



**INTEGRATED PLANNING OF ACTIVITIES USING THE NATIONAL  
CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND  
EDUCATION RURAL CENTRES**

By

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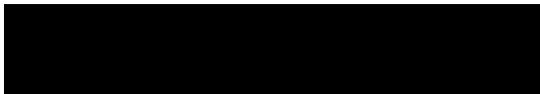
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Supervisor: Professor Joyce Nontokozo Mashiya

**2021**

## DECLARATION

I, **Cynthia Zanele Zama (211560590)**, declare that this thesis is my original work that has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification in any other Higher Education Institution. The work described in this thesis was carried out in the Early Childhood Education Discipline, School of Education, University of Kwa-Zulu Natal under the guidance of my supervisor. I declare that all the sources consulted have been acknowledged by means of complete reference.



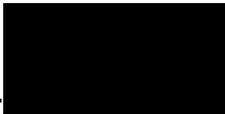
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## ABSTRACT

Young children easily learn where teaching and learning activities are integrated in relation to their age and interest (Ebrahim & Irvine 2012; Murriss, 2019). The introduction of the South African National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for children from birth to four years provided guidance to the planning of quality experience and equal learning opportunities in the variety of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) centres. This research study aimed to explore rural ECCE teachers experiences of working with the NCF for the planning of teaching and learning activities that are integrated to prepare three to four years children for school readiness as they advance further to the Reception year class (Grade R). This is primarily to probe how they learn to follow the guidelines of the NCF, identify and bring together teaching and learning activities from the six Early Learning Developmental Areas (ELDAs) included as subjects in the document. The research study also aimed to develop the Transformative Planning Model for Integrated Activities (TPMIA) as the original contribution to be followed when other ECCE teachers in the related context plan the integrated activities. Jack Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory and the theoretical contributions of Thomas Kuhn (1970) and Jurgen Habermas (1971) framed the study and assisted to understand integration as the meaning making process that requires preparedness, willingness, and the desire to engage in the new learning process. This qualitative case study targeted three ECCE centres that adopted the NCF for guidance in the rural Umbumbulu area in KwaZulu-Natal Province in South Africa. The research study was underpinned by the interpretive paradigm and three ECCE teachers from each centre were purposively sampled. Data collected from the nine participants using semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis were organised into themes using the data analysis spiral as an inductive method of analysis. The findings suggested thematic approach as the useful strategy to integrate teaching and learning activities for the development of young children. The participants in all the three rural ECCE centres organised suitable times to collaborate, communicate, share knowledge and select suitable themes for integration. They learned the NCF content, organise teaching and play resources and identify teaching and learning activities from the six Early Learning Developmental Areas (ELDAs). The study discovered the development of the daily programme (time-table), lesson planning and the organising learning environment as important steps in the planning process. The important and heartening outcomes were that after learning the NCF, rural ECCE teachers embraced their new insights with conviction and explored new roles as interpreters of the new curriculum,

creative thinkers, reflective teachers and assessors for learning. However, challenging factors including lack of support from the Department of Basic Education, lack of physical space and the shortage of teaching and play resources contributed negatively to the integrated planning process. The researcher recommends further workshops and training for the rural ECCE teachers to further learn the vision of the NCF. Moreover, further research of a similar nature is also recommended in the ECCE sector.

## ISIFINGQO

Ucwaningo luveza ukuthi abantwana abasebancane bafunda ngokuqonda bejabule ngohlelo lokufunda imisebenzi edidiyelwe ((Ebrahim & Irvine 2012; Murriss, 2019). Iningizimu Afrika ifake amava okufunda kothisha be-ECCE ngokusungula i-National Curriculum Framework (NCF) njengesiqondiso somsebenzi esiqondisa ukufundisa nokufunda kwezingane ezineminyaka emi-3 kuya kwe-4 be-ECCE. Inhlosonqgangi ukubheka indlela othisha esigabeni sokuqala i-Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) abahlela ngayo imisebenzi edidiyelwe yokuthuthukiswa kwezingane ezincane ezikhungweni ezintathu ezisendaweni esemakhaya. Ngokusebenza ngokubambisana, ababambiqhaza baholwa ekuhlanganiseni imisebenzi yokufundisa neyokufunda ebhekelele okuyisithupha okuyi-Early Learning Developmental Areas (i-ELDA) egqugquzela izindlela zemfundo esigabeni se-ECCE, kubhekwa ukulungela kwezingane isikole ngaphambi kokuya esikoleni. Enye inhlosonqgangi ukubamba iqhaza ekuthuthukisweni kwe-Transformative Planning Model for Integrated Activities (TPMIA) engasetshenziswa kunoma yikuphi okuqukethwe okuhlobene ne-ECCE. Ithiyori yokuguquka kokufunda kaJack Mezirow (1978) kanye neqhaza lethiyori kaThomas Kuhn (1970) noJurgen Habermas (1971), lube nomthelela okhulu ekwenzeni kwami lolu ucwaningo ngoba lungisize ngaqonda ukuthi ukulungiselela ukufundisa kuwuchungechunge oludinga ukulungela, ukuzimisela kanye nesifiso sokubamba iqhaza ekucebiseni izinqubo zokufundisa nokufunda. Ngiquke indlela yekhwalthethivi ukwenza lo msebenzi ukubheka izikhungo ezintathu ze-ECCE endaweni esemaphandleni eMbumbulu esifundazweni saKwaZulu-Natali eNingizimu Afrika. Indlela engiyisebenzisile yasekelwa yi-paradigm yokuhumusha. Othisha abathathu be-ECCE abavela esikhungweni ngasinye basampulelwe ngamabomu ukuhlola kwami izinqubo zokuhlela ukusungula amasu okufundisa nokufunda asebenzayo ezinganeni ezisencane. Imininingwane yaqoqwa kulabo babambiqhaza abayisishiyagalolunye, besebenzisa izingxoxo ezihleleke kancane (semi-structured,) inhlolovo (interviews), izingxoxo ezigxile emaqenjini kanye nemibhalo yabo yokuhlela eskeniwe (scanned) futhi yahlaziywa. Idatha ihlelwe ngezindikimba, kusetshenziswa ukuhlaziywa kwedatha njengendlela yokuhlaziya yokufaka okuthile (inductive method). Okutholakele kuphakamisa ukuthi indlela yendikimba iyasiza ekuhlanganiseni imisebenzi yokufundisa nokufunda ebhekise ezinganeni ezisencane ezineminyaka emi-3 kuya kwe-4. Ababambiqhaza be-ECCE kuzona zontathu izikhungo zasemakhaya ze-ECCE basebenze ngokubambisana ukutolika imihlahlandlela ye-NCF nokwenza imisebenzi ehlanganisa ukusetshenziswa

kwezindikimba esekwe yi-ELDA, ukuze kufundiswe futhi kufundwe ngempumelelo. Ukusebenzisa imihlahlandlela ye-NCF ngokubambisana nakwezokuxhumana kuthuthukiswe ukuqonda kwabo futhi kwabasiza ekwabelaneni ngobuhlakani babo nolwazi ekukhetheni izingqikithi, ukuhlela imisebenzi edidiyelwe, kanye nokusetshenziswa kwezinsizakusebenza zokufundisa. Indlela eyaqokwa yileyo ebandakanya izinhlelo zansuku zonke, ukulungiselelwa kwezifundo kanye nokuhlela izindawo zokufunda zangaphakathi nangaphandle zemisebenzi yokudlala edidiyelelwe ukufundisa. Imiphumela ebalulekile nekhuthazayo ukuthi labo thisha be-ECCE babenentshisekelo, bamukela ukuqonda kwabo okusha ngokuqiniseka, futhi benza izindima zabo njengabahumushi bekharihulamu entsha (NCF) ongqondongqondo bokudala, futhi babonakalisa ukuzethemba. Yize noma bezikhona izinselelo, othisha bafunde ukuthuthukisa imisebenzi yokufundisa nokudlala kanye nokuzenzela izinsizakufundisa. Ngokutholakele kulolu cwaningo, kunconywa ukuthi imihlangano yokucobelelana ngolwazi yenzelwe bonke othisha abasezikhungweni ze-ECCE lapho bengakwazi khona ukukhipha khona i-NCF, bahlole imisebenzi edidiyelwe yokufundisa nokufunda, futhi bafunde ukukhuthaza ukubamba iqhaza kwabazali ekwakheni izinsizakufundisa ezifanele izingane. Ucwaningo lwesikhathi esizayo lwento efanayo luyanconywa ukuthi luqhubeke ukuze luqaqe futhi lukhanyise indlela edidiyelwe yokufundisa nokufunda kulo mkhakha we-ECCE.

## **DEDICATION**

This PhD thesis is the attainment of my parents' goals! o Mazibuko

I dedicate this effort to my late mother Hellen Ntombo (MaMkhize), my late father Joseph Vusumuzi, my late brother Professor Vuma, my late sister Viera Zandile Mazibuko and my late mother in law Priscilla (MaTyiso) Zama.

It is a great pleasure to present my original contribution as the expansion of the boundaries  
of knowledge in the  
**Early Childhood Care and Education**

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

**ECCE** - Early Childhood Care and Education

**NCF** - National Curriculum Framework

**MRQECDE** - Minimum Requirements for Programmes Leading to Qualifications in Higher Education for Early Childhood Development Educators

**NELDS** - National Early Learning Development Standards

**ANC** - African National Congress

**NIECDP** - National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy

**NPC** - National Planning Commission

**NDP** - National Development Plan

**ECE** - Early - Childhood Education

**ECD** - Early - Childhood Development

**UNESCO** - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

**DBE** - Department of Basic Education

**ELDA**- Early Learning Developmental Area

**CAPS**- Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement

**DOE**- Department of Education

**HSRC**- Human Sciences Research Council

**DSD**- Department of Social Development

**DOH**- Department of Health

**GRT**- Grade R Teaching

**CL**- Contact Learning

**TLT**- Transformative Learning Theory

**HOD**- Head of Department

**EFA**- Education for All

**UNICEF**- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

**NGO**- Non-Governmental Organisation

**NAEYC**- National Association for the Education of Young Children

**NRC**- National Research Council

**NCERT**- National Council of Educational Research and training

**NQF**- National Qualifications Framework

**KDB**- Know/Do/Be

**SCSA**- Save the Children South Africa

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**APPENDIX I:** Focus group interview schedule

**APPENDIX J:** Document analysis guide

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**APPENDIX L:** Daily programme sample

**APPENDIX M:** Lesson plan template

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# CHAPTER ONE

## ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

*Teachers are adult learners and their development is a form of adult education to bring about change in their teaching practice and improvements in children's learning*

-Gregson & Sturko, 2007-

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter orientates the reader to the research study. It sets the scene for the exploration of planning as a basis for integrated teaching and learning activities involving young children in the rural Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) centres. ECCE in the education context is part of the Early Childhood Development (ECD), but it targets children from birth to four years. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for children from birth to four was pivotal as the professional guiding policy in this investigation that was conducted in three rural ECCE centres. Instead of the pivotal school learning areas (Mathematics, Language and Life Skills), six Early Learning Developmental Areas<sup>1</sup> (ELDAs) namely Well-being, Identity and belonging, Communication, Exploring mathematics, Creativity and Knowledge, and understanding of the world, formed the basis for teaching and learning as introduced in the ECCE curriculum (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012;<sup>2</sup> Murriss, 2019). Although the ECCE curriculum content is not intended to be used in a prescriptive manner, the NCF is essentially a guiding document that directs the development of the appropriate learning experiences for babies, toddlers, and young children (3 to 4 years old). Therefore, in exploring the integration in the ECCE sector, it was imperative to unfold the NCF content and the teaching and learning activities for children 3 to 4 years of age. Against this background, the chapter provides a brief history of the ECCE sector, the context and the vision of the newly devised ECCE curriculum, and the essentials contained in the document to understand what young children are expected to learn before proper schooling. The discourse in this chapter also synthesises the aim, the research problem, the research context, the rationale for the study, the study objectives and research questions. The theoretical framing of the study is discussed briefly as it is presented in more depth in the

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<sup>1</sup> These six developmental areas will be referred to as ELDAs or ELDA for a singular learning area.

<sup>2</sup> Note: Although the NCF was only issued in 2015, Ebrahim and Irvine were principal contributors whose work started in 2012. Their contributions are thus intrinsically associated with the NCF.

next chapter. The research design and the methodology, and the limitations of the study are presented before the definitions of key terms and the summary of all the chapters in this thesis.

## **1.2 Background to the study**

The NCF became the attainment of the country, to redress the shortfalls of the NIECDP and to professionalise the ECCE sector. It thus serves, inter alia, to develop skills that were lacking without compromising quality and equity for all children from different settings of the world (Campbell-Barr & Bogativ, 2017; Rudolph, 2017). ECCE centres regardless of the wealth status of parents, required to make the NCF meaningful for the development of children before they start formal schooling (Aubrey, 2017; UNICEF, 2019). However, there are some assumptions that urban centres already prospered while rural centres lagged as they lack opportunities and support in their areas (Atmore, 2018).

This research study was influenced by the rural ECCE teacher's positive effort and passion to follow the guidelines of the NCF regardless of the challenges they may experience in the planning process (Mwamwenda, 2014; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2015; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2019). They committed to engage in the new learning experience for the development of young children that are school ready. For many years, rural ECCE centres have been associated to the scarcity of teaching and play resources that hinders the planning of teaching and learning activities at the interest of young children (Mbarathi, Mthembu & Diga, 2016). They mostly lack funding as they struggle to meet the funding requirements of the DBE and the Department of Social Development (Department of Social Development, 2015; Sun, Rao & Pearson, 2015; Kirsten, 2017; Sibanda, 2018). For instance, in 2015/2016, of the large number of 992 093 children in ECD centres only approximately 86 309 were subsidised by the Provincial Government of KwaZulu-Natal (Rakabe, 2016).

In the ECCE sector, young children learn better where teaching and learning activities are aligned to the real-life related themes and play resources (Campbell-Barr & Bogatic, 2017; Wardani et al., 2019). Therefore, learning occurs as they see, touch, feel and explore using safe material that are appropriate for development (DBE, 2015). Unlike the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) directive used in the ECD (Grade R) and Foundation Phase (Grades 1 to 3) providing themes for integration and the examples of teaching and

learning resources (Department of Basic Education, 2011), the NCF supports integration without the examples of themes as they have to relate to the context.

When conceptualising the research study, it was pivotal for the researcher to accentuate literature and the importance of support as the contributions to the planning process (Bento & Dias, 2017). Where others lack proper planning ideas (Labuschagne, 2015; Aubrey, 2017), they work in teams to learn from each other (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012). Regardless of the ECCE sector changes in the post-apartheid era, the researcher became very much concerned about the realities of the rural ECCE teachers, opportunities, strengths, and weaknesses to bring together a seamless, integrated teaching and learning plan for young children's development. The problem statement of the research study is presented below.

