

*A participatory action research project to improve school readiness
in rural Grade R classes in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.*

By

Catherine Elizabeth Mather-Pike

214568826

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Declaration

I, Catherine Elizabeth Mather-Pike, declare that

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Catherine Elizabeth Mather-Pike
Student Name

Jane Quin
Name of Supervisor

Date

Date

Signature

Signature

Abstract

School readiness in the South African context has multiple complex facets to consider. Many children in South Africa are entering school not ready to learn for a whole range of reasons, sometimes resulting in low levels of reading, learning delays and difficulties and slow progress in their whole development. Long lasting consequences include an inability to break out of the cycle of poverty because of factors contributing to a large percentage of South African children not getting the opportunity to thrive and learn in an optimal environment. Teaching in South Africa therefore has many problems and challenges. Thinking of ways for transforming our South African systems to support all our children reaching their potential is challenging in itself. With our historical past still drenched in Apartheid and power dynamics so much needs to be taken into consideration when thinking about approaches to enable change. This thesis looks at what it means to enable change in South Africa with such a past and such a current situation for many of our children. Participation is explored through a rich, critically reflective process, bringing consciousness to this topic through creating opportunities for change that come from the ground up, by supporting educational development in not only a sustainable way, but one that also engages with pertinent issues of power in our South African context. This study is about the deep, ground level learning that came from participating within a participatory action research project that was planned within a critical paradigm. It is deeply embedded in a critically self-reflective approach using an experiential cyclical way of learning, to activate and facilitate change and development. The PAR team comprised of a mixture of pre-school, Grade R and Grade 1 teachers who, together with myself, sought ways to improve school readiness of children in their particular disadvantaged rural school setting. The overall findings include a systematic way of

improving practice in such spaces, highlighting the importance of self-awareness and building relationships.

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This project has been a steady process of my own learning. It has been both a spiritual and intellectual journey, enlightening a way forward, which has taken time, effort and tenacity to see it through to completion. Looking back, I realise without the support of family and friends around me this would not have been possible. I would like to mention my family especially, Ryan, Sarah, Jess and Jaime. Your patience and understanding has been amazing and has not gone unnoticed. My own learning process has been enhanced greatly by the supervisors who have led me along this path, mostly Jane Quin and Morag Peden. Without some of your disrupting thoughts and guidance, I don't think my own journey would have looked this way at all. To Thongasi Primary Principal and teachers, thank you for your willingness and time toward helping me achieve the completion of this project.

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Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
A-ELC	Annotated Experiential Learning Cycle
AR	Action Research
CRSX	Critical Self-Reflexivity
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
ECD	Early Childhood Education
ECP	Emancipatory-critical paradigm
ELC	Experiential Learning Cycle
ELDA	Early Learning and Development Area
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HOD	Head of Department
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
NDP	National Development Plan
NELDS	National Early Learning Development Standard
NP	National Party
NPO	Non-profit Organisation
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PP	Participatory Pedagogy
SD	Sustainable Development
SDG	Sustainable Developmental Goals
SGB	School Governing Body
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Chapter One Introduction

1.1 Study title

A participatory action research project to improve school readiness in rural Grade R classes in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

1.2 Study purpose

1.2.1 Motivation and background

This study focuses on understanding and developing school readiness in a rural setting through participatory practices (Child Advocacy Project, 2009), incorporating critical self-reflective processes (Quin, 2014), through my own journey as researcher and facilitator.

According to Ilifa Labantwana, an active non-profit early childhood development (ECD) organisation that is working closely with governmental services to initiate sustainable change within South Africa, approximately 60 percent of all South African children (18.5 million) are economically disadvantaged. Many of them are vulnerable because of the lack of resources to grow into healthy, productive adults as well as lacking access to ECD services (Ilifa Labantwana, 2014). Children in Grade R classes in South African state schools are noticeably behind in many areas of their development, namely physical development, including gross- and fine-motor skills; cognitive development, including language and communication, early literacy and numeracy concepts; and emotional and social development, when compared with the development stages according to age (Gordon & Browne, 2011; Ilifa Labantwana, 2014; Marais & Meier, 2012; Snow, 2006).



Figure 1. An ECD centre in KwaNzimakwe

My own journey in participatory pedagogy (PP) began on the 4th of July 2016 through enrolling for an Honours Module, which began the process of unravelling many new and challenging aspects of my own knowing and learning. My main motivation for beginning this process was that I had hoped to change and enhance my way of working within the communities that I support and I wanted to understand how this support can be for a long lasting change without using domination and unconsciously manipulating others to do things in the way I thought was best. These dynamics in power are rooted deeply in our South African history and current context. Lukes (2005) refers to some forms of power as influencing, shaping or determining what another individual's wants are which are not always obvious and glaring, but underlying, like coercion. Hooks (1993) discusses a way of teaching that respects and cares for the souls of the learners as being essential to providing the necessary conditions for learning to begin. Within this thesis, I hope to highlight key experiences and learnings that have impacted me, showing practically the development of my own learning for participatory pedagogy praxis towards change and development in early childhood development, the area of change I am most passionate about.

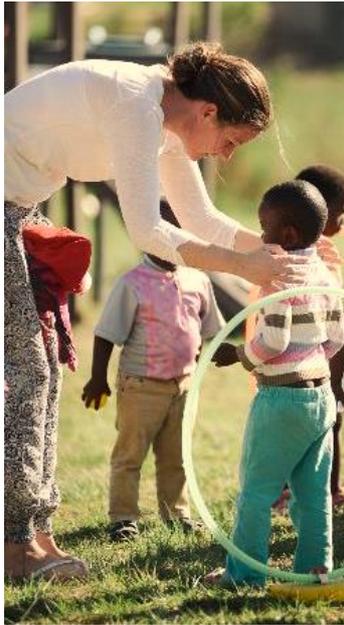


Figure 2 and 3. Working in the community

Looking at more recent statistics taken from the latest Child Gauge (Jamieson, Berry, & Lake, 2017b), more than a quarter, 27 percent of children under five are stunted and Spaul and Hoadley (2017) reveal that 56 percent of children cannot read fluently and with comprehension in any language by the end of Grade four. The early life experiences of children in South Africa are not optimal and compromised care during childhood can have negative lifelong effects and consequences (Jamieson et al., 2017b). Mezmur (Jamieson, Berry, & Lake, 2017a) emphasises that a South African context is often characterized by poverty, health system failures, lack of interpersonal needs as well as the emotional well-being of children not being met and poor schooling outcomes even though school attendance is high. Radebe, the current Minister of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (Jamieson et al., 2017a, p. 8), acknowledges a similar South African context and describes children as “trapped in poverty” and facing numerous challenges, including poverty, inadequate nutrition, poor parental care and poor quality education. According to Harrison (2017, p. 47), South Africa is considered “strong on policy but weak in implementation” and the

National Development Plan (NDP) recognises that children and young people are essential to our economic growth, but this has unfortunately not been reflected in national planning. It is evident that departments are not regularly referring to the second National Plan of Action for Children (2012-2017) which was introduced at the same time as the NDP (Harrison, 2017).

The Department of Basic Education believes that delays in cognitive and overall development before schooling can often have long lasting consequences for children, families and society. They go on to explain that the most effective time to intervene is before birth and the early years of life. Therefore they feel that investment in ECD should be a key priority in the National plan for development 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2011). There are many factors showing that early childhood education plays an important part in subsequent schooling and education. Snow (2006) believes that exposure to rich vocabulary in the home is a strong predictor of early language and literacy development and these practices are readily found in middle-class homes and schools. Spaul and Hoadley's research in 2017 found that rural South African children continue to have very little exposure to books in their home and school environments (Spaul & Hoadley, 2017), placing strain on their capacity to learn language early in their school careers. Siraj-Blatchford (2009) believe South African rural communities living in the previous homeland areas, remain some of the most impoverished societies in the world, where lack of access to employment, education, land, housing, health services and other essential resources can be a barrier to allowing communities and individuals to reach their potential. Therefore there are many disadvantaged children that deserve better pedagogical efforts (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009) to support them in pre-schools, in the many areas of development required for school readiness mentioned above and in more depth in Chapter Two, in order to see them grow, reach their full potential and break the cycle of deprivation that surrounds them.

Harrison (2017) believes that in order for a child to thrive in all areas of their development there are 3 factors to consider. Firstly, that children's capabilities or learning potential are rooted in the first thousand days of their life where either these capabilities are enhanced or reduced by external factors such as home and environmental conditions, nutrition and access to health and care which will affect a child's potential for life-long learning which is key to human productivity. The second factor is the motivation to succeed which promotes resilience and the ability to overcome hardship. Harrison goes on to explain that if this is established early in a child's life, there is a reduction in risk taking behaviour in adolescence

and better prospects of lifelong learning. Contributing to this further is the skill of self-regulation, nurtured by caregivers and teachers, as well as the mastery of language and the ability to read can support the development of self-efficacy which in turn supports the child’s belief in their own ability to succeed. Lastly, healthy relationships protect children and support them in being connected with adults and peers throughout life. These factors together lay a foundation for effective education and training as well as empathy, critical thinking and imagination (Harrison, 2017).

In the South African context there are three areas of development that have had little or no progress with regards to children’s development. These factors are prevention of stunting, children entering school ready to read and local networks of care and support (Harrison, 2017). Children getting the right nutrition, the confidence of being able to read and learn, as well as supporting all children with the right care and support would together help build children’s ability to learn, motivation to succeed and connectedness. In Chapter Two, I have taken a closer look at all the developmental areas, according to experts in the field and then in Chapter Four, through the findings, looked at discussions and dialogues together as a group, reflected on the complex environment within this rural setting, reflected on which areas are the most needed to develop, to enable change and support a smart response (Darling, Smith, & Gruber, 2015) in our current South African context.

In 2015, on September 25th, countries committed to a set of global goals to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all as part of a new sustainable development agenda (Jamieson et al., 2017a; United Nations, 2015a).



Figure 4. The global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) featured in South African Child Gauge: Part two (2017a, p. 23)

Each goal, known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), have specific targets to be achieved.



Figure 5. Key goals taken from United Nations Development Programme (United Nations Development Programme, 2018)

Goal four is to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning where no-one is left behind (United Nations Development Programme, 2018). Education is seen as the key that will allow many other SDGs to be achieved (Jamieson et al., 2017a; United Nations, 2015a). The United Nations believes that when people are able to get quality education, the cycle of poverty can be disrupted, as indicated in goal one. Education therefore helps to reduce inequalities, indicated in goal ten and empowers people everywhere to live more healthy and sustainable lives, indicated in goal 11 (United Nations, 2015a). These SDGs provide clear guidelines and targets for all countries to adopt to support their own priorities and challenges (United Nations Development Programme, 2018). Therefore, the goals separated above are interconnected and often success on one, will involve tackling issues more commonly associated with another.

It is encouraging to hear that some South African experts are aligning with these SDGs (United Nations Development Programme, 2018) and according to Jamieson et al (2017b) the challenges we as a country are facing are not new but that we need to do things differently in order to support children's development in our country. This will contribute to overcome the negative impact these factors have upon South African children's entire life course and support children in no-one being left behind (Jamieson et al., 2017b; UNICEF, 2014; United Nations, 2015a). Jamieson et al (2017b) and UNICEF (2014) quoted Nelson Mandela, that giving children a healthy start in life is the moral obligation of every individual (Department of Education, 2001).

In this study I intended to facilitate participatory practices to expand teachers' capacity to develop school readiness within a Grade R class in a rural school in KwaNzimakwe, Ugu, KZN. Mezmur (2017a) states that it is a child's right not only to survive, be alive or exist; but have a fair chance in life, including having opportunities to thrive and reach one's full potential. It is my hope that through participatory practices, a different and unique approach to change and development, that this goal may be achieved in some way, in a rural educational setting in Ugu, KZN.

According to Fourth Quadrant Partners (2015), the most successful and adaptive responses to problems come from individuals who are working towards a shared goal acting on their own initiative, not being told what to do as well as interacting with each other as much as possible. These responses or solutions are believed to be more "sophisticated" as they have a better "fit" to the environment and therefore a more adaptive solution. To attempt this type of solution adaptation for change, which has also been referred to as "growing smarter over time" (Darling, Guber, Smith, & Stiles, 2016, p. 60; Darling et al., 2015), I used participatory action research (PAR) (Child Advocacy Project, 2009) which is embedded within the emancipatory-critical paradigm (ECP) (Mash, 2014). Through this critical reflection and participation, I started to see development in school readiness emerge through supporting participants in knowing their worlds and by putting in place strategies for development in the areas that they wanted to see transformed. At the same time I discovered ways that informed my own thinking and practices through the Annotated Experiential Learning Cycle (A-ELC) I adopted throughout this study (Quin, 2014).

Participatory research is transformative and has a social justice concern and I therefore needed to reflect on all the possible implications these critical issues may have had on this study and its findings. Van der Riet (2008) argues that participatory research processes can actually enhance and enrich the research process as it addresses the participative, social and relational nature of human action required in this type of study. In order to support this type of enhancement or enrichment, my own self-reflexive development (Quin, 2014) was fundamental to the success of the emerging information being discovered from the ground up by engaging the participants. This can support "sophisticated" and "adaptive" solutions emerging from all the participants where combined thinking and expertise on self, others and the world creates more complex responses that are smarter (Darling et al., 2015, p. 60).

The critical research approach acknowledges that research can be affected by the way in which the researcher sees and understands the world, which is informed by their own values and position in society. It assumes that there is no universal truth, and that ideas are coming from people who occupy a certain position in society. In order to unravel these ideas, critical researchers often use dialogue with participants to understand certain phenomenon which can lead to transformation and support of participants in becoming more conscious of their world (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Mezirow's transformation theory (1997) reiterates becoming conscious through becoming critically reflective of one's own assumptions is the key to transforming one's taken for granted point of view. Lather (1986) goes on to describe the importance of developing legitimate research procedures that will protect the researchers work from their own desires in order that the research theory that develops will not be affected by self, that is, the researcher's opinions, biases and perspectives coming from a position of power in this particular community. Therefore, agreed upon procedures were needed for accepting the researcher's description and analysis through the search for unique and workable ways of gathering valid data and establishing data credibility. This is outlined in detail in the Methodology Chapter Three.

I have concluded that a neutral or objective position is not possible through the critical paradigm I followed and that through this research I aimed to unpack the reality of all the participants through self-reflection, critical thought and questioning. This supported enhancing effective facilitation, in order to explore change and enable transformation through participation. Individuals were able to continue actively within a complex system, Through this process opportunities were created for responses to problems, including their own "smart" solutions where not one individual can envision an "entire solution" (Darling et al., 2016, p. 60; Darling et al., 2015).

1.2.2 Location of the Study

This study was based in KwaNzimakwe in the Ugu District, in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN).

In rural KZN, living conditions and circumstances are likely to lead to children being delayed in their development namely physically, emotionally, intellectually and socially, because of many factors already mentioned, most predominantly poverty, including related factors like poor nutrition, poor early childhood programmes and services, lack of adult responsiveness



Figure 7. Limited access to running water

1.2.3 Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

Main objective:

To further develop participatory practices that enable teachers to develop school readiness within a Grade R class in a rural school in Kwanzimakwe, Ugu, KZN,

by:

1. further developing the participatory processes of the facilitator concerned using the experiential learning cycle (Kolb (1984)) to facilitate observation, analysis, reflection

and action of participatory practices implemented throughout the research process for self and for/with others.

2. facilitating a participatory process of identifying what are the strengths in the area of school readiness within their school or class in partnership with Grade R teachers and others that may be affected, like ECD Centre teachers.
3. facilitating a participatory process to identify the problems in the area of school readiness within their school or class in partnership with the teachers.
4. identifying interventions to deal with the problems, in partnership with the teachers.
5. developing and implementing an intervention to support school readiness in KwaNzimakwe, KZN, in partnership with the teachers.
6. evaluating the intervention and its effectiveness and exploring the implication of these findings for the development of school readiness practices, in partnership with the teachers.

The participatory reflective action cycle below (Quin, 2007) indicates the participatory process mentioned above in objectives one and two where the reflective process of the research cycle was followed. Objective three moved onto the learning process of the research cycle. Objective four and five followed the planning and also the action process of the research cycle and finally objective six looked again closely at reflection and back at the processes of what came before in the participatory action research cycle.

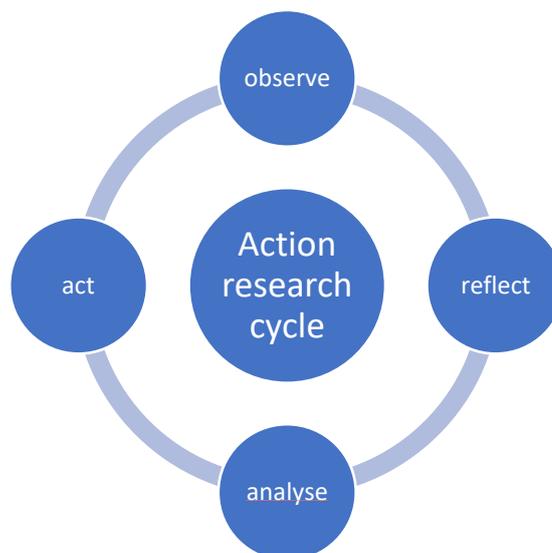


Figure 8. The adapted ELC cycle (Quin, 2016); supporting adaptive responses

1.2.4 Research questions

Main question:

How can participatory practices enable the development of school readiness programmes, among all participants within a rural school in KwaNzimakwe, Ugu, KZN?

Key Research Questions:

1. How have participatory processes, using the experiential learning cycle, supported the facilitator to improve participatory practices for self and for/with others?¹
2. What are the school readiness strengths in Grade R classes according to the teachers?
3. What are the problems about school readiness within a Grade R class according to the teachers?
4. How can we address these issues through a reflective participatory process?
5. What are all the participants' evaluation of the interventions that are developed and applied during this participatory process?
6. What are the implications of these findings for the development of school readiness programmes, within the community of practice, of the participants in this project?

1.2.5 Concluding this Introduction

The National Planning Commission quoted the following as their vision for every South African by 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2011, p. 13).

We feel loved, respected and cared for at home, in community and the public institutions we have created. We feel understood. We feel needed. We feel trustful. We feel trusted.

¹ It is important to answer the question 'what are these processes?' within question one, as part of the learning and understanding of the whole of the participatory process this project will encompass.

This supported me to wonder whether participatory action research in every context we take it into, can contribute towards every person feeling valued, supported and purposeful (Rural Network, 2009) creating emerging solutions (Darling et al., 2015) in our complex country towards development in early childhood (Jamieson et al., 2017b).

I hoped that through the structure of this thesis, as outlined below, I would start to see and show how this may be a reality in the contexts I live and work in Ugu, KZN, South Africa.

Following this Introductory Chapter One, that has provided a foretaste and overview of the whole research project, the Literature Review as Chapter Two, will outline all the current and important literature that pertains to the topic school readiness and the factors that may contribute in the South African context, supporting thinking and understanding of questions 3 and 4 which ask about the strengths and weaknesses of school readiness in this particular context.

The Methodology Chapter Three, places this study in the critical paradigm and then goes into a specific methodological approach, discussing participatory action research (PAR), the emancipatory-critical paradigm (ECP), action research (AR) and the critical elements of power this research entails. This chapter also describes data collection methods, how data were analysed and showing it was done in an ethical manner, considering all the factors and people that may have been affected. This contributes significantly to the three V's of value, validity and viability (Quin, 2010) and enabled myself, as the researcher, to create trustworthiness throughout this research process. This was reassuring, as the researcher, that the answer to the Main Question of 'How can participatory practices enable the development of school readiness programmes among all participants within a rural school in Kwanzimakwe, Ugu, KZN?' could be reliably answered following these well thought through processes.

The Findings Chapter Four is a comprehensive summary of all the data gathered and analysed, looking for emerging themes that were created in the particular space, within the focus group, including all the participants. This chapter outlines in detail all the self-reflexive analysis, myself as the researcher generated and the important learnings that occurred

because of this. Through this chapter, data started to emerge more clearly and contributed towards answering the questions more thoroughly in Chapter Five. The raw data found in the SWOT analysis and the force field analysis, were the main contributor to the answers to questions two and three outlining the strengths and weaknesses identified by the participants. Question four was also answered during further analysis of both the opportunities and threats, supporting finding solutions to threats and weaknesses.

In Chapter Five, the Discussions and Conclusions chapter, there is a very close link to the findings, taking the learning deeper through analysis and incorporating self-reflexive analysis (Quin, 2014), specifically looking at emerging data and themes from the ground up, using an inductive approach (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006), and concluding with the most important themes that carried the most weight in the learnings that occurred over the entire research project, providing answers to all the questions outlined in this chapter and finally bringing clearer understanding to the Main Question.



Figure 9. Care, value and purpose

Chapter Two Literature Review

In this Literature Review, I will be providing a wide range of perspectives from different writers who hold certain positions on specific topics affecting and influencing education. These topics will include early childhood education (ECD), brain development, quality in ECD, early intervention, school readiness, ECD policy and the history of ECD in South African education, teaching and critical development as well as professional development and adult education. Within this review, I have tried to explain and outline some of these perspectives and positions in order to give a critical view of these writers' positionality to enable understanding current information and bringing insight into the study that I have chosen.

Some of these writers are embedded in current research and others are well known for certain theories. They are relevant to this study, contributing towards the process of reflection I hope to nurture through the participatory way of working and the process of experience that this study follows, as well as the essential way of thinking through a critical paradigm. More of the methodology of this study can be found in Chapter Three. This Literature Review has supported me as the facilitator of this participatory project to observe and reflect on all the aspects of the topic individually and by looking at the whole picture, helping me to see what and how to make connections. That is, to analyse what emerges through such a process.

I have endeavoured to bring the various aspects together, to highlight the critical discussions that are essential for understanding school readiness, improvement and/or enabling change through participation in a South African context. One thought, idea or perspective cannot be understood individually but rather as contributing towards the whole. Some of this research is based on Western ways of thinking, acknowledging this is critical to understanding that views and perspectives are based on particular groups of people with particular realities and understandings of self, others and the world (Quin, 2014). It is my hope to see more, think more and wonder more about (Kolb, 1984; Quin, 2014) the below topics before embarking on data analysis in Chapter Four and finally concluding in Chapter Five.

In order to frame this chapter well and in its entirety, I have decided to begin with a summary of education and development, including the ways of improving that will be focused on in this study, linking the thinking and theory I have adopted around the learning and development process in action research for this project.

2.1 Education and development

Development can be seen as a journey filled with learning (Simmons, Barnard, & Fennema, 2009). According to Simmons et al (2009) this journey is part of a reflective process bringing consciousness and awareness to one's own perspectives and behaviour. The learner's experience is essential to this process, creating a holistic understanding, including choice and flexibility as well as critical reflection about the learning process (Simmons et al., 2009). Through this approach, participation is the guide to how learning happens and change is enabled (Boshier, 1998; Simmons et al., 2009). Kolb (1984) refers to this unique way of learning as creating the right relationship between learning, work, other everyday activities and creating actual knowledge in the process of learning through experience. These participatory methods are also referred to as an approach that actively involves and uses the experience of learners (Boshier, 1998). Simon (1992, p. xvi) refers to his participatory pedagogical efforts as "possibilities for progressive practice". It is this progressive practice within the participatory way of working that enables change and can ultimately bring change and development to educational settings in various forms. This innovative way of learning through participation can be considered as "a prerequisite to and a consequence of" adult education (Boshier, 1998, p. 17).

The global SDGs (United Nations, 2015a, 2015b; United Nations Development Programme, 2018) are concerned with many aspects of change and development looking at development globally. Jamieson (2017b) says that focussing on children is crucial for their well-being as well as for reaching the SDGs. "In signing the SDGs, states promised to leave no-one behind, to transform societies, economies and the environment to ensure a fairer and safer future for all" (Jamieson et al., 2017a, p. 33). The SDGs have been decided to ensure transformative steps needed to support the world in becoming more sustainable and resilient and where no-one is left behind (United Nations, 2015b). In goal four, there are specific goals broken down for education. One of these states that all girls and boys should have access to quality early education and development and care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education (United Nations, 2015b, p. 21).

In order for South Africa to change and develop we need significantly progressive ways of working to enable lasting and sustainable change that communities can adopt (Jamieson et al., 2017b). Some learners involved in participatory practices considered this process as “I knew inside out and I could buy into it because I had been involved in its creation” (Simmons et al., 2009, p. 90). When working in these progressive ways within our South African context it is critical that power relations are acknowledged (Quin, 2012). Power relations lie at the centre of education where “somebody’s interests are always being served” (Boshier, 1998, p. 6). However, when people are conscious of these power relations from a critical perspective and through a process of critical self-reflection, these power relations can be challenged and acknowledged (Quin, 2014).

2.2 Early childhood development (ECD)

The Centre on the Developing Child (2007) based at Harvard University believes that the science of early childhood is a source of new ideas that could be used to develop more effective policies and services focused on the early years of life. In their opinion early experiences determine whether a child’s developing brain architecture provides a strong or weak foundation for all future learning, development and health. Therefore, the early years need to have excellent practices in order to improve the later educational years of a child. Experts in ECD contributing to the South African Child Gauge argue that developing the capabilities of young children so that they are able to learn when they go to school, will affect the job they get when they are grown up, leading to fuller employment and greater economic growth, which results in a safer and happier society disrupting intergenerational cycles of poverty and enabling platforms for levelling the field for equality (Jamieson et al., 2017a). UNICEF (2014) believes the importance and value of early learning is no longer disputed and there is increased attention to ECD in South Africa. Access to ECD may open the doors to learning but it is in ensuring quality early learning experiences that will redress and realise the potential of children in South African.

In White Paper 5 (2001) the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa has taken a humanistic view on the importance of early childhood education. Humanism is concerned with the rights of the child and for the child to be able to reach their full potential (Jamieson et al., 2017a; South Africa, 2007). Early childhood development is referred to as a

comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to nine years of age, referring to programmes intended to effect developmental changes in children from birth to the end of Grade three (Marais & Meier, 2012), with the active participation of their parents and caregivers building a bridge between home and school². Its purpose is to protect the child's rights to develop his or her full cognitive, emotional, social and physical potential. The DBE define early childhood development as an umbrella term that applies to the processes by which children from birth to at least nine years grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially. According to John (2015) and Marais and Meier (2012) Grade R is a critical stage of childhood development and learning and therefore needs to be appropriate for that developmental stage. John (2015) believes that learning should be fun and informal and that teachers should be specialised³ for these skills as teaching through structured play can be very complex.

Jeff Radebe, who is the current Minister in the Presidency for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation and Chairperson for the National Planning Commission, (Jamieson et al., 2017a) as well as Albino and Berry (2013), reiterate that investing in early childhood development is now being increasingly recognised as cost effective for countries as well as beneficial for children and communities for long term sustainable development on a global level. Children are at the heart of the 2030 Global development agenda (Jamieson et al., 2017a) where the realisation of their rights is seen as the foundation for human progress and development, a human rights based agenda for sustainable development balancing economic growth, social justice and environmental stewardship. These Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDGs) impact every aspect of a child's life (Jamieson et al., 2017a). UNICEF (2001) believes that investing in ECD builds social capital, meaning that good ECD programmes strengthen community networks and support, and enhance service delivery and social infrastructures as well as educating and involving families. The immediate and long-term benefits of programming are not just limited to young children, or men and women as parents. Rather, they develop a community's capacity to access and manage health, nutrition, environmental and educational infrastructure.

² Link to reading begins in the home (Spaull & Hoadley, 2017)

³ Link to teacher training and adult education in South Africa 2.8

Ensuring that children are ready for successful school experiences is one of the most pressing issues in early childhood policy and practice, including the importance of a high-quality early education programmes which provide the foundation for school readiness and must be available to all young children and families (NAEYC, 2009). UNICEF (2014) acknowledges that quality is not neutral and can be understood in many different ways by different groups of people holding different views and perspectives.

