphasis on group work and learner participation.

However, the other class at each institution was set up with desks in rows of individual or twin seating facing the front. Given that andragogy promotes learner centredness, it seemed possible that this setup which places the lecturer in the front might not be

conducive for learning in an adult education environment as there would be less student participation and it lent itself to a more didactic approach.

Classrooms in institutions had a very print rich classroom visual environment with posters and quite colourful content on the walls. However, I saw rule posters, with 'silence is golden' and 'wait your turn', which came across quite belittling in the sense of treating the teachers like children. In one particular classroom I saw alphabet posters scattered around the classroom as well as a verbs poster and descriptive words poster. In another classroom there were animal pictures with Afrikaans labels and emoticons illustrating various feelings up around the classroom. These observations did make me feel that the setting was a bit patronising. In adult education there is the need to be positive and encouraging but not condescending to the students who are mature adults.

While the layout of class has an impact on the success of the adult learner (Knowles, 1973), learner centredness also involves respect for the adult learner. It was evident through my observations of all four classrooms that the participant was regarded as the weaker party and on occasions I observed the facilitator taking an authoritarian approach.

I observed facilitators reading information out loud from the teacher's guide and explaining the content. The manual was followed sentence by sentence. There was not much engagement with the participants or discussions and sharing of experiences.

I also noticed in two of the classrooms two to three learners walk up to the facilitator and ask if they could use the toilet. On one occasion the facilitator raised her voice telling students to 'shut up', while in one of the four classrooms the facilitator made threatening remarks to students for example "if I see you use your phone one more time I will confiscate it" and "don't lie to me and pretend you didn't know, I am not a fool". An adult educator speaking to adults in the tone of voice you might use with a child is offensive. Genuine encouragement from one person to another, regardless of age, is a wonderful point of human interaction. The above observations showed that in two of the four adult education classrooms the facilitators showed a lack of respect for the participants as adult learners and viewed them as subordinates.

## Personal experiences

All the teachers felt that they could relate well to other participants in the class, whether they had been in the field for quite some time or whether they were new to the field:

*Many of the general topics were easy to relate to with others whether you had experience or not.*

**(ECD Teacher E)**

*There were different ages in the class some very young and fresh out of school and some like me who was working long already in the crèche. We could learn from each other.*

**(ECD Teacher H)**

Experienced practitioners had gathered more ECD experience in the field and thus had accumulated a broader knowledge base than the inexperienced students.

Data from interviews with regards to sharing experiences revealed that the sharing of experiences happened mostly when sharing in groups of students, on arrival before classes started and in free time, and could be about any topic and not particularly about ECD.

*When we had free time, we had to share our experiences with each other, any of our experiences or how we felt.*

**(ECD Teacher F)**

*Every session, we had a morning session where we could speak about anything we experienced during that week, it was mostly personal home stuff or stresses.*

**(ECD Teacher A)**

*During activities sometimes, someone is asked to share their own experience.*

**(ECD Teacher E)**

*We were not asked frequently to share our own experiences.*

**(ECD Teacher D)**

It was evident however that facilitators had not taken into account the experiences of experienced practitioners as an asset in the classroom. My observations were that the facilitators did not draw at all on ECD teachers personal experience. During class time participants spent most of their time making notes and not speaking much in the class, showing that experienced teachers did not share much of their work experience out of choice or because they felt that they were not given the opportunity to do so. In adult education experiential learning is seen as the 'education that occurs as a direct participation in the events of life' (Houle 1980: 221). Sharing experiences in the classroom would enable reflection upon everyday experience and could enrich learning (Kolb, 1975).

The findings in this chapter suggests that the entrance testing as well as the teaching methods used did not fully respond to the experiential knowledge of the experienced teachers. It seemed that the primary objective of the Learnership was to meet the needs of the school leaver and the pedagogy tended to be more responsive the younger school leaver more used to being treated as a child.

## Chapter 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The overall aim of the study was to find out to what extent the ECD Level 4 Learnership curriculum and pedagogy recognised as well as drew on the knowledge of experienced ECD practitioners.