### **1.3 Brief History of Early Childhood Care and Education**

Edu-care that focused on the education of young children was the first step adopted in the years leading to democracy in South Africa as it encapsulated the credence of *care* rather than merely keeping watch over young children in Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres (Department of Education [DoE], 2001). The aim was to compensate for the care and education of small children that could not be found in all homes. To address educational challenges, the National Government of South Africa appointed the De Lange Commission to consolidate, amongst others, the provision of care and education that would prepare young children for proper schooling (Biersteker, 2010). Prof. J.P. De Lange, who was the Rector of Rand Afrikaans University, led the committee to reform education in South Africa that commenced its activities in 1981 (Human Sciences Research Council [HSRC], 1981). The De Lange Commission highlighted the importance of early childhood development (ECD). It used this as an umbrella and inclusive term to consider all aspects of children's cognitive, social, emotional, physical and social development. Children from birth up until the age of nine were included and important under this term (Department of Education, 2001; UNESCO, 2006; Republic of South Africa, 2015). The term, with its acronym ECD, is still applicable and generally encompasses children's care and education before they start the first grade of formal school. At its inception, ECD fell under the auspices of the Department of Basic Education (DBE), the Department of Social Development (DSD), and the Department of Health (DOH) (Biersteker, Dawes, Hendricks & Tredoux, 2016). The appointed Ministers heading these three departments worked together for the development

and care of young children in the education context and ECD became a national priority (Hebe, 2015; Atmore, 2018).

In 1994, after the African National Congress (ANC) had won the first democratic elections, the first black President of South Africa introduced policies to address the inequalities that existed in education at all levels. However, challenges persisted in ECD, particularly among poor and rural populations (Atmore, 2013; Biersteker et al., 2016; Rudolf, 2017). Noticing the continuation of past inequalities even after the publication and implementation of the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECDP) in South Africa, the government acted positively to address the needs of children at all educational levels as the '*Vision 2030*' that aimed to address many challenges by the year 2030 and the development of early childhood education (ECE) was highlighted as a matter of urgency.

The South African government, under the leadership of former President Jacob Zuma, prioritised ECD for children from birth to 4 years of age. The National Planning Commission (NPC), was appointed as a committee of twenty-six members to identify the challenges that negatively affected the development of education and other spheres in the country (Rudolf, 2017). The Commission identified poverty and inequalities in education as the main problems affecting the country. Therefore, ECCE was identified as an essential constituent of ECD and it was urged that this sphere had to be developed optimally (Republic of South Africa, 2015). Moreover, the care and education of children from birth to four years was identified as a global priority (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2015). UNESCO positively influenced ECCE development in South Africa.

It is essential for this research study to highlight that the National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS) became the first official initiative to emphasise both care and education for children from birth to 4 years of age in the South African context (Department of Basic Education, 2009; Biersteker et al., 2016). NELDS was introduced and used as a teaching resource and policy incentive for curriculum content and the establishment of related goals for children from birth to four years. However, it struggled to facilitate the required transformation and the anticipated development for all young children (Ebrahim, 2011; Biersteker et al., 2016). It was identified inappropriate in meeting the envisaged demands of the country. After some consultative processes, the South African

National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for children from birth to four years was introduced in 2015 (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012; Department of Basic Education, 2015). The related vision of the new curriculum is discussed below.

#### **1.4 The vision of the new curriculum in South Africa**

Due to robust Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) discourses, integrating teaching and learning activities gained extensive attention after had been identified as having a positive impact on young children's growth, development, and school readiness (Stoian, 2016; Somantri, et al., 2019). Ideally, integration permits appropriate interactions for the cognitive, social, emotional, and intellectual needs of young children irrespective of their context or background (Biersteker et al., 2016; Gordon & Browne, 2018; Murriss, 2019). It is accentuated as the vision of the South African NCF for teachers and adults to plan the activities that work best for children from birth to four years to prepare them for formal schooling. Integration as the concept is identified as an antidote to rigid and outdated teaching and learning activities incorporating the six ELDA's for children from variety of context to appropriately learn. The approach and the framework became the provision of early childhood education from low socioeconomic backgrounds and accommodated even the centres and teachers that were marginalised by the inequalities of apartheid (Department of Basic Education, 2015; Rudolph, 2017; Policy on Minimum Requirements for Programmes Leading to Qualifications in Higher Education for Early Childhood Development Educators [MRQECDE], 2017). The NCF changed and shifted the vision of the country and professionalised the ECCE sector. Registered, unregistered, rich, poor, urban, and mostly rural ECCE centres have subsequently been transformed according to parameters set out in the NCF (Aubrey, 2017).

The researcher felt compelled to conduct this research to explore ECCE teachers' experiences in the planning of teaching and learning for young children as the targets of the envisaged change occurred in the sector. It supports further research to strengthen the national concern to support the development of young children while prepared for school readiness (Ebrahim, 2011; Campbell-Barr & Bogatic, 2017; Wardani, Sunardi & Suharno, 2019). In the process, the focus became more to the vision of the NCF to consider all ECCE teachers as capable beings to share their experiences and knowledge for the development of young children (DBE, 2015). Hence, the opening quotation in this chapter, "Teachers are

adult learners and their development is a form of adult education to bring about change in their teaching practice and improvements in children's learning (Gregson & Sturko, 2007) resonates with the vision of the NCF. How the participating rural ECCE teachers' earlier practices had been altered in light of the new development in the sector became a crucial part of the research study (Murriss, 2019). In essence, the positive response and passion for encountering the rural ECCE teachers with passion and enthusiasm exuded in welcoming the NCF (irrespective of the challenges they experienced) incited this research study. While rural ECCE centres had been flagged for poor planning practices due to a lack of attention to policy directives (Labuschagne, 2015; Atmore, 2018), the researcher as a teacher felt compelled to explore the new policy directives, new developments and adopt the stance that earlier literature emphasise early educational practices for the holistic development of children as encouraged by Kamerman (2006), Clasquin-Johnson (2011), and Atmore (2018). The research study took consideration to facilitate transformative learning experiences in the ECCE. Hence the principal foci of the study were ECCE teachers' experiences, including all the learning opportunities, willingness to embrace new experiences, and the shift unfolded within the ECCE sector. The era of the National Curriculum Framework is discussed below.

#### **1.4.1 The era of the National Curriculum Framework**

As enshrined in the Bill of Rights that is part of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 1996), the National Curriculum Framework fulfils the promise of equal education by the National Government post-1994 (Rudolph, 2017). The NCF was then developed as a result of the urgent need to ensure quality and equity education for the first 1 000 days of a child's life (Department of Basic Education, 2015). It illuminates the aims of ECCE and presents developmental guidelines, examples of teaching and learning activities, and provides assessment guidance. Instead of subjects, the NCF proposes six Early Learning Development Areas (ELDAs) and the teaching and learning activities to be delivered in an integrated manner. The aims of each ELDA in a child's voice, developmental guidelines and the assessment ideas for the different categories of child development were included (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012). It is now mandated for teachers to identify and integrate teaching and learning activities to ensure equal learning opportunities for all young children (Ebrahim & Irvine 2012; Millei & Imre, 2015; Murriss, 2019). The NCF supports care and education for all young children and combats inequalities that affect

children and leave them at risk of harm (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012; Rudolf, 2017; Murriss, 2019). The NCF thus aims to democratise young children's education while they are being prepared for school readiness (Department of Basic Education, 2015). The NCF content and how it intertwines the six ELDAs are briefly discussed below to conceptualise what young children expect to learn and the ideas for assessment thereafter.

#### **1.4.2 The Early Learning Developmental Areas (ELDAs)**

The NCF defines the curriculum as “a meaning-making process that informs quality teaching and learning for the best interest of young children” (Department of Basic Education, 2015, p. ii). It is designed as a flexible resource to support the holistic development and assessment of babies (birth to eighteen months), toddlers (eighteen to thirty-six months) and young children (three to four years of age). The term ‘holistic development’ alludes to the development of the child’s cognitive, emotional, social, and physical skills through play as it was explained above. The examples of teaching and learning activities form the basis of what aspects of learning to be addressed and assessed in ECCE sector (Department of Basic Education, 2015; Murriss, 2019). A brief explanation of each ELDA and the ideas for assessment provided in this section serves as an introduction while further related activities are discussed in the literature review chapter. The six ELDAs are: well-being, identity and belonging, communication, exploring mathematics, creativity and knowledge, and understanding of the world.

##### **1.4.2.1 Well-being**

Well-being is the first ELDA that is mentioned in the NCF. It emphasises good health, safety, and active play participation for all young children in the learning environment (Berry & Malek, 2017; Azzi-Lessing & Schmidt, 2019). Well-being recognises physical, social, cognitive and psychological connections to all educational experiences (Rudolf, 2017). Therefore, well-being activities has to be integrated in all other five ELDAs of the NCF for intellectual support, nutritional care, growth and emotional development of children from birth to four years (Ebrahim and Irvine, 2012). Children’s right to health care is also supported by Section 27(1) of the South African Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Berry and Malek (2017) revealed that the activities that address young children well-being relate to the development of self-esteem and the confidence they need

as they play to learn in the ECCE learning environment. Identity and belong is introduced as the second ELDA below.

#### **1.4.2.2 Identity and belonging**

Identity and belonging are associated with social development, secure relationships, and the celebration of differences at a young age (Rudolph, 2017; Department of Basic Education, 2009; 2015). Teaching and learning activities for young children should help them make sense of their surroundings and support them in realising their full potential at an age-appropriate level early in life (Leggett & Ford, 2016; Kirsten, 2017). The activities also support the development of self-esteem for children to make group connections and positive engagement as they play to learn. Young children are exposed to various opportunities to learn self-respect, build relationships with others and develop self-confidence as they try out new ideas in the learning environment (DBE, 2015). Communication is discussed as the next ELDA below.

#### **1.4.2.3 Communication**

Instead of using the term languages, ‘communication’ is used for early language development. Communication skills permit young children to explore the use of language needed for school readiness (Department of Basic Education, 2015). Language learning at this stage is emergent and occurs through play. It is explored through rhymes, music, songs, and stories that are relevant to each child while the child’s home language is used for learning and instructions (Maluleke, Khoza-Shangase, & Kanji, 2019; Department of Basic Education, 2015). Teachers and adults in the ECCE have to model good communication practices for young children to imitate and develop similar skills. Exploring mathematics is discussed as the next ELDA below.

#### **1.4.2.4 Exploring mathematics**

Children explore mathematics as the fourth ELDA in the NCF. Teaching and learning early mathematics relates to real-life experiences for young children to easily make connections. Children variety of age-appropriate activities and the entire world in their sphere (Hutchinson & Pournara, 2011; Aunio et.al., 2016). Using real objects for teaching and learning encourages children to touch, see, and explore mathematics in the learning environment as the vision of the NCF (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012). Creativity is introduced as the fifth ELDA below.

#### **1.4.2.5 Creativity**

Creativity is the fifth ELDA that forms part of the Life Skills program in the formal schooling programme. Creativity is encouraged through art-expressive opportunities for young children to naturally learn as they investigate, discover and solve problems through play (Kindler, 2010). Children also learn as they sing songs, dramatize, and dance in an organised learning environment (National Early Learning Developmental Standards [NELDS], 2009; Ibrahim & Irvine, 2012). Learning become an opportunity to produce new and find solutions to real-life challenges that are presented at an age-appropriate level. Knowledge and understanding of the world is discussed as the sixth ELDA below.

#### **1.4.2.6 Knowledge and understanding of the world**

The sixth ELDA, knowledge and understanding of the world, provides young children with opportunities to explore, learn as they interact with the world around them (Ibrahim & Irvine, 2012; Department of Basic Education, 2015). They learn about different places, people, plants, animals, and objects from the natural learning environment. The ELDA also encourages investigation, experimentation, and problem-solving at the level of the child. Safety of all teaching and learning resources and all play materials is taken into consideration at all times.

#### **1.4.3 Assessment in the NCF**

While the NCF supports the equal provisioning of care and education for all children from birth to four years, achieving its objectives depends on how the activities are planned to suit the needs of all children regardless of their backgrounds (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012; Rudolph, 2017). Therefore, assessment for and of learning is identified as part of the integrated learning process in the NCF. For that reason, Epstein et al., (2004) suggest assessment as a guiding tool to support children with barriers to learning while the effectiveness of the teaching approaches is monitored. In the early years, assessment is the ongoing process that follows the policy guidance as included in the NCF (National Research Council, 2008; Department of Basic Education, 2015). It was introduced to monitor developmental needs and learning needs to achieve equity for all children (Biersteker et al., 2016). Moreover, assessment is used as foundations for lifelong learning and guidance to prepare young children for school readiness (Campbell-Barr & Bogatic, 2017). After this background to the ECCE and to the NCF, background to this research study is provided below.

## **1.5 Problem Statement**

Although planning to ensure that teaching and learning occur in an integrated manner is not a new experience in South Africa (Meier & Marais, 2018), very little is known about learning, preparations and ECCE teacher commitment during the first 1 000 days of life after the introduction of the NCF in 2015 as a result of the inequalities identified in the early years of child development (Dawes et al., 2016; Aubrey, 2017; Atmore, 2018). The NCF content for children from birth to four years focuses on the six ELDA's for ECCE teachers and adults working with young children to identify teaching and learning activities to be integrated at the interest of all young children (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012; Department of Basic Education, 2015; Murriss, 2019). However, anecdotal evidence through interactions with ECCE teachers showed that their exposure to the intricacies of the NCF requirements had never occurred. For instance, only a half-day workshop had been conducted where a very limited number of ECCE teachers attended. The departmental officials had not conducted follow-ups to the centres in rural areas for further training to clearly interpret the vision of the new curriculum. Moreover, the NCF is presented in English which is the second language of the vast majority of teachers and young children in rural ECCE centres. The NCF thus had to be accessed in the second language of all the research participants who lacked guidance and training to do so. This research study was thus conceptualised against the backdrop of these rural centres' previously and current disadvantaged status based on the assumption that they lacked guidance and continuous support to access the NCF and enhance their practice. The researcher therefore, viewed this study as an opportunity to make meaning as required in an understudied area of the ECCE sector. Thus, needed to explore rural ECCE teacher's ability to understand the demands of this guiding document as well as the manner in which they accessed the requirement to integrate all teaching and learning activities as required.