2.3 Brain development, “the sensitive period” and early intervention

Piaget (as cited in Bruce, 2004), was one of the first theoreticians to challenge the notion that human intelligence is entirely inherited and fixed at birth. He saw intelligence as adaption to the experiences of life. Following a science-based approach to the development of education, Nelson (2009) believes that brain development depends on experiences occurring during particular time periods, specifically from birth to five years, called sensitive periods. Neuroscientists, such as Nelson (2009) and Wasserman (2007) believe that should stimulation be absent during those periods, development can be compromised significantly and, in some cases, permanently and that brain research has led to the betterment of early childhood education. Early childhood can be a critical time for brain development, especially up to the age of five, therefore the timing and quality of early experiences combine to shape the brain (Gordon and Browne, 2011). Bruce (2004, p.24-25) describes how a young brain, in the first three years of life will have formed 100 percent more synapses than will be present in the adult brain. She goes onto describe how this allows for great flexibility in the brain as it develops, so that it can be sensitive and adaptive to the environment, experience and context. An element of “use it or lose it” is mentioned as part of a child’s learning processes and capabilities of responding to an ever-changing world, where his or her own ideas need to be formed to deal with this and be able to participate and contribute successfully. Serotonin is released in the brain as a feel-good chemical, which opens up to more learning. Fear, anxiety will have the opposite affect and release the chemical endomorphins which will close down learning and produce survival, flight or fight mode, not conducive to learning. Gordon and Browne (2011) continue to describe how the brain develops physically faster than any other part of the body and that by the age of seven it is fully grown.

Keeping this in mind, Australian experts, Dockett and Perry (2014) and Pears et al (2014) hold the opinion that some children who show difficulties in learning may be those who have special educational needs or those who are from a disadvantaged community. Disadvantages which can be the result of poverty and lack of resources in ECD as described by Ilifa Labantwana (2014) can fuel the inability to maximise on a child's development in these sensitive periods which can have a significant affect in getting a child ready for school. School readiness is explained in further detail in section 2.5.

UNICEF discusses that the earlier we intervene in a child's life the greater the chance of supporting that child to achieve their potential. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009) continues to hold the opinion that early intervention efforts support children who may be at risk for later school failure. Many early childhood development experts (Albino & Berry, 2013; Pears et al., 2014) agree that ECD interventions have the potential to prevent developmental delays through intensive early intervention and responsive community based programmes. Early childhood is the time when the brain develops most rapidly and it is a critical window of opportunity for establishing a child's foundation of good health, education and optimal productivity for the future (Albino & Berry, 2013).

2.4 Quality in ECD practice

UNICEF (2014) acknowledges that quality is not a neutral word and is not easy to unpack. It is multi-faceted, complex, diverse, subjective, open-ended, uncertain and challenging. Understandings of quality differ and are contested. Most literature comes from the Western world and is rooted in Western culture. We need to have a new understanding of quality and redefine quality for our South African context and reality which is particularly relevant in critical research to enable change in South Africa.

The priority areas for the improvement of the quality of ECD services by the Department of Education include: improvements in infrastructure, learner support materials and equipment, standardisation of training, qualifications and remuneration of staff; improvements in overall management and integration of Grade R into the foundation phase as a whole. Grade R needs

to be made compulsory and if Grade R is included in ECD provisions, attention also needs to be given to the nutrition, health, safe transport and after-school care of young children in Grade R (Richter, 2012).

Dr. Excell cited by UNICEF (2014) argues for a developmentally, contextually appropriate and culturally relevant teaching practice as important, based on a curriculum that foregrounds social justice and equity. Such a teaching practice will recognise local context, affirm the child as a citizen in his or her own right and it would show the teachers knowledge about content as well as early childhood development. She goes on to emphasise that a critically reflective teacher values child-initiated play, children's social and emotional development and the development of creativity as well as recognising children move to learn and learn to move.

Habermas (Young, 1990) believed that society had a false consciousness through the mass cultures that prevail and produce dominant ideology. He describes a reflexive participation where children set the conditions for their own learning and deciding the specifics where principles may be realised is potentially important. Habermas believed that a structured and ordered learning environment was very important to the effectiveness of schooling. He explained that a discourse model of pedagogy where the teacher and pupil produce and reproduce the rules through discourse within a framework of constraints. In the process of involving children in responding to classroom organisation and practices allowing their cognitive discourse to be heard can turn a potentially negative relationship between teacher and learner into a positive one. Habermas's ideas are wonderful and inspiring but can according to Guthrie (2012) be detrimental if enforcing a radical progressive model of teaching onto communities that have already been oppressed by South Africa's past historical battle. A severe shortage of the necessary expertise can turn an intended recipe for educational success into educational malpractice and failure.

Guthrie (2012) goes on to analyse teaching styles through three overlapping phases in developing countries over the last 50 years⁴. The first phase was to blame teachers for an inability to change away from formalism to more progressive teaching styles. The second phase was to blame lack of change on teacher training and curriculum, and therefore to attempt to alter either or both. Lack of cultural understanding contributed to the widespread failure of both these phases. A third phase has been a growing concern for context, for identifying teaching styles that are culturally appropriate. A consequence of the contextual approach is provision of teacher training and syllabuses that aim to improve the level of formalism rather than failing yet again to replace it with progressivism. Teaching is a cultural act and so is attempting to improve it.

Marais and Meier (2012) believe the following factors should guide the implementation of quality ECD programmes:

- Compatibility with family's philosophy and goals
- Convenient for families
- Parents should be included in the programme
- Staff should have good personal and communication skills
- The teacher child ratio should be appropriate for the age of the children
- Teachers should be well trained and have a good rapport with the children
- The children should be relaxed and happy to relate to their peers and resources
- The curriculum should be developmentally appropriate and activities appropriate for the age of the children
- The curriculum should be balanced allowing for optimum opportunities for children to develop to their full potential
- The health and nutrition practices should promote good health for learning
- The physical environment should be well maintained and accessible, ensuring the children's safety
- The costs should be affordable for the surrounding community

⁴ Link to teacher training and professional development section 2.8

The benefits of a quality ECD programme has been recognised as the ideal phase for the transmission of values underpinning the South African constitution and having a social justice concern, namely respect for human rights, appreciation of diversity, tolerance and justice as well as reducing social and economic disparities, including race and gender inequalities (Marais & Meier, 2012).

2.5 School readiness

In the next section I will be outlining many different experts' research, in particular of children's developmental phases applying to school readiness. In some cases, these are very similar and overlapping is common. This provides us with a clearer view of what is important for children to know, understand and be able to do before entering school. Through this section it is also important to see that, in order for a child's development to be appropriate for school readiness, the adults in that child's life have an important role to play in helping them (Department of Education, 2008; Ilifa Labantwana, 2014).

School readiness has been described by Dockett and Perry (2014) as a measure of how prepared a child is to succeed in school, cognitively, socially and emotionally. School readiness could also be measured on how ready a child is to enter school and engage well and successfully in learning. On the other hand, deficits in school readiness increase the risks for academic and social failures which affect educational and occupational attainment and success (Pears et al., 2014). Pears et al describes children who begin school with foundational skills for reading, the skills necessary to respond to peers, the ability to pay attention and concentrate, to control their own behaviour; these children will learn to read earlier, form positive relationships with peers and teachers and show appropriate behaviour in the classroom.

Snow (2006), Ilifa Labantwana (2014) and Gordon and Browne (2011), experts in their field in both South Africa and America, similarly break down the critical components of child development that contribute to school success as seen below:

1. Cognitive or intellectual skills; language and communication skills, oral language and listening comprehension, pre-reading knowledge and skills; phonological awareness,

print awareness and print skills and alphabetical knowledge, pre-mathematics knowledge and skills; aspects of classification, seriation, number, spatial relations and time.

2. Social and emotional development including relationships with other people, emotions, personality and an indication of being emotionally ready to learn.
3. Physical skills including both gross motor development and fine motor development.

Meier and Marais (2012) believe that the Grade R year is specifically responsible for the total or complete readiness of learners before they enter Grade one. They outline the development as follows:

1. Intellectual development; language and learning skills, creativity and basic concepts
2. Emotional development; positive self-image, control of emotions, self-confidence. In addition, Carr places an emphasis on certain dispositions and attitudes laying strong foundations for later formal learning and these characteristics underpin successful life-long learning and can be very difficult to establish these later. These learning characteristics include perseverance, curiosity, trust, responsibility and self-esteem (UNICEF, 2014).
3. Social and moral development; relationships, acceptable communication skills, knowledge of norms and values, respect for others
4. Physical development; healthy and strong body, physical independence, perceptual and motor skills

Another example of how developmental and learning needs of young children (3 – 5 years) can be organised with an emphasis on preparation for school (Ebrahim, Seleti, & Dawes, 2013).

1. Physical and motor development, including physical health and well-being and sensory, gross and fine motor development
2. Social and emotional development, including safety and security, awareness of the self, self-regulation, relationships with peers and adults and creative play.
3. Communication, early language and literacy development, including verbal and non-verbal communication, listening and speaking

4. Early language and literacy, including listening, speaking, print awareness, letter knowledge, vocabulary and phonemic awareness, book awareness and story sense, early reading and writing
5. Cognitive development (early mathematics), including memory, problem-solving, imitation and symbolic play, sifting, sorting and classifying.
6. Early mathematics, including number concepts, relationships and operations, patterns, shape and space and measurement.

Drum (December 2014) quotes the South African clinical psychologist Dr Scolari on why Grade R is good for supporting school readiness. She outlined the following benefits:

- Children can become familiar with the school environment, making them feel at ease and familiar with their surroundings.
- They learn social skills which they need for interaction in the classroom and to make friends.
- They learn to respect authority, to follow a teacher's instructions and to control their emotions.
- It lays a foundation for reading, writing and numeracy.
- It helps to develop children's hand-eye coordination and physical skills.

Scolari reiterates that by the time children go to school they should be able to:

- Go to the bathroom on their own, and dress and feed themselves.
- Know and say their name and age.
- Follow rules.
- Play with friends, take turns and share.
- Have enough emotional intelligence to perform new tasks, cope with changes in their routine and control their emotions, which all require emotional intelligence.
- Express themselves using basic communication skill.
- Hold a pen or pencil, copy simple designs, write their name and recognise a few letters.

Some strategies and/or interventions for teachers that promote school readiness can be found in the Thuthong guidebook of the DoE for South African teachers have three priority foci in a Grade R class. These school readiness strategies outlined by DoE (2008), could form a basis for observations and reflection questions to pose to teachers and assist the process of development and improvement within their classes.

1. Teachers should create stimulating indoor and outdoor learning environments.
Teachers can explain why play is important, have ideas on planning and organising the space and interest areas, being able to choose and store and label materials.
Teachers explore ways to overcome challenges.
2. Teachers can manage the daily programme and provide reasons why a daily programme is important. They can give an example of a half day programme and its segments, how to involve learners, they can show an understanding of the concepts of, and ideas for supporting emergent reading, writing and numbers, integrating learning areas. Teachers explore ways to overcome possible challenges.
3. Teachers can show responsive interaction strategies and provide reasons of importance. They can explain the role of the teacher as a facilitator of learning and teaching.

Training and Resources in Early Education (TREE), is a South African Non-profit Organisation (NPO) focused on ensuring that young children from lower income homes particularly those living in rural settings, develop to their full potential in line with their rights and needs, promote quality holistic early childhood development and care for children by creating an early childhood development enabling environment (Training and Resources in Early Education, 2015). Part of creating an enabling environment for school readiness is described extensively in the South African National Curriculum Framework (Department of Basic Education, 2015) by emphasizing six Early Learning and Development Areas (ELDAs) which are:

1. Well-being
2. Identity and belonging
3. Communication

4. Exploring mathematics
5. Creativity
6. Knowledge and understanding of the world

Each of the ELDA's is closely related to the Desired Results identified in the National Early Learning Development Standards (Department of Basic Education, 2015). NELDS promotes an integrated approach including all the different skills, knowledge and abilities that children are expected and encouraged to attain in the different domains of their development. This relates directly to how children learn through exposure to various experiences. The desired results are aimed at assisting in ensuring that children learn in an integrated way, enabling parents, practitioners and other caregivers to provide appropriate programmes and strategies to support children's learning activities and providing the basis for lifelong learning. This means that learning is becoming more about discovering and experiencing in all areas of a child's development and that it is important for all stakeholders, including parents to be involved in this process. In addition, Ilifa Labantwana (2014) stipulates that teachers need to be able to provide age-appropriate responsiveness and affectional care, to provide age-appropriate language stimulation and to provide age-appropriate cognitive/academic stimulation.

Ebrahim, Seleti and Dawes (2013) recommend that centre-based programmes that are subsidised and closely monitored for quality are essential for three to five year olds. Centre based interventions which are suitable for older children tend to be more effective in improving language and cognitive outcomes than home-based early stimulation interventions, but for children not in centres, other programmes, such as quality community playgroups, access to community toy and book libraries, story-telling and early reading programmes can support early learning. Ebrahim et al emphasises the importance of quality in the early learning programmes and to pay attention to evidence of effectiveness in improving early learning outcomes.

In addition to quality infrastructure, the following are recognised key programme quality parameters for centre-based provision in both low- and high-income countries (Ebrahim et al., 2013):

1. Learning materials provide opportunities for stimulation across developmental domains and encourage problem-solving.
2. Well-trained practitioners receive ongoing post-qualification support.
3. Teaching strategies consider cultural and linguistic diversity as well as children with disabilities.
4. Teaching strategies include frequent, warm and responsive interactions that scaffold the development of skills for schooling.
5. Children experience both individual and group activities, with more of the former than the latter.
6. Practitioners engage children's caregivers on their progress.

2.6 South African history affecting education

Marais and Meier (2012) note that knowing the history of ECD programmes is essential in understanding that educational practices have their origins in the past and can provide clear perspectives and new insights. In Chapter Three, where methodology is linked to this current research it is important to note that a critical paradigm has been adopted to ensure that the South African context has been considered carefully and critically.

Abdi (2005) describes the colonisation of Africa as a disaster of great destruction, where populations were uprooted and displaced, whole generations disappeared, European diseases killed both cattle and people, cities and towns were deserted, family networks disintegrated, and culture and history were torn apart creating two Africas, the one before and the one after, likened to the Holocaust.

Apartheid was a system of racial segregation in South Africa enforced through legislation by the National Party (NP) governments, the ruling party from 1948 to 1994, under which the rights, associations and movements of the majority black inhabitants were controlled by the Afrikaner minority rule. Education was therefore segregated by the 1953 Bantu Education

Act, which crafted a separate system of education for African students and was designed to prepare black people for lives as a labouring class (Wikipedia, 2014).

The provision of education in the first half of the 20th century for black people was “highly inadequate” (Booyse, Roux, Seroto, & Wolhuter, 2011, p.201). Schools were characterised by overcrowding, government grants were small, attendance was irregular, only a small minority of pupils progressed beyond the very junior classes (60% never reached Std one and only 2,5% were in or above Std five) and the supply of teachers was seriously lacking. Colonially imposed systems of learning were also deliberately built on marginalisation and exclusion policies that greatly limited the programmes as well as the levels indigenous populations could aspire to. If a select number of learners were able to go beyond the primary years, almost all were denied any further education (Abdi & Cleghorn, 2005).

2.7 The history of early childhood development (ECD), ECD policy and current status of ECD in South Africa

Margetts and Phatudi (2013) note that in South Africa, the preschool phase has for decades been a neglected area of education. From the 1950’s until the early 1970’s there was no preschool provision in the black communities of the country. The first indications on the importance of early childhood development (ECD) was recognised at government level in the 1980’s through the de Lange commission. The commission recommended a bridging class in preschool to prepare children for school, but this recommendation was not implemented.

The first decade of democracy marked a massive transition for South African children. Despite progress through the decision to make a bridging class by placing Grade R into all South African primary schools, the gains have not been strong enough to work against inequity. The Government plans to have Grade R year as compulsory by 2019 (Vlok, December 2014), but research by Porteus (2004) suggests that many children born into poverty may be at their most vulnerable during gestation and the first few years of life. ECD in South Africa has not received enough attention to make a difference in these young children’s lives and for their educational success to be impacted positively.

The White Paper 5 (2001) estimates that over 1 million of an estimated 6 million children in the 0 - 6 years age range are enrolled in some type of ECD provision. They also concluded that the weakness of ECD provision in South Africa is one of access and of equity. Children from urban and higher-income groups generally have more access, and services of much higher quality, than poor or rural children. 40 percent of ECD sites are located in rural settings. Children of farm workers have also shown to be the worst off while rural children generally are the most likely to suffer exclusion from early childhood development, stunted physical growth and lags in emotional and cognitive development. Unfortunately for South African children, looking closely at research done in 2017 (Jamieson et al., 2017a), this trend is still evident, as many children are academically left behind at school, but are progressing through the grades without gaining knowledge and skills. This is due to the fact that many learners do not learn to read properly despite regular attendance at school. These learners don't get a firm grasp on that first rung of education and then fall further and further behind as they progress through the grades. The differences in reading readiness between poor and rich schools in 2017 are profound, where the poorest schools have 8% high and advanced readers compared to the richest schools having 65% (Spaull & Hoadley, 2017). Harrison (2017) describes South African children struggling to learn, which is made worse by the poor state of basic education where just 45% of children who enter Grade one pass Grade 12. Over two-fifths drop out of school and another sixth fail Grade 12. The children in the poorest (quintile one and two) schools enter school at a disadvantage, scoring about 20% less on entry for maths and home language than children in higher quintile schools. These findings point to major deficits in language and cognitive ability that have already occurred by the age of five. He believes that language and cognitive development instinctively happen in the first few years of life if the right ingredients are in place, but for many South Africans this is not the norm.

UNICEF (2014) highlights some other challenges facing ECD in South Africa, which include ensuring compliance with legislation, policy, regulations and implementation where participation of different stakeholders are key to achieving objectives. According to Jamieson et al. (2017a), the conclusion taken from current research, is that the majority of South Africa's children remain marginalised and excluded and to move forward we need to consider what children need to thrive.

Going into further analysis of the current nature, context and status of ECD provision in South Africa, the Department of Education (DoE), reveals five key areas requiring attention, namely, the extent of ECD provision, the inequality in existing ECD provision, the inequality of access to ECD services, the variable quality of ECD services and an incomplete, fragmented legislative and policy framework for ECD that results in unco-ordinated service delivery (Department of Education, 2001). Another concern highlighted by UNICEF (2014) about White Paper 5 is the move of children from ECD centres into schools.

A school setting is usually more formal. This could have implications for the Grade R year for South African children, resulting in possibly a more formal Grade R due to the nature of formal schooling. A formal Grade R year may be detrimental to the learning of these children as the foundation of Grade R is to build upon experiences and allow for practical learning through play. Drum Digital (December 2014), published an article about research done at Stellenbosch University, where the academic performance of learners between Grades one and six who had completed Grade R, was compared to a group who had not completed Grade R, specifically focussing on maths and on the children's home languages. It was found that Grade R had little impact on the children's development in South Africa. The researchers felt this was due to poor teaching skills, lack of training, poor parental support and other support networks.

2.8 Teacher training and professional development

All South Africans do not necessarily receive the opportunity to complete their scholastic careers while they are still young. Many only learn to read and write once they are adults. Some only pass Grade 10 or Grade 12 years after leaving school. Others, while already in employment, pursue further diplomas or certificate training, among others, to further their careers (Duvenhage, 2016). The reality of many South Africans is poor adult education exacerbated by poor primary and secondary educations. Quin (2012) refers to South African schools in disadvantaged communities as schools that are often staffed by unqualified or underqualified teachers. She believes that underqualified teachers are less able to get jobs in the more privileged schools and the most rural under-resourced schools are less able to get qualified teachers. In 2013 the Education Department figures revealed that there are nearly 10

000 unqualified and under-qualified teachers on their payroll. KZN was the worst affected of all the provinces, where the province has difficulty recruiting qualified teachers and therefore has more than 85 percent of all the unqualified teachers which totals 6,050 with only a matriculation certificate (enca.com, 2013).

Another important factor to consider is that 33 percent of the teaching force in 2007 were aged 45 years or older, which means that they were trained under systems that no longer exist and 40 percent of all educators in 2007 were aged between 35 and 40 and thus were in their late teens or early twenties when we got rid of the apartheid government (Quin, 2012). This brings a close link to our Apartheid history⁵ and the effects of this on communities and the individuals, affecting how these teachers view self, others and the world around them (Quin, 2014) which in turn will affect how they teach and act in the context they live and work.

A post-apartheid political and social system has resulted in there being many fundamental changes in education in South Africa over the last 20 years. Teachers have had the enormous pressure of keeping up to date with these changes in curriculum, policy and implementation imperatives, including the introduction of outcomes based education (OBE) and the failure of teachers to cope with the unrealistic changes in curriculum (Maluleka, 2015). Teachers tend to draw on their own resources and experiences and have their own view of what is normal in education based on these already existing perspectives that they hold (Robinson & McMillan, 2006).

MacNaughton (2005) believes that Foucault's work explores the relationships between knowledge, truth and power and the effects of these relationships on us and on the institutions we create. Becoming reflective often jolts educators to rethink and deepen their understandings of equity and its possibilities in their work by giving them more understanding of power and knowledge in early childhood. This can drive and motivate efforts to find new ways to act for equity. Chapter Three outlines the important methodology of this study highlighting ways of supporting action through participation, using participatory action research (PAR).

⁵ Link to 2.5 South African Apartheid history

But the reality is that both schooling and tertiary education in South Africa still demand little more than several levels of convergent thinking. Its practices and testing focus on content acquisition through rote rehearsal, rather than the processes of thinking for analysis and synthesis (Sousa, 2011, p. 254). Robinson and Macmillan (2006) explain that the competences and skills expected of South African teachers are similar to what is expected of teachers around the world, including acting as professionals, analysing educational practice, being able to act in a variety of situations, reflecting on own practice, and collaborating with others. Research, reflection and enquiry need to be essential aspects of a teacher's abilities, but this is not the reality considering the alarming statistics and figures revealing the underqualifications of teachers in South Africa (enca.com, 2013; Quin, 2012)

Similarly, Mezirow (1997) is concerned with an education that encourages critical reflective thinking, imaginative problem solving, it is learner-centred, participatory and interactive and involves group deliberation and problem solving. In this way the materials reflect the real-life experiences of the learners and are designed to foster active discussions around reasons, examine evidence and reflect on discoveries within the group dynamics, ensuring learning happens through discovery and finding creative and innovative ways to solve problems. In contrast, the Basic model of change, proposed by Fleisch (2014) into South African schools, hopes that lessons plans, training and instructional coaching and learning materials will positively promote a new and improved instructional practice. The focus is on the curriculum and the implementation of that with available resources.

Teachers pedagogical beliefs and practices fall somewhere along a continuum from child-centred or child-initiated exploration and discovery at one end and teacher-directed or teacher-initiated experiences at the other end (Hahambu, Brownlee, & Petriwskyj, 2012). One extreme assumes that truth is known and that the adult must transmit this truth to the children within a formal structure as in the Freire (2005) banking concept, where he believes the more learners allow knowledge to be given to them, the less they develop critical consciousness. The other assumes that truth needs to be discovered and that adults don't know everything a child needs to know and it is their role to facilitate a child to discover through play and construct their own learning and as a result they become "transformers" of that world (Freire, 2005, p. 73).

2.9 Concluding this Literature Review

Quin (2012, p. 22) believes that the historical context of South Africa has provided a “particularly fertile field” for social justice work to develop. Carlson and Apple (1998) believe in emergent discourses able to construct and deconstruct within the fragmentation of culture and self, revealing ways for transformation and change within a particular context based on a new common sense discourse on progress. It is with this hope that going forward into the next chapters, a new discourse or way of working may emerge within this community of practice, to support change and development, considering critically all the aspects within the topic and context that this study encompasses.

Chapter Three Methodology

The methodology in this chapter begins with an overview of the critical paradigm, then goes into a specific methodology approach, discussing participatory action research (PAR) (Child Advocacy Project, 2009), the emancipatory-critical paradigm (ECP) (Mash, 2014) action research (AR) (Davidoff & van den Berg, 2008) and the critical elements of power (Lukes, 2005) this research entailed. Facilitation, reflection and experiential learning were critical in ensuring the current South African context (Quin, 2012) was considered and the unequal elements of power were thought about and planned for, supporting validity as well as trustworthiness (Lather, 1986). The specific methods used (Child Advocacy Project, 2009) as well as an inductive approach in the data analysis (Fletcher, MacPhee, & Dickson, 2015) are then outlined, beginning to show the emerging clarity of the whole approach towards interpreting the overall findings and conclusions in Chapter Four and Five. Through this emergent approach to research and learning (Darling et al., 2015), critical self-reflection (CSRX) (Quin, 2014)) became an important learning process for the researcher and both emergence and CSRX are therefore discussed in more detail in Chapter four and five. This chapter concludes with a discussion on ethical issues (Terre Blanche et al., 2006) as well as discussing possible anticipated problems and limitations that had to be considered in the planning stages for this research project.

3.1 Research Paradigm

Research paradigms are the all-encompassing system of practice and thinking which helps define the nature of a particular research idea and highlights those things taken for granted about the social world the researcher is studying and the appropriate and correct ways of studying it (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). In our South African context, this is especially relevant, involving careful thought through approaches and processes because of our unique socio-political history and context of post-apartheid is “steeped in layers of social and cultural oppression” (Quin, 2012, p. 20) and it was with this complex characterisation of this particular field of work, within action research, a critical paradigm was chosen.

3.1.1 A critical paradigm

In this study a critical paradigm was used to shape the methodology and research design so as to incorporate a critical awareness of power relations. This was to enable all participants to develop a greater understanding and supported sense making the contexts in which they lived and worked (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Shipman, 1997). Through the following discussion on paradigms, it is evident that a critical paradigm, was both relevant and crucial for this action research project to be carried out in an ethical and just manner, where all participants, including myself as the researcher, were enabled to understand self, others and the world. According to Quin (2012, p. 21), “engaging in a process that changes the world requires to change one’s own position in the world”. In this way, all participants’ roles were challenged in this process, supporting change towards a better world.

Mash (2014) recognises that Participatory Action Research (PAR) is embedded within the emancipatory-critical paradigm (ECP). ECP focuses on creating new knowledge by transforming or changing the world in which the research is embedded and reflecting critically on what is learnt in the process. Research participants in the ECP are not objects to be measured, but are rather participating subjects in action, where understanding of self, others and their world begins supporting participants from where their relative power lies and comes from. Quin (2012, p. 21) refers to this as changing “one’s own position in the world” which enables becoming active in changing the world to be better. Critical emancipatory research is aimed at raising awareness of injustice and correcting the way knowledge has been used to ensure the passivity of the socially vulnerable (Shipman, 1997).

Davidoff (1993) suggests that emancipatory action research is democratic when teachers have a voice and more control over education. He goes onto explain the challenge that this poses in South Africa. South Africa is notorious for its extreme authoritarianism and anti-democratic practice linked to our apartheid history outlined in Chapter Two. Extreme control over what is taught gives teachers very little space to share their own ideas, concerns or values. Therefore, a democratic way of learning and teaching goes against the norm and established ways of thinking within a South African context. Elliot (2005) discusses at length about theory connecting with practice. He believes that a critical self-understanding in itself is not always followed by strategic action and may not mean that a person is empowered to take an

action for the sake of an ideal. He feels that this requires further conditions like motivation to act, cognitive capabilities to know how to act and dispositions towards acting, as necessary in exercising change in a situation. “Becoming critical is not enough to become empowered as a change agent” (Elliott, 2005, p. 362). Some practical ways of ensuring strategic action takes place is giving teachers a major role in gathering data and interpreting its significance for their practice.

The first initiative after Apartheid to overcome the offensive and outdated content, was Curriculum 2005, the first post-apartheid curriculum, which was an outcomes-based approach to schooling which unified subjects into learning areas. The aim of the curriculum was the desire of a new South Africa which its citizenry was able to build social cohesion, advocate for democracy and at the same time devote to an economically booming country (Maluleka, 2015). Weber (2008) refers to post-1994 education practice as reform, not transformation which focused heavily on desegregation and expanding access. With few exceptions, schools remained hierarchical, authoritarian, and teacher-centred. Critical reasoning, self-reliant learning, cooperative approaches, community responsiveness, environmental awareness, self-confident assumption of responsibility, political consciousness, engaged citizenship and more were marginalised. Therefore, anti-oppressive practices or a democratic way of learning (Davidoff, 1993) had little development and improvement (Weber, 2008).