It is now possible to provide a tentative answer to these questions and present the insights I gained into the pedagogic practice through the manuals, observations and interviews. This chapter will present a discussion on the key findings relating to my research using the four sub-questions as introduced in Chapter 1:

- To what extent does the Level 4 Learnership curriculum – the way in which it is presented as well as through its entrance assessments – provide opportunities to recognise and draw on the prior knowledge of practitioners?
- To what extent are the programmes managers involved in the delivery of the Learnership aware of the prior experiential knowledge of some of the participants and to what extent do they ensure inclusion thereof?
- Are adult learning principles followed in the delivery of the learnership?
- To what extent do those with significant practitioner experience in the field feel that the curriculum adds to their existing knowledge?

#### **5.1. Discussion**

##### **5.1.1. Entrance assessments**

As seen in Chapter 2, Ralphs (2011), in his case study of the Portfolio Development Course (PDC) course highlighted the need for a ‘specialised pedagogy’ approach to RPL as it built confidence in what participants knew and scaffolded them into academic literacy and numeracy skills. Also, in the case study of RPL amongst care workers in Sweden, participants’ knowledge was assessed through discussion and assignments, and this

method allowed participants to be examined both orally and in writing.

In this study of the ECD learnership, a very different approach was adopted. Experienced teachers found the entrance tests quite difficult firstly due to the fact that the test was done on a computer and secondly due to a substantial amount of the test being based on mathematical knowledge. Experienced ECD teachers were required to complete a three-hour entrance test, sitting at a computer perhaps for the first time and this could create levels of anxiety and feelings of inadequacy. The data revealed that managers also felt that pass marks could be obtained through 'lucky guesses' due to the testing being multiple choice.

A report, with the title "Lagging ICT adoption in SA" from Research ICT Africa shows that only 53% of South Africans use the Internet (RICTSA, 2018). While technology is rapidly evolving, and many people in South Africa use technology on their mobile devices to run various day to day applications, manual testing could perhaps be more beneficial to those who are not as computer literate.

According to Michelson an assessment 'is an inexact science and there is no right way of doing things' (Michelson, 1997a:17). It is necessary to 'recognise that the standards by which knowledge is assessed are always culturally specific and that people have their own assessment structures for traditional skills'. My research showed that it was evident that the entrance test or assessment used was not appropriate for the experienced teacher and no help was given to acquaint them with the required skills. Doing algebra and what seemed to be advanced mathematical equations did not allow experienced teachers to show evidence of what they did know.

On the other hand, it should be noted that the motivational letter written by applicants included meaningful data about the experienced teachers' background in ECD and made participants feel more confident about their experiences. Rather than a multiple-choice test which focused a lot on mathematics, a portfolio of evidence such as in Ralphs study in Chapter two, would allow for a more personal assessment of experiential knowledge and a task which involved questioning around day to day childcare knowledge would provide for better identification of experiential knowledge prior to gaining access to the learnership.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, RPL in its purest form usually relates to the process of entry to a course of study. Coopers' (2011) three elements sees RPL in South Africa being closely aligned to attempting to close the gap of the injustices of Apartheid and certify knowledge acquired experientially to enhance flexibility and to articulate for national credit accumulation as part of the National Qualifications Framework. This is relevant in this case as many of these experienced teachers were historically disadvantaged by the injustices of the Apartheid regime in terms of their access to educational opportunities.

Ralphs (2016) case study on RPL for access to undergraduate study saw two routes of RPL for access. The PDC in the case study provided an orientation into academic practices and allowed for the participant to engage with both formal and informal knowledge. It is known that RPL cannot be reduced to a 'one size fits all' approach (Cooper et al, 2016:135), and it is acknowledged that ECD is a unique field and the Learnership course cannot necessarily replicate other cases. However, the Learnership curriculum needs to learn from best practices in RPL and adapt methods more appropriate to experienced ECD practitioners.

The Level 4 ECD Learnership was potentially a way to recognize and formalize experienced teachers informal experience and certify their experiential knowledge for purposes of 'credit accumulation'. Regarding the entrance testing of the teachers for this learnership, this did not happen. As Moran (1998) notes it is of utmost importance to recognize the value and skills as well as experiences of teachers before they enter a learning programme. With a 3-hour test on literacy and numeracy this was not evident and RPL did not in fact take place.