Teachers require in-depth knowledge of curriculum content to effectively plan the integrated teaching and learning activities (Van Niekerk et al., 2017). Moreover, as the NCF is not a prescriptive document, it requires the creative application of previous knowledge and skills to effectively deliver meaningful learning to the young children under their care (Murriss, 2019).

## **1.6 The Purpose of the Study**

This research study was prompted by the shift that had occurred in ECCE as a result of the introduction of the NCF. The purpose of this qualitative research study was thus to explore the integration of teaching and learning activities for young children as the meaning making effort for ECCE teachers. Furthermore, the research study intended to contribute to scholarly knowledge of change in the ECCE phase by means of the originally designed Transformative Planning Model for Integrated Activities [TPMIA] in ECCE that may be utilised in the related contexts. To achieve this purpose, all the planning practices of the participating rural ECCE teachers were explored and evaluated against the NCF guidelines.

## **1.7 The Context of the Study Sites**

The research study population was located in the Umbumbulu educational district that is a rural area falling under the Umlazi District. The area is located about forty kilometres from Durban. This area falls under the traditional jurisdiction of a headman (izinduna) and chiefs (amakhosi) that are collectively acknowledged by the Traditional Leadership and Governance Act No. 5 of 2005 (KwaZulu-Natal Legislature, 2005). Councillors in this area are elected as administrative political leaders in different wards. Councillors and traditional leaders thus serve collaboratively as leaders in the area. Machen (2011), who conducted a research study in the same area, mentions that infrastructure exists in the form of schools, clinics, and small businesses. Moreover, young children's education is appreciated and prioritised by the community and therefore many young children attend ECCE centres and schools.

Both formal and informal ECCE centres operate in the study area. The formal centres are registered with the Department of Social Development and appear on its database. Teachers are also appointed to work in these formal ECCE centres and they are now committed to follow the guidance of NCF for the planning of teaching and learning activities. Before the study commenced, anecdotal evidence suggested that many teachers working in these rural ECCE centres were passionate about change and had transformed their practices in line with the visions in the NCF – but they had done without the active support and involvement of the Departmental officials. This might be the reason why literature revealed that rural centres were still affected by many challenges, including minimum planning skills among

teachers and a lack of teaching and learning resources for young children development (Labuschagne, 2015; Ntumi, 2016). Moreover, that other teachers were teaching without any appropriate ECCE qualification. A surprising informal observation was that some ECCE teachers in the rural context were committed to change regardless of the challenges associated with this process (Mezirow, 2000) and with the lack of official support they had to endure.

### **1.8 Integrated Learning in the Early Childhood Development Phase**

The motive for presenting this thesis and its guiding topic will unfold in more detail in the literature review. It should suffice to state here that planning and the teaching and learning activities that are integrated were pivotal themes. Although integration occur in different contexts, in the context of this research study integration means combining, connecting, and aligning teaching and learning activities for appropriate learning opportunities involving young children (Campbell-Barr & Bogatic, 2017; Wardani et al., 2019). Integration is thus a teaching approach to bring together separate components of the content of different subjects into a whole for children's best learning experiences (UNICEF, 2014; Kamara et al., 2018; Meier & Marais, 2018). The integrated activities lead children to deep learning as it covers content from different topics that are theme related at the same time. "Where activities are integrated, positive attitudes develop for continued successful learning and excitement throughout the early grades" (Mumford, 2000, p.4). Integration is acknowledged as a 21st century teaching skill as it is argued that teaching and learning activities should not be restricted by subjects' boundaries (Soni, 2015; Drake & Reid, 2018).

Against this backdrop, the current study focused on the new learning experiences of the participating ECCE teachers as they were guided to collate activities based on the ELDAs in order to devise meaningful learning experiences for the holistic development of young children in their care (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012; Department of Basic Education, 2015). The inter-relatedness of different ELDAs was pivotal and the integrated planning of activities for teaching and learning based on the guidance provided by the NCF document that teachers had accessed. The rationale for the study is discussed below.

## **1.9 Rationale for the Study**

The rationale for the study was driven by my personal academic and professional experiences as well as my vision that ECCE should be developed as an important component of ECD.

As an ECCE lecturer at a private institution my job description was to lecture ECCE and Grade R Teaching (GRT) Contact Learning (CL) modules and to supervise students specialising in ECCE during practice teaching. In the course of the duties, it was surprising to encounter rural ECCE centres that had transformed to embrace the NCF as the new official ECCE curriculum document. These rural ECCE teachers were passionate about the development of young children and understood that play is a pivotal learning tool in this phase. The centres registered under the DSD database while also registered and appeared on the DBE database and they were introduced to the NCF. Some had also formed forums to share their skills and support one another in accessing the NCF. However, it was clear at the time that teachers from those centres had not been exposed to further developmental workshops after an initial introduction to the framework by educational officials. The institution developed good relationship with these rural centres as they accepted student teachers and as a researcher I began to realise them as capable beings and teachers who are also confident in their role as student teacher mentors. They were expected to be thorough and to present work of high standards to the institution, yet the researcher became curious to learn to what extent their understanding of the NCF (which is presented in their second language) impacted their ability to unpack the requirements for integrated teaching and learning in ECCE.

Rural ECCE centres are known with many challenges that affect learning and development and that many might struggle to meet the objectives of the NCF, which is a notion that Labuschagne (2015) and (Aubrey, 2017) shared. The researcher was also particularly interested to unpack the planning skills that the teachers utilised as important steps in the model to be proposed and used in similar contexts.

As a foundation for the investigation, the researcher first engaged in an intensive literature review and discovered that earlier scholars attested to the fact that ECCE centres tend to lack teaching and learning resources, government support, funding, and planning, while it

also confirmed the information that many teachers working in these centres might have no relevant qualifications (Grieshaber, 2008; Knafo, 2016; Sibanda, 2018). Aubrey (2017) also discovered that some of the centres lacked play resources while some teachers were not creative or motivated enough to create their own resources, which is a common requirement in ECD. Understanding the realities that the rural ECCE centres faced and how they utilised the NCF meaningfully was thus an important driver of this study. Moreover, learning how they overcome the challenges they faced in the rural ECCE centres was pivotal.

In conceptualising the study, the researcher was motivated by the suggestion by Van Niekerk et al., (2017) that teachers' experiences and their qualifications positively contribute to the way they put ideas together when planning for teaching. However, not all the ECCE teachers would be academically qualified to teach young children. But, realised how much as a researcher could learn from them by collating their realities and how well they still managed to make sense of their environment. The researcher was thus, keen to unpack how they devised learning opportunities to achieve the objectives of a curriculum that was a new experience in the ECCE (Stoian, 2016; Drake & Reid, 2018). The researcher also envisaged that learning from the practices of rural ECCE teachers might contribute to the findings of and recommendations of the research study. In the investigation, thus focused on the ELDA as the new formal bedrock of ECCE teaching and learning while exploring the practices of some teachers who might not have been formally trained in the delivery of the new curriculum. The research aims, objectives and the key research questions are presented below.

### **1.10 Aim, Objectives, and Key Research Questions**

The aim of the study was to explore the extent in which teachers make the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) meaningful for the planning of teaching and learning activities in the quest to prepare young children for school readiness in rural ECCE centres.

To achieve the aim the specific objectives were:

1. To investigate how the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) is used to guide the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities for young children in rural ECCE centres.

2. To explore ECCE teachers' experiences of using the NCF for the execution of the teaching and learning activities that are integrated in rural ECCE centres.
3. To examine ECCE teachers' planning roles after using the NCF to integrate teaching and learning activities for young children.

Based on the above objectives, the study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. How is the NCF used to guide the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities for young children in rural ECCE centres?
2. What are ECCE teachers' experiences of using the NCF for the execution of the teaching and learning activities that are integrated in rural ECCE centres?
3. To what extent do ECCE teachers reflect on the planning roles after using the NCF to integrate teaching and learning activities for young children?

## **1.11 Introduction to the Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

This study was underpinned by Mezirow's (2000) transformative learning theory (TLT) and the theoretical contributions to educational development by Kuhn (1970) and Habermas (1971).

### **1.11.1 Mezirow's transformative learning theory**

Mezirow's (1978a) well-known theory was initially developed to explain the learning experiences of adult women returning to school. He framed his theory from the perspective that the effects of thinking, attitude, beliefs, and actions are transformed when new learning experiences occur. Since his first scholarly contribution, Mezirow expanded his work (1991, 1997; 2000; 2009) and highlights that educational practices can be transformed by learning and development that occur in different phases. Therefore, his works argue that transformative learning (TL) practices that occur when adults desire to learn are driven by a paradigm shift (Kuhn, 1997), diverse forms of learning (Habermas, 1984), new learning experiences, empathy, and the influence of perspective.

In brief, the paradigm shift concept is a notion of empowerment that occurs in self-directed people who aim to learn about and promote effective guidance (Ritz, 2010; Santalucia &

Johnson, 2010). In an educational context, Orman (2016) associates a paradigm shift with practitioners of a particular discipline who learn and then share their experiences with others to encourage change in their teaching environment.

Mezirow argues that TL results from meaning-making opportunities that happen after some challenging experiences (Mezirow, 1997; 2000). He emphasises that diverse forms of learning occur at different stages and argues that the TLT relates to learning skills and awareness involving critical thinking and empathy that are instrumental in changing people's views of the world (Mezirow, 1978). His theory accentuates gaining new knowledge and helps to make sense of the impact of all previous experiences relevant to a new experience (Mezirow, 1978; Hatherley, 2011). Thus, the researcher believed that would find earlier experiences and skills of the participating ECCE teachers would have guided them to access the NCF and to plan the integrated teaching and learning activities. In this regard, the Department of Basic Education (2015, p. 2) states the following:

*The National Curriculum Framework provides learning guidance for adults to work together in planning integrated activities for the needs of young children in diverse settings.*

The TLT supports planning to create new ways of doing things after learning. It therefore emphasises the learning process in which adult learners (in this context ECCE teachers) examine their meaning and perspectives to transform their practice (Vaughn, 2016). Mezirow further suggests that learning is a collaborative learning effort (Hatherley, 2011).

Mezirow acknowledges Thomas Kuhn's and Habermas's contributions to his TLT but his personal and unique contribution is that change often involves progression through ten stages (Mezirow, 1978a; Christie, Carey, Robertson & Grainger, 2015). Mezirow (2000) identifies ten stages of transformative learning and argues that learners learn by exploring new roles and reaffirming transformation. However, transformative experiences may vary from person to person while some people do not necessarily experience all the phases (Kitchenham, 2008). Five of the phases (Figure 1.1) of transformative learning that are identified by Mezirow in his TLT related to the research. Hence, the planning process in this research study is regarded as an action to explore the new curriculum before the actual

teaching, which is a process described as the fifth stage of Mezirow's TLT presented in a figure and discussed below.



**Figure 1.1: The five phases of transformative learning as relevant to this study**

Source: Adapted from Mezirow, 2000

The first phase in the figure, disorienting dilemma, is identified as a pre-existing stage in the meaning-making process. Mezirow (1991) suggests that when the new experiences do not fit the existing mental structures frustrations occur. When people's beliefs become the opposite of the experiences they become angry and stressed. Some people may even give up after experiencing challenges during the new experience. However, those who are passionate, strive to achieve their set goals which is a process that contributes to transformation (Mezirow, 1978a; 1990). Roberts (2006) argues that a disorienting dilemma has varied effects on adult learners. He adds that once learners begin to explore different options in a new course of action they undergo a positive shift and become stimulated and motivated to explore new roles in the learning process. Thus, wanted to determine transformative learning experience as the introduction of the NCF in the rural ECCE centres and also to learn how ECCE teachers transformed their practices, regardless of the challenges in the planning process.

Mezirow (1997) suggests self-examination as the second phase in learning and he argues that this leads to the acquisition of new skills and knowledge that engender change. Self-examination thus encourages and benefits change and critical assessment and guides learning. Therefore passion, collaboration, and thinking exercises are important components for people to transform. Critical assessment of one's assumptions as a meaning-making exercise is also important when people set out to identify what it is they want to learn (Alfred, 2002). Thus, when creative thinkers and problem solvers set objectives, they anticipate positive results which, in turn, helps them to combat challenges. Thus, the researcher needed to determine the extent to which the participating teachers set objectives and strove to achieve them in the ECCE context.

Thomas Kuhn's (1970) theory on paradigm shift and Jurgen Habermas's (1971) critical theory and domains of learning made positive contributions to Mezirow TLT that framed the research study are briefly referred to below.

### **1.11.2 The paradigm shift theory of Thomas Kuhn**

Thomas Kuhn, an American physicist and a philosopher, is known as the father of the paradigm shift theory that related to this research study. He identified problems as the seeds of revolution and paradigm as the collection of ideas, principles, and attitudes that influence the conduct of scientific inquiry (Goldstein, 2012; Mezirow, 1991). This theory was applicable to my investigation in an educational context to determine a paradigm shift that occurred for the ECCE teachers after being exposed to the NCF and after many years of challenging experiences related to young children's development. The researcher also needed to determine if these teachers shared similar views and perspectives and if these were drivers of change.

### **1.11.3 Jurgen Habermas's critical theory of learning**

Habermas contributed significantly to the educational field by identifying the importance of communicative learning, sharing of information, social skills, and the value of recognising people's points of view (Mezirow, 1978b). He also highlighted the importance of meaning making, critical reflection, and experiences that transform learning (Mezirow, 2000). He suggested that adults who experience challenging conditions can undergo transformation at

various stages as they share knowledge, ideas, and problems to learn together. The limitations of the research study are discussed below.

### **1.12 Introducing the research design and the methodology**

This interpretive research case study adopted a qualitative approach to explore the phenomenon under study. The interpretive paradigm suitably supported qualitative approach as set out to obtain rich information from the participants' interpretations of their realities. Social interactions and all the practices of the ECCE teachers became relevant as the study unfolded.

Nine purposively selected ECCE teachers provided rich data that contributed to achieving the objectives of the study. The three ECCE rural centres under study transformed to the guidelines of the new framework. The sample included teachers that were allocated to the development of young children. They were involved in planning integrated activities and their contributions thus aided in answering the research questions. Nine participants were a suitable number as there is no defined sample size for qualitative case studies of this nature (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

All the collected data were coded and arranged into categories for the identification of themes (Stake, 2005). The inductive data analysis approach using Creswell and Poth's (2018) data analysis spiral was suitable for analysing the data collected by means of semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis. Utilising the data analysis spiral was a simple and straightforward approach that allowed findings to emerge from the themes. After data collection, the data were transcribed and classified into themes (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014) that are presented in Chapter Five of this research study.