Perhaps in our South African context, Habermas, quoted by Young (1990) could be relevant, in that action research, is research into one’s own practice, which could support groups of practitioners to carry out action research, enabling them to rediscover. Davidoff (1993) believes restructuring the work of teachers will have little lasting impact if it is not interwoven with teacher’s existing perspectives and beliefs confirmed by Weber (2008) who explains the educational change or lack thereof in South Africa since 1994. Change needs to be linked to teacher’s existing identity and supporting a re-conceptualisation of each individual teacher’s normal and creating a new normal based on new perspectives discovered by themselves (McCabe & Holmes, 2009; Robinson & McMillan, 2006). Again, there is more to consider in our South African context (Davidoff, 1993; Maluleka, 2015; Weber, 2008), suggestions for change and development often come from outside of teachers realities, bringing unequal power possibilities that can be problematic. The balance between

disempowered individuals and the powerful dominant cultural norms and structures is common and continues to be destructive (Quin, 2012, 2014). New forms of community can emerge where teachers are engaging in serious democratic and progressive work in schools (Carlson & Apple, 1998).

In the South African context this can only be possible through the critical paradigm where reciprocity is important. This is described by Maiter, Simich, Jacobson and Wise (2008) as an ongoing process of exchange or dialogue with the aim of establishing and maintaining equality between parties. This approach aims to break down barriers between the researcher and the participants. Maiter et al (2008) explains that reciprocity describes the respectful nature of good research relationships and exchanges that are essential in participatory research and that this reciprocal dialogue where researcher and participant communicate as equals support a strong ethical basis for research relationships. This further supports empowering participants into co-researchers (Lather, 1986).

Something else to consider may be what Habermas (Young, 1990) paid tribute to Hanna Arendt for influencing his thinking in her major work, *The Human Condition* (Young, 1990). Habermas believed that Arendt had an understanding of practice which he referred to as participatory democracy. She believed that being human and to live in a society involved plurality, meaning individuals hold several perspectives, beliefs and diverse ways of thinking. She argued that participants inevitably viewing the world differently are nevertheless connected to one another. She talks about overcoming plurality without abolishing the reality of individual perspectives through the construction of an intersubjective ground. To do this we must recognize the significant relationships which give our lives meaning and that connect us to one another and keep the value of others alongside these relationships of our own (Young, 1990). This would ensure each individual is valued and given the opportunity to contribute to the group in their own individual way (Rural Network, 2009).

3.1.2 Power and its effects on research

From the above outline of both participatory and critical research, it is clear that within this action research project that involved local teachers in improving school readiness, there were power dynamics that needed to be acknowledged and planned for in order for this research to be carried out in a truly participatory and critical way.

Power is the notion that A in some way affects B and that we all affect each other in many different ways all the time (Lukes, 2005). Lukes expresses the importance of the manner of how A affects B, is it “non-trivial or significant” and does A exercise power over B, against B’s interests (Lukes, 2005, p. 30). Lukes (2005) argues that power is not always associated with actual observable conflict on the basis that manipulation and authority does not always produce conflict but may have elements of coercion as a basis of change. Power is therefore not always exercised in situations of conflict, but can also be exercised through influencing, shaping or determining what another individual’s wants are even where no conflicts seem to arise. He adds that this use of power where no conflict arises can actually be the most effective, where people feel no grievances, and it is assumed then that they have no interests that will be harmed by power. This form of non-decision-making power where there are no grievances was something very important to consider whilst conducting this research.

Because of these specific power dynamics, I analysed ways that teachers may be influenced by myself as the Siyakhwazi Programme Manager. It was very important to note that it would be very unlikely for the teachers involved to show grievances because of the position I held in the community and also they could be easily influenced, persuaded and/or coerced in order to please myself as an outsider who supported and helped them at their school. To counteract this compliance, at the beginning of every session, I reminded the teachers that their views were exceptionally important to the project and without what they thought the project would be highly limited. I also reminded them that if at any time they felt they would like to withdraw from the project they were free to do so. Strategies needed to be in place to convince the participants of the value of their input. Practically this meant creating a learning space which had many questions like, ‘how do people get to a place of being open and comfortable to share? What does the kind of space that enables learning look like? Everyone

is different, unique, comes with a set of beliefs and perspectives that are based on their own experiences, so what is valuable for everyone in creating this place of learning together?’

Simmons (2009) believes that three elements are required to create successful participatory pedagogy, creating a context for potential transformative learning. They are choice and flexibility, challenge and risk, and critical reflection. Choice provides learners with the knowledge of the syllabus, as they chose it, they bought into it, as they helped create it. Creating contexts for learning and development requires going beyond comfortable boundaries, going out of your comfort zone. Reflection enables us to understand what we know and either build on that or reject these assumptions. A learning space is a place where someone participates, feels valued for who they are, what they think and where they have come from, but it is also an uncomfortable place of going beyond usual boundaries and sharing. So how do we support people to take this risk? This space may be created in how valued an individual feels. What I say matters and what I think is important. “It creates us and makes us feel as human beings” (Rural Network, 2009, p. 9).

Freire (1978, p. 9) states “If the dichotomy between teaching and learning results in the refusal of the one who teaches to learn from the one being taught, it grows out of an ideology of domination. Those who are called to teach must first learn how to continue learning when they begin to teach”. He then describes that teaching and learning should not be separated and as a researcher I wished to have a learning attitude and stance using participatory methods to value the community’s thoughts and perceptions above my own.

According to Griffiths (1998), the concept of ‘voice’ may be linked to a collective interpretation and/or an individual one. She sees the principles of power and voice as interlocking, they focus on who has a say, whose viewpoints count and whether the researcher and everyone else is prepared to change their minds as a result of encountering alternative perspectives. Hunter, Emerald and Martin(2013) go onto explain in PAR there should be an emphasis on democratic decision making throughout the project. PAR also emphasizes reciprocity, trust and collective action and breaks down the traditional barrier between the researcher and the researched, but rather seeks to build collaboration and enduring relationships (Hunter et al., 2013). This participatory approach builds critical social science, self-determination and liberatory practice in order to interrupt injustice and build community capacity. Those who practice this development-oriented approach bring to their

research a commitment to local knowledge and democratic practice (Zeller-Berkman, Muñoz-Proto, & Torre, 2015). Critical studies are distinguished by the researcher's role to respond to important themes of marginalised individuals or groups. The struggles of these groups become the central issue and often the researcher is involved in empowering members of these groups, advocating for them and stimulating change so that participants have more power and influence, reducing inequality (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2010).

3.1.3 Participatory Action Research

Participatory research is described by Bertram and Christiansen (2014) as often being used in community development and aims to enable the people in the community to solve their problems within their community. There is an assumption that the process of engaging with challenges and solutions is as important as the outcomes and that participants become co-researchers. This is emphasised by Bless and Achola (1990) in participatory research (as cited in Bertram and Christiansen, 2014) that firstly the participants are actively involved in identifying and then investigating a problem. Secondly, the participants are actively and directly involved in finding a solution to the problem they identified in the first step and then engaging in implementing this solution. This is further explained by Corbett and Fikkert (2012) elaborating that inadequate participation of poor people in the process of development has been a contributing factor to the slow process of poverty alleviation. Researchers and practitioners have found that meaningful inclusion of poor people in the selection, design, implementation and an evaluation of an intervention increases the likelihood of that intervention's success. Mezmur (2017a) emphasises that community engagement will support building stronger systems for health and education.

Bertram and Christiansen (2014) state that Freire argues that solutions should not come from the oppressors helping the oppressed but from the oppressed themselves. Freire (1978) eloquently writes letters to Guinea-Bissau and explains that the work of those supporting, namely the facilitator, will have nothing to teach if they do not learn from those they are supporting. Freire expresses that those lessons learnt before need to be explained, discussed and critically understood and then a new context may be reinvented. To enable a new context to be reinvented, Young (1990) describes critical action research according to the Carr Kemmis model as a self-conscious or reflective process of guided experimentation. The act of

research itself changes situations and that the knowledge that comes from observation and reflection on the results of action permit further change of situations through plans, based on the understanding of participants which can be systematically incorporated into the process of change. This type of research is potentially critical because of its participatory and communal nature of the cycle of action and reflection. A weakness of the method could be the findings in the observation and reflection stages of the action research cycle that can show only a situational form of knowledge, specific for that particular group of individuals, rather than a generalizable one which could yield information readily adaptable to particular situations. This model seems especially adaptable and appropriate for a small group engaged in school improvement. Davidoff (1993) elaborates on the Carr and Kemmis model and explains that all those involved in the research process should participate equally in all its phases of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Then action research is democratic (Maiter et al., 2008; Young, 1990). With this in mind, Pym (1993) describes the process of action research involving dialogue between teachers with participation, collaboration and collective control. She goes on to explain that it is an approach to encourage teachers to be aware of and reflect on their own practice by being critical of that practice. This is to understand the situation where their practice is carried out and to be open to changing practices and the situations within which they are found.

Elliot (2005) talks about three different types of action research styles, namely, technical action research as serving the interests of exercising control over human behaviour to produce desired results, whereas, practical action research serves the interests of practical wisdom in discerning what's the best action in certain circumstances and critical action research serves the interests of emancipating people from oppression. Elliot's view is sandwiched between technical and critical at the same time as acknowledging that being critical directly affects pedagogical change at the level of the classroom and that critical self-reflection is an integral feature of action research. Keeping this in mind, PAR creates the conditions for all involved, that is the teachers, as well as the facilitator, to be social agents and in order to ensure this, the use of interactive methods were adopted, specifically for this project, drawing, mapping, photo voice and force field analysis (Child Advocacy Project, 2009). The specific methods used will be explained further in the next section.

3.2 Research Style and Methods

3.2.1 Critical participatory action research

In this study the research was done by the participants, using their own thinking and resources which supported gaining useful information to help deal with the problem themselves (Child Advocacy Project, 2009). This participatory action research project (PAR) within the emancipatory-critical paradigm (ECP), involved teachers in developing school readiness within their classes and educational settings. In PAR (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Child Advocacy Project, 2009; Corbett & Fikkert, 2012), the participants, including the teachers and the facilitator, who have the problem decide what that problem is and how to do the research to help them with the problem they have identified.

Each tool was carefully chosen to enhance participation and create an environment that facilitated enhancing the substance of PAR in becoming a reality practically and encouraging teachers to reflect, analyse and ultimately be activated into social agents. Freire (1978) advocates the process of facilitation, which was used in this study where the researcher, as the facilitator, supports a process of critical discussion of all participants' knowledge and together through enduring relationships and trust, a new knowledge or idea is reinvented. I believe that the tools, specifically the SWOT analysis provided the group with an opportunity to start this process towards more critical thinking and consciousness and supported identifying the problems within their communities, and other tools, like drawing, supported relationship building and trust to start to develop.

Davidoff and van den Berg (2008) acknowledge that action research is a way for teachers to do what they probably do anyway which is reflect on and research their classroom activity but emphasise that the research process would be more systematic to support change that can be transforming to their vision, practice and values. It can also create a greater awareness in teachers of the context that they are working in. Van der Riet (2008) describes participatory research techniques as having novel, democratic approaches including many different ways of gathering data as in this research project. She speaks about mapping, photo-voice, modelling, the use of symbols and drawings. She explains that the expression of knowledge is not limited to the written or spoken word but includes active representations of ideas and

even direct activity in the context of the study. Creating an environment for students to develop requires supporting them beyond comfortable boundaries (Simmons et al., 2009). Changing dynamics may create conditions for deeper learning even though they could create anxiety and fear in a student. My own experience confirms this as well as a student quoted by Simmons et al (2009, p. 90) “activities were out of my comfort zone”.

The practical tools used in the research are highlighted in more detail later, but I would like to explain reasons for planning certain sessions with the methodology in mind and what the goal of using these specific methods or tools were.

Through ‘Drawing’, I wanted to create a safe place for participation as well as build trust and connections for strengthening relationships. This was to create the opportunity to get to know each other and create a learning space that is conducive to sharing. These activities were unusual and different to any other workshop attended by the participants which went a long way to prepare for the out of box thinking that South African teachers are not often required to do on any level. The facilitators role was to be established from the beginning, as one of listening and asking questions and the participants role was clearly encouraged to be about sharing and that their input was valuable and important to the research process. Davidoff (2008) encourages facilitators doing action research to make the activities more student-centred to encourage co-operative work by empowering the participants and encouraging their participation.

The ‘SWOT analysis’ in session two and three, as already mentioned was planned to start to provoke thinking about their own school environments and situations. This started with what do I see as strengths and weaknesses (Child Advocacy Project, 2009) and then how do I see threats and opportunities coming out of these strengths and weaknesses, stimulating participants towards a consciousness and analysing practise to do with school readiness.

‘Mapping’ in session four required input from the participants forcing them to interact with the resources that were around them. This was to support further reflection and analysis of all the service providers supporting and the gaps where there was very little support in all that they do towards school readiness.

The 'Force field analysis' in session five was to support further analysis in identifying the problems and threats and finding solutions to support these weaknesses which involved careful planning of action towards change and transformation (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Corbett & Fikkert, 2012).

'Photo voice' was encouraged to record actions done once the participants had identified what they would like to do. Participants were encouraged to take photos of their plans and actions using their cell phones. Therefore, support to provide evidence of before and after would be taken advantage of, as well as support evaluation of all the activities that had been planned and implemented.

All of these activities were unfamiliar and not readily used in any training within this context and a great deal of anxiety could occur (Simmons et al., 2009), every activity was also therefore designed with an ice breaker of sorts that supported moving participants into a space where they were comfortable to share and grow. Through these activities planned it was evident that all participants were required to become active participants in the entire research cycle (Kolb, 1984) as well as Car and Kemmis outline (Davidoff, 1993; Pym, 1993). Each session was designed to enhance participants actively participating and therefore stimulating participants towards consciousness and more critical thinking to do with the topic of school readiness (hooks, 1993; Young, 1990).

3.2.2 Facilitation, reflection and experiential learning

Freire (1978) describes the educator's task is to discover and rediscover the paths to learning but not to uncover the objects of interest himself thus denying the learner to search and in searching an act that is indispensable to knowing. This succinctly describes the facilitator as one who does not divulge information and solutions but assists and supports others in the act of searching for answers themselves and through that process, participants may know what they would like to do and how they would like to do it.

Within this study, facilitating a process of becoming conscious, was extremely important for its success. Action research (AR) is an approach teachers' may find useful to begin working transformatively in their classrooms by taking a systematic and critical look at the way in

which they teach with a view of changing it so that the classroom experience becomes more meaningful for everyone involved. This is done by linking the action with reflection, trying out an idea, understanding the actions taken, and then trying to make changes or improvements (Davidoff & van den Berg, 2008). Quin (2007) describes action research as research carried out by teachers to improve their teaching and that because this type of research is engaged in the teacher's own particular social context it may be more meaningful than research carried out by an outsider. Quin describes action research as self-reflective, where teachers are researching and reflecting on themselves, acting on own practices and actions. It is a model that adds to what you already know and do and supports the process of becoming conscious.

Kolb (1984) believes that the difference between experiential learning and traditional learning is that the emphasis is on the process of learning and not on the outcome. Ideas are not fixed but change and evolve and that knowledge is created after learning takes place. Learning is a transformation process that is continuously created and recreated. Therefore, "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). Using the experiential learning cycle through each stage of the four step process, this method of engaging participants was crucial to creating learning towards transformation.

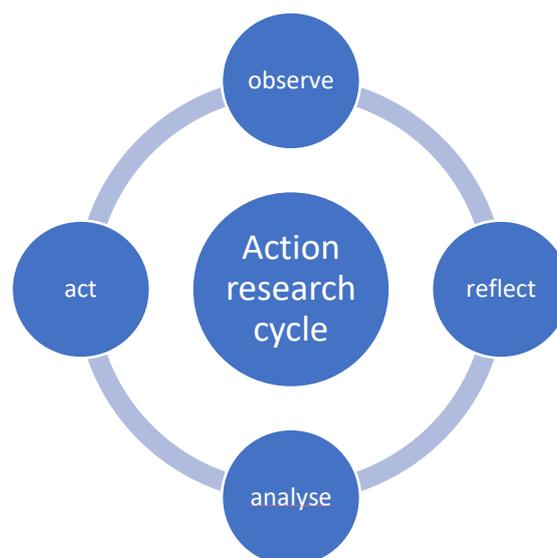


Figure 10. The adapted ELC cycle (Quin, 2016)

Through the above adapted ELC cycle (Quin, 2016) derived from Kolb (1984), the following questions were asked and revisited through each session with participants and researcher's own self-reflection. Self-reflection is an essential element of action research and provides us with a structured, thorough way of improving our overall practice (Quin, 2007).

Observation questions included, 'What do I see?'

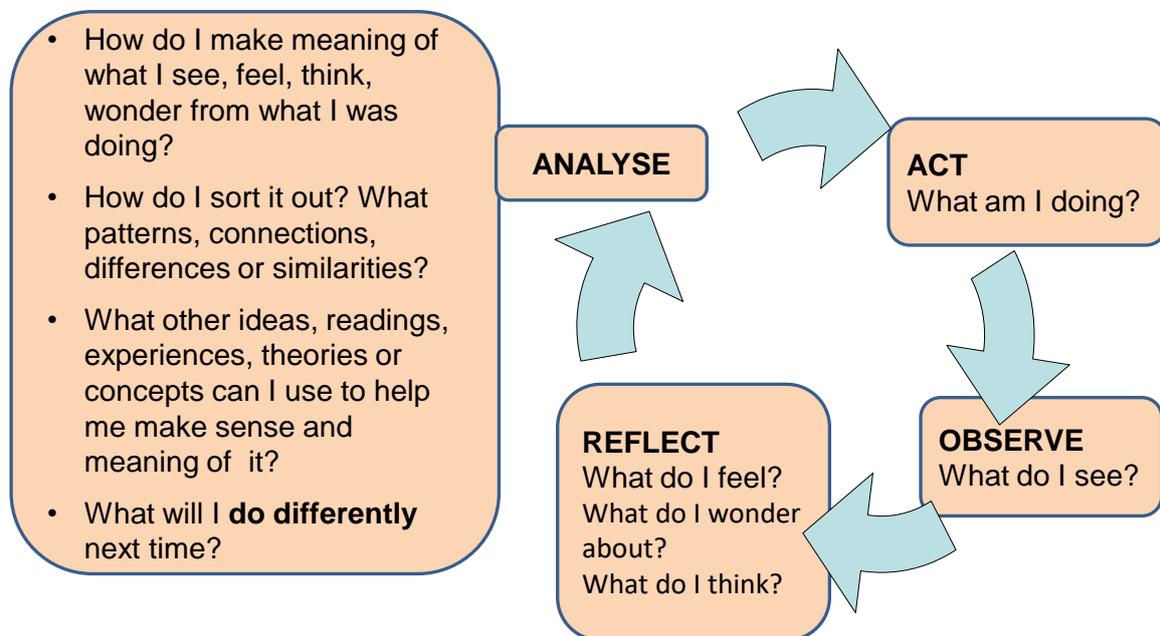
Reflection questions included, 'What do I feel? What do I think? and what do I wonder about what I think and feel?'

Analysis questions included, 'How do I make sense and meaning of what I feel, think and wonder? What can I do differently?'

Action questions included, 'What can I do?'

Through this type of questioning, the Annotated Experiential Learning Cycle (A-ELC) (Quin, 2014) was used and is outlined in detail in Figure 12.

Annotated **Experiential Learning Cycle:** What are the **Questions** that each stage asks?



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Figure 11. A-ELC (Quin, 2014)

3.3 Sampling

The sample for this research project was the Grade R and Grade 1 teachers at Thongasi Primary School as well as local ECD practitioners from two ECD centres in the Thongasi area within KwaNzimakwe, KZN. Six female teachers were involved covering a broad range of age and experience in teaching.

3.4 Research methods

Learning can be from, with and by local people, drawing out and using their knowledge to inform understanding and change (Institute of Development Studies, 1993). Qualitative data collection methods were implemented through focus groups, including strategies that increased participation, like drawing, mapping and photo voice. Force field analysis was used to support taking action and implementing interventions for change. Please see table below outlining methods briefly which are elaborated on more fully after. In Figure 11 and 12, these methods were chosen to support the reflexive cycle. Each cycle builds on the previous one to improve its effectiveness (Quin, 2007).

1. Observe (this involved looking closely at individual's situations and experiences)
2. Reflect (this involved reflecting upon experiences to draw out the learning)
3. Analyse (making sense and meaning of learning to improve future action)
4. Act (engaging in processes and increasing opportunities to learn)

Table 1. Research methods plan outline

Sessions	Research methods	Outline	Reason/link
1.	Drawing (Observation)	Draw your hand and write 5 things important about yourself you want us all to know Draw yourself in your classroom environment Present this to the group	Getting to know each other Establishing a starting point of each participant in their classroom environment
2.	Discussion (Reflection) Drawing (Reflection) SWOT Analysis (Reflection) Share with group (Reflection)	How did you feel about last session? Think back (Krueger & Casey, 2009) to last session and your drawings. Share with person next to you. Describing School readiness: What does school readiness mean to you? Strengths, Weaknesses (internal), opportunities and threats (external) Share observations	Making sure everyone has a broad understanding of the term before starting SWOT Exploring strengths and challenges Assist process of reflection and breaking down elements of school readiness within participants world/understanding
3.	SWOT continued (Reflection and analysis)	Consolidate all groups SWOT analysis Look at threats and opportunities	Consolidate reflection and support conscious thinking

4.	Mapping (Analysis) Introduce Thuthong guidelines (Department of Education, 2008) SWOT Thuthong guidelines (Reflection and analysis)	Resources within community Barriers and opportunities with Thuthong guidelines	Preparation for action
5.	Force field analysis (Analysis)	Choosing threat or weakness Planning action	Removing barriers
6.	Photo voice (Action)		Recording actions
7.	Evaluation (Reflection and analysis)		Reflect on actions informing changing practice for future

The research methods designed to facilitate this on-going process through focus group sessions included: SWOT analysis, drawing, mapping, photo voice and force field analysis.

Drawing: According to (Child Advocacy Project, 2009) drawing can be used to express what the participants know or think about something and then assist further talking about this.

SWOT analysis: This process was used to formally document the trends coming through in the drawing session and for teachers to specifically look at each of the four aspects with a critical stance, namely strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Mapping: This is where participants were thinking about what resources are available to support them.

Force field analysis: Force field analysis supported weakening the forces which are stopping you and strengthening the forces that are helping you.

Photo voice: The participants could take photos of both the problems they identified and the interventions they had implemented using their cell phones.

3.4.1 Researcher's SWOT analysis

A SWOT analysis is a useful technique that helps identify strengths and weaknesses and analyses the opportunities and threats that flow from them. It can help uncover opportunities and by understanding weaknesses, you can manage and eliminate threats that might otherwise hurt the ability to move forward (Mind tools, 2016).

In order to become conscious of the biases I may have had and place them all on the table before starting research I conducted my own SWOT analysis (Institute of Development Studies, 1993). Part of this was being clear about my role and acknowledging both assets and challenges there may be. The SWOT tool was to support this process and create more consciousness of underlying biases or perspectives, I as the researcher may have held before the process began. This is confirmed by Hadfield (2012), concerned about external input or a facilitator coming with their own ideological agenda and under the guise of helping emancipate others from existing ideology and simply imposing a new one which is their own. Also, according to Quin (2007) self-reflection is the essential element of action research and that the starting point should be thinking and changing self, in order to challenge systems and injustices in society. Lather (1986) suggests some documentation of how the researcher's assumptions have been affected by the logic of the data and refers to this as reflexive subjectivity.

3.4.2 Focus group sessions

A focus group is defined as “a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 5). This method was used to create a safe place to facilitate critical self-awareness where continuously examining behaviour and practices already in place was encouraged, acknowledging good practice and creating an awareness or consciousness of what had already been done (Institute of Development Studies, 1993).

These focus group sessions were facilitated by the researcher with a group of individuals who were interested in school readiness and the process of action research that this project offered. This included Grade R teachers, Grade one teachers and ECD practitioners. It was important to be aware of sensitive issues between Grade R and Grade one teachers which may have been needed to be addressed or talked about as the research process unfolded. This could affect who is included in the research process. According to Bertram and Christiansen (2014) in this type of interview the researcher may simply introduce the topic or main research question and the participant may respond and answer as he or she would like. The researcher can ask some questions but generally the participants speak freely. The purpose of these focus groups was to find out what the teachers knew (knowledge and information) and what they thought (attitudes and beliefs). Dialogue is vital to critical research (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

Approximately six focus group sessions were planned to assist the reflective process throughout using participatory methods, including, mapping, drawing and photo voice that facilitated involvement and active participation. The sessions planned for implementation are outlined below:

Session one: Drawing

Through drawing, the initial session was to gain a baseline to work from and what to work towards. The Drawing session was designed to begin the process of becoming conscious and reflective. According to Quin (2007) thinking should affect your practice and practice should affect your thinking and in this way learning will not remain unconscious. This session also facilitated participants in starting to think about the strengths within their classrooms and the problems and challenges that they faced. According to Child Advocacy Project (2009) drawing can be used to express what the participants know or think about something and then assist further talking about this.

Time at the beginning of the session was invested in a drawing activity of introducing all participants to each other. Each person drew around their hand and placed 5 important things in each finger that they would like everyone to know about themselves. This was to support relationships to form and trust to be built before the process of reflection began.

Then the participants were asked to draw a picture of themselves in their classrooms or whilst they were teaching. When the teachers had finished their drawings, they showed their picture and talked about it. Then the pictures and what people had said about them was used to discuss and work together on what they thought were the important issues.

Session two: SWOT Analysis

This process was used to more formally document the trends coming through in the drawing session and for teachers to specifically look at each of the four aspects with a critical stance. What are the school readiness strengths within their classes or their school? what are the weaknesses? What are the opportunities? And what are the threats that will hold the teachers back from developing school readiness skills? This gave us a more detailed understanding of the baseline and what we had to work with.

Session three: Mapping

This was where participants were thinking about what resources were available to support them and what could support the necessary actions that needed to be taken, to support what participants thought should be done. They drew a circular diagram depicting the different levels of support that were around them, ranging from local support to government.

Session four: Reflection on photo voice and force field analysis

Reflection on the use of photo voice was planned to take place. Participants were encouraged to share the photos they had taken to support them in describing their problems and/or strengths. In the same session, Force field analysis was used to facilitate the process of taking action and implementing change. These techniques are explained below.

Photo Voice: According to Child Advocacy Project (2009) photos are often taken of the participants and not by them. In this project there were two different foci using the photo voice. The participants were encouraged to use their cell phones to take photos of both the problems they had identified and the interventions that they had implemented. Initially the

photos could provide a baseline for the research process and as the project ensued, they may have been used for recording the progress through the project by the participants themselves. This was planned to facilitate discussion in focus group sessions and action on the ground. A collage of photos could be printed and placed on a timeline to facilitate this process through a strong visual representation. Great care needed to be taken in the use of staged photos and emphasis needed to be on recording the natural process of reflection and implementation.

Force field analysis: According to Child Advocacy Project (2009) it is important to facilitate the process of taking action by using methods such as making teams and implementing actions to change the problem. Force field analysis supports weakening the forces which are stopping you and strengthening the forces that are helping you. Through this process participants were encouraged to write down their goal that they wanted to achieve, to draw a line and then write down what could stop this from happening and what could help this to happen. This supported participants in identifying barriers and ways to overcome them.

Session five: Discussion and reflection

The Child Advocacy Project (2009) describes part of this process as analysing, looking at data carefully to understand what it actually means. This should not be a separate step, but rather a part of the entire process as the participants will be thinking about the data and what it means to think about this along the entire process and in every unstructured focus group.

In this session, the particular focus was on reflection on the implementation part of the action research cycle. Story telling could facilitate this process well, allowing participants to relay their journey through stories to show their development and learning.

Session six: Evaluation

In this session, it was appropriate to sort through the data taken right at the beginning of the research process, namely the drawings and the mapping. Looking back to see how far we have moved forward. In the evaluation it was important to highlight the cyclical process of action research and that it can continue into another cycle.