### 5.1.2. Curriculum

According to Hoadley (2009:180), a curriculum plan provides 'a course for learning' and the course needs to 'start somewhere and end somewhere'. In any curriculum, subject matter should fit together and flow in such a way as to organize knowledge to provide specific outcomes. A common approach used to facilitate this in adult learning is the experiential learning cycle, which "begins with activity, moves through reflection, then to

generalizing and abstracting and finally to transfer" (Henton, 1996:39). When ordering the curriculum, is important to ensure that the content is relevant for engaging adult students as they construct conceptual and practical knowledge in real life situations.

Muller (2008) as cited by Gamble (2009) makes a valuable distinction between *conceptual and curriculum coherence*. Both authors draw on Bernstein (1990) who developed the theoretical approach for vertical and horizontal discourses. Conceptual coherence has an upward or vertical hierarchy and the curriculum is organized with certain parts dependent on being taught before the other. Order, sequence and pace are seen of high importance as logic becomes the key for coherence. Whereas on the other hand, with contextual coherence sequence matters less and the order in which the topics are presented does not matter as *adequacy-to-context* is the key criterion for coherence. (Muller, 2008:17).

In this study neither was the case. As mentioned in Chapter 4, both TVET colleges received the learning materials from Eduwrite. It was noted that this created uniformity in how the Level 4 ECD learnership was presented at both institutions. Data revealed that the learning materials were printed and bound as well as presented with vast differences in sequencing of modules at the two TVET colleges. This was due to a variety of factors. Firstly, only small part-time contracts were offered which resulted in a lack of elective lecturers. These lecturers were not from an ECD background; they would be qualified to teach fundamentals i.e.: literacy or numeracy only so there was no link between their teaching and modules dealing specifically with ECD. Secondly, depending on facilitators' background or preference, a facilitator could choose where to start. For example, a lecturer who came from an ECD background might start with the Core modules which focused on ECD practice. On the other hand, it was noted that one manager felt that teaching fundamentals should come first so that she could cover various administration processes and teach the class how to punch documents and file them. Furthermore, one of the managers felt that there was repetition and it was better to swop or eliminate modules because of this.

This shows that even though there was uniformity in the original learning material received, TVET colleges allowed for high levels of flexibility when it came to what modules would be presented in what order and at which particular stage of the eighteen-month learnership programme. The above demonstrates customization of the learnership within

each of the institutions' according to the institutions needs as well according to personal preference but without much consideration for adult pedagogy or learning principles.

The Level 4 ECD Learnership curriculum could have responded to the prior experience of teachers if there had been a closer relationship between the RPL process and the TVET college curriculum. Managers and facilitators had control over the pacing and sequencing and felt responsible for 'initiating' experienced teachers into the understandings of the ECD discipline. Thus, it can be said that the Level 4 ECD Learnership was not very responsive to the prior experiences of already practicing teachers.

When looking at the managers views on the entrance test and what the overall findings revealed it is evident that the programme managers understood that there were experienced teachers who entered the learnership. After all, The Department of Social Development expected all teachers to obtain the new qualifications and notices were sent to community ECD centres requiring teachers to get trained. So, the programme managers could not help but be aware that these participants had teaching experience as they came from ECD sites. Despite this, they did not use this awareness in designing the access testing or in sequencing the curriculum. As noted in the Cooper and Ralphs (2016), RPL in practice is about working the boundaries between experiential learning and formal education "*navigating*" through learning pathways.

### 5.1.3. Learning environment

As mentioned in Chapter two, adult learners require a climate conducive for learning (Knowles, 1973:33). The physical structure of a classroom is a critical variable that could affect how participants learn (Phillips, 2014). "Learning environments cannot be considered neutral. They tend to have either a repressive effect or the ability to strengthen learning..." (Belanger, 2003:81). Drawing on Knowles (1984) theory of andragogy it is evident that the ECD learnership in this study did not follow his four main principles of adult learning:

#### 1. Relevance

Adults want to know why they need to learn something before undertaking learning

(Knowles et al., 2005). Facilitators must help adults become aware of their "need to know" and make a case for the value of learning. In this study it was evident that the training and materials were not always relevant to the experienced teacher as seen in Chapter 4 when Teacher A mentioned the unwelcomed mathematics on interest and loan structure calculations in the fundamental module.