### **1.13 Limitations of the Study**

A primary limitation of the study is that it was qualitative in nature and used case study design and the findings cannot be generalised (Yin, 2011; Creswell, 2014). A very small number of participants were sampled for their experience of using the NCF for planning the integrated activities in the ECCE centres represented a very large population. Only nine participants were interviewed and shared their planning documents and the focus group interviews had three participants from each centre. However, the study aimed to make positive contribution for the development of babies, toddlers, and young children.

Another limitation was that due to the lack of training and support some participants might find it extremely difficult to verbalise their understanding of the NCF in English which may contribute to limited data during the one-on-one semi-structured interviews.

Another limitation of the study was that the recipients of the integrated teaching and learning activities, the young children could not be included as they were minors and were thus not able to express their involvement in the planning process. Their voices were thus silent in this study. However, it often referred to 'The voice of a child' in the NCF document itself and strongly urge readers and scholars to access this document intensively to understand the power of a child in the ECCE sector. The study was also limited to pre-Grade R education hence the first grade of formal schooling was peripherally referred to but not studied in depth for the confirmation of results. Definitions of the key terms are provided below.

#### **1.14 Definition of Key Terms**

**Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE):** This phase in the education structure involves the support of children's growth, development, and learning from birth until they enter the Reception year class (Grade R) or primary school (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2015; United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2012). In this phase adults' obligation to invest in the early years of children's lives is highlighted while the needs of teachers, educators, and all adults working with children are also accentuated (UNESCO, 2015). ECCE is linked to the achievement of the goal of Education for All (EFA) (improve quality education as part of the fifth Millennium Developmental Goal) that were agreed upon at the World Conference in Thailand in 1990. South Africa is one of the countries that committed to the Millennium Goals that were to be achieved by 2015. These goals include policy guidance and the provision of better care and education for all children, especially those that are deprived and require equitable education. The NCF that was issued in 2015 is evidence of this commitment. Dawes et al., (2016) state that the importance of ECCE in South Africa was emphasised after the development and performance of children from lower quantile<sup>3</sup> centres had been identified as poor and unequal to those of children from wealthier quantile

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<sup>3</sup> All South African public ordinary schools are categorised into five groups, called quintiles, largely for purposes of the allocation of financial resources. Quintile one is the 'poorest' quintile, while quintile five is the 'least poor' (Grant, D. 2013).

centres. Persistent inequalities in the education system were thus identified in South Africa and a myriad of poor children were deemed not ready for schooling.

In the context of the research study, ECCE services are provided by day care centres, crèches, and early childhood development (ECD) centres. ECD centres are thus referred to as ECCE centres in this thesis. Whereas ECCE is the term used in South Africa, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is used for similar services in other countries. ECEC that is used in other countries is briefly explained below to unpack the similarities with South Africa.

**Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC):** Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is defined as the compulsory service and contribution to cognitive stimulation, child development and early education (Kamerman, 2006). In countries like the United Kingdom, China, and Vietnam and in various countries in Europe ECEC is associated with positive economic and social outcomes depending on the positive integration of policies that address the importance of quality care and education for all children (Eurostat, 2016). It is identified as the obligation to the provision of inclusive education ensuring suitable services that are adapted to the diverse needs and capacities of families and their socioeconomic backgrounds. Similar to South Africa, ECEC is the investment in young children to break the cycle of being disadvantaged and to facilitate parents' involvement in the education of young children (Heckman, 2012). The service is provided in public funded and private centres where children are supported. Therefore, ECEC and ECCE are similar terms referring to the broader concept of ECD.

**Early Childhood Development (ECD):** Early Childhood Development (ECD) is a broad term that refers to an educational phase when stimulation activities for the holistic development and support of children from birth to at least nine years of age are vital (Department of Education, 2001; Britto, Yoshikawa & Boller, 2011). In this phase quality provisioning of early education is emphasised while developmentally appropriate teaching and learning activities are regarded as pivotal (Atmore, 2019).

**Developmentally appropriate activities:** This phrase defines the approach to teaching that complements both the age and the individual requirements of each child (Ebrahim, 2011). Teaching and learning activities are thus designed to be relevant to the development of each

particular age group of children. In the NCF, the six Early Learning and Developmental Areas (ELDAs) provide examples of developmentally appropriate activities for babies, toddlers, and young children (Department of Basic Education, 2015). When planning for teaching, ECCE teachers need to be guided by the NCF although they also need to be flexible in their planning and ensure the integration of skills at the level and interest of the appropriate age in their care (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012).

**Young children:** The term ‘young children’ used in this research study refers to three to four-year-old children who are advancing to the reception year class (Grade R) (National Early Learning Development Standards [NELDS], 2009; Department of Basic Education, 2015).

**Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) teachers:** This term refers to adults who are teachers in ECCE centres and who provide care and education to assist young children to acquire desirable skills at an early age. ECCE teachers are also referred to as ECCE educators or ECCE practitioners. Using the term teachers was preferred as these teachers engage with the NCF to emphasise care and education at an early stage. They are involved in the planning of teaching and learning activities as per framework guidance.

## **1.15 Layout of the Research Chapters**

### **Chapter One: Orientation to the Study**

The first chapter introduces the research study and orientates the reader in terms of all seven of the chapters. It includes the background of the study, a brief history of the care and education of young children and stresses the importance of integrated learning in the ECCE phase as a primary developmental phase for young children. The chapter also backgrounds the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) as a recently developed curriculum for the ECCE and briefly discusses the six learning areas that are foundational to the development of young children (three to four years). The problem statement is presented to outline the research purpose, which is also discussed. The rationale for conducting the research study is presented and the objectives as well as the research questions are listed. A brief overview of the theoretical framework that guided the research study forms part of the introduction while the research design and the methodology are discussed and the limitations that impacted the execution of the study are presented. Definitions of the key terms are outlined

and the chapter is concluded with a presentation of the layout of all the chapters and a chapter summary.

## **Chapter Two: Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks**

Embedding a study in a theoretical framework is an important research process as it supports the rationale for the study, underscores the problem statement, and is significant in answering the research questions and achieving the objectives (Lysaght, 2011). In this chapter the conceptual and theoretical frameworks related to this research are discussed in detailed. The discourse illuminates Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory (TLT) as well as Thomas Kuhn's and Jurgen Habermas's domain of learning that relates to transformation. The discourse clarifies how and why adults (teachers in this instance) engage in and learn from new experiences. Related concepts are presented and Mezirow's phases of transformation are presented as five of these were particularly important for the study.

## **Chapter Three: Review of Related Literature**

In this chapter, both international and national literature in relation to integration as a phenomenon of interest in study are discussed. The findings of various related studies on countries that adopted formal and structured ECCE curricula for the development of young children are discussed as this information underpinned the research questions. The review focuses on ECCE teachers' experiences of planning for integrated activities in ECCE and on different learning opportunities and roles that can be played in the teaching environment during a process of change.

## **Chapter Four: Research Design and Methodology**

This chapter presents the methodological approach to the study. It commences by situating the study within the interpretivist paradigm and by noting the philosophical assumptions of interpretivists. The case study research design and the qualitative nature of this research study are discussed. Moreover, the research field and the qualitative sampling procedures utilised are described. The data collection methods (semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis) and the data analysis procedure for qualitative data evaluation are discussed and finally how this research study achieved trustworthiness and validity is clarified. The ethical considerations that were adhered to are also iterated.

## **Chapter Five: Data presentation, analysis and interpretation**

This chapter presents the findings for the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities for young children based on the NCF guidelines in the rural ECCE centres. The nine participating ECCE teachers' experiences are discussed while the roles that they played in the three rural ECCE centres as study sites are unpacked, with specific reference to their understanding of integrated learning activities for young children as proposed in the NCF. Verbatim data obtained during the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews are presented and analysed while data from document analysis also contribute to the findings. The data and findings are presented under the various themes that emerged from the qualitative data.

## **Chapter Six: Discussion of findings**

This chapter presents my analysis and synthesis of the research findings based on the qualitative data that were discussed. Four main themes emerged: desirable learning opportunities, the creation of a conducive learning environment, challenges encountered, and the development of new roles after learning.

## **Chapter Seven: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations**

In the final chapter, present Transformative Planning Model to Integrate Activities [TPMIA] in Early Childhood Care and Education. This chapter also presents a summary of the whole thesis, indicates how key limitations were addressed, and offers relevant recommendations and brief concluding remarks.

### **1.16 Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided an orientation to the study with particular focus on the new NCF curriculum for ECCE. Curriculum content concerning learning areas for the appropriate development of young children was briefly explained. The chapter also outlined the problem statement and the purpose of the research. The brief history of the consolidation of the care and education of children in the ECCE phase was presented as a background to the study. The research context was discussed and the meaning of term 'integration', its importance in the education of young children and their development were elucidated. This chapter also reflected on the implications, rationale, the objectives, and the research questions that gave impetus to the research study. The conceptual and the theoretical frameworks were briefly introduced and the research design and the methodology was introduced. This was followed

by the limitation of the study and the explanations of the key terms. Thereafter, the layout of all seven the chapters was presented and chapter summary was presented.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

*The goal of promoting transformation is to assist learners to move from the simple consciousness of their experiences to an awareness of the conditions for their experiences.*

-Mezirow, 1996-

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that underpinned this research study and its findings in more depth. Grant and Osanloo (2014, p. 16) state that “a conceptual framework is a researcher’s remedy for the research problem” while “the theoretical framework guides the research questions”. The selected conceptual framework was appropriate as it clarified concepts that were pivotal in describing teachers’ participation in new learning experiences while the theoretical framework illuminated the phases of transformation the teachers experienced after learning. These insights assisted to explore the roles that the teachers explored after gaining new knowledge and accessing the NCF. It was imperative to use these frameworks as they illuminated how teachers might engage as adults in new learning experiences to transform their planning practices for the development of their learners. The quotation above that, “The goal of promoting transformation is to assist learners to move from the simple consciousness of their experiences to an awareness of the conditions for their experiences (Mezirow, 1996) associates with the vision of the theory in this research study. To frame the study, the researcher set out to explain how Mezirow’s (1978a) transformative learning theory relates to Thomas Kuhn’s (1970) idea of paradigm shift and Jurgen Habermas’s (1971) domains of learning. These insights explain how learning and change were refined for the teachers who participated in the study. The study also acknowledged teachers as adult learners who are willing to gain new knowledge and understandings to improve their practice.

As discussed in Chapter One, the South African early education in the apartheid era was characterised by many inequalities that had to be addressed post-1994. Among many others, a policy to professionalise the ECCE sector and to recognise the importance of education for children from birth to four years was introduced (Department of Basic Education, 2015; Murriss, 2019). The Department of Basic Education was mandated to, inter alia, support and

guide the planning of activities that are appropriate for the holistic development of pre-school children. This resulted in the introduction of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for children from birth to four years, a guiding document that heralded the important shifts in the ECCE sector, specifically for rural ECD centres that had been in operation for some time without any specific guiding framework. The NCF emphasises that care and education entwined in the activities of the six ELDA's for school readiness and, ideally, for lifelong learning. Moreover, to improve the quality of experiences and equity of learning opportunities in Early Childhood Education as proposed by Ebrahim (2011; 2014), the NCF became a change that triggered transformation in the ECCE sector, more specifically in rural ECD centres that had previously been marginalised (Department of Basic Education, 2015; Rudolf, 2017; Murriss, 2019).

ECCE teachers in rural ECCE centres felt acknowledged, and many started to embrace NCF to improve young children education. They had to plan the integrated teaching and learning activities in the best interests of the young children in their care. Although integration was not a new phenomenon for some, the world view of many about the education of children in rural ECCE centres shifted and changed.

For some time now, ECCE centres in rural areas have been identified as ineffective because little or no learning occurs there due to a lack of planning skills, the low level of young children's education, and these children's deprived backgrounds (Dawes et al., 2012; Mbarathi et al., 2016; Ntumi, 2016; Aubrey, 2017; Kirsten, 2017; Bongoza, 2018; Atmore, 2018). Moreover, Azzi-Lessing and Schmidt (2019) suggest that ECD centres in rural areas are known for many challenges that affect them while very little is known about the strengths of and opportunities in the development equity in the ECCE. Therefore, to understand the learning and development of teachers in these rural centres is exploring and analysing their attitudes and experiences. The conceptual and theoretical frameworks that underpinned the study would illuminate the research findings.

This chapter thus provides in-depth understanding of the conceptual framework that was utilised to support the theoretical framework. The conceptual framework constituted the researcher's choice of concepts that reflected the kind of learning and thinking that are important in the transformation process, whereas the theoretical framework, particularly Mezirow's (1978a; 1991; 2000) TLT, was utilised to understand all the related aspects

(Cranton, 2006) and particularly the phases of transformation that Mezirow (1991) argues as important for change.

## **2.2 The Conceptual Basis of the Study**

The conceptual framework was chosen to better understand the participating ECCE teachers' new learning experiences. Their participation in the planning of integrated activities was explored in order to address the research questions and to achieve the objectives of the study. By exploring the concepts that underpinned the study, the researcher hoped to provide a clear picture of how various relevant ideas connected with one another as the research unfolded (Grant & Osanloo, 2014; Adom et al., 2018).

In the process of transformative learning, the participating ECCE teachers intentionally transformed their practices by accessing the NCF to plan high quality experiences for the young children and to prepare them for formal schooling. The NCF was designed to provide guidance for all ECCE adult role-players (parents, caregivers, ECCE teachers and community leaders) who work with young children (Murriss, 2019). The intention to utilise the conceptual framework was thus to understand all the constituents and structures associated with the planning for teaching after the teachers transformed to support their young children to properly learn. Mezirow's (1978a; 2000).

It was imperative that ECCE teachers adapted their practices to the guidelines provided and took ownership of their social and personal roles in the planning of activities that needed to be integrated (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012; Department of Basic Education, 2015). The researcher envisaged that the teachers' learning experiences to integrate activities as required by the framework could be easily unfolded by using the selected conceptual framework. Moreover, it would assist in answering the critical questions regarding transformative learning experiences as the data intended to obtain would be loaded with empirical information that would be useful for this research. The focus on the development of the new roles and the teachers' appreciation for and their application of new actions. Thus, assisted the researcher to understand the new experiences that shaped their planning practices in the ECCE centres (Chao, 2016; Uyanık, 2016).

This study focused on the NCF as the required shift that ECCE teachers needed to embrace in order to improve their planning practices. In this process they needed to engage in new

thinking perspectives to achieve the required outcomes (Mezirow, 2000). Moreover, they have to view it as an opportunity of growth in the best interests of their young children. This study therefore adopted the pivotal concepts as: *paradigm shift*, *the desire to learn*, *empathy*, *experiences*, and *diverse forms of learning* (collaborative, instrumental, and communicative) (Mezirow, 1991 p. 73).