3.5 Data Analysis

Krueger (1998a) discusses analysis as a fluid process rather than a series of isolated tasks and Cyr (2016, p. 4) describes the generation of data from focus groups as “rich experiential information” that need to be categorized clearly as the research process unfolds. Recording based analysis was relied upon in this study. The data analysis process therefore involved inducing themes with a bottom-up approach (Terre Blanche et al., 2006) after listening to the recordings made of each session and reflecting on the session. This reflection generated more questions and themes that naturally arose from the data but also reflected and related to the Main Question and the Key Research Questions (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The analysis began during the data collection process where listening for inconsistent, vague or cryptic comments, developed the need for probing to discover more in depth data. Questions such as, ‘Please explain further? Tell me more. What do you mean?’ supported getting more information from the participants. Whilst participants gave comments and feedback the responses were recorded on a flip chart where information was collected and organised (Krueger, 1998b). The translator was recording responses as well as the researcher, giving two observational views, supporting an increase in collecting all the valid data generated in each session.

Information or data is only useful when we think hard about what the information means, how it can help solve the problem that is being researched. To get from information to meaning, the data must be analysed. It is important to realise the difference between the information that simply describes something as it is and the information that shows people’s critical understanding of the root causes and deeper explanation of that thing. In PAR, participants will be thinking about the data, what it means and what it is showing all the time, not as a separate step (Child Advocacy Project, 2009).

Through this PAR approach (Child Advocacy Project, 2009) where participants are discovering together, analysis was taking place throughout the process outlined by Child Advocacy Project (2009) in steps which I have simplified below in supporting the understanding of the roots of the problems we wanted to change.

Step 1 was a description or diagnosis of the problem.

Step 2 was the first analysis after describing the problem, asking questions such as why this problem is there.

Step 3 was real life, thinking about whether this problem affects everyone, every day or all the time, making sure it is relevant to their people and community.

Step 4 was related problems where what you are talking about joins to other problems or identifying the most important one.

Step 5 was the root causes of the problems. One way to do this was through a “But why?” method (Child Advocacy Project, 2009, p. 37). This method was useful as it drew out more information about a particular problem. For example. The child cannot hold a pencil properly. But why? They don’t have the correct pincer grip. But why? Their hands are weak. But why? They never went to ECD centre. But why? They stayed at home with their granny. But why?

Within these above steps we looked at analysis as often being organised around key questions, themes or big ideas. This research was organised into themes that developed within the focus group sessions, but because of the participatory nature of this research there was an emphasis on searching for the essential meaning found in the participants’ shared experiences (Massey, 2011). These themes were generated together in sessions and recorded on flip charts after analysing the data in small groups as well as during the facilitator’s self-reflection. Articulated data, as described in step one, which was the first layer of data found in the focus group sessions, providing insight into experiences, observations and opinions of the participants, leading to a greater understanding of the topic of interest (Massey, 2011). These conversations were recorded and grouped into themes together as a group on a visual flipchart. It was important throughout the research process to actively understand all types of data, including unique experiential or emergent data of the participants, revealing what participants thought and why they thought as they did (Cyr, 2016; Massey, 2011). This was done through critical and analytical reflection (Davidoff & van den Berg, 2008; Quin, 2007) drawn out throughout the research process by using the three data analysis activities described by Miles and Huberman as cited by Bertram and Christiansen (2014) and was built into each session and each step of analysis (Child Advocacy Project, 2009).

Firstly, data reduction was the process whereby we jointly selected, focused, simplified information into themes, making it easier to identify patterns or relationships (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). In qualitative research, interpretive themes are known as thematic analysis. I used the inductive approach which is a data-driven, bottom-up approach in which

the researcher does not begin with any pre-existing themes but instead looks for repeating ideas in the data, which are then gathered (Fletcher et al., 2015). Themes were organised as they occurred within the sessions with the input of the participants and displayed on visual flip charts. This was useful for a process analysis in identifying changes as the research process developed (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2010) as well as supporting the inclusion and participation of the participants in the whole of the research cycle as planned (Davidoff, 1993; Kolb, 1984; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Secondly Miles and Huberman, cited by Bertram and Christiansen (2014) suggest a data display as a compressed and organised assembly of information which will assist the researcher and the participants in drawing conclusions and taking actions. Participants were involved in both generating and analysing data as suggested in PAR (Child Advocacy Project, 2009), as it was during the analysis, that much of the learning took place and then the planning for action. At this point, it was useful to construct a visual representation on a flipchart collecting all data given by participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010) which was an organised assembly of information building on the analysis of data from session to session further enhancing the analysis process.

Lastly, the conclusion, (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014) allowed for patterns and possible explanations to be noted and was finalised once the analysis was completed, leading to planned action in PAR (Child Advocacy Project, 2009).

3.6 Validity, reliability and rigour

Validity, trustworthiness and reliability are continuous concepts and it is impossible for research to be completely valid or trustworthy, but rather, researchers should be paying attention to improving the validity and trustworthiness of their study (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

3.6.1 Validity

Validity often refers to data being sound or justifiable. Validity also acknowledges the difficulty in controlling variables in the social world and within the critical paradigm are

concerned with trustworthiness in general, credibility and the political positioning of the participants (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Therefore, when conducting participatory action research, it is imperative to guard against research biases distorting evidence and the development of data credibility. Checks need to protect our research and theory construction, creating self-reflexive research (Lather, 1986). Making a determination about the validity of research is dependent on design and data collection methods (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2010). Boudah (2011) raises a concern about external validity as the conclusions of some studies, like this one, cannot be applied in other contexts. Because of the in-depth nature of this study it may not be generalised to another context and will have poor external validity.

Nevertheless, data can be coded reliably and provide clear detailed descriptions as advised by Bertram and Christiansen (2014). When using the critical paradigm, the interpretation of data can be found inadequate through the use of dialogic validity, democratic validity, construct validity and catalytic validity described by Lather (1986). Therefore, I have undertaken to look more intensely at validity below, in order to support the data that was collected in an adequate and trustworthy manner.

3.6.1.1 The researcher's role and validity

Identity and how one is perceived by others may create challenges and problems during research (Hallowell, Lawton, & Gregory, 2005). Research interactions are influenced by who we are, what we are, where we are and how we appear to others. Siyakwazi, the organization I started, is concerned with supporting children with disabilities and learning difficulties. I needed to recognise and acknowledge the power Siyakwazi's workers may hold in the community through the work we do and what we provide to the community. Self-reflexivity is described by Bertram (2014) as a process whereby the researcher has to be vigilant to read the data in a way that reflects power issues, not just how they may appear to the researcher.

Mac Naughton (2005) affirms critical reflection as a guide to social change because as we become inquisitive in our daily lives we start to understand power in our social contexts, then we can begin to understand what needs to change and why. Beneficial questions can be 'Why am I taking this particular action or using this particular knowledge? Whose interests does this knowledge or action support?'

Throughout this research process as the Siyakwazi Programme manager, I acknowledged I had a strong motivation and desire to support change in this community and therefore wanted to give this community the opportunity to reflect and explore ways of implementing change. The Columbian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda (1995) affirmed my desire, not to monopolise knowledge or impose arrogantly my techniques, but respect and combine my skills with the knowledge of the researched taking them as full-partners and co-researchers (Hunter et al., 2013). The steps I took towards equalising power relations was by taking on the role of facilitator (Freire, 1978) and avoiding expressing my own views and perspectives. Self-reflection on each session supported any actions that may have represented to have power over any of the participants and encouraged change before the next session occurred (Quin, 2009) .

3.6.1.2 Dialogic validity

Dialogic validity is concerned with the review of data by those participating through conversation and dialogue encouraging critical reflection (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2010). This directly influenced the interpretation of data ensuring those participating were continuously reflecting and reviewing data throughout the research process. Including people from the culture being studied in the planning, implementation, interpretation and dissemination of the research will increase the likelihood that cross-cultural research will be respectful of those it studies (Lather, 1986; Maiter et al., 2008). Following the A-ELC cycle through each session supported this outcome of participants having the opportunity to be a part of the whole research process (Kolb, 1984). This was reiterated by Maiter et al (2008) that researcher-participant relationships that are reciprocal and based on dialogue can result in a deeper understanding of participants' experiences which benefit both the researcher and participants, resulting in empowerment and change for the group under study. Therefore, creating an environment where meaningful exchanges can occur was essential in this critical research process. Expressing that the participants' expertise were highly valued and that their contributions would result in richer more meaningful results needed to be reinforced throughout the project (Rural Network, 2009).

It was also important to build relationships amongst themselves as they may draw on common experiences to support one another and encourage speaking up as a group when they feel that someone's voice had not been heard (Maiter et al., 2008). By using the interactive approaches and methods outlined (Child Advocacy Project, 2009) like drawing, mapping and SWOT analysis, this helped towards eliminating the suppression of the participant's individual voices. Through these methods all participants were valued and nurtured and encouraged to participate actively. The activities were designed in such a way that the participants' opinions and thoughts were needed for the activities to be successful.

3.6.1.3 Democratic validity

Democratic validity is concerned with representation of the stakeholders in the process of research (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2010). Van der Riet (2008) argues that participatory research has transformative potential because of three core principles and that these also articulate local knowledge and account for human action producing greater validity within a study. These three principles are namely, that the participants are actively involved in the research process, secondly there is co-ownership of the research process and outcome, and thirdly any investigation of a phenomenon builds on what is already known by accessing local knowledge. Furthermore, in addressing the participative, relational and social nature of human action, participatory research processes enhance validity by enabling researchers to understand and interpret human action.

Within the research design it was clear that methods used were specifically designed to enhance participation as well as understand root and local knowledge of problems (Child Advocacy Project, 2009; Rural Network, 2009). With regards to co-ownership, the nature of PAR ensured that all participants were co-researchers validating this outcome in the research process (Davidoff & van den Berg, 2008; Kolb, 1984; Young, 1990).

3.6.1.4 Construct validity

Construct validity means that an adequate description of the focus of the study is in place and the methods for measuring that construct. Boudah (2011) agrees that construct validity is the degree to which a researcher truly measures the construct of focus in the study. Therefore,

school readiness has been clearly laid out in the literature review. Lather (1986) describes construct validity as a strong awareness of the experience of the participants in their daily lives. This self-reflective method was grounded in the dialectic construct ensuring participants were involved and their voices were heard contributing to the consciousness of the participants themselves and supporting the critical change-enhancing research theory. This contributed to the construct validity as participants' local knowledge of school readiness was accessed and used as relevant data towards defining the processes within the action research cycle. Within the research cycle and sessions planned, defining school readiness shaped the construct effectively during the research process and sessions focused on assessing the actions planned to implement change assisted catalytic validity within this study.

3.6.1.5 Catalytic validity

Catalytic validity is based on the action component of action research (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2010). This supported participants in becoming more conscious which can also be described as knowing their reality better in order to transform it. Self-understanding and self-determination can be an impact from the research process through participation (Lather, 1986). Macmillan (2010) suggests this concept addresses the extent to which the participants are compelled to take action and therefore needed to be consciously built into the research design (Lather, 1986). Research data should include some insight and ideally some activism on the part of the respondents (Lather, 1986). In my research design, I included practical methods of developing and awakening the participants' perspectives. For example, the SWOT analysis enabled participants to recognise both strengths and weaknesses of school readiness and built upon becoming more conscious. Then the practical sessions like community mapping and force field analysis enabled learning and planning for action, supporting teachers to recognise practical steps towards action, meaning the actual 'how can I make a change?' and implementing these steps and becoming the actual catalyst for change.

3.7 Trustworthiness

Bertram and Christiansen (2014) describe trustworthiness as a concept of credibility where the findings and data collected reflect the reality of the participants and their lived experiences.

Lewin describes the cyclical process of action research in Mertler (2012). Fact finding, planning, taking action, evaluating and amending the plan, before moving into a second action step. This reiterative process where consistent revisiting of the data strengthened the data collection processes in place, as analysing at each stage occurred through reflection.

The use of more than one data collection method in the research design, such as unstructured focus groups, through mapping, drawing and photo voice, needed to seek counter patterns as well as convergences, if data were to be credible (Lather, 1986). This also supported the participants by giving them opportunities to confirm or correct data that had been collected, improving the trustworthiness of the data.

Lukes (2005) suggests that leaders can shape others preferences and that we all have been subjected to indoctrination through our schooling. A leader can be classified as someone who inspires trust and focuses on people, while a facilitator has an expert opinion but does not offer it until it is absolutely necessary (Vorster, 2018). Within this project, my roles as facilitator and researcher were prominent, but as the leader of Siyakwazi and a passionate believer in early intervention and active play, I believed I had the ability and the motivation to shape these teachers in believing in my passions and ideas and this could have affected the responses I got back from the teachers. My position was therefore highly subjective, but this self-awareness supported me in holding back and allowed the data that came forth in the sessions outlined, to be shaped by the teachers themselves. This can be referred to as latent conflict (Lukes, 2005) which consists of a contradiction between the interests of those exercising power and the real interests of those they exclude. The sessions planned, were done so with this in mind allowing for as much participation from the teachers and very little from the researcher. The data that were produced came from those participating because of the nature of the research methods. Although, as I am a teacher myself, I found it difficult not to respond to the presentations given by the teachers that have similar ideas to mine. Again, self-awareness of this, supported me as the researcher in giving all participants

acknowledgement of their ideas. Teachers also may have been inclined to give responses that they think I wanted to hear, although this was less likely to happen if I kept my view quiet. This came into consideration when analyzing the data from each session planned.

Another concern was that English was a second language for the participants and Zulu a second language for the researcher and therefore there could be misunderstandings within communications. The use of an interpreter to translate throughout the reflective process and as the focus group sessions developed was essential to ensuring trustworthiness of the reflective research process. Interobserver agreement is the degree to which 2 independent observers record observational data of the same situation similarly (Boudah, 2011). In this case the interpreter was a Zulu-speaking teacher trainee and her input during observations and interviews contributed significantly to the data collected.

Reliability is the extent to which an experiment or research project can be repeated with the same or a similar group of respondents and whether the findings would be similar. This is not possible with critical research (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Trustworthiness in this paradigm was strengthened by detailed descriptions of data where the researcher engaged in the study from the viewpoint of the participants. It was important for the researcher to show clearly how the data had been analysed and how they had reached their conclusions. The findings cannot be generalised to all contexts and therefore reliability is not a concern. The subjectivity of the researcher was acknowledged. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) see the critical paradigm as shaped by social, political, cultural, economic and other dynamics where what we know about the world is subjective, influenced by our place in society. Therefore, as a critical researcher I acknowledged that I was not neutral or impartial because everyone has a particular position in society, including me.

3.8 Anticipated Problems/Limitations

The following anticipated problems and/or limitations were thought about and reflected upon before the actual research process began. The following points are therefore made with this 'looking forward' perspective in mind.

3.8.1 Participant motivation

Teachers may withdraw from the project for a variety of reasons which could be included in the findings. If this happened, I had planned to approach another school in the area, as there were four to choose from. Teachers may have also been uncomfortable with certain processes like opening up, sharing and giving input into their own work situations. Therefore, I used drawing and mapping methods, to support alleviating formalities and bringing a feeling of openness, making it easier for all types of participants to be active and involved. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) state that the progress of the study often depends primarily on the relationship the researcher builds with the participants. Relationships needed to have a strong element of trust and the entire process of the research project needed to be discussed before the first sessions took place ensuring everyone understood what was required and were comfortable with, as the entire process unfolded.

3.8.2 Researcher subjectivity

Subjectivity or researcher bias had been part of the reflection process as this was a qualitative study where the researcher was personally involved in the research. Therefore, having an interpreter supported reliability of data and the use of a range of research methods used to support data collection. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) confirm that no two researchers observe, interview or relate to participants in the same way. Data obtained was valid even though they may represent certain views or be influenced by the researcher's presence. Such data were only problematic if used out of the context of the study it has been taken from. Looking at research in South Africa, it is important to acknowledge the implications for the way in which research is done and by whom, highlighting the need for critical self-examination for the researcher (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

This critical aspect of this project had been inserted into the design and plan for every session and for every stage of the A-ELC ensuring that my self-awareness and self-reflection were continuous and part of all the learning that took place within the entire project. Davidoff and van den Berg (2008) describe the researcher's reflection as hearing the response of the participants, as well as thinking about their own views on what was observed. Then these insights needed to be understood in such a way that they could inform the next step within the research cycle.

3.8.3 Time constraints on overloaded teachers

Significant time needed to go into the focus group sessions planned and time to plan and implement interventions on the ground. The time frame needed to be flexible as it was hard to know what problems the participants faced and what they planned to do to implement change within their community. Teachers also may not have liked the extra time this project may have taken. It was important to be open about time commitments as well as asking for a verbal commitment to the process and organising a favourable time to conduct sessions and managing implementation. Time was given for teachers to think about the commitment and it was clear that non-participation was an option. Potential benefits for the teachers were outlined and explained to encourage teachers to be committed to the developmental process. One of these benefits could be that supporting children in their classes in being more 'school ready' could enable them in being more successful in the grades ahead and for future success throughout their lives, leading to a strengthened community. It may also have been useful to explain to teachers that this was a learning process for them and that they are not just being 'researched' but were developing themselves as teachers. A certificate at the end of the project could acknowledge this process and their participation in this action research project.

3.9 Ethical Issues

In order to ensure that ethical procedures are evident and practically implemented the following needs to be considered (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

Autonomy and respect for the dignity of persons: Voluntary informed consent from all participants. The identity of all participants should be protected.

Nonmaleficence: This means that no harm comes to any of the participants which can include wrongs which means both should be avoided through careful consideration of the research design.

Beneficence: This means there should be a direct benefit for the participants, such as better knowledge of the topic in question and/or better skills.

Justice: Participants receive what is due to them. Researchers treat participants with fairness and equity throughout the project and all stages of the project.

Keeping the above in mind, referring to Terre Blanche (2006), I took the following steps to avoid risks for all participants involved.

1. Names were kept confidential
2. Information was disguised so that it cannot be identifiable.
3. Permission was granted from Principal of School
4. Permission was granted from the Department of Education (DoE)
5. Teacher's permission was granted for this study as teaching skills and school readiness strategies were the focus of this study and not the children. This step was confirmed with the ethical department at UKZN. (Ref: Mariette at 031 2604557-UKZN Human Social Science Ethics Dep.)
6. The data will be securely stored for 5 years with the supervisor, and then destroyed.
7. PAR was used as the approach, to ensure all participants 'voices' are heard and carefully considered.
8. Self-reflection was used to support consciousness of power dynamics and ensured democratic dialogue.
9. The topic was relevant to the participants' work environment and could benefit their teaching practice through action towards transformation if they chose to embrace the Annotated Experiential Learning Cycle (A-ELC).

3.10 Concluding this Methodology

Through the thorough outlining of methodology within this chapter, including the whole research process, a clear way has been outlined in gathering information and data going into Chapter Four. According to Darling (2015, p. 1), "emergence can predict that solutions developed in this kind of environment where agents are allowed to experiment and share notes will be more sophisticated, more fit to their environment and more adaptive than any solution."

Chapter Four Findings

Through the next two chapters, namely Findings and Discussions, I have taken the approach of answering the Main Question and the Key Research Questions set out in Chapter One through using my own voice through critically self-reflexive action research (Quin, 2014) and the voice of the participants using participatory action research (Child Advocacy Project, 2009). Quin (2014) explains critical self-reflexive (CSRX) research as part of the experiential learning cycle, using critical self-reflection as crucial to the participatory process, involving self and others.

The specific purpose of this Chapter Four, is to present the findings of this study. In order to do this, I will be explaining the objective of each session as well as drawing out themes, in order to analyse all the data collected over the period of research. The themes emerged from the reflexive analysis on each session using the A-ELC (Quin, 2014). In this way, themes have been extracted in the form of self-reflexive data before going into the next session. It can be seen within this research project a whole representation of the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984) and smaller cycles reflected within each session, that can be referred to as metacycles (Quin, 2014). The whole cycle and the metacycles are enhanced by the experiential learning within each session where there will be reflection on my own seeing, feeling, thinking and wondering, highlighting my own discourse analysis within the A-ELC in Figure 12 (Quin, 2014).

I have used an inductive approach (Terre Blanche et al., 2006) to gather, reduce, interpret and draw conclusions. I will explain this iterative experiential approach through observation describing the planned actions in each session, reflecting on each session, analysing each session and outlining the actions implemented. The questions outlined by the A-ELC (Quin, 2014) through observation, the question ‘what do I see’ shall be answered; through reflection, ‘what do I feel, think and wonder’; through analysis, ‘how do I make sense and meaning of what I see, feel, think and wonder’; and then through further analysis, ‘what will I do differently?’ This process should improve actions going forward (Davidoff & van den Berg, 2008) and support thinking about future actions and arriving at a new action ‘what am I

doing?’ resulting in a thought through, improved ‘consequent action⁶’. Ultimately themes should become brighter and clearer leading us towards deeper understanding of participation within a school towards change and development.

According to Fourth Quadrant Partners (2016, paragraph 4) emergence is a process whereby individuals create new patterns through many interactions that are more sophisticated and that could not be created by an individual entity. Eventually over time and over many interactions, emergence creates a whole, that is greater than the sum of all its parts. Once emergence begins, it does not stop, it seems to get smarter over time. In order for social change initiatives to be more impactful, we need to be thinking of new, smarter ways towards change and development, informing our approach. Through the following Findings Chapter, an emergence of data can be seen to grow and develop over each session, seemingly getting smarter over time because of the many interactions of the many individuals coming together and creating a more sophisticated pattern for change. This emergence for change will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five where discussions and conclusions will provide more insight into this approach to change, and support answering all the Research Questions set out in Chapter One.

4.1 Researcher’s SWOT analysis

Objective

The starting point to challenging problems within society, begins with self (Quin, 2007) through the process of self-reflection. I decided as part of my own becoming conscious of any biases or perspectives I may have and supporting understanding my place in the world better, before starting research, I conducted a SWOT analysis (Institute of Development Studies, 1993) reflecting on my own perspectives, observations, thoughts and understandings. SWOT is an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. I have continued this critical self-reflexive process through the sections in this chapter and continuing into Chapter Five, indicating my own reflections and development that has taken place using CSRX as a tool to draw out meaning from this participatory action research process for self and for/with others (Quin, 2014).

⁶ The term ‘consequent action’ emerged in Supervisor’s notes through discussion on Findings, by Quin (2018).

Observation

In Table 2, the SWOT analysis that I as the researcher completed as a self-reflective exercise before the research began.

Table 2. Researcher's SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Committed teachers	Large classes	Access local resources	Apathy
Full service school	Various/ limited training	Create change and development	Demotivation
Special needs focus	Limited resources	Motivate teachers to change and improve	Time
Amicable Principal	Formal schooling	Increased learning for children	Lack of participation
School environment positive	Taking over/ dominating/ Manipulating/ Coercion to my way of thinking	Increased school readiness	Lack of trustworthy data
Relationship	Researcher's power in the community could hold back participants	Critically analyse Government frameworks	Curriculum constraints
Focus groups	Language/ Communication barriers	Team work	Overworked and overloaded teachers
	Learners experiencing difficulties in learning	Building relationships	Teachers withdrawing from project
	Lack of understanding of concept school readiness	Creating a model of how to implement change through participation	
	South African Apartheid past and I am white	Understanding curriculum	

		Facilitate consciousness of teachers	
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Through observation and asking the question ‘What do I see?’ I noticed a SWOT analysis done during the research planning stage informed my thinking processes. I see that the answers given were only from self and therefore my own perspectives. I see that the issue of power was pertinent in preparing for the upcoming sessions and needed to be acknowledged by self and planned for within sessions.

Reflection

This SWOT analysis was intended to bring more consciousness to self as the researcher, but I feel this was not established well. The beginnings of reflection were evident, but perhaps because I was the only individual involved in this process, the answers were limited and surface.

Analysis

Further reflection revealed that this process was necessary to prepare for the upcoming sessions and perhaps needed more in-depth questioning from the A-ELC to deepen thinking and consciousness of self. It was also evident to me that at the beginning of any process, very little is understood, therefore very little should be assumed and should not be taken for granted. For example, relationship was seen as a strength before any session had taken place.

Action

I planned to try and overcome certain barriers I had foreseen through this exercise, by planning sessions within certain time frames as to be efficient in use of the participants’ time available. I also planned sessions with ice breakers to support participation.

Themes emerging

Reflection is necessary to encourage understanding of self, in order to support others.

Quin (2014, slide 19) refers to using these A-ELC questions as I have done throughout this Chapter “as a way to seek and find answers through doing that which we seek”. In this way, emergence (Fourth Quadrant Partners, 2016) has been created through seeing, thinking,

feeling, analysing, being and doing. The process began here and continues through the focus group sessions outlined below.

4.2 Focus Group sessions

4.2.1 Session one: Drawing

Objective

This session was intended to create a safe and equal space for learning to take place, as well as form a baseline of where teachers are at in their understanding of school readiness and their teaching practices. This is the reason why I chose to use relaxed and motivating activities that supported easy participation. The first activity was for each participant to draw around their hand and write five things they wanted to share with the group and then share this with everyone (Quin, 2016). Participants shared 10 things about themselves using this hand exercise. This exercise was planned to support relationships to form and trust to be built, before the process of reflection and sharing began. The second activity was for participants to draw themselves in their school environment and share what they had drawn.

Observation

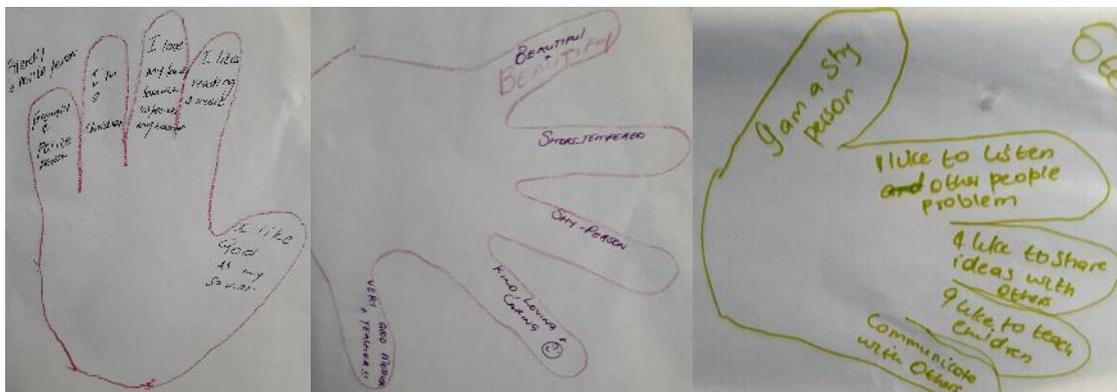


Figure 12. ECD teachers', Grade R and Grade 1 teachers' hands

Most participants enjoyed sharing about themselves and seemed to bring feelings of being valued from the exercise. For example, the participants saw themselves as kind, beautiful and good listeners. I noticed lots of laughter and most participants explained who they were confidently, therefore participation was high and active. I noticed that some participants were more confident in sharing than others. ECD teachers were noticeably the quietest and seemed to wait for the Grade R and Grade one teachers to share first. I had to encourage their participation before they were willing to stand up and share.



Figure 13. ECD Teachers' teaching environments



Figure 14. Grade R teachers' teaching environments

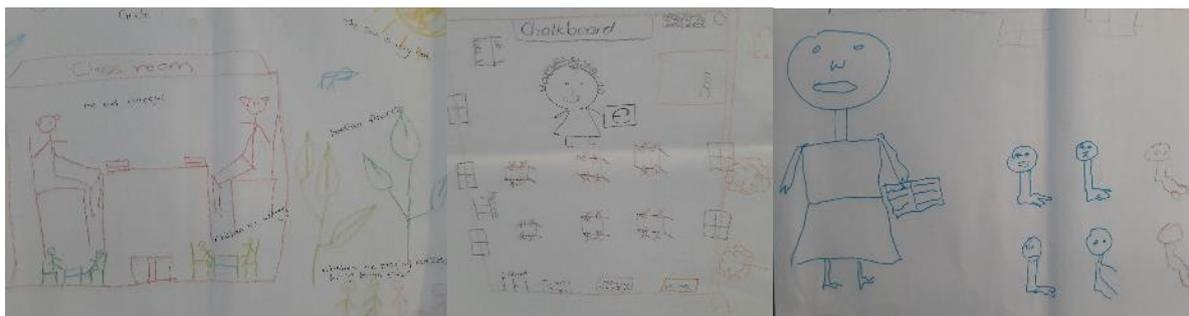


Figure 15. Grade 1 teachers' teaching environments

When observing the actual drawings done, it was evident that most participants described what they were doing within their classrooms. Most participants explained about teaching alphabets. Although, one participant explained about telling stories in an outside environment. She described this as clean and healthy, as well as teaching a moral as she was reading a story to the children.