## 2. Engaged

Adults believe they are responsible for their lives (Knowles et al., 2005). They need to be seen and treated as capable and self-directed. Facilitators should create environments where adults develop their latent self-directed learning skills (Brookfield, 1986). According to my observations, facilitators often simply read through the materials with the participants and did not create a sense of discovery to keep participants interested. This method of 'spoon feeding' did not allow for self-direction.

## 3. Active

The richest resource for learning resides in adults themselves; therefore, tapping into their experiences through active learning techniques (discussions, simulations, problem-solving activities, or case methods) is beneficial (Brookfield, 1986; Knowles et al., 2005; McKeachie, 2002; Silberman & Auerbach, 1998). I did not see the facilitators encouraging any of the participants to process their learning actively or engage with what they were learning through recalling similar situations at their workplaces.

In adult education it is important to understand that adult learners accumulate knowledge most effectively when they are active in their learning process and where learning is relational (Bartlett, 2005). As seen in Chapter two, Freire notes that the 'banking concept' of education sees teachers or facilitators depositing knowledge and this hinders the growth of participants by turning learners into 'receptors' of information with no real connection to their everyday knowledge (Micheletti 2010:2). Freire reminds us that true education is an active educational process and that participants need to engage with the learning material (Freire,1994).

## 5. Learner-centredness

Student-centered instruction focuses on skills and practices that enable lifelong learning and independent problem-solving. The processes being taught seemed to not always equip teachers for the real situations or allow them to critically reflect on their own experience. As shown in Chapter 4 Teacher D felt they were not asked frequently enough to share their own experiences. Also judging from my observations and noted in my findings of the classroom setup; the facilitators' approach to teaching adults as well as classroom setup did not encourage practices that focused on learner-centered independent problem solving.

A concern for myself as an adult educator was that two out of four of the classes' physical setup signaled unequal power relations, where adult learners sat in rows and the facilitator walked up and down the aisles and looked over the participants as a teacher might do with children. Discussions were not always encouraged. Having students seated in rows facing the front of the class did not allow for them to see other students, and did not promote engagement and interaction, as might tables arranged in groups.

Experienced teachers were also patronized and reprimanded as if they were children, and this showed a degree of lack of respect and was demeaning for the adult learner. Adults learn better when they feel respected, according to Kolb and Kolb (2005:16), "Negative emotions such as fear and anxiety can block learning, while positive feelings of attractions and interest may be essential for learning".

All these findings suggest that the way the curriculum was delivered did not respond to the experienced teacher as an adult learner. Lectures, activities and assignments that encourage them to explore a subject matter on their own as well as through discussions would also have allowed them to learn from their own personal experience. A continuous process of action-reflection-action; becoming aware of situations and sharing as well as taking responsibility of their own lives would have corresponded more closely with Freire's conscientization process (Freire, 2004).

### **The value of new knowledge**

The importance of building on adult learners' rich experiences will always be highlighted

in adult education. Brookfield (1998) argues that we must move from romanticizing of experience to a critical reflection on experience. As an adult educator I know that adults bring important experience to the classroom but through closer examination as Brookfield notes, experience is not always rich and helpful and we cannot always assume that a learner's experience "always constitutes a rich source that educators can build on" (Brookfield, 1998:127-8) thus presenting limitations of experience.

It was interesting for me to see how much of the knowledge the experienced teachers gained was felt to be new knowledge. The Core unit standards of the curriculum deals with the theory of ECD and about educating the child, while the Fundamentals refers to mathematics, literacy and communication which forms part of formal schooling. It was not surprising that the data revealed that experienced teachers learnt more in the Fundamentals than in the Core parts of the curriculum. Considering that many of the experienced teachers had not been in school for some time or had not completed their schooling, this made sense. The subject matter of the Fundamentals was mostly theoretical and had the experienced teacher learning calculations as complex as compounded interest.

Whilst this was an interesting observation, I do feel that the teachers felt intimidated with the fundamentals. It did come across from the data that it was not required. The experienced teachers needed their knowledge in ECD (that corresponded with the Core part of the curriculum) to be formally recognised and perhaps that would have been enough.