In terms of the conceptual underpinning, the relevant concepts elucidate on how adults learn to solve problems to transform their practice (Mezirow, 2000; Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012). Liu (2015) suggests that teachers need to modify their roles and challenge their previous expectations to respond to the diverse and changing needs. The diagram below visualises the interrelated concepts that drive ECCE teachers' learning experiences for more effective planning practices.



**Figure 2.1: Concepts that drive transformative learning**

**Source:** Mezirow (2000)

## **2.2.1 Pivotal conceptual terms that framed the research study**

### **2.2.1.1 Adult learners**

The use of the term ‘adult’ (or adults) in this research study encompasses significant characteristics that the ECCE teachers involved in this research study are expected to possess. The concept of adult learners is embedded in Mezirow’s (2000) TLT thus central in clarifying and understanding of how the participating ECCE teachers evolved as learners of a new experience (i.e., accessing and employing the NCF). According to Vorster et.al, (2016), the ECCE domain is staffed by only a few qualified teachers while very few ECCE teachers were trained to teach in this field. A common requirement is that all these teachers need to possess the qualities of an adult, whether they have been trained or not. An adult teacher who becomes an adult learner is defined as “a self-directed person who intends to learn in order to promote effective guidance in the classroom” (Cranton, 2006, p. 132). Authors such as Ritz (2010), Santalucia and Johnson (2010) and Addae (2016) endorse this definition. For the purpose of this study, the term ‘adult learner’ relates to all the ECCE teachers who transformed their practice by embracing the ideas set out in the NCF in order to better care for and support young children. These adults had to learn to come to grips with the dictates of the new curriculum framework and to understand guidelines provided to identify and devise suitable activities for young children to properly learn. Uyanık (2016) asserts that changes in the ECCE sector have inspired teachers to become learners as they need to embrace change in the ECCE phase. Transformation is discussed as another important concept in the research study as it is discussed below.

### **2.2.1.2 Transformation**

Quan-Baffour (2000) argues that transformation is the appropriate practice, means and commitment to create new learning opportunities, growth, and development. This is especially relevant in ECCE centres and teachers who in the past planned teaching and learning activities without any policy guidance. Teachers as adults differ from children, they engage in a state of learning with different needs, values, and intentions to transform. They required skills and knowledge from each another for new development and change (Mezirow, 1995; 2000). The researcher thus, anticipated that the introduction of the NCF triggered transformation and became transformation in a similar manner to women that transformed their practices and presented their willingness to return to formal schooling after many years (Mezirow, 2000). The researcher was conscious of the fact that ECCE

teachers had become overwhelmed by the low level of young children's education in rural ECCE centres. That they might seek for change to create new learning opportunities that would prepare these children for school readiness. Thus, the research study intended to make the NCF pivotal as it had been specifically developed to guide teaching in the variety of context, which had provided inappropriate basic education before (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012), so that they could rise above their challenges. The ECCE teachers in this study would be adult learners and thus, argued that their development would constitute adult learning if they wished to transform their teaching practice to improve the learning of the children in their care, as proposed by (Gregson & Sturko, 2007). Adults as teachers took the responsibility to plan teaching and learning activities that are integrated for the holistic development of young children. Below is the discussion of the paradigm shift relating to the situation that happened in rural ECCE teachers.

### **2.2.1.3 Paradigm shift**

A paradigm shift occurs as people engage in critical thinking as the exercise to find the solution to a problem that affected them or a community or group (Kalman, 2016). In relation to the study, the researcher encountered rural ECCE teachers that took action to change to the newly developed framework to learn the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities. This happen as the intention to address marginalisation as experienced during the apartheid regime that had impacted negatively on the rural children.

A paradigm shift involves a process in which the collection of ideas, principles, and attitudes influences how a problem is comprehended (Kuhn, 1997; Mezirow, 1991; Goldstein, 2012; Orman, 2016). In the educational context, Pajares (2004, p. 544) identifies it as "a new achievement to prepare students for a new professional practice to ensure [that beliefs are] installed ... in their minds". Teachers thus need to shift their ideas, perceptions, and attitude to share better problem-solving practices for the best experiences and development of children. Moreover, a paradigm shift has occurred once people (or a community) have transformed from previous actions or attitudes and have adopted improved practices due to change that occur (Orman, 2016). This process needs to occur collaboratively and interactively, hence Kuhn (1997) accentuates community-shared problem-solving ideas.

In this research study it was assumed that a paradigm shift had occurred for the ECCE teachers as they reportedly engaged actively with the NCF and found it to be a solution to

the problems they experienced that were related to inequality and challenges in their ECCE spaces. In my exploration of their transformation for improved planning (and thus teaching) practices I understood that the care and education of young children before formal schooling was identified as important (Department of Basic Education, 2015). Having encountered such teachers and becoming aware of their desire for transformation prior to the study, the researcher assumed the shift of the focus from merely taking care of children during the day to the growth and the development of themselves and the young children as they had to prepare for school. Those ECCE teachers exhibited the desired to learn and follow the NCF guidelines.

Prior to the study, the researcher had been informed that many rural ECCE teachers had decided to access and follow the guidance of the NCF in order to better understand and execute new roles in the planning process. They had thus taken action as they had become aware that their earlier practices had been inappropriate and ineffective. As Orman (2016) argues, they had accepted the challenge to change and share the vision and values to correct past inconsistencies.

#### **2.2.1.4 The desire to learn**

The desire to learn underscores the preparedness, willingness, and interest that people show when they engage in a transformative learning process without being coerced by forceful measures (Taylor & Cranton, 2013). Mezirow (2000) argues that *desire* drives the readiness to change. This desire is usually the wish to achieve a goal which motivates adults to realise their potential. It was this kind of desire that I had noticed in ECCE teachers and that prompted my decision to conduct the study.

The researcher was conscious of the fact that many rural ECCE teachers had surprisingly volunteered to engage in transformative learning regardless of the challenges associated with such a drastic step (Atmore, 2018). Instead of resisting change they had started engagements to gain new experiences and to learn about the new curriculum framework. Transformation was an organisational challenge but they embraced it to break the chains of ignorance and to achieve the common goal to learn new ideas and transform their practice (Senge, 2004).

In light of the observations and insights described above, purposively recruited nine ECCE teachers voluntarily desired to change their practice. They were identified and sampled from three rural ECCE centres that engaged in new learning experiences after noticing the stark distinctions between the education provided to rural children and the education provided to many urban black children and children of other races. They willingly agreed to engage in the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities for young children to benefit from the guidelines of the new curriculum.

#### **2.2.1.5 Empathy to learn**

Empathy is associated with transformative learning for people with a shared vision to listen to one another during discussions for development. It is associated with a feeling of compassion for others in acknowledgement of their experiences during the learning process (Reynolds, 2002; Mezirow, 2003). Empathy is a pivotal requirement for transformative learning as it allows people to be emotionally considerate of others and to work comfortably and considerately in teams to transform. Mezirow (2000) asserts the necessity for understanding of one another and taking turns along the transformation journey. People working together thus, need to empathetically listen to one another and share information for positive results. They critically think about what and when they have to enquire or add information that will contribute to a discussion for learning (van Woerkom, 2010). Empathy is the common skill that adults who are open minded share when they build good relationships in the process of transformative learning. Where there is no order, no awareness of other people's feelings, and no objective reasoning, proper learning lands in crisis. This study thus recognised the importance of empathy among ECCE teachers for successful collaboration, planning, and sharing of ideas.

#### **2.2.1.6 Experiences and sharing**

The focus on experiences that support the learning process includes the recognition of prior knowledge as pivotal in transformative learning (Taylor & Cranton, 2013). The latter authors explain that experiences form the basis of people's beliefs and values and allow them to make meaning of the world and to change the assumptions that are outdated and to adopt new ones that are relevant to their new experiences. New experiences are thus influenced by past experiences during any new learning process and provide conditions to assess if something that is learnt is good or bad, appropriate or inappropriate (Mezirow 1991; 1997).

Thinking can thus unfortunately also be transformed by negative experiences. Experiences can be gained individually and socially and in cultural or work contexts.

Dewey (1990) identifies transformative learning as the process of understanding new realities, while Ebrahim (2011; 2014) highlights the importance of what she refers to as ‘contextual realities’ for the development of young children. The unique conditions of the rural ECCE centres that I would target and the ECCE teacher’s diverse and personal backgrounds and the rural context of the study sites would be important experiences that needed to be considered as the study unfolded. The ECCE teachers were expected to bring their diverse experiences to the planning table for the integration of the activities from the six ELDA’s required for young children’s learning. The teachers’ diverse qualifications, experiences, and sets of knowledge of teaching and learning resources would also be relevant in the planning process (Ntumi, 2016; Kirsten, 2017). Sharing their experiences would thus be an important concept that the ECCE teachers needed to embrace as they would be required to share their knowledge, skills and new insights when trying to make meaning of the NCF. These experiences would need to include their prior knowledge of how young children learn and everything that would concern the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities. In transformative learning adult learners need to acknowledge all their relevant experiences regardless of the level of their academic background.

### **2.2.1.7 Diverse learning efforts**

Habermas (1984) refers to diverse learning efforts as collaborative, instrumental, and communicative whereas Mezirow (1991) highlights individual learning opportunities, learning from other people, and learning from the environment. Transformation thus occurs due to different learning decisions when adults learn. These types of learning are discussed in more detail below.

**Embracing collaborative learning efforts** is a professional development opportunity for people to share their experiences in formal or informal settings (Bruder, 2010; Alsalman, 2016). Wells (2014, p 492) describes collaborative practices as “the attainment of quality teaching and learning in modern circumstances”. This suggests that people collaborate to share their views and work as a team to transform (Steyn, 2017). Team work among adults is thus encouraged by the Department of Basic Education (2015) and teachers who work with young children are motivated to work in groups to access the NCF meaningfully for

transformed and best learning experiences. It is in such groups that teachers collate concepts to understand and achieve the outcomes of the NCF. Similar to the sharing of their previous experiences, collaborative learning is identified by Rahman and Hoque (2017) as the willingness to appreciate the ideas of other people.

As ECCE centres differ in many respects from formal schools, collaboration thus needs to be steered by teachers, relevant non-governmental organisations (NGOs), municipality representatives, and other ECCE role-players (Alsalman, 2016). Working together, these people need to organise their thinking and acquire skills by sharing with and listening to one another. For instance, ECCE teachers who are more creative than others need to share their skills during the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities. Collaboration, as a pivotal concept that was embraced by this study, is identified by Senge (2004) as learning organisations (also referred to as learning communities) for a group of people with similar perspectives where they can share the capabilities and knowledge of the organisation. ECCE teachers also need to share their vision and beliefs about the future education of young children. Although Senge (2004) highlights the importance of team work and learning communities in a different context, ECCE centres are also community organisations that intend to produce quality learning. Kitchenham (2008, p. 108) refers to what Jurgen Habermas (1991) identifies as “domains of learning to embrace diverse forms of learning”. The establishment of such domains was also encouraged during this research study.

**The instrumental learning effort** is identified by Habermas (1981, p. 44) as “environmental adjustments” for problem solving. Goharimehr (2017) suggests that this type of learning is impacted by influences from the environment where teaching and learning take place. For instance, challenges that affect the ECCE sector cause action. Therefore, ECCE teachers have to think about the consistency of their actions and their own principles to achieve convincing results. Instrumental achievement also concerns estimations about observable actions that can be confirmed as wrong or right by means of evidence (Stray & Saetra, 2017). In the context of the current study the NCF was the evidential intervention for the professional development of the ECCE teachers. It offered the guiding principles that needed to be emulated (thus proved) for the achievement of the ECCE teachers’ goal to develop children who would be school ready (Campbell-Barr & Bogatic, 2017). Instrumental learning thus focuses on learning through goal-directed

problem solving. Mezirow (1991) suggests that instrumental learning happens within the context of communicative learning.

### **2.2.1.8 The communicative learning effort**

The communicative learning effort is an opportunity to understand how people communicate their intentions, feelings and needs (Goharimehr, 2017; Heldal et al., 2017). In this research study it was viewed as planned opportunities to unpack and discuss the content of the NCF with the intention of learning about and knowing what to include in activities for teaching and learning to be integrated for young children's development. I envisaged that the teachers would reveal their understandings of the content of the six ELDA's as set out in the NCF, explain how they planned integrated activities, and how they identified steps for assessing young children's learning. This information would shift what was unfamiliar into a meaningful perspective and would support my efforts to create a model that could serve as an extended guideline for ECCE teachers to prepare their learners for school readiness. Mezirow (1991) strongly endorses the communicative learning effort and a learning process in which people make contributions towards transformative learning.

When people do not possess the necessary knowledge, they create a new plan by communicating their thoughts and sharing their ideas with others. In this process each piece of relevant information becomes a building block for understanding and transformation (Mezirow, 1997; 2006). As school readiness for young children is required for formal schooling, I envisaged that learning to adhere to the NCF would bring confidence to the ECCE teachers as they communicated their ideas about children's learning. Communication in my view would thus herald a new beginning for these teachers as they would be exposed to new knowledge for the planning of integrated activities, as proposed by Mezirow (1991) and endorsed by Heldal et al. (2017).

## **2.3 Exposition of the Theoretical Framework**

Although theoretical framework selection is often a struggle for researchers, Casanave and Li (2015) consider building a theoretical framework as simple as asking oneself, "What will happen in my particular selected research site?" A theoretical framework thus guides the researcher to make meaning of each stage of the research process as it provides direction for research development, underpins data collection, and regulates findings (Imenda, 2014). In

the end, the researcher determines if the collected data relate to the theoretical framework and for what reason.

The theoretical underpinnings of this research study were drawn from Mezirow's transformative learning theory (TLT) which was introduced in Chapter One. This theory provided a suitable context for meaning making as what people choose and what they know become pertinent for desired development. TLT and the concepts discussed above provided useful insight into what the researcher deemed would be *teachers' empowerment* and that this empowerment would be illuminate at different stages throughout the study. The notion of empowerment development is endorsed by Percy (2005) and Taylor and Cranton (2013).

Emeritus Prof. Jack Mezirow, the father of TLT, framed this theory as a perspective on transformation after studying the learning experiences of women who had returned to formal education in a community college after a lengthy break (Mezirow, 1991; Calleja, 2014; Freeman, 2015). Mezirow looked at how these women facilitated their learning experiences and realised that their expectations framed their points of view which, in turn, influenced their new beliefs, attitudes, thinking, and actions. The researcher envisaged that this learning would be fairly similar for rural ECCE teachers who were devoted to change due to inequalities and challenges. Teachers had been encouraged to embrace new learning for the improved development of the young children in their communities. The hope was that these teachers, who worked in three rural ECCE centres in a rural context, would explore how they had reassessed the limitations of the past and their debilitating gender roles and would reveal what had inspired them to identify with new learning opportunities for themselves and their young learners in order to address the demands of the academic field in which they functioned on a daily basis (see Mezirow, 1978a; 1991; 1997).