Teacher-centred environments seem to be prevalent where teachers have been drawn large and prominently in all pictures and mostly drawn above children. Teachers are also drawn as behind a desk or board pointing to the alphabet as they teach. This shows a formal model of teaching prevalent using writing of alphabets as seen as the most important aspect of teaching and learning. Drawings show children sitting in rows mostly, one drawing had children in groups.

Only a few drew what children were doing. A Grade R teacher who used to work in an ECD centre drew children skipping and playing, kicking a ball and outdoor play. Another Grade one teacher valued a healthy environment and safe centre for the children.

I see teachers who value teaching alphabets. I see some teachers starting to value play and include this in their teaching. I see participation that is still surface. I see reflection as something that is difficult to do.

Reflections

The drawing of the hand exercise worked well in creating a relaxed atmosphere and most participants were willing to share. I wondered if this would contribute to the learning environment and space for future sessions. The drawing exercise on their school environment seemed quite surface sharing. I felt very aware of my role as facilitator and did not want to overshare or dominate the group. I asked questions only about clarification on what they were sharing or if I didn't understand something they had said. I had planned to ask questions to support observation and thinking about their school environment. I do not think I achieved this. I also felt that it was important to go with the plan of sharing their drawing to establish relationship and trust which I hoped would result in a safe learning space.

My desire was to create a safe learning space through the activities chosen. It felt as though participants were holding back, giving safe answers. I felt like this because I had to ask many participants to elaborate on their second drawing. It felt like the participants were participating on a level that was secure for them. I wondered how could I draw them in deeper into more valuable reflection? The participants were also very aware of time, they were checking their watches and the clock. The session started late and was therefore only an hour long.

I think that teachers did not feel that this was a safe environment, it seemed especially the older teachers as their expressions were more serious and they were more reluctant to participate. I think that they all enjoyed activities which required them to do something. They all loved having fun and then a safe space was created. I think some teachers felt uncomfortable sharing their ideas and their thinking. My critical self-reflexivity is continued in Box 1 below, generating learning and making meaning within the metacycle of CSRX (Quin, 2014) as outlined in the introduction to this chapter. In this way, I will be using examples of this type of self-reflexivity throughout Chapter Four and Five, demonstrating

that throughout this research process CSRX was supporting learning for self and for/with others.

Box 1. Researcher's reflections

My reflections

“I feel that I am a hindrance in this process. I am white and not a part of the participants’ immediate circle which seems to stop them from sharing. I feel separated from them. Relationships feel strained. They already have an idea of what they think I want to hear and know. I think they feel forced to be here. Because of the time factor, I also did not have time to go into detail again about what we are all doing together to focus on developing school readiness? This was covered in approaching the participants to get involved. I am not sure that everyone understands fully what we are doing and why we are doing it. I wonder if I will gain the insight I need to make this project a success? I wonder if I am able to create a space that learning can occur. I wonder if I know how to create a consciousness? I wonder if I can trust the process?”

Analysis

The ECD participants spoke about singing and dancing as a focus to their teaching. Participants from Grade R had varied drawings and sharing. One participant shared about reading a story with a moral in the outside environment which was clean and healthy. Most participants shared that teaching the alphabet for children to write was their most important role. Some spoke about sharing stories. Some participants commented that they learnt a lot from each other today. Some participants see their most important role as teaching alphabets and that most learning environments were quite formal and teacher centred. ECD teachers’ drawings seemed less formal as pictures showed circles of children and some active learning, including playing.

When thinking more consciously about whether I was able to create a learning space for these participants to develop, I realised it requires supporting them beyond comfortable boundaries (Simmons et al., 2009). Simmons (2009) goes on to say that changing dynamics may create conditions for deeper learning even though they could create anxiety and fear in a student. The drawing experience for participants was mostly fun and within comfortable boundaries

for most participants. Simmons et al (2009) talks about “activities were out of my comfort zone”. One of the most important aspects to consider was creating a learning space or edge. How could I get people to a place of being open and comfortable to share? What did the kind of space that enables learning look like? Everyone is different, unique, comes with a set of beliefs and perspectives that are based on their own experiences, so what was valuable for everyone in creating this place of learning together?

Simmons (2009) believes that three elements are required to create successful participatory pedagogy, creating a context for potential transformative learning. They are choice and flexibility, challenge and risk, and critical reflection. Choice provides learners with the knowledge of the syllabus, as they chose it, they bought into it, as they helped create it. Creating contexts for learning and development requires going beyond comfortable boundaries, going out of your comfort zone. Reflection enables us to understand what we know and either build on that or reject these assumptions. Therefore, a learning space is a place where someone participates, feels valued for who they are, what they think and where they have come from, but it is also an uncomfortable place of going beyond usual boundaries and sharing. So how could I support people to take this risk? I believed that this space may be in how valued an individual feels, meaning what I say matters and what I think is important. “It creates us and makes us feel as human beings” (Rural Network, 2009).

What will I do differently? This question informed the very valuable iterative experiential process working towards ‘improved’ actions for session two. How could reflection and analysis inform the next stage of learning within the action research cycle planned? How could I ensure that actions were better each session, becoming a more ‘consequent doing’ (Quin, 2017). Davidoff and van den Berg (2008) describe a fourth stage of reflection in action research that sorts out all the meaning of the data you have gathered, critically evaluating the consequences of your actions and using this evaluation to help plan your next action cycle, consequent action⁷. In this way you are looking back on your action to look forward to your future plans (Davidoff & van den Berg, 2008). On this basis I derived the following actions going forward and for analysis of the whole.

⁷ The term ‘consequent action’ emerged in Supervisor’s notes through discussion on Findings, by Quin (2018).

Actions

Make sure all participants understand the purpose of the study as I felt rushed through the introduction of this session.

Try and help participants feel valuable in the process. Thinking about appropriate actions that will support this outcome.

Try and start session by having fun together and creating a safe space for learning as this seemed to work well in creating the appropriate environment for participation. The use of ice breakers can be very useful to do this. Deeper learning needs to take place supporting more consciousness.

Emerging themes

Teacher centred environments evident

Formal learning prevalent

Participation difficult, strained and surface

Reflection of teachers may create more awareness and consciousness

Power dynamics evident between ECD teachers and Grade R/one teachers and between facilitator and all participants

Fun and interactive activities support participation

4.2.2 Session two: SWOT

Objective

This session was to describe school readiness and participate by doing a SWOT⁸, showing the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities to do with school readiness within their school and community. This was the first time that the group had heard of a SWOT analysis.

The word threat had to be explained by the translator into isiZulu so all understood better.

This process of doing a SWOT was to facilitate consciousness and awareness through reflection of what school readiness was and what was happening in their own school environment and community. Time was allocated to share group discussions.

⁸ SWOT: This is an analysis method used, reflecting on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Observation

School readiness definitions were discussed and participants contributions are noted below:

The whole child should be ready for school. They should be able to develop socially, physically, mentally and intellectually. They should communicate with others.

They should be able to concentrate for a longer period.

Not all children are ready for school.

It is important that children can learn to read and write.

School readiness is the importance of knowing skills and being able to write.

When a child is 6 years they should be ready for school.

Communication is important for school readiness.

The child must be able to stand on own.

The child must be able to be a part of the group.

The child must be able to adapt to the school environment.

Parents should encourage their children to be ready for school.

Getting more knowledge for children.

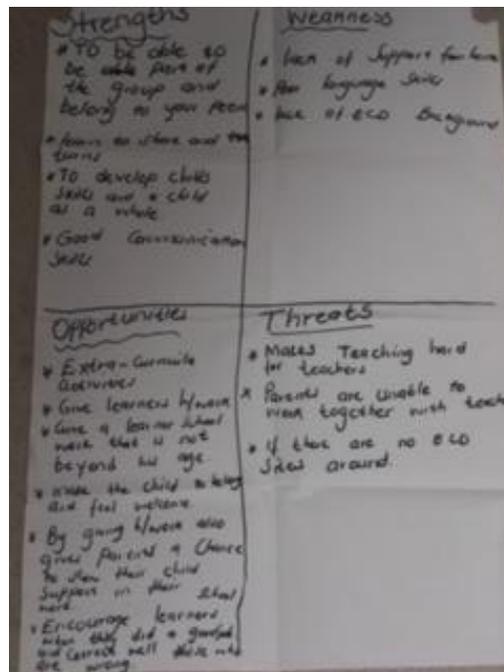


Figure 16. SWOT analysis

The following *strengths* were noted and discussed:

For children to be able to part of a group and belong

For children to share and take turns

Children's skills development as a whole

Good communication skills

Children know how to speak, read and listen

Children ask questions if they are misunderstanding. They are bold.

Developing fine motor

Teachers know how to discipline

They learn to listen to each other

They know how to behave

The following *weaknesses* were noted and discussed:

Lack of support from home

Poor language skills

Lack of ECD background

Some children are shy and always crying. Some act like they are 4 months old.

Some need a lot of attention

Some children are cleverer than others

Some children take more time to understand

Putting pressure on children

The following *threats* were noted and discussed:

Teaching can be hard on teachers

Parents are unable to work together with teachers

Few ECD sites in local area

Some children hide their feelings

Shouting at children

Discouraging children

Threatening children

Discriminating against children

The following *opportunities* were noted and discussed:

One group documented that giving an opportunity is giving the children a chance to do something

Extra-curricular activities

Giving learner's homework which will also give parents the opportunity to show their child support.

Giving learners school work that is age appropriate

Help the child to belong and feel welcome

Encourage learners when they do a good job and support those who need help when getting things wrong.

Always praise the children and do not punish them

Help them to be independent

Reflection

This session had a lot of valuable data, but time unfortunately ran out. Participation was good after the task was made clearer. Once all participants were working within groups there was a lot of discussion. Groups were three to four people. The participants thinking appeared to be going to a new level of consciousness of the topic, enhanced by the SWOT activity. After sharing what each group had come up with, we decided that at the next session we would put together all data into one SWOT and go further into analysis as time had run out.

In Box 2, some of the researcher's reflections were recorded after this session.

My reflections

“School readiness understanding seemed holistic from some participants.

Some participants said that all 6 years olds are ready to read and write. After questioning this a bit more, this changed to some children are ready.

Participants are hesitant to get started.

Participation is better when broken up in smaller groups. There seems to be more discussion.

Everyone seems to be involved. Is being involved true participation?

When asking whole group only some participants seem comfortable enough to answer.

Good activity with a lot of great input and insight into school readiness and the real issues these teachers are facing.

Attitudes towards parents about homework and about involvement were spoken about.

Disappointment that they are not more involved. Some thought this was a very big issue.

No one spoke of how this could be changed.

Opportunities were developed.... but were general not specific.

There needs to be more time set aside feedbacking and collaborating all this info together and sharing of what we all thought.”

Analysis

Kolb (1984) talks about the power of experience in learning, where harnessing an active experiential learning ingredient can produce a more effective learning process. Learning is not fixed elements of thought but are formed and reformed through experience. Thoughts cannot remain the same, they are continuously modified by experience which re-moulds and interrupts a concept or thought. Therefore, sharing experiences together, reflecting and sharing their meaning and together thinking about the implications of these thoughts, is crucial in knowing and learning. Gathering this information may create a critical understanding from where action can be taken (Anderson, Boud, & Cohen, 1995; Kolb, 1984). In this way, I felt it was important to continuously go back to Kolb's experiential learning cycle (1984) following each stage, step by step asking the questions through observation, reflection, analysis where evaluation and reconstruction took place (Anderson et al., 1995) and hoped that this review of experience may lead to action. The main questions I

concentrated on were, ‘What do I see?’ ‘What do I feel, think and wonder?’ ‘How do I make sense and meaning of what I see?’ (Quin, 2014). I found these questions were very useful in unravelling thoughts, perceptions and experiences. (Andreson et al., 1995, p. 225) describes this reflective process as being able “to draw meaning from it in the light of prior experience”. These questions supported thinking within the processes we were discussing and brought participants ‘voices’ to the forefront.

Going further into analysing self, by revisiting my own reflections made on this session, I noticed that there were no recordings made about my own deeper thinking with regards to my behaviour, thinking and feelings within my role as facilitator of these sessions. My reflections were mostly observations of participants, including recording of valuable, actual data on thought processes around school readiness.

Action

This was decided with the participants to summarise and combine all groups SWOT analysis into one document.

Emerging themes

Smaller groups within the larger focus group promoted participation

SWOT analysis promoted analysis and deeper thinking as well as researcher’s reflection on session

Questioning draws out further thinking and consciousness.

Time threat, same as in session one.

4.2.3 Session three: SWOT 2

Objective

We decided to extend the SWOT session into the next session as it was evident there was a lot of good responses to this that needed to be culminated and consolidated with further reflection and analysis. We started the session by putting all the group SWOTs together and analysing the data further.

Observation

Teachers needed a lot of time to recap what they had written before. A month had elapsed between meetings. They all seemed vague as to what had been discussed before, regardless that they had all been participating in the previous session. Once I put up SWOTs done before, this supported participation and we put together a joint SWOT and discussed opportunities to strengthen weaknesses. A comprehensive summary was created together as a whole group outlining the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities of school readiness within what we were seeing, thinking about and doing on a daily basis within education.

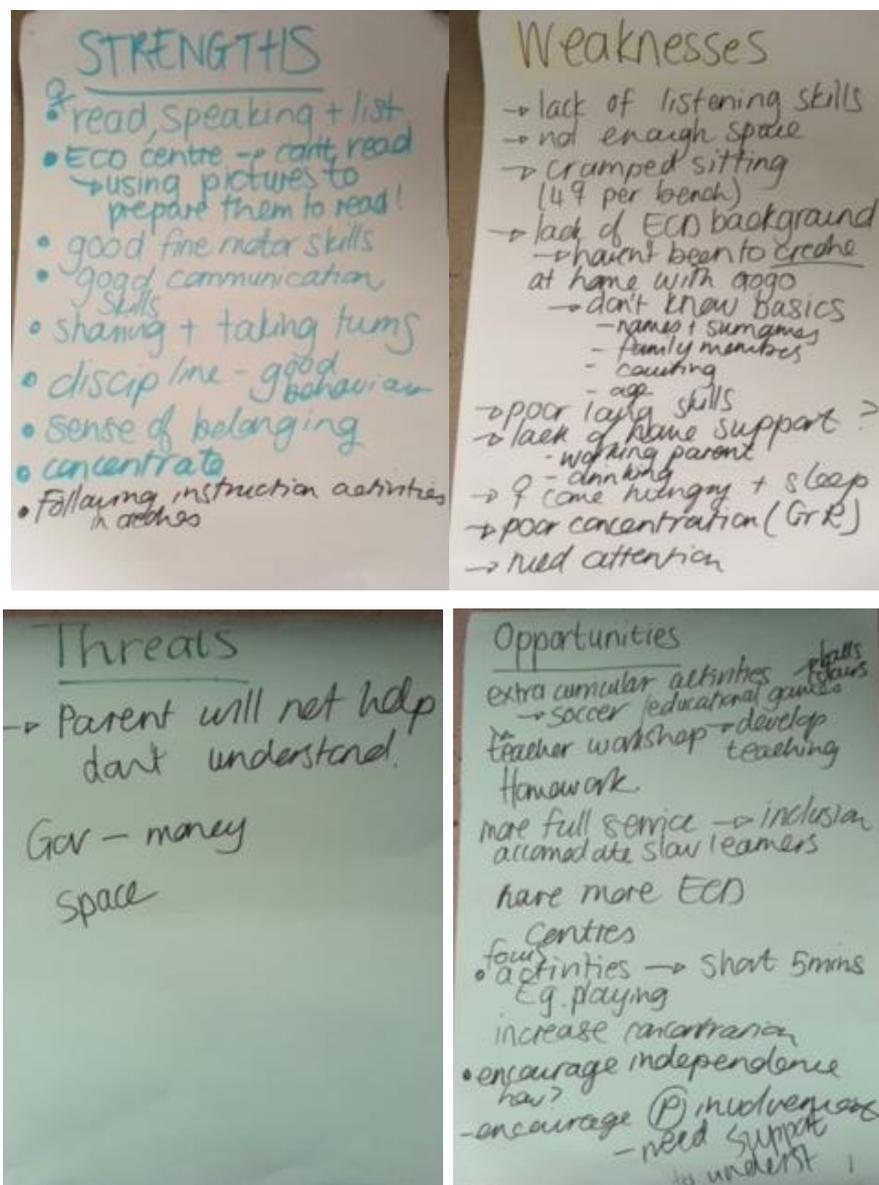


Figure 17. Joining all small groups into one SWOT analysis

Reflection

Putting all SWOTs together was a very useful exercise and supported participants in revising their ideas and input and hearing what other's had to say further supporting a more sophisticated and smarter response (Fourth Quadrant Partners, 2016) towards understanding school readiness as a whole.

Box 3. Researcher's reflections

My reflections

“I think that leaving too much time between sessions can lose momentum in participation and reflection. It doesn't matter how successful the session was before, too much time had elapsed and both memory had faded as well as trusting the process that had begun. It felt like I had to build trust and create a learning space all over again from scratch. Was this due to the time that had elapsed? In one month, relationships had not continued to be built and trust had not formed, but I had to go back to what was done before to establish a thin bond that had been forgotten.”

Analysis

How do I make sense and meaning of what happened in the session? I saw that time was a threat, not only that it stressed teachers but that it also created a barrier to building relationships.

What will I do differently? To try get sessions to be closer together as much as possible to facilitate participation and learning.

Action

Facilitated closer sessions in timing

Emerging themes

Time is a threat to participation.

Relationships are something you need to build on an ongoing basis.

There are many barriers to participation.

4.2.4 Session four: Mapping

Objective

This session was designed to support the participants to look at all the resources within their local community to support school readiness, like their school/ECD centre, family and community; and to look at the wider network of support like NGO's and Government.

Observation

All participants were actively involved in their groups and brainstorming networks accessible to them at iThongasi Primary School.

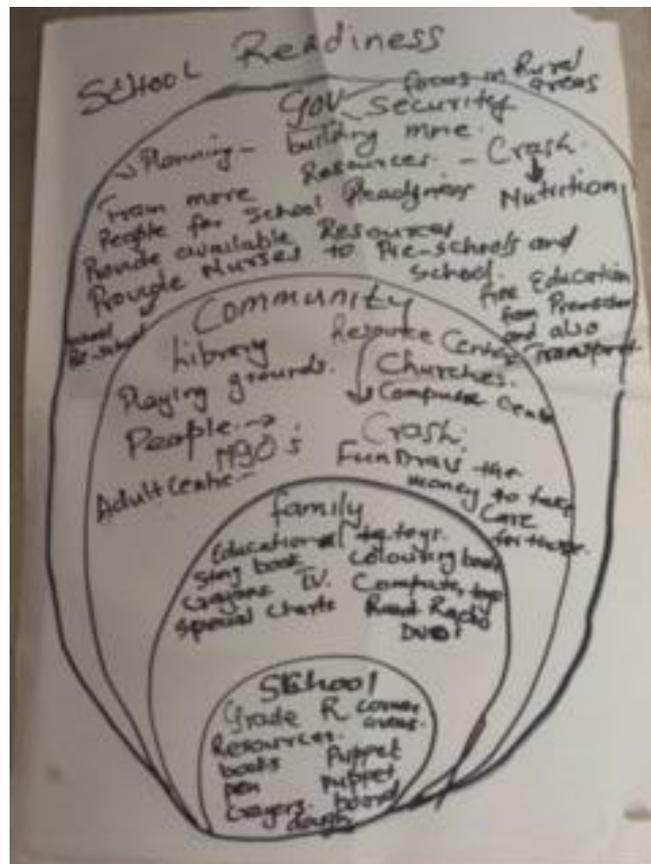


Figure 18. Community mapping group 1

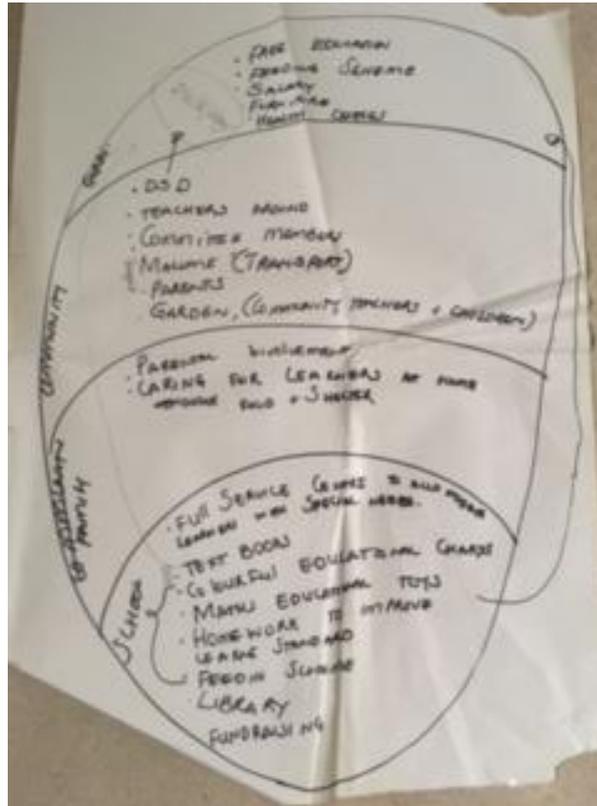


Figure 19. Community mapping group 2

Reflection

This exercise supported the participants to wonder and think about the resources they had accessible to them to support school readiness.

A concern about the lack of ECD and pre-schools before school.

A concern that children need love to support their learning. ‘If they don’t get love at home, they will be stressed, and they can’t learn.’

There was discussion around the government’s provision and their role in supporting. ECD through DSD (Department of Social Development): ECD teachers explained how the system works. That if an ECD centre is registered with DSD, they are given an amount per child per day. This amount is split up to make up salaries, maintenance, auditing and food. A Grade R teacher noted that ECD teachers are paid a small amount for a big job. ‘It is not fair for the huge job they do.’

The SGB was noted as an entity from the community that supported schools and ECD centres.

Books were noted as a valuable resource as well as libraries.

Government has started giving educational toys, but progress is still slow.

Box 4. Researcher's reflections

My reflections

“I see understanding between participants developing and confidence growing. I see opportunities arising because of all participants’ understanding self and others and the world better. Is this understanding of self and others growing in the group and in each participant? Is it possible for opportunities for change towards growth and development from within? Is it possible to continue to create this smarter response towards impactful change?”

Analysis

This session brought a lot of understanding between the two groups of participants, namely the Grade R and one teachers at primary school and the ECD teachers at ECD centres. It gave confidence to the ECD teachers that what they do was extremely valuable towards school readiness and supported the teaching and learning in Grade R settings. It gave them a voice and put them on an equal status to those employed by DoE. It encouraged me, as the researcher, to believe in the A-ELC experiential process, as understanding of self and others was becoming evident in some of the participants.

Action

I decided to share with the group a bit more closely the actual research cycle that was facilitating the process we are going through to further support analysis and understanding.

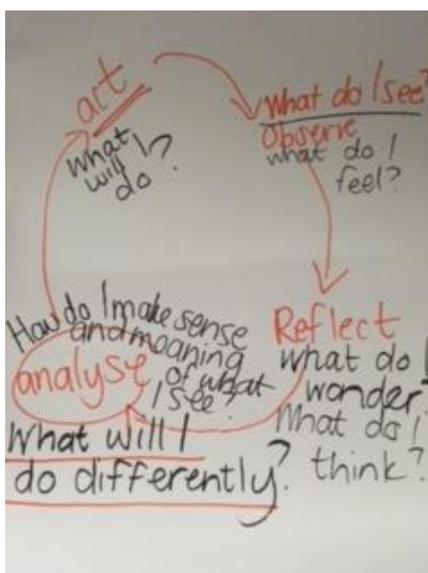


Figure 20. Researcher's visual representation of the A-ELC cycle

Emerging themes

Group work supports participation.

The value in ECD teaching and learning.

The breaking down of power dynamics.

The lack of Government support in the areas of learning most needed.

The feeling of being valued supports confidence to participate.

4.2.5 Session five: Force field analysis

Objective

This session was intended to identify a problem and a goal to work towards using a force field analysis approach, focusing on the 'What will I do differently?' We started with a balloon activity where all participants received a balloon and threw up into the air without allowing any balloon to land on the floor. Discussion was encouraged to discuss what they noticed or saw about all the balloons. All the participants were shown the actual cycle and what we had done so far in the project together. Then each participant was given a paper with the main questions from the A-ELC. What do you see? What do you feel? What do you think? And what do you wonder? The purpose was to draw out further thinking and participation towards consciousness through the questions, to support smart actions for the future towards change and to be able to identify the most important things we saw and

wanted to see change. The Thuthong Government document was introduced as something that may or may not support us. All groups were encouraged to think about ‘What will I do differently?’

Observation

The balloon activity was very effective in gaining participation and facilitated thinking around what do we see first, similarities or differences. Everyone was laughing and participating. As soon as we sat down to talk about the A-ELC, participation was hindered and strained. Teachers were reluctant to talk. I recapped the entire process so far to support understanding of process and what we were doing together. Breaking into two groups and filling in a paper facilitated more participation than asking for a discussion around these questions as a whole group. Emphasis was made on needing participants views and thoughts as that was the most valuable resource to bring more understanding.

Reflection

As the facilitator I continuously asked the A-ELC questions and reiterated ‘What do you think?’ to support participation and to support that each participant felt their contribution was valuable. Was this enough for them to contribute in an honest and real way?

Box 5. Researcher’s reflections

My reflections

“I feel frustrated as in each session, as we move through the process it feels like I have to recap and consolidate continuously before we can move forward with the next session. It feels as though participants lack interest and/or motivation in what we are doing. It feels as though they are there because they have to be.”

Analysis

After analysing my own actions of asking participants to contribute, I decided that asking and telling participants that what they think is valuable, is not enough. In order for trust to be there, there needs to be more. More could have meant that relationships needed to be stronger. People feel safe when they can trust someone and all the other participants in the

room. I don't think our focus group was at that place yet within the process. How were we going to get there? Could we get there?

A force field analysis is about removing barriers to reach that goal. I do not think this was my focus for this session. The focus was more on furthering understanding and analysis of the data. Problems were more closely identified, and participants were encouraged to see which problems or barriers were important to them. We did not go deeply enough into what could hold us back from getting this done. The session was successful in identifying what participants are most passionate about which was key in supporting motivation.

What do I see?

- * Children have less concentration in class.
- * They have affected, because their school readiness is poor, because of lack of E.C.D background.
- * A lack of parent involvement

What do I feel?

- * I feel parents should support their children.
- * I feel extra classes should be provided.

What do I think?

- * The government should provide more E.C.D centres, and schools with educational toys to help children.

What do I wonder?

- * I wonder how would it be if the parents were more concerned about their children.
- * How would it be like if they provide psychologist to schools so they can help children who need extra help.

What would I do differently?

- * I would support and encourage them to be responsive, because every child need support in developing emotional and social needs and abilities
- * Include every child in the activities that are done.

Figure 21. A-ELC cycle sheet

Some of the participants' responses are quoted below.

"I feel bad for those who didn't attend pre-school. They cannot hold a pencil and they are afraid of the teacher. They cannot communicate with others. We feel happy for those who have attended pre-school because they are ready to learn."

"I feel parents should support their children"

"I wonder how it would be if parents were more concerned about their children."

The following data shows the main responses to the question, ‘What will I do differently?’

Parental involvement. Parents need support and encouragement.

Lessons must be short and fun.

Acting out learning. Example, acting out stories, pretend learning.

All children included in all activities.

Resources for themes.

Supervise children at all times, especially in outdoor play.

Follow daily programme.

Actions

Everyone decided to look at the Thuthong document more closely. Participants felt that a SWOT of this document would be valuable to see change in their classrooms.

Emerging themes

Parental involvement is key to supporting school readiness.

ECD background is very important to support school readiness.