## Conclusion

*Mary, after 3 months of classes, grew tired of the assignments and theory. Many days she would fret about the research that had to be done for a project, or a poster that needed to be presented in class. She hated mathematics and felt that some of the work was just too difficult. The lecturer enjoyed role play, but Mary didn't like having to act out everything and found it too much. Her principal would ask her how class was going, and she would lie. She would say it's going well. But that wasn't true. She just wanted to her job without going to the college. She wondered why it was so hard. Why she never understood some of the theory. She asked to see her principal one day and told her that she no longer wished to attend. She was*

*in tears and as much as the principal tried to convince her to continue, she refused. This was not for her. The principal reminded her of the norms and standards that required her to have certification. Four months later Mary resigned. She didn't want to be reminded all the time of her lack of certification, lack of determination and her low literacy levels. She loved taking care of children, she loved teaching them songs and rhymes and how to count. But the Level 4 ECD Learnership was not for her.*

Implementation of RPL is an on-going debate in the Department of Education and Training. This study showed a lack of implementation of in-curriculum RPL when facilitating a class with experienced teachers present.

For the ECD level 4 Learnership to be responsive to the adult learner the programme managers and facilitators would need to recognize the value of the experiences and knowledge that experienced participants bring to the training and also encourage these participants to draw on their experiences and knowledge related to the various modules on ECD.

This research study will add to the limited literature in South Africa on the importance of RPL in the current complex structure of teacher training in ECD programmes. Furthermore, my hope is that this small study will contribute to a future body of research on ECD. It may also help to make visible various underlying issues that may lead to dropouts from the Learnership of experienced teachers, as in the case of 'Mary' above.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### Early Childhood Development Level 4 Learnership outline

According to the South African Qualifications Framework (SAQA) the purpose and rationale of this Learnership includes the following facts:

- Is an entry-level Qualification for those who want to enter the field of Education, Training and Development, specifically within the sub-field of Early Childhood Development (ECD)
- Many of the participants entering this Learnership are already practicing within the field, but without formal recognition.
- This Qualification will enable recipients to provide quality early childhood development services for children in a variety of contexts, including community-based services, ECD centres, at home and in institutions.

SAQA Board decision, 2012

SAQA also states in the framework of this qualification that this learnership will provide 'formal recognition of those who are already practicing in the field, but without qualifications, as well as for those who wish to enter the field.' (SAQA, 2012)

SAQA ECD Level 4 Qualification rules

Learnerships require the participant to complete a theoretical course as well as practical training, which is done at a workplace, in order to be deemed competent. The workplace component of the qualification involves practical hands on experience in the field, while the theoretical component is provided by an education and training provider. Together they form an integrated and comprehensive learning programme. (SAQA, 2014)

Generally, a Learnership has certain features and components as well as agreements and exit level outcomes that together forms the framework of the Learnership.

The ECD Level 4 Qualification consists of a Fundamental, a Core and an Elective Component. Learners are required to obtain a minimum of 140 credits to successfully graduate. In my opinion the framework of this particular Learnership includes a vast amount of areas related to early childhood development and clearly highlights the exit outcomes in relation to its content. The following examples across the three components will show this:

#### *The Fundamental Component*

The Fundamental Component (compulsory), this forms the basic requirements to take part in the Learnership and mainly consists of:

*Mathematical Literacy 16 credits.*

Communication in a First South African Language 20 credits.

Communication in a Second South African Language 20 credits.

#### *The Core Component*

The Core Component forms the mainframe of the learning programme and what the qualification is to be based on. The Core Component consists of Unit Standards to the value of 64 credits all of which are compulsory.

Examples:

244480 Facilitate the holistic development of babies, toddlers and young children

244475 Observe and report on child development

#### The Elective Component

The Elective Component, this includes specialized areas, or the application of the core skills and knowledge in defined work situations. The Elective Component consists of Unit Standards to the value of 165 credits. Learners are to choose Unit Standards to the minimum of 20 credits.