### **2.3.1 Earlier research studies on the transformative learning theory**

TLT was effectively used by Calleja (2014) to explore how teachers structured their experiences to allow themselves the opportunity to learn new planning skills after a professional development programme had been introduced in a school under study. Calleja's (2014) findings revealed significant change in learning when teachers cooperatively passed through different stages, as proposed by Mezirow (1996; 1997). In contrast, Badara (2011) identified some challenges in the process of transformative learning but in the latter study

the main outcome was meaningful professional development as the participants, after critical reflections, desired to learn and to transform their previous practices. This is in line with Mezirow's (1991; 2000) theory which posits that previous experiences guide future actions and play an essential role in the transformation process as memory, which is a natural human attribute, is actively engaged in the identification of previously learned experiences (Mezirow, 1991; Hatherley, 2011). In ECCE, the TLT supports understanding of the kind of development that is required for young children to learn to the best of their ability (Curran & Murray, 2008). Therefore, professional development as guided by the NCF requires in-depth reflection to adapt and change the perspectives of ECCE teachers so that they can make informed decisions about the future of young children (Abdul-Majied, Johnson & Campbell, 2017).

The TLT has not always been hailed as a panacea for change in the education context. For instance, John (2016), who conducted a comparable study in a similar context, criticises the TLT as it could not adequately explain the trauma experienced by the participants and thus many questions about educators' learning could not be resolved. Conversely, Cox and John (2016) associate TL with meaning-making opportunities for people who then transform. Fleming (2018) also suggests that it contributes positively to the educational field, especially as it illuminates the domains of learning and emphasises communicative collaboration. The latter author identifies it as a critical theory and recognises Habermas's contribution as significant in the evolution of the theory. In another research study meaningful learning tasks were identified by Rossiter and Clark (2007) as an important contribution of the TLT. They highlight the importance of narratives for making sense which the research study emulated in its exploration of ECCE teachers' new learning experiences.

My perusal of the above studies and others endorsed my focus on the NCF for teachers' transformative learning in the ECCE phase. An essential motivation for the development of the new framework was the necessity to introduce equal education in all schools, including rural ECCE centres. Although Mezirow (2000) identifies ten phases of transformative learning, five of these phases were applicable to my exploration of teachers' learning and their ability to plan for integrated learning in the ECCE phase.

## **2.4 The Tenets of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory**

Soon after the introduction of the NCF in 2015 it became apparent that conditions and practices in rural ECCE centres transformed to proper guidance. Many teachers embraced this change and resolved to advance their practice by adhering to the guidelines of the new framework, specifically in terms of planning integrated activities for the development of young children in their care. This had also become a global focus in ECD (Campbell-Barr & Bogatic, 2017). Many ECCE teachers have since transformed their practice and have endeavoured to make positive contributions to young children's education in order to redress earlier inequalities. Their actions are in line with Thomas Kuhn's (1970) notion of a paradigm shift when people begin to understand the problems they face and then change in order to redress them (Goldstein, 2012; Mezirow, 1991; Orman, 2016). A paradigm shift is thus required to guide development and newly adopted actions for various benefits.

Habermas (1981) contributed significantly to the development of Mezirow's (2000) transformative learning theory as he highlighted instrumental and communicative learning as two social benefits of learning and transformation. Mezirow (1978b) explains that communicative learning is the kind of learning that involves sharing of information and understanding others for people to transform. Mezirow and Habermas both agree that communication and collaboration lead to transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991; Habermas, 1981) and therefore that working together, sharing information, listening to one another, and working collaboratively are central to learning.

### **2.4.1 What triggered transformative learning in ECCE centres in South Africa?**

The development of the NCF was the government's effort to professionalise ECCE and to advance all young children's education equitably. The introduction of the NCF thus heralded transformation in the ECCE phase and has particularly impacted ECCE centres in rural communities where ECD was sadly marginalised during the apartheid era. The NCF policy guideline combats inequalities in the ECCE phase and mandates appropriate educational investments in the early years of children's lives (Mbarathi et al., 2016). Moreover, an important aim is to transform the lives of and create opportunities for the poorest of poor South Africans who generally reside in rural areas (Statistics South Africa, 2017). The Transformative Learning Centre (2004) identifies transformative learning as a profound shift in education that was initiated by the Department of Basic Education after

critical deliberations about the importance of appropriate teaching and learning methodologies and particularly of young children's education and school readiness preparation. This means that educational practices in the ECCE phase have to be adapted by devising appropriate teaching and learning strategies and utilising suitable material and resources. This requires that ECCE teachers adopt the role of, among others, curriculum planners as the NCF does not provide specific directions but guidelines. Syomwene, Nabwire and Musamas (2015) assert that curriculum planning is the gathering of information by selecting what will best suit the targeted learners.

Mezirow (1990) believes that transformative learning occurs when critical reflection changes attitudes and behaviour as people's views and values transform. Thus, when people think about an ineffective or outdated practice or phenomenon and seek to change it, transformation occurs and results in new experiences. Mezirow's critical reflections on an individual's ability to make new meaning thus underpinned his TLT (Taylor, 2007; Dirkx, 2000; Lennox, 2005). However, Johnson-Barley and Alfred (2006) critically argue that Mezirow's notion of individual transformation does not highlight collective and collaborative learning experiences for people so that they can share their experiences and learn from one another. This sentiment is also expressed by Clark and Wilson (1991), who highlight that Mezirow disregards the contextual essentials of learning and promotes only the individual in the transformative process. The current study thus took cognisance of both views in its exploration of the planning of new experiences for teaching and learning as this process required both individual motivation and the collaboration of diverse teachers in specific contextual situations to make meaning of the NCF. I thus took the stance that collective participation was essential for individual adult learners to gain new knowledge and to drive their experiences in order to transform both individually and collectively. These teachers needed to share their ideas and later reflect on the learning process for change to occur.

Rioch (1970) is a fervent supporter of group development, arguing that a group works as a system to support decision making and to reinforce action. This notion was relevant to the study as ECCE centres function as systems that are similar to schools, and for this reason communication, collaboration, and teamwork are important practices explored to determine if the ECCE teachers' planning practices had been conducted in line with NCF guidelines

and if they would thus be effective for the learning and development of young children to ensure school readiness.

Mezirow (1978a; 1991) and Hadeed and Henry-Campbell (2015) argue that transformative learning is a process in which critical thinking transforms the mindset and changes the way people view the world. The TLT thus underscores the implementation of a plan to bring about a new way of doing things and to enable people to look at a phenomenon in a different light. The theory therefore focuses on the learning process in which people examine their meanings and perspectives – and when they are convinced that their old ones were inadequate for their goal they transform (Vaughn, 2016). Thus, needed to understand why and how the self-directed people (the ECCE teachers) under study had gained new understandings and insights for their transformation, as proposed by Cox and John (2016).

The TLT also addresses the issue of empowerment that allows people to free themselves from a challenging situation. It illuminates the notion that transformative learning is triggered by a traumatic or challenging situation (Mezirow, 2002). In this regard, the contextual challenges as well as past inequalities in the ECCE domain as the literature suggests that many rural ECCE centres lack teaching and learning guidance and that this shortcoming negatively impacts the learning of young children was considered (South African Early Childhood Review, 2019; UNESCO, 2015). The researcher was cognisant of the urgent need for professionalism in these centres and understood that the NCF had been introduced in South African to address this need as much as to combat early education inequalities. Moreover, the Department of Basic Education (2015) emphasises the importance of following the NCF guidelines for effectively planning integrated teaching and learning activities to prepare young children for school.

Mezirow's theory of transformative learning highlights that life crises result in learning that transforms people's views (Taylor, 2000). His unique contribution is the ten phases of transformative learning that are summarised below. Although all these phases are important, transformation can be explored in any of the phases (Mezirow, 1991) as people are diverse and transform differently. Five of the phases related to the current research study, particularly as the development of the NCF was associated with transformative learning opportunities triggered by the challenges of the apartheid era. The decision by ECCE managers and teachers to embrace the NCF was undoubtedly embedded in much of

Mezirow's TLT as these centres had previously not been adequately supported in their efforts to develop and educate young children. The NCF endorses the global vision of democracy and equality and mandates the development of school readiness skills in young children, and I needed to determine if it was these tenets, among others, that motivated forward-thinking teachers working in rural ECCE centres to transform.

**Table 2.1: Mezirow's ten phases of transformative learning**

Source: Adapted from Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b

PHASE	DESCRIPTION
Phase 1	A disorienting dilemma
Phase 2	Self-examination and experiencing feelings of guilt and shame
Phase 3	A critical assessment of assumptions
Phase 4	Recognising that the process of transformation requires sharing
Phase 5	Exploration of options for new roles
Phase 6	Planning a course of action
Phase 7	Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
Phase 8	Provisional attempts at trying new roles
Phase 9	Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
Phase 10	A reintegration into one's life based on conditions dictated by one's perspective

The five phases of transformative learning that were applicable to this study are briefly discussed below.

### **2.5 The five phases of transformative learning**

In this research study, transformative learning included a disorienting dilemma, self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame, a critical assessment of assumptions, recognition that the process of transformation requires sharing and the exploration of options for new roles.

### **2.5.1 A disorienting dilemma**

A disorienting dilemma is associated with the negative challenges that people experience (Mezirow, 1991; 1997; 2000). This experience contests existing frames of reference (beliefs and ideas) and impacts behaviour positively or negatively. Therefore, when past experiences do not fit into the frame of reference of an adult person, they negatively affect such a learner's performance. Mezirow argues that a disorienting dilemma is the first stage of transformative learning as it is associated with a variety of conditions that adult learners experience when seeking meaning. It appears as the expectations that people experience that determine how they know and understand themselves and the environment around them (Taylor & Elias, 2012; Johnston, 2013; Raikou, 2018). A dilemma can be caused by internal or external factors (Taylor, 2007). Taylor and Snyder (2012) and Raikou (2018) highlight that a dilemma can be caused by external factors (life conditions such as racial differences) and/or internal factors (such as a new learning experience). Roberts (2006) suggests that adults who are passionate about change desire new experiences as positive stimuli for renewal. Therefore, change creates new meaning and new ways of thinking when previous experiences finally link with new experiences (Mezirow, 1978a; 1991).

However, some scholars consider change as grievous and argue that it causes negative effects on learning (Roberts, 2006). Stress Directions (2005) associates conditions such as age, culture, language, and the diverse experiences of adult learners with stress and depression that may manifest as negative experiences. Such experiences may cause people to be irritated and they thus resist change as they are sometimes not clear about what is expected of them (Robertson, 1996). They thus critique and reflect on previous beliefs and struggle to make sense of new demands (Mezirow, 1991).

At the inception of this research study I was cognisant of the fact that many rural ECCE teachers had previously planned their teaching without policy guidance. The NCF was introduced as a guideline in the ECCE sector with the intention of heralding new experiences for ECCE teachers. The document comprises newly devised ELDAs, the objectives of each ELDA, and examples of teaching and learning activities as a guide for the development of children for school readiness (Department of Basic Education, 2015). However, this curriculum changes initiated pressure that was either resisted or adopted (Clasquin-Johnson, 2011; 2016). The requirement to adopt the NCF guidelines was a new experience that caused

a dilemma for all ECCE teachers, and for those in rural ECCE centres in particular. During my interactions with such teachers prior to the study many admitted that they felt ashamed and guilty as they could not cope with the new demands.

### **2.5.2 Self-examination and experiencing feelings of guilt and shame**

Mezirow (1978b;1997) identifies self-examination as the second phase of transformation in the process of acquiring new skills and knowledge to support their plan of action. After a disorienting dilemma, the feelings of shame, doubt and guilt continue while the mind is thinking about the variety of approaches that may be followed to get accustomed to the new experience (Cranton, 2006). People weigh options and think about previous experiences and the consequences, and their expectations lead to critical reflections as explained above (Mezirow, 1978b). When the NCF became available rural ECCE teachers thus also examined their actions based on their previous planning experiences and they understood that inappropriate planning impeded the development of young children so that many were not school ready. This awareness was pertinent in rural areas in particular where young children are often vulnerable and exposed to neglect and a lack of guidance and support (Atmore, 2018). In this context, teachers' change of direction will engender new knowledge and skills that will allow them to act in more appropriate ways (Mezirow, 1995), such as adopting effective planning strategies. In this process critical assessment of one's earlier assumptions becomes an integral part of decision making.

### **2.5.3 Critical assessment of assumptions**

Mezirow (1995) observes that our perspectives shape and define our assumptions. Therefore, critical assessment of assumptions entails the reflections that guide us to work hard to adopt or to reject new experiences (Mezirow, 2000; Hatherley, 2011). Reflection is a way of thinking about the realities that link to knowledge and practice (Raikou, 2018). It is engagement with and the exploration of experiences and involves interpretations and remembering all the previous experiences that impacted problem-solving practices. Dewey (1981) refers to reflection as the assessment of one's behaviour and a decision-making process.

#### **2.5.4 Recognising that the process of transformation requires sharing**

Kitchenham (2008) studied the evolution of Mezirow's transformative learning theory and discovered that people transform through personal reflections and group discussions. When confronted with the newly devised NCF, most rural ECD teachers were exposed to its tenets and subsequently opted for positive change as they understood that this document would guide them to expand young children's education and combat inequalities and challenges in ECCE (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2015). Therefore, their disorienting dilemma became a positive challenge to learn about and engage with this new framework. For this fourth phase of transformation to be effective, social change was a key feature that needed urgent attention in the South African ECCE phase (Department of Basic Education, 2015). The importance of collaboration in the transformation process was recognised and focus was placed on communication as an essential requirement for effective change, as proposed by Mezirow (1978b; 1991). It was in this context that ECD centres and ECCE teachers attempted to address their challenges, as was discussed earlier.

As explained in the conceptual framework, embracing new learning experiences and planning for integration would have required collaboration among the ECCE teachers to learn from one another. The issues of support from and for other individuals and recognition of their cultural values should thus be considered during the transformation process (Taylor, 2007). The NCF emphasises how important it is that teachers in the ECCE phase learn together by discussing best teaching practices (including planning) to achieve the objectives of the curriculum (Department of Basic Education, 2015). Such collaboration is vital in the learning process and for the growth and development not only of the teachers, but also of the children in their care (Mezirow, 1978a; 1991; 2000). My conceptualisation of the study was thus built on the assumption that the ECCE teachers I would recruit would already have learnt about and from the NCF, specifically in terms of planning requirements for integrated learning activities to develop young children's school readiness.