Participation does not always create motivation to act. There are many barriers that hold back motivation in participants.

4.2.6 Session six: Introducing Thuthong DoE document

Objective

To complete a SWOT analysis of the Thuthong (DoE) document for Grade R classrooms and discover what could be useful for school readiness in each participant’s educational setting.

Another goal was to guide participants towards their own actions towards change, answering the question, ‘What will I do differently?’

Observation

The A-ELC cycle was recapped to introduce the session. There was no ice breaker. A Thuthong document was then given to two groups and each group was asked to discuss together and think of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and write them down. Most participants were very quiet and appeared to be disinterested in session. This was seen through closed body language, lifeless facial expression and lack of verbal interaction when

asked questions and asked to participate. Participation was very low. Attitudes and motivation were also very low and there was not a lot of interest in being a part of looking deeper into this document.

Reflection

This session was particularly strained and there was a heavy reluctance to participate. There was a strong feeling of being forced to be present and evidence of management forcing staff to participate, regardless that the sessions had been made voluntary from the beginning. Body language of most participants was closed and responses very low. As I was trying to facilitate participation, there was a lot of silence in the session. I noticed this as we were busy and decided to address it there and then. I asked whether they felt forced and reiterated that participation was voluntary.

Some strengths of the Thuthong Document were identified by the participants, specifically around the use of play within their classes to support learning. The participants saw value in play and said it was a valuable tool to support early learning in young children. Play was recognised as important for the whole development of the child. The Thuthong document went into different types of play which was discussed briefly in the two groups. One participant said that all types of play were important and they all needed to be included. The daily programme was also noted as a strength and was considered to be of help in a classroom as it enabled a teacher to do all activities that were needed for children's development. One of the participants responded by saying, "we need to be organised to fit all these activities in."

Two opportunities were recognised. One being that children should be able to choose. Another was responsive interaction of adults. What does that mean? Participants felt that asking questions of children would be considered interactive and facilitate learning. One of the participants responded by saying "the children will develop more if the teachers are involved'. Encouraging children to be independent was also recognised as an opportunity already discussed in our own SWOT in session two and three and something we had already established as a valuable part of school readiness.

Threats discussed, were cramped classrooms and lack of resources. These were big frustrations for teachers as participants agreed vocally and loudly to this comment.

To facilitate reflection towards action, I used the question “What can I do?” continuously during this session. I also supported further responses by using the questions, ‘What is your goal? What do you want to increase for readiness? How are we going to remove the barriers that hold back this process?’

Participants were asked when a convenient time would be to do action and meet again. This was met with great resistance. One participant in particular was very resistant and seemed to affect all participants around her. Most participants expressed that they were busy with assessments and wanted to delay the actions. I gave all participants the option of continuing in the process of working towards action.

Analysis

After this session I realised there were many barriers to participation occurring that I needed to reflect and analyse the whole process and make changes after doing so, hopefully altering action to support better participation. It seemed obvious to me now, that without a desire to see change in one’s own school it was almost impossible to get someone to do anything if the passion or motivation was not there. This was the reason that I asked who wanted to continue with the process and support these few individuals, rather than drag more along, that had been coerced by management or myself, into being a number at the session. Five people put their names down to be contacted again to support going forward into the action cycle of the A-ELC.

My self-reflection and analysis on process thus far

“Looking back at the first session, I see a facilitator still learning. Nervous of being accepted by those I want to assist. Participants contributions seemed to be just scraping the surface of what the participants think, feel and know. How could I have supported the process of participation in the initial sessions even further? Acknowledgement of my own power within this context? Would this bring more balance to self and others? Does this need to be brought to the front right at the beginning? Is it enough to say your views are valued? I want to hear what you think? Did they believe me? Years of historical power, privilege and inequality are represented in my being and speak messages to participants without me even saying a word. So how can I expect an equal relationship of openness and honesty with people who hardly know me. Can this power be used to advantage this process or is it a barrier that is not easily broken? I feel frustrated as I still do not know the answers. Looking back, I feel that the first session was successful in creating participation through drawing. It was also successful in bringing some teachers from ECD centres together with Grade R teachers and Grade one teachers. Even within this there was tension and power dynamics. I need to acknowledge power more actively. How do I do this? How can I overcome barriers in our relationships? Power is there, evident and building a wall between openness and trust. How do I acknowledge this? How do I become more vulnerable and real? A start may be to explain my intentions of why I am doing what I am doing? I want to see change and development. I want to see opportunities for all.”

Action

I gave an opportunity to all participants to become more involved out of choice and be motivated to make a change within their classes. Participants voiced their feeling of being overworked and not wanting to be overburdened. As the facilitator I decided to go through the A-ELC of the whole process thus far, reflecting and analysing my own actions to enable a better way forward for the last sessions coming up (Davidoff & van den Berg, 2008). Swanepoel and de Beer (2016) talk about motivation that can be seen as source fields making a direct impact on an individual's behaviour. An external source field includes equipment, climate, peers, organisational goals, policies, rules, structures and rewards. These factors are

all external to the individual. Internal source field includes ability, needs aspirations, perceptions, mental set, personal goals and expectations. These are all internal to the individual but they are not born with them. Genetic source field includes genes, upbringing, parents, experience, size of family, socio-economic situation of family and early childhood. All three sources are present in an individual and therefore motivation will be influenced by all three source fields. Facilitators can mostly support and influence an individual externally and the internal like aspirations and expectations can influence motivation. The facilitator can't do anything about the genetic source field but that does not mean it should be ignored. When preparing for the next session, I felt strongly to address the differences in the genetic source fields and to be open and honest to support creating a learning environment.

Emerging themes

Threat and/or barriers to participation include overworked teachers and lack of fun interactive activities (no ice breaker).

Motivation for change needs to come from individuals and cannot be forced or created by facilitator. Motivation for change needs to be addressed. How?

Play seen as valuable as well as a daily programme for learning in all areas of development.

Children and adults should be given choices.

Responsive interaction of adults for ECD learning is important.

Threats to school readiness were cramped classrooms and lack of resources.

4.2.7 Session seven: Moving towards action

Box 7. Researcher's reflections

My reflection before session

“I feel apprehensive at the same time as deeply motivated. I want the focus today to be on the learning cycle assisting the process towards liberation. I will relook at the SWOT and support participants to plan an action towards changing a weakness identified in the SWOT. I want to see plans for action for five days and then analyse and reflect at the next session. I want to be more real, I want to somehow break down more power barriers. I am white and I cannot change or overcome this. I want to provoke and ignite passion for change. I feel limited for time and need to use what I have wisely. Perhaps I should start about who I am, what I was born into and my desire for development.”

The programme outline that I planned to follow in this session was as follows:

1. Introduce myself more honestly, my place in society, weaknesses and strengths, desires and passions
2. Recap learning cycle
3. Recap SWOT briefly with participants actual data
4. Action plan
5. Encourage reflection on actions

Questions I wanted to ask after this session:

Does breaking down and revealing power dynamics enable learning environment?

Does it help motivate participants?

Does having an organised plan support active participation?

Objective

This session's objective was to move participants towards an action by planning what steps to take for the action each participant chose to do. I would use the SWOT from session two and three to guide what needs and opportunities there were to choose from. This could provide a great strength to the session as all these were brainstormed by the participants themselves and was therefore ground value knowledge and understanding of the needs of that particular school and topic.

Observation

A very specific action plan sheet was given to each participant. This was to facilitate motivation and provide the support and guidance needed towards action.

PLAN FOR ACTION TERM 2			What can I do differently?	
April	May	June	Date:	Activity:
1 Sa	1 Mo PUB HOL	1 Th Research session	20.04.17	Planning action
2 Su	2 Tu ACTION	2 Fr	11.05.17	Analysing action
3 Mo	3 We ACTION	3 Sa	1.05.17	Evaluation
4 Tu	4 Th ACTION	4 Su		
5 We	5 Fr ACTION	5 Mo		
6 Th	6 Sa	6 Tu		
7 Fr	7 Su	7 We		
8 Sa	8 Mo ACTION	8 Th		
9 Su	9 Tu ACTION	9 Fr		
10 Mo	10 We ACTION	10 Sa		
11 Tu	11 Th Research session	11 Su		
12 We	12 Fr	12 Mo		
13 Th	13 Sa	13 Tu		
14 Fr	14 Su	14 We		
15 Sa	15 Mo	15 Th		
16 Su	16 Tu	16 Fr		
17 Mo	17 We	17 Sa		
18 Tu	18 Th	18 Su		
19 We	19 Fr	19 Mo		
20 Th research session	20 Sa	20 Tu		
21 Fr	21 Su	21 We		
22 Sa	22 Mo	22 Th		
23 Su	23 Tu	23 Fr		
24 Mo ACTION	24 We	24 Sa		
25 Tu ACTION	25 Th	25 Su		
26 We ACTION	26 Fr	26 Mo		
27 Th PUB HOL	27 Sa	27 Tu		
28 Fr SBN HOL	28 Su	28 We		
29 Sa	29 Mo	29 Th		
30 Su	30 Tu	30 Fr Schools close		

THREAT	OPPORTUNITY	HOW	WHO
		DAY 1:	
		DAY2:	
		DAY 3:	
		DAY4:	
		DAY5:	
		DAY6:	
		DAY7:	
		DAY8:	
		DAY9:	
		DAY10:	
		Reflections	

Figure 22. Sheet to support action

Participants were quiet. I had to ask many questions to understand what some of their intentions were to focus on. The participants only shared once a question was directed at them. Participants seemed more open to discussion about actions after the format I proposed to them. This enabled them to see more clearly what was expected and that it was attainable.

Reflection (What do I think? What do I wonder?)

I started to wonder about the difficulty to motivate participants for various reasons. There was a reluctance towards participation shown through the lack of response to questions and body language like avoiding eye contact. I also felt I needed to bring more of myself into the sessions. Perhaps participants saw a white person telling them what to do, even when I was acting as a facilitator asking questions. I had to reiterate that it was voluntary but at the same time motivate participants towards action. I felt that this session needed to somehow be different. Session six, clearly showed that participants were struggling with workload, motivation and implementation. I felt I needed to go back to the type of activities like in session one, looking at creating a safe place for learning, building on relationships to try and draw participants into feeling confident and motivated to act in some way towards improving school readiness. I started to wonder about relationship. Trust. If you see others as a threat, you cannot allow them in. ‘How can I grow a relationship? How can I break down barriers? How do I speed this process up?’

Analysis (How do I make sense and meaning of what I see, feel, think and wonder?)

I needed something different to draw participants in and create a space for understanding and learning to occur. Through CSRX ‘what will I do differently?’, creating a ‘consequent doing’, I decided to share who I am, where do I come from and what are my reasons for doing what I am doing. I wanted to create a space that was real, honest and that would break down barriers and rather build towards a relationship.

Box 8. Researcher’s reflections

My reflections on my consequent action

The ‘consequent doing’ started as introducing myself, how I was born, how I grew up. I used words like ‘white’ and ‘privileged’ and given a lot of ‘opportunities’. I explained why I was doing the project. One of my main reasons, I explained, was to try and increase opportunities for others by improving school readiness and supporting, increasing and enabling more success at school for all learners. The reaction of participants was good. An openness emerged. I encouraged others to share in the same way. Some shared more deeply, some on the surface. But everyone was participating! It seemed as if we had all joined together onto one platform.

“A path forward is not found through providing resources to the poor, but instead walking in humble relationship with them” (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012).

I started to wonder more about this relationship as a key to breaking down barriers of participants to move towards more meaningful participation and ultimately towards change. What would it take? What else could I do to support participants?

I started to wonder about more regular contact, perhaps through cell phones, WhatsApp and SMS. I wondered if this would be a way to connect and keep participants motivated. Staying out of touch for a month is never good for any relationship. Relationships need care and invested time and this is something we were struggling with.

Action

The opportunities for change identified by participants were parental involvement, basic skills of children like knowing names and surnames, age and where they live, increasing concentration.

Emerging themes

The researcher's further reflection and analysis revealed themes within participation after journaling session and reflecting on participants' reactions to activities and openness of discussion.

Some factors I think that can affect participation:

- Openness
- Organised diary and lay out of questions
- Shorter interim between meetings
- Follow up required after action is initiated
- Encouragement to reflect (only 2 people took small books)
- Time invested/relationship/openness/set up of project
- Threats are time/ formal schooling hierarchy

Answering the three questions posed at beginning of this session further supported emerging themes.

Does having an organised plan support active participation?

A liberal view of good participation is that it is organised and orderly where a solid local knowledge base is used for development and the 'common sense' knowledge of participants has been gained and accessed on how development efforts may work. Developers who do not use this are placing limitations on the project (Swanepoel & de Beer, 2016). This is great advice, but what if, you get local knowledge in this way but are struggling to get participants to make changes/actions after they have identified needs and problems?

Does breaking down and revealing power dynamics enable learning environment?

Yes, it was evident participants were listening and opened up about their own lives and desires, but the depth of sharing improved but was not related to power but life experiences.

"My dream was to do tourism. I am stuck in teaching"

"I desired to be a social worker, I have four children and my husband passed away"

"I was struggling to find a job"

And does it help motivate participants?

Yes, there was a definite mood towards action and change. This was evident in participants' responses where they talked about the following weaknesses and threats that hold back school readiness and which they felt most strongly about changing. This was encouraged by

relooking at the SWOT as well as encouraging each individual participant to indicate that one thing that participants felt passionate about was? And making and action to see this change. The specific sheet drew out conversation and enabled a clearer way forward. Participants' responses included the following.

“Lack of parental involvement and commitment as parents towards their children”

“ECD preparation and foundation for learning for formal school”

“Love is very important, love means everything. We must do everything with love”

“Increasing concentration”

“lack of skills in the practitioners and carers in my ECD centre”

Another emerging theme is that a more intentional critical self-reflexive approach by the facilitator enhanced the session and supported participation as well as motivation.

Organised step by step plan facilitated participation, because it was specific, attainable and clearly set out.

Relationships becoming more connected when power is acknowledged and value for one another seemed to increase because of body interaction and increase in participation.

4.2.8 Session eight: Reflection on actions and planning new action

Objective

My objective for this session was to gain knowledge on what actions had been done towards improving school readiness and participants were encouraged to share their actions that they had planned and implemented.

Hi Boni,
Hope you are well!
I want to hear all about your actions. Please meeting date change
Also, some photos will be soo great.
Whatsapp me on 071 274 6285!!
♡ Cath

What can I do differently?
 ✓ Session 1: Thursday 20 April 1:15-2:30 (done)
 Session 2: Wed 31 May 1:15-2:30
 Session 3: Wed 14 June 1:15-2:30

Date:	Activity:	Main question:	What did we plan to do differently?
20.04.17	Planning action	What can I do differently?	Mrs Mpitane: parental involvement/ call parent and talk to them. She will encourage parent/ homework Boni- she wants to work on the basics of the children. That they know their names and surnames and that they know where they live and how old they are counting. Stella- parental involvement/encourage to do activities. Use book with colours Ms yemi- if a child is not achieving in the classroom sometimes its because she/he is not receiving love Samkha- poor concentration Miss Mjicungama- lack of ECD background
31.05.17	Analysing action Planning new action (10 days)?	What do I wonder about what I was doing? What can I do differently?	Bring feedback sheet, photos on phone and reflections *
14.06.17	Evaluation	How can I make sense and meaning of what I see, feel and wonder about what I was doing?	

Figure 23. letter encouraging action

Before this session, I sent out letters to encourage actions to continue between meetings. My intention was to bridge the gap between the time that had lapsed between sessions to try support relationship, show support and of course, encourage and motivate towards action.

Box 9. Researcher's reflections

Researcher's critical self-reflection in preparation for session

"I am so nervous and afraid no-one has done anything. I feel like I have failed and not managed to motivate participants. Time is a big issue for the participants. This meeting has been put off twice already by the HOD at school. I do believe that if someone really wants to do something regardless of whether there is time or not, they will. How do I motivate? How do I inspire? How do I say there is a better way without forcing my ideas and opinions? How do I support participants in becoming more conscious of this? Without their own realisations very little will happen."

Participant 1 shared that her planned action to improve school readiness was to see the writing skills of her Grade R class improve. Her plan was to support the children to write their names and write the initial sounds of words. Each day for five days a different letter. Participant 2 shared that she would like to see more parental involvement. She planned to meet with parents and share their children's progress.

Participant 3 shared that she too would like to see more parental involvement and had planned to call a meeting with parents in her ECD centre.

Participant 4 shared that she would like to do activities in the classroom to increase concentration.

Participant 5 shared that she felt skills development was a threat to the growth in her ECD centre and she would like to see this improve.

Observations

Not all participants had implemented their plan. Nevertheless, participants had become freer in sharing their ideas towards action. They each had a specific idea and shared a plan on what they would like to implement.

Participant 1 had implemented her plan and shared enthusiastically about what she had done. She had implemented for five days writing skills of initial sounds for all her learners. She reported that she could see an improvement in their writing and understanding even after three days. She shared that she was concerned about three learners who had shown no improvement. She shared ways of improving activities for these learners. Her suggestions were to find new ways to learn letters by not writing, but rather to use playdough, finger rhymes, letter boxes with initial sounds and newspaper cuttings. Another participant suggested that she cut out pictures from magazines of objects with that same initial sound to reinforce the learning. She shared that all Grade R teachers had been part of her action plan and had joined in. This was three classes in total.

Participant 2 had not implemented her plan for parental involvement because of time constraints but explained that she still intended to do so. She explained that the parents know their children best and this would facilitate their learning and support school readiness. Her goal was to meet five to 10 parents.

Participant 3 had called a meeting with all parents of the children at her ECD centre to share with them a new programme to support early learning concepts.

Participant 4 had not implemented anything with regards to supporting concentration.

Participant 5 had started to think of ways she could introduce more skills to all her staff.

Reflections

Participant 1 felt that not only had writing improved but also concentration and pre-reading skills. She noticed that the children who continued to struggle did not attend pre-school. She felt her actions were successful but that she would change the way she supported the three learners with difficulties. She would make it more hands on and to do with pre-writing skills. She also felt that she would like to play more games and that she would like to try sound boxes. Matching objects to symbols showing initial sounds. She felt that she would like more ideas and that a teacher support group might be able to do that for her.

Participant 5 at first felt that there was not much that she could do to change the threat she had identified. She acknowledged she did not know how to solve this problem. Her body language showed defeat and helplessness. She needed support from others to think of ways to overcome this barrier and access local resources that were potentially within her reach in her community. Participants supported her in thinking of our community mapping task and suggestions were made to access potential learnerships for an ECD level 4 and Wordworks

training, which is offered by a local NPO, supporting early literacy learning. Participant acknowledged this as a good idea and was willing to follow up this support.

As participants were sharing their actions and challenges, other participants were giving ideas on how to support further learning. It felt as though participants were getting actively involved in supporting each other. How could this be continued?

Analysis

Few of the participants did the actions they had planned. The main barrier that seemed to be a common thread as the biggest challenge was time, but when challenged to find solutions there was no solution given to this threat. It seems that creating an environment requiring a participant to move beyond comfortable boundaries according to Simmons (2009) and creating conditions for deeper learning can create anxiety and fear and needs to be considered throughout the process that the A-ELC advocates for this process to work completely. A participant needed to be at a certain level of confidence and trust to embrace participation and truly become a participant in the process that required an internal motivation that will move a participant toward action.

Emerging themes

Few participants implemented action

Actions implemented had produced some change

Participation and sharing becoming easier and more open

Levels of consciousness and awareness had improved

Supporting each other starting to emerge

4.2.9 Session nine: Evaluation

Objective

My objective for this session was to evaluate the process thus far and gain access to participants learning, thinking and reflections. Participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire to document their thoughts and learnings over the period of research.

Observations

Participants were reluctant to fill out the questionnaire. Some needed support to answer questions in more detail. I noticed that more detail was recorded when I had an individual meeting with Participant 3. She shared with confidence and openness.

034478992

Name: Bomi Kazi Date: 07-06-17

Questions	Reflections
What do I see about this whole project?	It is helping and support teachers
What do I think about it?	It is good
What do I wonder about it?	It is useful → because everything that concerns learners — involves learners as a whole
What was best session and most useful for me?	Are one where we did activities and where we had discussions. → balloons / dancing.
What was worst session and least useful to me?	I can't remember, I was sleep (boring).
What do I think about the research cycle?	
How does this help me in what I do?	It open up my mind about most things concerning school
Did I plan an action?	Yes

Figure 24. Evaluation: Participant's feedback page 1

How did it go?	It was productive. I gained and was effective. learners were participating.
What could have helped me do this better?	If I had more resources
What stopped me from doing this? What were the barriers I faced?	They were low. Some learners didn't not break through.
What could I have done differently?	I would have made learners understand easily and grasp knowledge and also teach new exciting ideas.
What do I think should happen next?	Gain more knowledge, activities How? group sessions, discussions
What support do I need to be able to do more action?	People with knowledge of good ideas.
Any other comments:	

Figure 25. Evaluation: Participant's feedback page 2

Reflection

I will draw out the learnings of all the participants who had filled in the evaluation form and not necessarily implemented actions.

Participant 1:

She felt that the sessions were helpful and supportive to teachers

She found the most useful sessions were the ones where there were fun activities like balloons and dancing.

She felt the research cycle opened up her mind about many things concerning school.

She felt her actions were productive. That the learners had gained and her teaching was effective. She felt the learners were participating.

She felt the process could have been easier if she had more resources.

She felt the biggest barrier was that some learners did not improve or learn.

She would like to teach these learners differently to help them grasp knowledge and use more exciting teaching ideas.

She thinks that she would like to gain more knowledge of activities through group sessions and discussions.

She felt she needed support through people with knowledge and good ideas.

Participant 2

She felt that the research cycle gives her new ways of seeing the challenges of the children.

She felt it was useful as it gives her new ideas.

She wondered if she would have identified the challenges if she hadn't been a part of the project.

She felt the best session was when she learnt about doing actions as she then had the idea of talking to parents.

She didn't like the first session as she didn't know what to expect and wasn't sure what to say.

She felt the cycle helped with self-introspection and it helped her improve her teaching skills.

She planned an action but was unable to implement because of time.

I need more time to do my actions better.

I plan to do my action.

I think we should get together as teachers to get good ideas.

I want to get support from parents to help with school readiness in my class.

Participant 3

Participant 3 had a separate interview at her ECD centre and she had implemented the action she had planned and she was very excited to share about what she had done.

She had called a meeting with parents to learn more about colours and shapes. She taught them how to talk to their children about colours and shapes. 15 parents came and bought a R20 book about these topics to take home. She had taken a video of the interaction of parents with their children doing activities with shapes and colour in the classroom at the ECD centre. She explained that some parents discussed with her that they did not feel that their child's learning and development was their responsibility but she had helped them change their minds. "Some parents now understand that they must help us in supporting their children." She explained that she has also been sending more homework with the children and now almost all the children do it with their parents/carers and return it to school. She said she had also noticed an improvement in the children, and specifically commented that they were able to match more effectively. She was excited about the partnership with parents and was planning a follow up next year with sharing stories with parents. She saw the importance of partnering with parents and wanted to do it earlier in the year to encourage more involvement.

Participant 3 additional reflections post action research project:

"This project has helped me to share ideas and communicate with others.

I have learnt about what I really want to do in my creche.

It has given me ideas of what to do with parents and helped me understand them.

These sessions have helped us come together. We (ECD practitioners) are scared to talk to them (School teachers) as they have degrees. I am same teacher like them. I make a difference.

This project helped me to call a meeting at my creche."

All teachers found project useful even if they had not shown or participated outwardly. "This project helped by giving teachers a chance to share ideas". I noticed that the teachers who had participated more actively had the most learnings happen. Some participants were more motivated than I had realised and had continued to do actions after evaluation.

My reflections

What is the threat I want to see change?

The threat I see is that not all children are ready to learn and often get left behind each year that they attend school. This threat is exacerbated by large classes, lack of resources, history of poor quality programmes and overworked teachers facing many challenges in their rural contexts. I see a threat that from year to year little changes and few are acting on behalf of others to intervene in the cycle of poverty and lack of support for learning and success. This is allowing for children to go through a school system that does not support every child to thrive, support understanding of self and others and ultimately support reaching their full potential that each and every one of us has at birth. This threat is overwhelming and has the ability to crush hope and affirm helplessness. Nevertheless, I see an opportunity for teachers to work together to enhance teaching practices towards all children being school ready. I want to see relationships forming and support networks starting to make sure this happens and that all relationships are equal, supportive and empowering. An opportunity to see small changes made within our grasp, within what we have access to, to support all children in gaining skills for self towards reaching their full potential and thriving within the context that they live and learn. This is possible through individuals who know how to access support and make changes within the school and context that they work.

Analysis

Looking back over the whole process of learning (Davidoff & van den Berg, 2008) in order to look forward to future plans, I used the last metacycle (Quin, 2014) of learning as done through each session to support concluding the entire process of the participatory action research project. Even though the objective for this session was to document the participants' learning, I had not put anything formal into place to acknowledge my own learning that had taken place and decided this should be a focus of the evaluation. At first glance, I see a wealth of data emerging through every session and I am overwhelmed at my own learning through this process. I feel this has been the most valuable and this has seen the most growth. I had given the participants a sheet to document what they had seen and thought and now I

felt it was my turn to do the same mostly through discussions in Chapter Five. In order to lead into this discussion, I felt I needed to answer the following important analysis question.

And 'What would I do differently?'

One of the participant's response to this entire project was "It refreshes me". This is a positive response, one which shows good came from her participation in this PP process. She was on a journey through experiential learning which refreshed her. It does not indicate any action, but it is a step towards being present and acknowledging something happening within self. So, what would I do differently? I would like to make the most difference in participants, creating a supportive participatory environment, where everyone is encouraged to learn, to participate and go beyond being refreshed, to being actively involved through participation, possibly hoping towards small steps of change and being brave enough to make these actions happen.

Themes emerging

Relationship building

Overcome barriers to participation like time, busyness and school hierarchy

Valuing others

Being present

Be more active in creating motivation

A self-reflexive deeper analysis enables learning which supports consequent doing and therefore change and development

4.3 Concluding these Findings

Reflecting over the entire process, it is evident through the findings, that there are many challenges and barriers to participation. There within lies opportunities to overcome and make solutions, accessing and tapping resources to understand the challenges and barriers, name them and find ways to tear them down and make 'enabling a community of practice' a reality.

Freire (2005, p. 45),

But almost always during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or 'sub-oppressors'.

The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men; but for them, to be men is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity.

New smarter patterns for change can emerge through interactions with one another and it is within these interactions a new model of humanity is created where individuals can begin to trust and allow themselves to be present in a new place of understanding their world. In concluding Chapter Four and moving into the final Chapter Five, a sophisticated response has been enabled, through recording these many interactions of coming together which have been laid out clearly in Findings. The answers to the Main Question as well as the six Key Research Questions, are underpinned by this chapter. Therefore, based on these findings, the answers to 'how to enable' and 'how to adapt' to solutions that 'fit', through overcoming these barriers that exist, may be available from this knowledge that has been generated from the ground up through emergence (Darling et al., 2015).

Chapter Five

Reflective Analysis: Discussion of Findings

In the words of Ben Okri, the Nigerian born poet (theguardian.com, 2016 , extract: paragraph 4),

There was not one amongst us who looked forward to being born. We disliked the rigours of existence, the unfulfilled longings, the enshrined injustices of the world, the labyrinths of love, the ignorance of parents, the fact of dying, and the amazing indifference of the living, in the midst of the simple beauties of the universe. We feared the heartlessness of human beings, all of whom are born blind, few of whom ever learn to see.