Examples:

- 242816 Conduct a structured meeting
- 119661 Demonstrate knowledge of the foundations of human rights and democracy

In addition to this, learners must select additional Unit Standards from other specialisation areas listed in order to obtain a minimum of 20 credits.

*Examples:*

244259: Support children and adults living with HIV and AIDS.

13643: Develop learning programmes to enhance participation of learners with special needs.

*The exit level outcomes*

The exit level outcomes of the Level 4 qualification are as follows:

1. Communicate in a variety of ways within Early Childhood Development and societal settings.
2. Use mathematics literacy in real life and education, training and development situations.
3. Plan and prepare for Early Childhood Development.
4. Facilitate and monitor the development of babies, toddlers and young children.
5. Provide care and support for babies, toddlers and young children.

(SAQA, 2012)

## Appendix B

### Information Letter and Consent

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research.

This form outlines the purposes of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

My research aims to investigate the Early Childhood Development Level 4 Learnership curriculum and whether institutions that deliver the learnerships consider the prior knowledge of practitioners.

I would like to explore and gain insight into your experience of the course. The methods to be used to collect information for this study are explained below.

I plan to interview teachers with regard to their experiences. I would like to tape record these interviews (with your permission). These tape recordings will not be transcribed as I shall also be taking notes. Rather, they will be used to clarify anything I think I may have missed. Once I have collected and analysed all my data, I plan to conduct focus group interviews with respondents to present and confirm my understanding of the findings.

You are encouraged to ask any questions at any time about the nature of the study and the methods that I am using. Your suggestions and concerns are important to me; please contact me at any time at the address/phone number listed above.

I will use the information from this study to write my Thesis. This report will be read by you, my supervisor and co-supervisor, and will then be placed in the university library where it can be read.

I guarantee that the following conditions will be met:

- 1) Neither your name nor that of your institution will be used at any point of information collection, or in the written report; instead, you and any other person and place names involved in the study will be given pseudonyms (where necessary) that will be used in all verbal and written records and reports.
  
- 2) If you grant permission for audio taping, no audio tapes will be used for any purpose other than to do this study and will not be played for any reason other than to do this study. At your discretion, these tapes will either be destroyed or returned to you.
  
- 3) Your participation in this research is voluntary; you have the right to withdraw at any point of the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice, and the information collected, and records and reports written will be turned over to you.

4) You will receive a copy of the final report before it is handed in, so that you have the opportunity to suggest changes to the researcher, if necessary.

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Do you grant permission to be quoted directly?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Do you grant permission to be audiotaped?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to the terms

Respondent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to the terms:

Researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### Questionnaires

#### Teacher Questionnaire

##### Objective 1: RPL - Process of entry as an adult going back to study

- How did you hear about the learnership?
- What were the official entrance requirements?
- How did you find the entrance testing?

##### Objective 2: Adult Education: Classroom setting, participatory methods

- How could you relate to the participants in the class?
- How did you find the presentation of learning material?
- What example used to teach an area of the work will you always remember?
- Why?
- How frequently were you requested to share your own experiences verbally?
- How frequently were assignments given and was research required to complete these assignments?

##### Objective 3: Learning materials – sequence, pace

- How did you find the pace of the classes?
- What module of the Learnership did you learn the most in?
- Which percentage of the knowledge if any did you perhaps learn at the centre where you work, or at a prior centre?
- In which part of the coursework did you learn the most?

- What percentage of the what you learnt was new knowledge in the core and in the electives?
- In your opinion was the content what you expected?
- What can say about the sequencing/order of modules?
- If you could put the modules in order how would you want them to be taught?

#### Departmental Head Questionnaire

#### Objective 1: RPL - Process of entry as an adult going back to study

- How do you advertise the learnership?
- What are the entrance requirements?
- What method of entrance testing is used?

#### Objective 2: Adult Education

- How are facilitators recruited
- Who decides on the layout of the classroom
- How are lessons required to be presented by facilitators?
- Do you know whether participants draw on their own experiential knowledge during lectures and whether they are requested to share your own experiences verbally?

#### Objective 3: Learning materials – sequence, pace

- What can you tell me about the sequencing/order of modules?
- How is the pace of the class monitored?
- Can lecturers deviate from the plan?
- If you could put the modules in order how would you want them to be taught?