#### **2.5.5 Exploration of options for new roles**

Transformative learning encourages people to become more autonomous thinkers as they learn to negotiate their values, meanings, and purpose rather than merely adopting those of others (Mezirow, 1997; 2000). Ebrahim, Verbeek and Mashiyah (2011) argue that

transformation heralds exciting possibilities and opportunities for self-development. The Advanced Certificate in Teaching that these educators adopted in their professional field as teacher educators thus guides their students to explore options for the new roles they might adopt in order to enhance their practice after obtaining their professional qualification.

Mezirow (1990) states that when adults explore different roles they are required to gain new perspectives and set new goals that will focus on their learning. According to Ebrahim et al. (2011), when they explored new roles their pre-service teachers increased their level of confidence. They also received continuous support from their families. Moreover, as they demonstrated their willingness to learn they must have acquired new capabilities to teach as learning and teaching cannot be separated. It was this transformation, amongst other things, that the study intended to focus on.

## **2.6 Transformative learning for effective teaching**

In linking TLT to the planning of integrated activities as would be presented in the NCF, Ibrahim and Irvine (2012) iterated that this framework would herald a new experience for teachers in the ECCE. It was introduced in 2015 and now adults and qualified teachers who work with young children are expected to learn, understand, and use the NCF to plan integrated activities in the best interests of the young children in their care. In my exploration of planning for integrated activities in the EECE phase it was thus inspiring to conceptualise the study and view the findings through the lens of Mezirow's (2000) TLT. This theory assisted me in framing the study in such a manner that it was possible to illuminate and better understand the roles that my ECCE teacher participants had to play in order to transform their practice within the tenets of the NCF.

## **2.7 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I discussed the conceptual and theoretical frameworks related to the research study. I clarified adult learning and explained that ECCE teachers are adult learners who need to utilise the NCF guidelines when planning integrated teaching and learning activities for the development of young children. The concepts paradigm shift, desire, empathy, experiences, and diverse learning efforts were discussed in relation to Mezirow's (1978) TLT. I also discussed key concepts related to the research study by exploring Kuhn's (1970) and Habermas's (1971) work and explained how their influences shaped transformative

learning theory. I briefly listed all ten and then discussed five stages of transformative learning that Mezirow (2002) proposes and discussed how these unique ideas made a considerable contribution to change in rural ECCE centres. Various authors' perspectives on transformative learning were also woven into the discourse for extended clarity.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

*A reviewed of related literature should take the form of a critical analysis, showing insight and an awareness of differing arguments, concepts, and approaches*

*-Boote & Beile (2005)*

#### **3. 1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, the conceptual and theoretical frameworks in which the study was embedded were discussed. It presented related concepts, referred to the phases of transformative learning, and discussed the processes that are required when people (ECCE teachers in this instance) choose to embrace new roles after learning and transforming to improve their practice.

This chapter was informed by my understanding that using the NCF for the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities needs to relate to how young children learn. The NCF incorporates six ELDA's and examples of teaching and learning activities as well as assessment strategies as part of this new curriculum for the ECCE phase. In this literature review, the international and national studies that focused on the learning of young children as well as the nature of activities that will enhance their development and learning in the ECCE phase. The discourse that follows explores, amongst others, how the forerunners of the ECD phenomenon propose the planning of integrated activities that will be in the best interest of young children. The importance of accessing and following policy guidelines for the planning of integrated activities is also addressed.

The literature review chapter is divided into two sections. The first section includes literature that elucidates earlier ECCE research about children's development and conceptualises care and education as foundational in the ECCE phase. The background of early childhood care and education in a rural context is also highlighted. The second section presents a review of related literature to underpin the objectives of the study. The term 'integration' to clarify how and why it was foregrounded in the study and to explain how activities for young children are to be integrated was defined. Appropriate approaches, methods, and ideas used in planning in general and in the planning of educational learning activities in particular are integrated with policy guidelines that guide approaches in ECCE. Thereafter, readers are

acquainted with the South African ECCE curriculum and the six Early Learning and Developmental Areas (ELDAs) that are the ‘subjects’ in the ECCE phase. Furthermore, ECD centres and ECCE teachers’ experiences in the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities are discussed and the knowledge and skills that teachers need to play their different roles after learning to follow policy ideas and guidelines are conferred.

## **SECTION 1**

### **3.2 An Overview of Early Childhood Development (ECD) Education**

This section presents a review of recent literature in the ECCE domain to raise matters of teacher development and learning that are still deemed inadequate in the development of young children. The findings of this review form the crux of the research arguments (Aubrey, 2017; Kirsten, 2017). The discourse exposes the lack of environmental stimuli and raises concerns that previously affected the development of rural children. In this regard the consequences of the lack of planning during the era preceding the introduction of the NCF that hindered effective teaching in ECD and ECCE centres are discussed. The intention of the research study to present the truth about rural ECCE centres is also presented.

As was mentioned in Chapter One, the NCF urges the planning of teaching activities for all children from birth to four years and aims to ensure that appropriate learning activities are devised as this is pivotal in the ECCE sector. The NCF was developed to compensate for earlier inequalities in ECD and the challenges experienced during the former political dispensation in South Africa (Department of Basic Education, 2015; Murriss, 2019). However, regardless of this initiative there is still evidence that young children are negatively impacted in rural ECCE centres where their education is associated with challenges and the limited educational expertise of many teachers (Atmore, 2013; Bongoza, 2018). When the current study was conceptualised, I had been informed that despite this reality, some ECCE teachers supported transformation in the ECCE sector and worked tirelessly to transform their practice. The research study was inspired by Rudolph et al., (2019) to obtain adequate details in a local situation (i.e., rural ECCE centres) for evidence-based evaluation of the situation. This is also encouraged by Ebrahim (2011) as she urges that it is necessary to understand local procedures and realities in ECCE centres for their evaluation. Thus, engaged in an in-depth exploration of diverse authors’ views to understand ECCE teachers’ reality. More specifically, explored literature that evaluated ECD and

ECCE teachers' practices and focused on the planning of integrated activities for the development of suitable activities for young learners. The literature review became the platform from which the researcher interrogated teachers' roles in their unique educational settings in order to evaluate their attempts to prepare young children for school readiness. The literature reviewed in this regard underscores the necessity for teachers to effectively plan and showcase their response to challenges in order to build the kind of ECCE that is desirable (Azzi-Lessing & Schmidt, 2019).

In brief, the approaches and the new roles that ECCE teachers should adopt after learning are discussed in light of the philosophical assumption that teachers' beliefs and perspectives about the planning of integrated activities for the development of young children would be the driver of successful learning activities for the young children in their care. The review also highlights the notion that change and social transformation occur through communication and collaboration (Mezirow, 1978; 1991; Department of Basic Education, 2015).

### **3.3 Conceptualising Early Childhood Care and Education**

Salminen (2017) identifies early childhood care and education as 'day care arrangements' and states that it should entail various and appropriate developmental activities for the holistic development of young children. In the ECCE phase there is a strong emphasis on safety, health, and teaching and learning activities that are age appropriate (Kamerman 2006; UNESCO, 2010; Richter et al., 2012). Early care and education is globally prioritised in light of UNESCO's global Millennial Goal 1, which is one of six educational goals that were adopted by countries that now endorse the call for 'Education for All'. These Goals had to be achieved by 2015 in signatory countries that identify Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as an essential component for young children's development and school readiness (Mbugua, 2009; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2014; Atmore, 2018). This is a principle that has been endorsed and adopted by South Africa as well.

After many consultative processes with relevant people, the South African National Curriculum Framework was published jointly by UNICEF and the Department of Basic Education and was introduced in 2015 for the provision of ECCE activities for children from

birth to four years (Department of Basic Education, 2015). The NCF aims at laying the foundations for lifelong learning for all at a very early age of a child's life (van Niekerk et al., 2017; Campbell-Barr & Bogatic, 2017). The NCF contains six ELDA's (see Chapter One) with educational directives integrated into all six these learning areas for young children. The activities embedded in the ELDA's are aimed at the holistic development of young children as developmental skills such as communication and early mathematics are developed through play. It focuses ECCE teachers' attention on the value of play that should be "prudently planned age-appropriate activities" that are integrated across learning areas for the achievement of optimal potential in young children (Department of Basic Education, 2015; Labuschagne, 2015). Mwamwenda (2014) endorses the notion that the ELDA's have to enhance young children's development.

The activities described in the NCF are intertwined and address the health, safety, and well-being of young children, especially to support underprivileged communities (Department of Basic Education, 2015). Safety procedures, social welfare support, assessment guidelines, and examples of teaching and learning activities for babies, toddlers, and young children (Murriss, 2019). Teachers are expected to follow these guidelines in their planning and they need to approach all activities in support of integrated learning. Teachers are thus important role players in the promotion of appropriate care and education to prepare young children for school (Schumacher et al., 2006; Burger, 2014; Felfe & Lalive, 2012; Lazzari & Vandenbroeck, 2012; Dean & Jayachandran, 2016). In addition, Mwamwenda and Lukhele-Olorunju (2013) suggest that ECCE teachers are vital for curriculum implementation, quality education, and school readiness support.

However, Sun et al., (2015) suggest that many rural ECCE teachers lack the professional skills to implement the official curriculum and that most work under very challenging circumstances. Conversely, various authors have mentioned that it is commendable that so many teachers in this phase give so much of their creativity to achieve the objectives of the curriculum (Soni, 2015; Stoian, 2016; Drake & Reid, 2018).

### **3.3.1 Early childhood care and education in the rural context**

Various authors and researchers agree that although the term 'rural' has different connotations, its meaning remains allied to the underprivileged and poor (Sikongoa, 2002;

van der Vyver, 2012; Gardner, 2017). 'Rural' generally refers to areas that are located far from cities and these areas are affected by many problems associated with socio-economic challenges such as increasing poverty and slow economic growth (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). ECCE centres located in these areas are thus associated with lower levels of care and education provisioning (Klein & Knitzer, 2006; Gardner, 2017). The literature reveals that rural ECCE centres generally experience many challenges that hinder effective planning of activities that best suit young children's learning styles and needs (Atmore, 2013; Kirsten, 2017). Aubrey (2017) explored inequalities in South African ECCE centres and raises her concern that rural ECCE centres in particular lack play resources to ensure development and the attainment of skills and knowledge for school readiness. Klein and Knitzer (2006) paint a dark picture of these centres as they conclude that the deprived condition of rural ECD centres is still very far from changing.

Clasquin-Johnson (2011) argues that teachers need the support of policy makers and education officials to access and implement a new curriculum. However, the literature provides evidence that only more accessible teachers in urban areas benefit from official interventions and support as rural centres are often remote and difficult to reach (Sun, Rao & Pearson, 2015; Ntumi, 2016) and many are thus marginalised in training and workshop initiatives. However, although the benefits of being workshopped by education officials are undeniable, the NCF allocates significant responsibility to adults and teachers who work with young children to work in teams in order to access and render the policy directive meaningful (Department of Basic Education, 2015).

This proposition was offered by Ebrahim and Irvine (2012) in the inception stages of the development of the NCF. Therefore, positive contributions towards accessing the NCF and sharing knowledge are needed to help teachers to learn from one another. For instance, qualified and experienced teachers should share their expertise with others while indigenous and natural resources should be creatively utilised. The Human Sciences Research Council (2010) argues that, when working in teams, qualifications and experiences are not necessarily associated with excellency and relevancy during the planning process. Therefore, teachers who are passionate about their work can learn from others and then put much more effort into engaging with the curriculum content for their children's development (Eliason & Jenkin, 2008).

Moreover, Chiparange and Saruchera (2016) are positive about the rural context where a lack of play resources and poor implementation of the learning program can be challenging for ECCE teachers as they argue that collaboration, teacher creativity, and the involvement of people with interest in children can enhance development. This view is supported by Mezirow (1978a, 1990), Kitchenham (2008), UNESCO (2010), van der Vyver (2012), and the Department of Basic Education (2015). In light of these arguments and being mindful of the lack of official support for ECCE teachers, I was thus hopeful that my study would reveal positive and commendable efforts by the study participants.

However, the researcher agrees with Ebrahim (2011) that although transition as a unifying interactive approach leads to social transformation, this has been difficult to achieve in the South African ECCE landscape. Therefore, used the NCF as the point of departure in my exploration of planning for effective integration of teaching and learning activities that should address the developmental needs of young children.

## **SECTION 2**

### **3.4 The Planning of Integrated Activities in the Early Childhood Care and Education Phase**

Planning is identified as the decision that people make prior to doing something important (National Council of Educational Research and training [NCERT], 2015). It comprises clear objectives and appropriate ways of action that someone takes in achieving set goals. Planning in education involves thinking about how one can utilise time meaningfully and to the best advantage of one's learners (UNICEF, 2009; Deacon, 2016). There is a common belief that poor performance in young children results from a lack of teachers' planning skills and their inability to convey content knowledge about a subject (Atmore, 2012; UNESCO, 2013; Kirsten, 2017). Therefore, Ramirez et al., (2016) argue that planning is one of many professional tasks that teachers must conduct as it is associated with how well they teach.

In the ECCE phase planning for teaching and learning should consider and combine several factors that impact everyday learning experiences for young children. One important requirement is that these experiences should be exciting and enjoyable (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2019). In this context it is

integration that facilitates the interconnectedness of learning content and that enhances comprehensive learning in the best interest of young children. It is for this reason that they should be exposed to a variety of experiences during play activities in which the learning areas are integrated (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012; Meier & Marais, 2012; Department of Basic Education, 2015).

### **3.4.1 Integration**

Although the term ‘integration’ was briefly enlightened in Chapter One, an in-depth presentation is provided for more elucidation of this concept in this chapter.