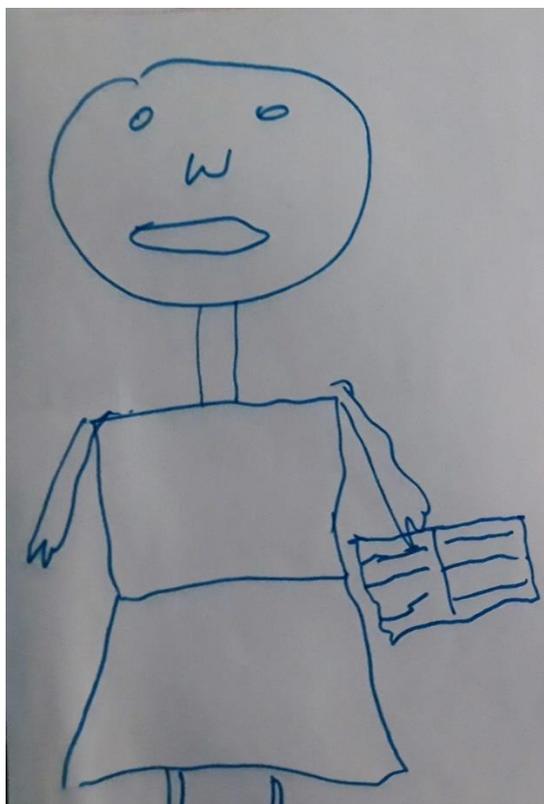


Figure 26. A teacher's visual representation of self

Following my findings in Chapter Four, I find myself continuing to make use of the Annotated Experiential Learning Cycle (A-ELC) (Quin, 2014), going deeper into analysis and self-reflection, as I draw closer to pertinent discussions and conclusions. It is important at this stage to explain the process of reflection and being reflexive, a bit more closely. According to Ryan (2005), being reflective is a means to monitor oneself, looking more

closely at actions with the desire to improve. He goes on to describe reflexive processes that involve introspection, “a deep inward gaze into every interaction of life” (Ryan, 2005, p. 1). Reflexivity is a tool that can be used to study thoughts, feelings and behavior, supporting critical introspection (Ryan, 2005). Through this process and using the A-ELC, new questions arose, ‘What would I do differently to support all participants to see more clearly? How can the ‘few’ become ‘more’ who learn to see and have the support to create change in the context that they work and live? Could this support for change be included in ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning where no-one is left behind, found in goal four of the SDGs (United Nations Development Programme, 2018), empowering people everywhere to live more healthy and sustainable lives (United Nations, 2015a)? In this way, children in South Africa may be given opportunities to thrive (Jamieson et al., 2017a) through appropriate learning programmes and enabled to be school ready, according to developmental stages outlined in Chapter Two (Ilifa Labantwana, 2014; Snow, 2006).

Participatory processes have driven this project forward from its beginnings⁹ and now into its conclusion, through the participatory pedagogical (PP) practices outlined in Methodology, Chapter Three, including the evidence of the participatory action research (PAR) (Child Advocacy Project, 2009) findings, outlined in Chapter Four and including self, through CSRX (Quin, 2014) which emerged as a critical process through the PAR process. For a conclusion to be reached, I need to follow a clear process outlining how the Main Question and the Key Research Questions will be answered, as well as the reflexive questions that have been generated through emergence (Darling et al., 2016) and using the A-ELC (Quin, 2014). These questions have emerged within the Findings and will be answered within the Main Question and the Key Research Questions. In this way, I will first reflect on each Key Research Question outlined in Chapter One, discuss the reflective analysis and the reflexive questions that arose through emergence, which will also support answering some of these Key Research Questions. These reflexive questions are, ‘What will enable becoming fully present? Could finding ways to support relationship enhance participatory practices? How can I make sure every participant is valued and valuable? Will creating a learning space support consciousness and in turn improve participation? Will finding solutions to time

⁹ My PP journey began on the Honours Module Course, explained as such in Chapter One, page 2.

threat, feelings of being overworked and busyness improve participation? Can school hierarchy influence participation? What would I do differently?

The Main Question will be answered in the section titled, Going Forward, and will also include reflexive questions that are outlined in the introduction of this chapter. These reflexive questions are, ‘What would I do differently to support all participants to see more clearly? How can the ‘few’ become ‘more’ who learn to see and have the support to create change in the context that they work and live? Could this support for change be included in ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning where no-one is left behind?’ In this way, I provide the Main Question’s answer that has evolved and grown and provided the ‘how’ do participatory practices enable, enable more participants to see and not to stagnate, but rather to continue along the A-ELC (Quin, 2014) path towards action.

The Main Question and the Key Research Questions have been repeated for the convenience of supporting reflective analysis through the A-ELC, using these questions as a base to be answered.

Main Question:

How can participatory practices enable the development of school readiness programmes among all participants within a rural school in KwaNzimakwe, Ugu, KZN?

Key Research Questions:

1. How have participatory processes¹⁰, using the experiential learning cycle supported the facilitator to improve participatory practices for self and for/with others?
2. What are the school readiness strengths in Grade R classes according to the teachers?
3. What are the problems about school readiness within a Grade R class according to the teachers?
4. How can we address these issues through a reflective participatory process?
5. What are all the participants’ evaluation of the interventions that are developed and applied during this participatory process?

¹⁰ This question will include ‘what are these processes’ as outlined in Chapter One, section 1.2.4.

6. What are the implications of these findings for the development of school readiness programmes, within the community of practice, of the participants in this project?

From the evidence found through observation in the Findings, outlined in detail in Chapter Four, it was evident that participatory practices can enable the process of change and development, but that there were many barriers that could stop this from occurring. For participatory practices to enable development, the participatory practices need to be working well and used well, in essence, participation needed to be active and participants needed to be present in body, mind and heart. This was not always my experience in my findings. Participation was low and erratic due to many factors and emerging themes. There were many barriers to participation, that were not easy to overcome.

5.1 How have participatory processes using the experiential learning cycle supported the facilitator to improve participatory practices for self and for/with others?

To answer this question, I have outlined the two main processes, also answering the ‘what are these processes’, indicated as important to answer in Chapter One, that I have found beneficial in supporting participatory practices within this project. They are CSRX (Quin, 2014) and the A-ELC (Quin, 2014). Quin (2014) explains a critical self-reflexive (CSRX) approach as part of the experiential learning cycle and that using critical self-reflection is crucial to the participatory process, supporting involving self and others in this process. The A-ELC is an adapted cycle and can incorporate metacycles in this cyclical process, where within the larger cycle of experiential learning, there are smaller cycles of learning, including each stage of the cycle, namely observation, reflection, analysis and action, which informs practice and changing actions towards better understanding of self and others (Quin, Ngobese, Ngema, & Xulu, 2017). Therefore, consequent ‘better’ action occurs for the metacycle that follows directly after, within the research process. Because of the nature of CSRX and the A-ELC, more questions have been raised through these two processes and enabled my own consciousness and learning (hooks, 1993). I have outlined these additional questions that have been raised within these two processes, to highlight the learnings that have taken place for self and for/with others, which demonstrate that the participatory

processes used have enabled consequent actions¹¹ toward a better world through emergence. Thus, it is through participating reflexively that the reflexive analysis has been generated. Therefore, these six additional questions will be answered in the next section focused on the process of CSRX.

5.1.1 Critical self-reflexive analysis (CSRX)

Simmons, Barnard, and Fennema (2009) describe learning as a reflective journey bringing to consciousness knowledge not fully realised. Quin (2017, p. 2) describes critical self-reflexivity (CSRX) as driving momentum more consciously in a purposeful direction which in turn enables participation more openly and fully. Through each of the chapters within this study, there has been a continuous process of learning through my experiences, drawing meaning from them, by seeing, thinking and wondering about them (Andreson et al., 1995; Kolb, 1984; Quin, 2014) showing that learning was a continuous process, grounded in experience where knowledge was continuously derived from and tested out my experiences as the learner (Kolb, 1984).

¹¹ The term 'consequent action' emerged in Supervisor's notes through discussion on Findings, by Quin (2018). This term is used extensively in this Chapter Five to support the evidence of the emergence of learning towards smarter action in this PAR project.

My reflections

This project has been one of the toughest things I have ever done! Slow, agonising implementation, underlying resistance continues and does not relent. Few steps forward, more going backwards. The answers to development evade me, but I choose to stand, to push forwards, to look for meaning and sense making within the project I chose to pursue. So many barriers, so hard to overcome, but my nature and beliefs say there are always solutions. The solutions cannot lie only within me. I must find a way to activate solutions within myself and with others. Needing change, wanting change, motivated to change? I need to find those who want to change or see change. I am pushed to explore all options. Where to next? How can we move forward in providing equal opportunities for all? I have looked and looked, searched and analysed, worried and fretted and this is what I have thought about, wondered about, tried to make sense and meaning about and ultimately what I want to change and do differently within my own practice.

Question one: Active participation - What will enable becoming fully present?

“Even big waves of political revolution are not able to wash away deeply internalised oppression and entrenched injustice” (Quin, 2012, p. 20).

A very important element I have considered, pondered and wondered about, is brought up by Hooks (1993) that teachers must actively commit to a process of self-actualisation. I believe that this requires active participation and an openness to be able to teach in a manner that empowers learners. Being fully present requires this type of attention, participation and action from participants. A challenge to all of us not to hold back, but allow ourselves to be vulnerable, both individual participants and as a facilitator. Hooks (1993) explains that being vulnerable with others, being present and engaged with others, can enhance pedagogical practices, engaging others and supporting their knowing that enhances their capacity to live fully and deeply. So how can this be nurtured and carried through over session to session? This is something that was a continuous struggle for me to maintain and something I feel was integral for the project's success.

As part of this question I would like to acknowledge the barriers South African teachers face in this regard. There may be many reasons for a lack of self-actualisation and the resistance to embrace and trust such a process. Pym (1993), suggests dialogue enhances understanding, which has been particularly true for this study, especially evident during the SWOT analysis in Session two and in Community mapping in Session four, nevertheless within other sessions, participants held back and were reluctant to be present and actively involved. Perhaps our apartheid history outlined in Chapter Two is to blame, where now, in this present South African context, we find individuals in a struggle for liberation, “shaped” by what came before, stuck in that “model of humanity” (Freire, 2005, p. 45). Participation is vital to the success of PAR (Child Advocacy Project, 2009), but it is extremely difficult within the current South African context, resulting in a lack of participation in all the sessions outlined in Chapter Four. South Africa’s history contributes subconsciously to the way we do things, the way we listen, who we listen to, how much of ourselves we are willing to share.

Robinson found that in her experience in 1993 of the demands of transforming an education system these are often underestimated. She explains that after implementing a participatory workshop where problems were identified by the participants themselves and enthusiasm and motivation for change appeared high, after three months, teachers had made very little headway in initiating or reflecting any changes in their teaching (Robinson, 1993).

An anti-collaborative culture in South African Schools could be contributing to this lack of participation as well as the banking way of teaching (Freire, 2005) that has been traditional in South Africa for many years. Emancipatory action research should be collaborative between teacher and teacher, between teacher and learners and between teachers and facilitator (Davidoff, 1993). Davidoff explains that in her experience establishing a collaborative environment is extremely difficult. Teachers feel mostly comfortable working in isolation and having visitors is associated with inspection which they find undermining, disempowering and scary. She goes on to describe the lack of enthusiasm or openness to working together. She believes that a new culture of collaboration needs to be built rather than merely encouraging a new way of working together. Pym (1993) confirms the difficulty in becoming critically reflective of practice in an inspector system of South African schooling. Teachers have become dependent on supposed experts strengthening hierarchy and lessening the voice of teachers and their own thoughts and perceptions about the challenges they face.

Linking back to Chapter Three, the methodology outlined, that teachers need to be able to have a 'voice' and more control of education for a democratic process to support changing thinking and ways of doing (Davidoff, 1993). She goes on to describe equal participation in every stage of the research process and concluded that it is extremely difficult to obtain in the present South African context. Quin (2012) elaborates on how empowering teachers is not a fixed point that can be arrived at but is rather something that continues as an on-going dialogical process. She describes the process as consistent with anti-oppressive ways of being. This description feels fluent and on-going as well as consistent and needs to be encouraged in an ongoing dialogue, for the teachers to move forward into new ways of being and thinking (Pym, 1993). This will support changing teacher's own positions in the world (Quin, 2012) and this knowing self will enable participation and action.

Question two: Relationship - Could finding ways to support relationship enhance participatory practices?

In Chapter One, Harrison (2017) outlines many ways a child can be supported in reaching his or her full potential, healthy relationships being one of these important keys. In Chapter Two, Ilifa Labantwana (2014) reiterate this idea of responsive adults as well as in the Thuthong ideas for school readiness (2008). Many leading experts are now recognising the need for individuals to be connected and that professionals should have the capacity to care and build responsive relationships (Jamieson et al., 2017b, p. 93). Encouraging relationships with one another would have supported the objective of working towards school readiness within this community. Swanepoel and de Beer (2016) believe efficient interpersonal relations with good communication encourages good relations which motivate people and that for any group of individuals to reach certain goals, good interpersonal relationships are central to its success.

I think this aspect about relationship was not thought through enough for each session. I was focused on the objective of school readiness working towards an educational goal and I think creating more space for relationship was lost. The fact that I am not regularly in the environment also did not support relationships. For this type of learning group to work well there needs to be a facilitator all participants trust and know and want to work with. I don't think I was the right person for this particular group. In the evaluation some teachers acknowledged they would like support but finding time to do this is not easy. A teacher on

site would be the best person to know when these accessible times are. She could be the driver to head up times to meet and then sharing and learning can occur. This person needs to be motivated and organised. One participant stood out as someone who participated and believed in development and learning. Would she take this opportunity and use it to see her environment grow around her? Is finding a key person within a school to drive and motivate change going to contribute to more development and learning? Other ways I have found to support relationship and good continuity in discussions was to make sessions closer together and have more regular contact.

Question three: Feeling valued - How can I make sure every participant is valued and valuable?

Knowing this journey towards consciousness that I embarked on was a continuous one with self and others; embracing, appreciating and valuing each participant's perspectives was important and relevant. Rural Network (2009) describe this as enabling people to know where they come from and to feel proud of themselves no matter where they come from, no matter if they are rich or poor. I feel this helped me to get closer to thinking and working in a new and better and lasting way, that enhanced our capacity to live more fully and deeply (hooks, 1993). This I felt should have been the starting point, but unfortunately, we as a group only started embarking on this type of journey in Session seven. Not that the previous sessions were wasted but rather that there could have been more potential in the six sessions that came before. The potential was lost because the participants were not convinced yet that they were valuable and they could therefore not trust the process and not give themselves fully, allowing for more learning of self and for/with others.

Question four: Creating a learning space - Will creating a learning space support consciousness and in turn improve participation?

“Few of whom ever learn to see” Ben Okri (theguardian.com, 2016).

My reflections

My fear is that human beings will not see and remain blind to the challenges of injustice, and that power and self-protection will win. Is it too far, too high to overcome? Yes, through this project I have seen questioning can open some eyes, bring more consciousness, can promote thinking, can scratch open minds and create new things, new thoughts. But there is more. I want to know this secret to overcome the overcomeable, to break down the hardness and the severity of the heartlessness and persevere till there is breakthrough so that all are able to see and to see clearly, as seeing clearly will bring clarity and bravery towards action and active participation.

Hooks (1993) describes this consciousness as a critical awareness and engagement and that learning is about being an active participant. Mezirow's transformation theory (1997) reiterates becoming conscious through becoming critically reflective of one's own assumptions is the key to transforming one's taken for granted point of view.

The learning space was key to creating a place where participants feel safe and were encouraged to share (Simmons et al., 2009). Fun activities and ice breakers were useful in creating this type of space as I found in Session one when implementing Drawing outlined in Chapter Four. Unfortunately, this feeling of being safe needed to continue for participation to go beyond comfortable boundaries (Simmons et al., 2009, p. 90). Once I approached the sessions more honestly and openly, acknowledging my own vulnerabilities, the atmosphere to the sessions changed. Choice and flexibility also contributed to the learning space (Simmons et al., 2009). Because of CSRX, my flexibility as the researcher and facilitator was ongoing and for sessions planning action, choices were given to participants in planning their own action. From the findings, I have noticed that knowing self and that we are valued may contribute significantly to a person's individual learning space, as well as choice and flexibility. This knowing self may take time, and activities invested at the beginning of a research project to support knowing self and creating this more intentional space for learning, may support participation to improve and be more consistent in all sessions going forward.

Question five: Time - Will finding solutions to time threat, feelings of being overworked and busyness improve participation?

Barriers noted in evaluation were mostly that time interfered with school times. One participant commented, “I have lots of work and other activities already”. For relationships to grow there needed to be regular contact. With huge time restraints and busyness this was exceedingly difficult. I feel that shorter cycles of intervention packed into a term would be more beneficial as maintaining the relationships that are being built and having less time to forget about what happened before with more reminders to take action. It seemed staff were under extreme time pressures and anything additional felt like a burden. If actions are made into smaller goals that are more attainable, staff are more likely to be motivated and try to implement. It was noted in the findings that participation improved significantly when participants were given the planned action sheet in Figure 23 to support a specific goal that was attainable and relevant to their setting as they had created the choices themselves. “I could buy into it because I had been involved in its creation” (Simmons et al., 2009, p. 90).

Another factor to consider when thinking about time threat and teacher’s appearing to have a lack of motivation. Rewards and motivation need to be a part of the process to enable PAR (Child Advocacy Project, 2009). Frederick Herzberg quoted by Swanepoel and de Beer (2016) devised the two-factor theory of motivation. He explains that people are usually motivated and demotivated at the same time. Some situational aspects satisfy people and that then leads to motivation, while some aspects lead to dissatisfaction which demotivates people. It is a facilitator’s task to have as many satisfiers present as possible and as few dissatisfiers as possible. Satisfiers can be a sense of achievement and belonging to a group, a job worth doing well which will lead to something better for them or worthwhile to them and being recognised for their achievements as people naturally want to be recognised for their achievements giving them a sense of worth and dignity. He describes some dissatisfiers being adverse policies, including policies of government at all levels where the policy prevents the participants from achieving something, they then feel demotivated. There is a limit to participants’ willingness to sacrifice, especially when the work necessary to achieve something is hard and the returns are few, participants become disheartened. Very few individuals are prepared to give their all for the sake of the greater good of society. Participants need to gain something tangible.

Swanepoel and de Beer (2016) recorded a case study of a doctor who noticed mothers of children with kwashiorkor would bring their children to be treated at the local clinic, he would explain the importance of a healthy diet and nutrition. A few months later the children would be back with the same symptoms. The doctor spoke with these mothers and realised that they did not have the means to provide nutritious food for their children. A vegetable garden was devised as a project to assist as a solution to their problem. This was greatly successful and led to many more off shoots of projects supporting families in the community. There was a tangible reward. A healthy balanced diet of nutritious food for families as well as a monetary reward when selling the excess produce as well as future business opportunities with the wider community. What tangible reward did this school readiness project give to participants? The only possible reward was that children would improve towards more school readiness, which is not an individual reward for participants but rather a development in society which is not enough motivation for most individuals (Swanepoel & de Beer, 2016). Therefore, what could be a tangible reward for the participants? Resources in their classes towards school readiness? The case study above generated the reward from the actual project they began. Could recognition for achievements have improved participation from the beginning, something to work towards? Perhaps, a certificate of achievement of implementing actions towards school readiness. This could have been presented at the beginning of the project and seen as something to attain and steps on how that can be attained.

Question six: Hierarchy- Can school hierarchy influence participation?

Participant 3's acknowledgement of school hierarchy and power between different participants, namely the ECD teachers and the Grade R and Grade one teachers, employed by DoE, during the evaluation in Session nine, confirmed suspicions of the tendency of some participants to hold back.

Davidoff (1993) describes Principals in South African schools as powerful people and schools are structured in a top-down hierarchical manner. She explains that there are also informal power relations which have to do with age, gender, length of time at a particular school, personal relationships with people in authority that all contribute to power relations and freedom to participate within each group in school. Critical engagement with power relations is critical for the processes of empowering learning.

Freire (1978) describes teaching and learning resulting in the refusal of the one who teaches to learn from the one being taught, it grows out of an ideology of domination. During this project I have seen power dynamics unfold within schools, within systems and it has shown people can dominate and learning can be suppressed. Enabling an environment where all are equal and status is set aside is important for learning to take place for all involved. This occurred during the community mapping, in Session four, where ECD teachers' roles were seen as valuable and they were commended for the work they did. This equal status and feeling of being valued supported their participation greatly.

Through CSRX (Quin, 2014) I see from the analysis of the above questions, that I have recognised and become conscious of the barriers that were influencing and holding back participation during the research process. This was the beginning for finding solutions that may overcome these barriers and thus contributed to my own learning as facilitator and researcher. I had hoped in the concluding of Chapter Four that my responses would become more sophisticated through this process and consequent learning towards consequent action would emerge (Darling et al., 2016).

5.1.2 Participatory pedagogy using the A-ELC

Using the A-ELC, through participatory practices has been a way of seeking answers in my own self-reflection as well as for others, those in the community of practice, investigating ways to improve school readiness. This tool has been the core to every session and has generated the important data that has been gathered and collected in Chapter Four. It has also provided the method in which to analyse the data and recognised emerging themes.

Looking back at the sessions that were more focused on using the A-ELC questions practically in finding answers to school readiness through the SWOT analysis in Session two and force field analysis in Session five. Both of these sessions are found in more detail in Chapter Four. I noticed that participation was more active. Reflection from participants started to go deeper, linking participants to finding out more about the topic and what they thought about teaching practice towards school readiness in their own context. The below diagram, taken from Quin (2014), illustrates the cycle and particularly its questions as they

supported the most successful sessions outlined in the research project in more detail in Chapter Four.

Annotated Experiential Learning Cycle:
What are the **Questions** that each stage asks?

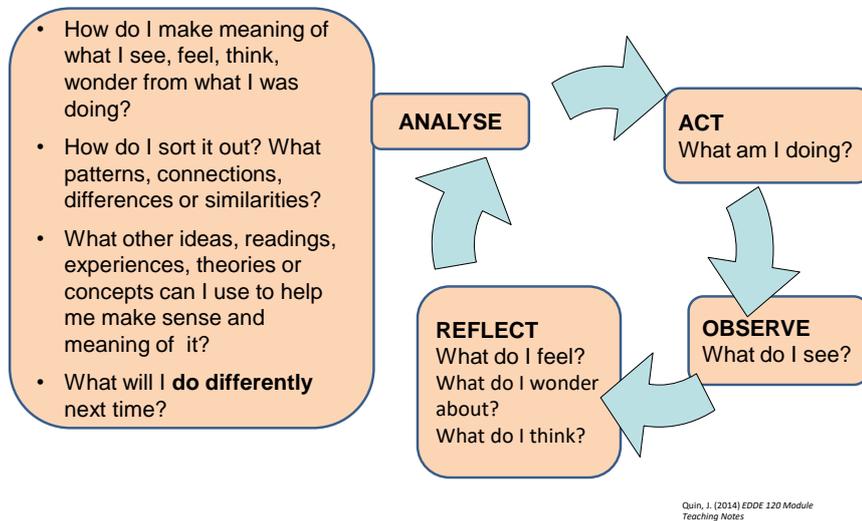


Figure 27. Questions that each stage asks according to Quin (2014, slide 19)

Going further into a deeper analysis using the A-ELC, Quin (2014) speaks about metacycles within the A-ELC which created a better, informed and improved action for each session. This was evident through my own development as a facilitator. The change in my self-reflection goes from surface sharing in Box 3 in Session one to an in-depth reflection and analysis in Box 9 in Session eight. In this way a thorough way of improving overall practice for all was nurtured in a purposeful way.

Question seven: Analysis- What would I do differently?

I would introduce the A-ELC and its questions earlier on in the project, possibly in the first session, as well as making guidelines for all to follow. This would ensure that the group knows what is expected as a group, enabling the participants right from the beginning to make a decision whether they wanted to be part of the learning process. Looking back, I see teachers who had been told to be there to please me and help me get my Master’s degree. They had little invested in the sessions besides being there because that was expected by authority. Guidelines and ways of working would support participants in knowing what was expected of them personally and then they could have the confidence to know whether that

was something they could or wanted to commit to or not. This resulting in “where the way of working and being, makes the will for working and being in that way” (Quin, 2014, slide 23). In other words, participants would be ready to work in a certain way, as had been established in the guidelines, wanting to be there to work towards change and ‘being’ in a different way.

Davidoff and van den Berg (2008) refer to this as negotiation as part of the planning stage where there is a need to explain to participants exactly what it is you would like to do and why you want to do it and gain their support for this. In the preparation stage of this research project, there was a pre-session explaining the objectives of the research project and why I was going to do what I wanted to do. I feel that this was not enough for participants to buy into the idea and that there was more that needed to be laid down upfront, than the objective and the ‘why’. I think this ‘more’ may mean having some sense of how the process was going to work (Davidoff & van den Berg, 2008). This may have posed a threat to participants being pushed out of their comfort zones early in the project, but it could be a real way for supporting the participants in making a more individual decision based on their needs and wants and not on what others have said, breaking down power and supporting individual value. I think this goes hand in hand with bringing in motivation for participants. Believing in the reason for doing the project may support motivation that will keep participants coming and participating which needed to be established at the beginning.

The processes of the A-ELC cycle provide the tools to support participation within the group, but before this can occur, motivation needs to be established. This needs to be a beginning process established in guidelines and ways of working as part of the set up process, supporting continuity, commitment and individual understanding of self and inner motivation established in each participant from Session one.

My reflections

I started to wonder about cultivating active participation. For participation to work well, a participant needs to feel safe. For a participant to feel safe, there needs to be trust between all. For there to be trust between all involved there needs to be relationship. For there to be relationship there needs to be time invested. For there to be time invested there needs to be ongoing continuous support on a weekly or daily basis. Trust grows stronger, a supportive environment is cultivated and learning can be enhanced and participants can be motivated. Participation is key to development. And relationship is key to real participation. Cultivate the relationship and the participants will grow in their own truths supporting knowing self and growing to know the others around them, namely the children in this instance, and knowing this may motivate them to make changes from what they see.

Concluding this question, it is evident that both CSRX (Quin, 2014) and A-ELC (Quin, 2014) have supported self and for/with others to improve participatory practices.

5.2 What are the school readiness strengths in Grade R classes according to the teachers?

Participants noted the following school readiness strengths¹²:

1. A sense of belonging to a group
2. An appropriate environment where children can take turns and learn to share
3. Awareness of children's whole development
4. Good communication skills, including a strength to listen to one another
5. Children's confidence and ability to ask questions
6. Fine motor skills
7. Teachers know how to discipline and the children know how to behave
8. Play is important

¹² The data were generated during the session on the SWOT analysis and the Thuthong SWOT analysis and is recorded in Chapter Four.

9. A daily programme is a strength as it supports the child's learning in all the different areas
10. Give children choices in their learning
11. Responsive adults

Referring to Chapter Two, these areas of strength identified are covered in the school readiness section of the Literature Review (Gordon & Browne, 2011; Ilifa Labantwana, 2014; Marais & Meier, 2012; Snow, 2006). Some of these strengths identified were during the Thuthong Session six, where teachers were encouraged to engage with Government policies (Department of Education, 2008). Some of these strengths were recognised as something they would still like to develop, especially when a certain barrier was holding them back from achieving this school readiness practice, for example a lack of space listed in the following section 5.3.

5.3 What are the problems about school readiness within Grade R?

Participants noted the following school readiness problems¹³:

1. Poor or lack of parental support
2. Parent and teacher communication poor
3. Poor language skills, including not knowing their own name or where they live
4. Lack of ECD background and few ECD centres in the area
5. Poor emotional skills of children
6. Different levels of learning and understanding of children
7. Amounting pressures on children
8. Teaching is a difficult profession
9. Teachers can be hard on children including, shouting, discouraging, threatening and discriminating against children
10. Cramped classes
11. Lack of resources

¹³ The data were generated during session two in the SWOT analysis and session during the Thuthong SWOT analysis and is recorded in Chapter Four.

Participants were encouraged in the research process to choose a problem, issue and/or threat that they would like to see change in their current educational context. The following issues were chosen and are outlined below in more detail.

5.3.1 Parental involvement is key to supporting school readiness

Jamieson, Berry and Lake (2017b) believe that adults working with children and families should be given time to develop relationships with the people they are supporting to offer direct and meaningful support to children and their families. They go on to explain that services need to adopt a multigenerational approach, caring for parents and caregivers and supporting them to provide ‘responsive care’, and stable environments for children because when “adults are supported and can model responsive relationships with each other and with children the benefits come full circle, ultimately helping children become healthy, responsive parents themselves” (Jamieson et al., 2017b, pp. 93, 95).

Two of the participants chose this threat that they would like to see change and planned actions towards this. They believed that this would make a significant difference in school readiness for the children they were working with. This belief is confirmed through Berry and Malek (2017) who discuss the important role of parents as critical for determining the pathway for lifelong health and continuous development in children.

5.3.2 ECD background supports school readiness

All participants agreed the importance of ECD background for school readiness skills in children and noted a considerable difference if a child had come to Grade R without having any ECD background at all, confirming UNICEF (2014) point of view in the importance and value of early learning as crucial to supporting a child in reaching their full potential. In support of this, Harrison (2017) believes cognitive development and language attainment happens before school and ECD, further supporting the importance of parents being a key to unlocking more school readiness potential.

Current research, according to Berry and Malek (2017) is saying that establishing emotional attachment between parents and infants the first three years of life is critical to their

development. Neuroscience indicates that responsive care is fundamental for healthy brain development, while poor maternal care can cause emotional stress and anxiety in infants and young children, in turn impacting on brain structure and function, and reducing children's ability to thrive (Berry & Malek, 2017). This research implies that ECD background begins before pre-school age and leads to children needing responsive adults from birth and being involved in their child's development. This confirms the importance of parental support from birth and continuing through the child's life course will benefit the child's development through every stage. Our approach to gaining parent support and adult responsiveness for school readiness in Grade R is beneficial, but it is becoming clearer it begins before this and needs to be established right at the beginning, in the first 1000 days (Berry & Malek, 2017).

In reality, the South African context is often not an ideal environment for supportive responsive adult care. According to Malek and Berry (2017) 21 percent of children in South Africa in 2015 were not living with either parent. In South Africa, primary caregivers have the main responsibility of providing nurturing care but there are often other members of the household who contribute to caregiving tasks. Practical caregiving is mostly assumed by women and in general, fathers' participation in caregiving duties is low. The vast impact of HIV/AIDS on South African children is continuing where relatives such as grandmothers and aunts have often assumed caregiving responsibilities for orphaned children. It is common to see shared caregiving with the other parent, relatives or neighbours as well as both children and caregivers moving between households as families try to support suitable care arrangements for their children and attempting to overcome challenges that affect daily living for many rural households in South Africa. Despite these challenges, research has shown parenting programmes are 'showing promise' in improving parenting skills (Berry & Malek, 2017, p. 55). These programmes have a focus on understanding child development, encouraging secure early relationships, providing a stimulating environment and promoting positive behaviour management strategies.

5.3.3 Lack of space

In order for teachers to be enabled to transform their teaching environments they should be given manageable caseloads and class sizes (Jamieson et al., 2017b). Participants agreed this was a consistent problem in ECD centres and schools, where children have to share benches and classes are overcrowded. Books tend to overlap each other while the children are working at their desks. There is insufficient space for appropriate early learning corners.

5.3.4 Lack of resources

One participant suggested developing more resources within her class. She felt this would support more school readiness. She suggested to meet for workshops to discuss use of resources and make toys from waste.

5.3.5 Lack of children's concentration

This was recognised as a weakness within the Grade R classes. Discussions around supporting children in extending their concentration spans and having brain breaks to keep attention. Some ways discussed to address this were to make shorter, fun activities and provide brain breaks for the children to keep their attention and interest.

5.4 How can we address these issues through a reflective participatory process?

Freire is best known for his attack on what he called the "banking" concept of education, in which the student was viewed as an empty vessel to be filled by the teacher. He notes that "it transforms students into receiving objects. It attempts to control thinking and action, leads men and women to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power" (Freire, 1970, p. 77). By going against this traditional view of teaching and learning in South Africa, facilitation using PAR, uses learning through active participation, supporting a new way of learning and coming against South African 'old' ways that supported oppression and inequality (Quin, 2012).

Using the A-ELC practically as outlined in Figure 28, where the participants were encouraged to think of their own actions to support the threats that they had identified as

important. The A-ELC enabled them to identify as well as plan their actions to support school readiness in their context and what they valued as important, contributing to motivation. This way of working in the research process can be aligned with Quin (2007) where teachers make the right decisions about what to teach, how to teach it to particular pupils in particular circumstances and contexts. In this way the research is contributing to the teachers' professional development bringing relevant information into focus and perhaps needs to be acknowledged as such to create motivation and a reward.

Nevertheless, having gone through this supportive and reflective process, not all participants were able to get to actions and something held them back from participating and therefore their issues they had chosen to address remained unaddressed and still an issue to face.

Quin (2014, pp., slide 5) describes human beings as “whole one's in one whole world”. Part of the how can we address these issues is closely linked to how can the researcher facilitate that each participant becomes more whole and more valued within this process towards self-actualisation and ultimately toward action. If we are not ‘whole one's’ our impact or motivation to impact will be greatly affected, thus affecting how we deal or don't deal with issues that we face. Starting with self is important in ensuring PAR is continued and successful. This is confirmed by Davidoff (1993) who believes that changing a teacher's practice begins with understanding their points of view and perspectives and that these need to be interwoven with the learning that occurs. Teacher's existing identities have to be explored which supports a re-conceptualisation of each individual teacher's normal (McCabe & Holmes, 2009). Knowing self, enables action (Quin, 2012, p. 21).

5.5 What are all the participants' evaluation of the interventions that are developed and applied during this participatory process?

5.5.1 Researchers Self-evaluation of all the interventions

Because of CSRX and the nature of this process, many of my reflections as the researcher on the outcomes of the interventions have been outlined in 5.1, specifically laying down the barriers to participation that I experienced over this study. The following barriers were recognised by me as affecting the process of this participatory project. Active participation in our South African context, relationship building, being valued, creating a learning space to

enable consciousness, time as a threat and school hierarchy. Through this study the multiple uses of focus groups have been greatly beneficial to supporting PAR; creating the learning space required for participation to grow and support gathering “rich experiential information” (Cyr, 2016, p. 4).

According to Cyr (2016) focus groups represent the public forum in which individual opinions are voiced. She argues that focus groups are useful for bringing together targeted groups of individuals to confirm or build upon evidence. They are a relatively inexpensive and efficient method to assess what people think about a question. Cyr explains that if this is all that a focus group objective is, it is nothing more than undertaking several interviews at once. She discusses focus group data as having three specific elements, namely the individual unit of analysis appropriate for triangulating other methods that corroborate or substantiate evidence collected, the group unit of analysis appropriate as a pre-test and finally the interactive unit that is appropriate for exploration. She believes that researchers are underutilizing focus groups. In group analysis, Cyr (2016, p. 16) explains that participants tend to “exaggerate, minimise, or withhold experiences” depending upon the group in which they find themselves. Therefore, the final outcome or consensus that emerges on a given question may not accurately reflect every participant’s individual opinion perfectly. Personal opinions are a product of the environment and are influenced by the individuals with whom we interact (Krueger, 1994).

Through this project I have focused on group evaluation and interactive data informing the PAR process and learning as I have found and agree with Cyr (2016) that using focus groups is an essential for crafting an argument. She goes on to suggest that focus groups can serve three very distinct research purposes. They can rapidly appraise the opinions of multiple individuals at once. They can reveal group-level consensus on phenomena. Finally, they can raise new questions or hypotheses about an issue or topic. In my reflections as researcher I need to look back to be able to look forward. Did this project serve these three purposes? Was I able to access the participants’ individual opinions at once, was I able to reveal group level consensus? Was I able to raise new questions about the issue of school readiness?

Even though, I found responses to activities and methods limited and strained, I saw an individual response from the data emerge, revealing participant’s own desires and consciousness emerging. Within group analysis, I saw groups reaching consensus and

moving towards change in small attainable steps and finally yes, new questions have been raised and enhanced by having a focus group to interact with and enable more consciousness and awareness to evolve through the interactions that took place. I believe that the rich experiential information described by Cyr (2016) accessed from focus group sessions have been a success in this project in varying degrees. With regards to individual level feedback, over the implementation of sessions seeing individuals grow and learn and gain confidence in expressing their views and ideas was ultimately one of the highlights of individual data gathered. Additional information gathered regarding the Research Question was hugely influenced by individual and group input especially when doing the SWOT analysis and community mapping sessions, group consensus was evident when all Grade R teachers supported an idea of an individual and implemented an action in every Grade R classroom, levels of group interest were evident especially around ECD support and parental involvement, and last but not least the platform to discuss high effort cognitive thought in a less burdened environment, working together to tackle complicated ideas.

5.5.2 Participant's evaluation of the research cycle and its benefits

Through this evaluation I have tried to include participants' specific responses in the evaluation session as to ensure that their voice comes through, which will allow for supporting evidence going forward for consequent action. Through this session it was evident that the participants believed that this process was beneficial to them and to the children they are working with in the following ways.

“I have learnt about what I really want to do in my creche”

This showed that through the participatory process, understanding of self and for/with others occurred for this participant and she acknowledged that she felt she understood what she wanted to see change. Based on these findings, CSRX including knowing self and for/with others was evident in participants (Quin, 2014).

“We give each other ideas and views which is good”

This showed that individual and group input, benefitted learning as a whole group. Based on these findings the multiple uses of focus groups benefitted individuals and groups of individuals (Cyr, 2016).

“This project helped me to share ideas and communicate with others”

“I make a difference”

This showed that value was starting to emerge for some participants, acknowledging their worth and ability to share good ideas with one another (Rural Network, 2009).

“Everything that concerns learners, involves learners as a whole”

“It opens up my mind about most things concerning school”

“It gives me new ways to see challenges of children”

This showed that these particular participants were starting to critically think about the impact of learning for children in their educational settings, supporting critical self-reflection (Quin, 2014) towards enabling change for school readiness (Jamieson et al., 2017b).

“This helped me face challenges in my teaching and in the children’s learning”

This showed that the sessions supported overcoming challenges and planning certain action in a practical way for some teachers (Davidoff, 1993).

“This project has helped me to improve”

This showed that this project has supported active participation (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012) towards ‘better’ consequent action.

Based on these findings it is evident that PAR, through using CSRX and the A-ELC, has supported all participants in working towards change and development for self and for/with others through actively participating in this project. Each participant has acknowledged learning in some way and each is on their own individual path towards change, but together, through focus groups sessions, this growth has been enabled.

5.6 What are the implications of these findings for the development of school readiness programmes within this community of practice?

From the evidence I have outlined, I have seen the following implications develop through CSRX and through using the A-ELC.

5.6.1 Active participation enables learning

It is evident that through active participation, learning was enabled. For this to occur, self-actualisation was nurtured by using dialogue between participants which enabled knowing self and the world around them better.

Unfortunately, Davidoff and Walker believe that reflection is not always enough to shift existing practice (Davidoff, 1993) which was evident in this project. Hooks (1993) believes that teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualisation. This requires active participation and an openness to be able to teach in a manner that empowers learners. In other words, being fully present is a challenge not to hold back, but allowing ourselves to be vulnerable. Hooks (1993) explains that being vulnerable with others, being present and engaged with others can enhance pedagogical practices, engaging others and supporting their knowing that enhances their capacity to live fully and deeply.

I have learnt through my experiences within this project, drawing meaning from them, by seeing, thinking and wondering about them (Andreson et al., 1995; Kolb, 1984) that learning is a continuous process, grounded in experience where knowledge is continuously derived from and tested out in the experiences of the learner (Kolb, 1984). With this in mind, knowing this journey that I have embarked on is a continuous one and will help me to help myself and others in embarking on this journey of consciousness; embracing, appreciating and valuing each of their perspectives as important and relevant. Rural Network (2009) describe this as enabling people to know where they come from and to feel proud of themselves no matter where they come from, no matter if they are rich or poor. I feel this is helping me to get closer to thinking and working in a new and better and lasting way. A way that enhances our capacity to live fully and deeply (hooks, 1993) and that may push future participants in being able to overcome uncomfortable boundaries within.

Young (1990) reiterates my thoughts and learnings bringing to the fore a very pertinent thought on where action could be taken from. He describes an inward dimension where practitioners need to understand themselves and one another and need to 'grow up' and develop greater inward strength. He believes as I believe from the evidence gathered that some of the barriers we face are those that lie within ourselves and our desire to be understood and valued.

5.6.2 Overcoming challenges

'Think big start small' (Davidoff, 1993)

Davidoff (1993) suggests that it is crucial to start where teachers are and this is not necessarily a tradition of innovation and reflective practice. She goes on to explain that researchers need to think big but start small. Relationships need to be founded on respect and trust and provide a 'safe' environment so that teachers can begin to share their own anxieties and uncertainties as well as their hopes and ideals. Robinson (1993) believes that emancipatory action research operates in real situations with real people and their real resistances and programmes that move too far or too fast beyond teachers' interests stand little chance of teacher involvement or implementation. She goes on to explain that one small step for one teacher may indeed be one great leap for changing practice. It is evident from the findings that small steps were indeed made for each participant involved and these should be seen as leaps towards change.

5.6.3 Identifying problems and encouraging 'consequent action' from individual participants

On reflection, what I had considered as an important threat to school readiness was not necessarily the same views as any of the participants. In fact, every participant had a different focus on what threat they wanted to see change, affirming that participatory practice is the only way to really establish what is meaningful for an individual (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012).

My main observations in Session one through Drawings in Chapter Four was that classrooms were formal and that there was possibly a lack of early learning through play that was taking place. Alphabets were taught formally using rote learning and chanting. In Figure 14, 15 and 16, there are self-representations of teacher's pointing to a letter with a stick at the front of class. From the findings it is evident that most Grade R and Grade one teachers are inclined to teach more formally. Could this be that teachers are teaching the way they have been taught as young children? Were they modelling the formal way of teaching that has been in place since before government placed more of an emphasis on ECD? Then through the Thuthong SWOT analysis in Session six, all participants agreed that an important aspect of school readiness was identified as being active play. Yet, nobody chose this as a threat to change, but if I had chosen what threat to change, it would probably have been this. The

participants had other ideas and thoughts as was planned for. I was relieved that my thoughts had not influenced their thinking and coercion, as outlined in the methodology in Chapter Three, was not in play through the PAR process. Instead other pertinent aspects for school readiness were discussed and raised in 5.3.1 through to 5.3.5. This linked closely to the ideas of the Child Advocacy Project (2009) where the voices of the community were heard and formed the basis of the entire project processes, as well as Davidoff and van den Berg (2008) describing a teacher realising his students need not be uninvolved but could be actively involved in the learning process.

“What we wanted was a framework that would not in any way pre-determine the agenda or topics for discussion. There could be no curriculum set by anyone except the movement militants themselves” (Rural Network, 2009, p. 12).

5.6.4 My recommendation for practical changes to PAR processes to support active participation

Through emergence (Darling et al., 2015) my own consequent actions emerge and are documented below.



Figure 28. Active participation

The following practical changes could be made to influence the planning for such a participatory research project to support more active participation and therefore more success in supporting change in the participants' lives and the context within they live and work.

These are:

1. Having a strong sense of way of working and communicating this clearly to the group (Davidoff & van den Berg, 2008).
2. Start with guidelines formulated together as a group supporting strong sense of way of working (Davidoff & van den Berg, 2008).
3. One of the guidelines to included would be the commitment to reflection in a book to support consciousness (Quin, 2016) and self-actualisation (hooks, 1993).
4. Acknowledge power in the beginning¹⁴ and establish base for trust and relationships to form.

¹⁴ Learnings taken from Session seven in Chapter Four.

5. Keep sessions not more than two weeks apart, acknowledging time as a threat to relationships¹⁵.
6. Facilitator to self-reflect after every session and plan ‘consequent action’ for next session based on outcome of CSRX (Quin, 2014).
7. Continuously refer, throughout PAR project, to A-ELC and A-ELC questions to accelerate learning and facilitate consciousness (hooks, 1993; Quin, 2014).
8. Have a focused programme, compacted and specific, to keep momentum and motivation¹⁶.
9. Establish an appropriate and tangible end reward for group right at the beginning of project to support motivation (Swanepoel & de Beer, 2016).
10. Start with small attainable goals (Davidoff & van den Berg, 2008).

5.7 Concluding this Reflective Analysis

In the wise words of one participant of this project, “love is very important, love means everything. We must do everything with love,” compounding in ways to transform South Africa by expecting care and responsiveness from adults who work with children. Hooks (1993) refers to this as teaching in a way that respects and cares for the souls of the learners as being essential to providing the necessary conditions for learning to begin.



Figure 29. Teacher’s responsiveness nurtures healthy relationships

¹⁵ Learnings taken from Chapter Five, Question five in section 5.1.

¹⁶ Participation increased with a focused plan in Session seven.

“Professionals should have the capacity to care and build responsive relationships with children and families” (Jamieson et al., 2017, p. 93) confirmed by Thuthong Grade R document (Department of Education, 2008) believe responsive adults are important in school readiness development. The Rural Network (2009, p. 12) talks about a ‘living learning’ that really connects with what’s happening in ‘everyday work’. It is accessing these learnings that are enabling for participants. Accessing this, starts to access inner value, value for one’s own life, acknowledging what has come before, looking within and establishing identity. Teacher identity (Robinson & McMillan, 2006) is shaped by different interests and ideologies which are culturally specific and historically grounded, influencing thinking and identity which is most likely sub-consciously.

This Reflective Analysis section of Chapter Five, has revealed that through experiential learning, linking to lifelong learning in real experiences, old ways can be disrupted and lifelong learning becomes a road to walk along, ‘learning all the time in all parts of our lives’ (Rural Network, 2009, p. 42), and in this way PAR, using CSRX and the A-ELC have facilitated this process for all participants within this participatory action research project.

Conclusion

In the introduction of this concluding Chapter Five, the Findings revealed that through the process of CSRX and using the A-ELC questions, new wonderings about and thinking, were created and documented, representing the next part of the metacycle that will conclude this participatory action research project. Within this Conclusion, I will attempt to answer and address these wonderings in hope for smarter and adapted responses to emerge (Darling et al., 2016), which will inform not only the way in which I am, my being and doing (Quin, 2014) within my own life affecting the way in which I work, but also becoming a contribution for how to facilitate PAR within any community of practice to enable change and development. First, I will address the limitations of this study, then I will establish what does this mean for moving forward and can answering, ‘What would I do differently to support all participants to see more clearly? How can the ‘few’ become ‘more’ who learn to see and have the support to create change in the context that they work and live? Could this support for change be included in ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning where no-one is left behind?’ contribute towards knowing self ‘better’ for and with others.

5.8 Limitations of this study

The sample of teachers chosen for this study represent one community, within a primary school within a rural setting, within KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. Because of the in-depth nature of this study and the small sample it represents, the data generated may not be generalised to another context and has poor external validity. Nevertheless, participatory action research has transformative potential because of the local knowledge and accounting for human action, therefore a greater validity has been produced because of this factor. Within this study, the participants were actively involved in the research process, they had co-ownership of the research process and into the investigation of school readiness programmes, built on what was already known, as well as supporting self-actualisation of all participants. This PAR process (Child Advocacy Project, 2009) enhanced validity by enabling the researcher's understanding of self and for/with others and being able to interpret this human action (van der Riet, 2008).

5.9 Moving Forward

“Stories are the secret reservoir of values. Change the stories individuals and nations live by and tell themselves and you change the individuals and nations...if they tell themselves stories that are lies, they will suffer the future consequences of those lies...if they tell themselves stories that face their own truth they will free their histories for future flowerings” (Clarke, 2014).

In answering the following Main Question, ‘How can participatory practices enable the development of school readiness programmes among all participants within a rural school in Kwanzimakwe, Ugu, KZN?’ I am moving forward to greater understanding of how this study contributes to the field of school readiness and a community of practice of teachers enabled through participation to support change.

As discussed in the findings in Chapter Four, emergence (Darling et al., 2016) became evident through the data that were produced, supporting this particular community of practice to improve school readiness practices and programmes towards enabling change. Following this approach, it is both probable and possible that another community of practice may

participate using these specific processes, being enabled to supporting change within their settings and community. In this way, a thorough way of improving overall practice can be reproduced through emergence (Darling et al., 2016), using PAR with CSRX and the A-ELC to support participatory practices within any community of practice. PAR (Child Advocacy Project, 2009) through the A-ELC and CSRX (Quin, 2014) enables development in many ways as we have seen through our discussions.

More specifically, using the A-ELC questions (Quin, 2014) can produce ‘being’ in a new way for individuals. It can create a learning space that brings awareness and consciousness (hooks, 1993). It can deepen self-actualisation and self-awareness through critical self-reflexive practices (Quin, 2014). Through these processes, it can bring about a new way of doing called consequent doing, where actions are smarter, more relevant and addressing grassroot problems, which many South Africans are facing and living with, within a broken society with unequal power (Lukes, 2005), programmes and provisions (Jamieson et al., 2017). This is a beneficial process for all who allow themselves to be vulnerable in the process and are brave to overcome all the obstacles that hold the process back from what it can achieve. If an individual or a group of individuals, participate and become engaged, they can be enabled to develop programmes and practices to do with school readiness or any other focus, that they may choose.

‘What would I do differently to support all participants to see more clearly? How can the ‘few’ become ‘more’ who learn to see and have the support to create change in the context that they work and live?’ I want to continue to understand how to support a long lasting change within communities, and to do so without domination and unconsciously manipulating others to do things in the way I think is best, as hooks (1993) expects a way of teaching that respects and cares for the souls of the learners as being essential to providing the necessary conditions for learning even to begin. All participants need to be given the opportunity to face their own truths, and these truths may be buried, they should be able to recognise and take out the lies and replace with their own truths, freeing themselves for growth and development (hooks, 1993; Robinson & McMillan, 2006; Rural Network, 2009).

‘Could this support for change be included in ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning where no-one is left behind?’ Looking at the global SDGs

(United Nations Development Programme, 2018) outlined in Chapter One and Two, as well as current South African research engaging others to ensure all children not only survive but thrive (Jamieson et al., 2017a). These goals are concerned with sustainable development and implementation, offering equality in education and reducing poverty in the process. I believe that through participatory processes using more critical self-reflexive activities, every participant is slowly taken on an individual journey, affecting self, towards enabling change for self and for/with others, as Quin (2017, p. 2) refers to as 'one degree at a time'. These small differences or steps are shown through various ways like becoming more open, trusting pedagogical processes, gaining confidence and finding motivation to implement action, in order to enable change within our own worlds of self and then of that of the others we are affecting through our teaching practices. Becoming a caring and 'responsive adult' (Berry & Malek, 2017; Department of Education, 2008; Jamieson et al., 2017b) can be enabled, which will in turn support sustainable development for bettering the world around us.

Through this participatory action research project (PAR) (Child Advocacy Project, 2009), I have found that participation, using critical reflexivity (CSRX) and the Annotated Experiential Learning Cycle (A-ELC) (Quin, 2014), supports greater consciousness (hooks, 1993) in all participants, enables engagement and responsiveness, and builds understanding and knowledge of self and for/with others. These essential ingredients work together to create a recipe that can generate and facilitate change, that has emerged from within, and can therefore be seen, as not only sustainable, but self-motivating and unlimited.

It is my hope as Simon (1992) hopes that people will come together, those who share the way of political commitments and educational perspectives to be able to learn together, refine their vision and support their diverse efforts as educators. This is my motivation for initiating a participatory action research project and my hope that participatory practices are a way and means of supporting others in discovering their purpose with self, others and the world.

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Appendix 1: UKZN Ethical Clearance Certificate



27 July 2016

Mrs Catherine Elizabeth Mather-Pike (214568826)
School of Education
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Mrs Mather-Pike,

Protocol reference number: HSS/DMS/016M

Project title: A participatory action research project to improve school readiness in rural Grade R classes in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application received on 01 July 2016, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted FULL APPROVAL.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol (i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods) must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....
Dr Shenaka Singh (Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Ms M Peden
Cc Academic Leader Research: Dr SB Khoza
Cc School Administrator: Ms Tyzer Khumalo

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

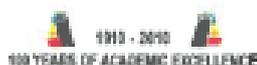
Dr Shenaka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag 354001, Durban 4006

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/3588/3557 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4699 Email: zimbao@ukzn.ac.za / scymnom@ukzn.ac.za / rohuna@ukzn.ac.za

Website: www.ukzn.ac.za



Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

Appendix 2: DoE permission to conduct research



education

Department:
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Phindile Duma

Tel: 033 392 1004

Ref.: 2/4/8/808

Mrs CE Mather-Pike
P.O. Box 1537
Port Shepstone
4240

Dear Mrs Mather-Pike

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"A PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT TO IMPROVE SCHOOL READINESS IN RURAL GRADE R CLASSES IN KWAZULU-NATAL, SOUTH AFRICA"**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 27 May 2016 to 30 June 2017.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Connie Kehologile at the contact numbers below
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report / dissertation / thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

Pinetown District

Adv. MB Masuku
Acting Head of Department: Education
Date: 31 May 2016

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

POSTAL: Private Bag X 9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200, KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa ...dedicated to service and performance
PHYSICAL: 247 Burger Street, Anton Lembede House, Pietermaritzburg, 3201. Tel. 033 392 1004/beyond the call of duty
EMAIL ADDRESS: kehologile.connie@kzndoe.gov.za / Phindile.Duma@kzndoe.gov.za
CALL CENTRE: 0860 596 363; Fax: 033 392 1203 WEBSITE: WWW.kzneducation.gov.za

Appendix 3: Principal's permission letter



CONSENT:

I MARIA MZELUMU (ACTING) (full name of Principal) have been informed about the study entitled 'A participatory action research project to improve school readiness in rural Grade R classes in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa' by Catherine Mather-Pike.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study is to improve school readiness.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my staff's participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that my school may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at cathy@siyakwazi.org or cell: 0712746285.

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my focus group discussion YES / NO

Use of my photographs for research purposes YES / NO

WMzeleni
Signature of Principal

08/06/2016
Date

PROVINCE OF KZN UMNYANGO WEMFUNDO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
2015 -06- 08
P.O. BOX 325, MUNSTER, 4278 ITHONGASI PUBLIC PRIMARY EMIS 169645

Appendix 4: Plan for action sheet

April	May	June
1 Sa	1 Mo PUB HOL	1 Th Research session
2 Su	2 Tu ACTION	2 Fr
3 Mo	3 We ACTION	3 Sa
4 Tu	4 Th ACTION	4 Su
5 We	5 Fr ACTION	5 Mo
6 Th	6 Sa	6 Tu
7 Fr	7 Su	7 We
8 Sa	8 Mo ACTION	8 Th
9 Su	9 Tu ACTION	9 Fr
10 Mo	10 We ACTION	10 Sa
11 Tu	11 Th Research session	11 Su
12 We	12 Fr	12 Mo
13 Th	13 Sa	13 Tu
14 Fr	14 Su	14 We
15 Sa	15 Mo	15 Th
16 Su	16 Tu	16 Fr
17 Mo	17 We	17 Sa
18 Tu	18 Th	18 Su
19 We	19 Fr	19 Mo
20 Th research session	20 Sa	20 Tu
21 Fr	21 Su	21 We
22 Sa	22 Mo	22 Th
23 Su	23 Tu	23 Fr
24 Mo ACTION	24 We	24 Sa
25 Tu ACTION	25 Th	25 Su

What can I do differently?

Session 1: Thursday 20 April 1:15-2:30

Session 2: Thursday 11 May 1:15-2:30

Session 3: Thursday 1 June 1:15-2:30

Date:	Activity:	Main question:
20.04.17	Planning action	What can I do differently?

11.05.17	Analysing action	How can I make sense and meaning of what I see, feel and wonder about what I was doing? What can I do differently?
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1.06.17	Evaluation	How can I make sense and meaning of what I see, feel and wonder about what I was doing?
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PLAN FOR ACTION

What do I want to see happen?

What will I do differently?

THREAT	OPPORTUNITY	HOW	WHO
		DAY 1: DAY2: DAY 3: DAY4: DAY5: DAY6: DAY7: DAY8: DAY9: DAY10: Reflections	

Appendix 5: Action research cycle evaluation

Questions		Reflections
What do I see about this whole project?		
What do I think about it?		
What do I wonder about it?		
What was best session and most useful for me?		
What was worst session and least useful to me?		
What do I think about the research cycle ?		
How does this help me in what I do?		
Did I plan an action ?		

How did it go?		
What could have helped me do this better?		
What stopped me from doing this? What were the barriers I faced?		
What could I have done differently ?		
What do I think should happen next ?		
What support do I need to be able to do more action?		

Any other comments:

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