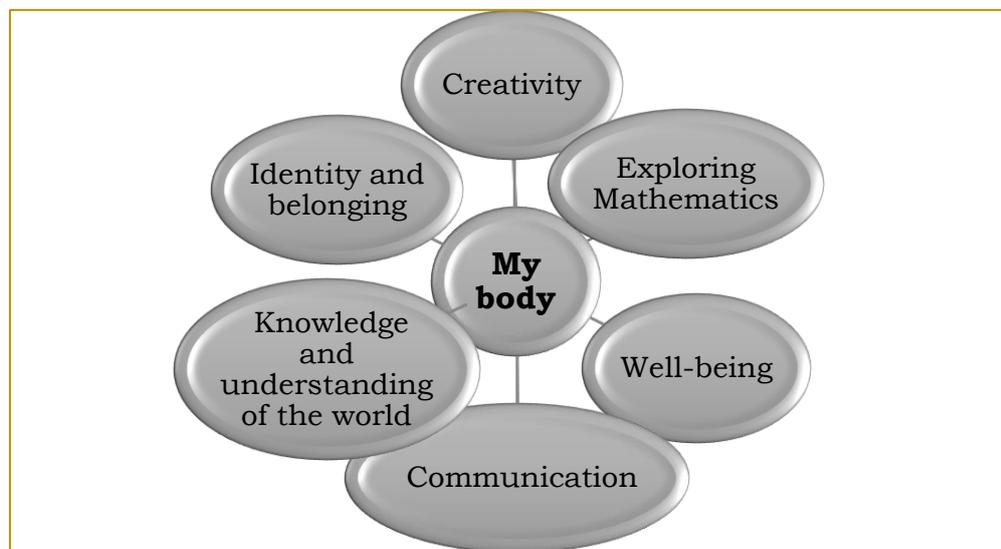
The Department of Education perceives integration as the most suitable approach in the planning of teaching activities for young children (Department of Basic Education, 2011). It has been argued that although integration is not a new teaching approach, it is now identified as a powerful lens that should be utilised to make learning more stimulating for young children (Mangione & Monahan, 2016; Salminen, 2017; Drake & Reid, 2018; Meier & Marais, 2018). The literature suggests that integration is considered mainly in the early years when teaching and learning activities for young children are connected to a variety of learning areas by means of selected themes for comprehensive learning (Stoian, 2016; Verun & Venugopal, 2016; Meier & Marais, 2018). For instance, when the selected theme is ‘Family’, teaching and learning activities may involve counting of family members, discussions about the family, stories about families, drawing and colouring, the conversations about the health of the family, and so forth. Young children are easily engaged to explore and learn from activities that are connected under a theme (Drake & Burns, 2004; Wrenn, 2009; Costley, 2015; Department of Basic Education, 2015). Drake and Savage (2016) argue that teaching and learning activities may also be integrated around age-appropriate issues or problems such as ‘Honesty and Truth’, or ‘Friendship and Caring’.

Integration has been identified as a 21<sup>st</sup> century educational approach that inspires positive attitudes for young children's robust development (Drake & Reid, 2018). Brough (2012) presents the argument that integration is influenced by teachers’ understanding of the term and it is therefore applied variously by teachers based on their understanding of ‘how it is done’ (Costley, 2015; Magoma, 2016). Drake and Reid (2018) suggest that there are three approaches to achieve integration. These approaches are:

- multidisciplinary
- interdisciplinary
- transdisciplinary

### 3.4.1.1 The multidisciplinary approach

The term ‘multidisciplinary approach’ is an international term used for the planning of teaching and learning activities that are connected within a similar theme (Brough, 2012; Drake & Reid, 2010; 2018; Mandic & Bojanic, 2018). This means that knowledge, skills, and content derived from different subjects need to be linked and connected for learning to occur in a natural way under a specific theme (Meier & Marais, 2018; Wardani et al., 2019). Learning occurs when young children connect topics that are related and they experience their actual connectedness through play. In the South African context, the multidisciplinary approach is also known as the thematic approach or thematic teaching as various activities revolve around one theme (Meier & Marais, 2018). Figure 3.1 below illustrates how the multidisciplinary/thematic approach links the six ELDA of the NCF in the theme ‘My body’.



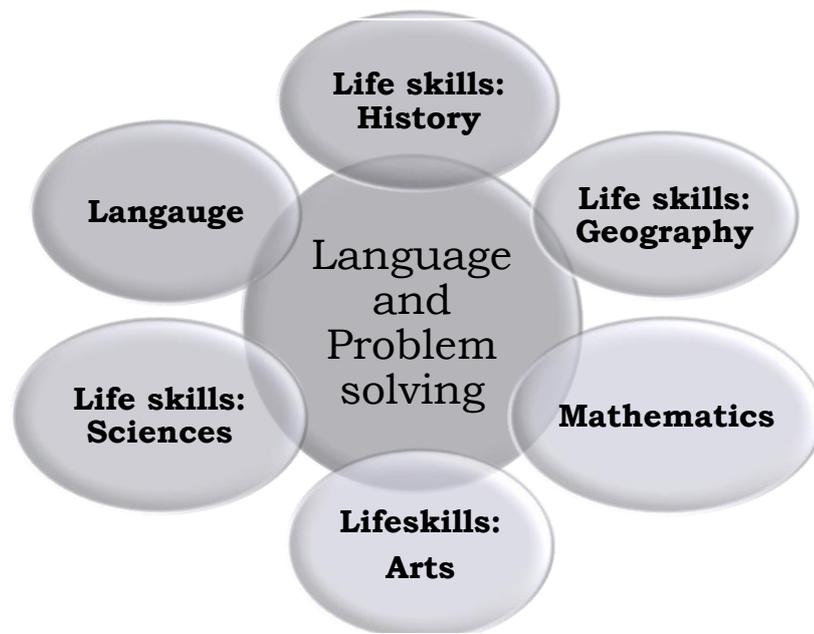
**Figure 3.1: The multidisciplinary/thematic approach as thematic teaching**

Source: Author

### 3.4.1.2 The interdisciplinary approach

The interdisciplinary approach requires the integration of essential skills such as communication or problem solving across a variety of subjects or learning areas (Drake et al., 2015). They argue that it is not obligatory to integrate all the subjects at one time in this

approach. The interdisciplinary approach is also known as a content-centred approach as it supports content development while the parameters of subjects are less distinct (Walter, 2013; Wall & Leckie, 2017). The acquired skills in one subject are thus compared and related across the content of other subjects. This approach is less used in the education of young children than in formal schooling (Walter, 2013). However, Drake et al., (2015) state that pre-service teachers in an ECD college successfully used the interdisciplinary approach for discrete disciplinary literacy tasks and found it to be useful for young children’s development. In this approach knowledge and thinking are integrated to combine important skills from two or more subjects for cognitive development in young children. Figure 3.2 illustrates how language and problem-solving skills are integrated using a variety of subjects:



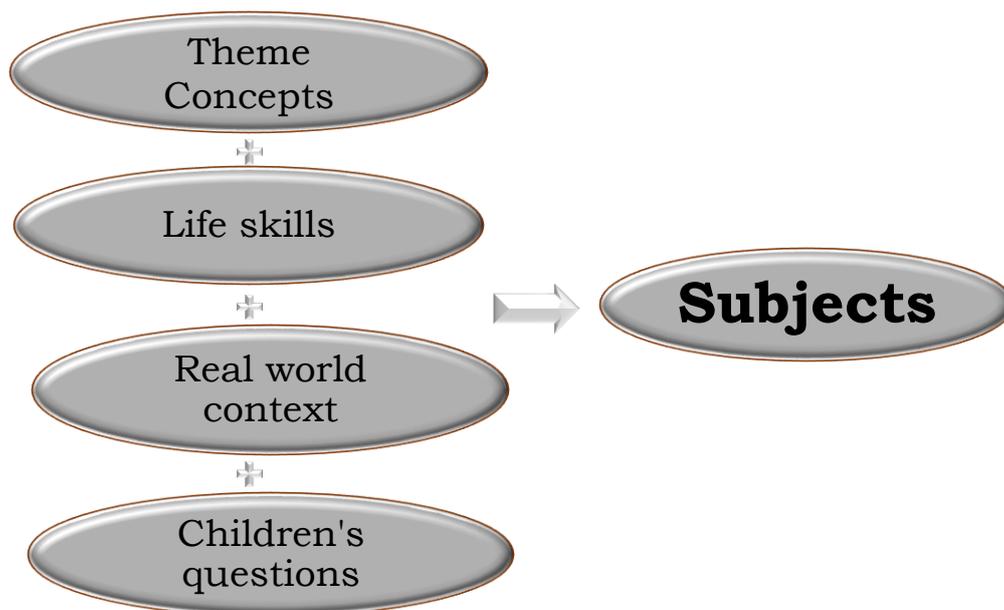
**Figure 3.2: The interdisciplinary approach**

**Source:** Author

### **3.4.1.3 The transdisciplinary approach**

The transdisciplinary approach requires the integration of activities around a problem, issue, or question (Drake & Reid, 2018). In this approach subjects lose their limits as they are holistically blended to address a problem. Jeder (2014) reveals that the transdisciplinary approach allows children to explore the world, solve real-life problems, and enjoy real-life

experiences by solving questions related to a variety of subjects. Interactive cooperation among learners is encouraged in all these activities while teaching and learning activities are planned around real-life situations and problems at the level of the child (Drake & Burns, 2004). In these activities young children are guided to take the lead based on what they want to know and learn. They may select the topic of interest and be flexible by asking any question for clarity. In this manner they are prepared to be critical thinkers who can easily identify and address problems in all subjects and eventually in real life. Jeder (2014) believes that this approach generates a paradigm shift and inspires a new vision on the world. It is celebrated as a child-centred approach but it can be challenging when planning is not properly done and executed to guide learning appropriately (Tani et al., 2013). Figure 3.3 illustrates this interdisciplinary approach and offers examples of related aspects involved in problem solving for learning in all subjects.



**Figure 3.3: The transdisciplinary or holistic approach**

**Source:** Author

Integration thus requires a variety of approaches and is recommended in the South African Grade R curriculum where it underpins the integration of all subjects through themes and activities for later success in higher grades in formal schooling (Department of Basic Education, 2011; Meier & Marais, 2018). However, in contention of Mandic and Bojanic's (2019) statement that holistic child development occurs in all of a child's surrounding

conditions, I argue that the historical development of integration occurred primarily in the formal schooling context and was limited in the ECCE context where care and not education was the focus. In South Africa the need for the planning of integrated activities has thus been endorsed based on global research perspectives and this approach is encouraged for young children's development by the forerunners of the current topic. I support the notion that young children's development is of global concern based on international research, arguments, and reviews. I shall thus later review elucidations from low- and middle-income countries that adopted EFA.

Drake et al. (2015) declare that educational transformation calls for the development of young children so that they become creative thinkers, problem solvers, and interactive learners in the classroom environment. Therefore, integration is identified as a practical approach in which the planning of activities that attempt to follow children's way of learning is pivotal (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005; Newell, 2014; Drake & Reid, 2010, 2018; Somantri et al., 2019).

It is in light of the above discourse that the South African NCF content is discussed. The six ELDA's that are the 'subjects' in the ECCE phase, examples of teaching and learning activities, and guidelines for assessment that are relevant for the holistic development of young children are placed under the lens.

### **3.5 Advent of the National Curriculum Framework**

The introduction of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for children from birth to age four heralded a paradigm shift in ECD in the South African education landscape and thus requires new planning of teaching and learning activities for the development and learning of young children. The Minister of the Department of Basic Education at the time, Ms Angie Motshekga, states in her Foreword that the NCF is the first document of its kind. She urges adults and teachers to work collectively to make it meaningful and fruitful for the children that they teach (Department of Basic Education, 2015, p. iii). She states:

The NCF comes as we are celebrating 20 years of democracy in our country and it is one of the activities aimed at improving the quality of basic education by laying a solid foundation in the early years. The development of the NCF is a great achievement for our country as it is

the first document of its kind. This will ensure that children from different backgrounds in different settings have access to quality ECD services.

### **3.5.1 The National Curriculum Framework Content**

The National Curriculum Framework document includes a set of learning outcomes that define the learning content while flexibility is emphasised in planning and assessment for the best experiences of children (Department of Basic Education, 2015; International Bureau of Education, 2017). It sets out what babies, toddlers, and young children aged three to four should know and value in all the stages of early education and provides examples of teaching and learning activities. Inequalities and unfair distribution of education during the apartheid era triggered the transformation that this document heralded (Department of Basic Education, 2015). This initiative came in response to the very little progress that had been observed in the provision of ECD education in lower socio-economic populations where children were deprived of a good education. Murriss (2019) reviewed the NCF in March 2017 and mentioned that although it was published in 2015, the first development started in 2012. The primary contributors were UNICEF that funded the development process while the principal contributors were Prof. Hasina Ebrahim (from the University of Free State) and Margaret Irvine who prepared the initial draft. Dr Snoeks Desmond executed the final editing and developed an abridged version (Department of Basic Education [Foreword], p. iii).

Twelve principles as expressed in children's perspectives and that position them as capable beings are foregrounded (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012; Department of Basic Education, 2015). However, in the South African ECCE context young children's development requires capable adults as teachers who can effectively guide young children to learn and develop (Peleg, 2013; Murriss, 2019). Therefore, the NCF identifies teachers as responsible adults who should read and make the NCF meaningful in teams to understand the content and implement it effectively. Moreover, they are required to develop young children that are critical thinkers, problem solvers, and responsible citizens that are ready for school.

Ebrahim and Irvine (2012) argue that the South African NCF is designed on the foundations of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to transform education and to:

- make learning simple and clear to be used by everyone who is interested

- unlock working opportunities for populations that had previously been treated unfairly;
- permit the development of children’s full potential
- support social and economic transformation

Table 3.1 below elucidates the six ELDAs of the NCF. It provides a summary of the desired outcomes and the related subjects in the CAPS Grade R curriculum (Department of Basic Education, 2015).

**Table 3.1: The six ELDAs: Desired results and related subjects in Grade R**

Source: Department of Basic Education, 2015

<b>Early Learning and Developmental Areas</b>	<b>Desired Results</b>	<b>Related Subjects in Formal Schooling</b>
1. Well-being	Babies, toddlers and young children develop a positive self-image, control their behaviour, become aware of diversity, respect themselves, and take care of others. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Physical and motor abilities are developed through play.</li> <li>▪ A healthy lifestyle is important.</li> </ul>	Language/s Life Skills
2. Identity and belonging	Babies, toddlers and young children develop a positive self-image, learn to manage their own behaviour, demonstrate awareness of diversity, and respect and care for others.	Life Skills (history and geography) Language
3. Communication	Babies, toddlers and young children develop critical thinking skills, learn to solve problems, form concepts, communicate effectively and confidently, and develop language through play. They develop age-appropriate mathematical concepts through a play-based approach.	Language Mathematics Life Skills
4. Exploring mathematics	Babies, toddlers and young children develop critical thinking skills, learn to solve age related problems, develop concepts, communicate well and use mathematics language at their level.	Mathematics Language Life Skills (Science and environmental knowledge)

5. Creativity	<p>Babies, toddlers and young children develop creative skills, thinking skills, problem solving skills, and form related concepts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They are more aware of themselves, develop positive self-image and manage their own behaviour.</li> <li>• They also learn to communicate effectively and to use language with confidence.</li> </ul>	<p>Language Mathematics Life Skills</p>
6. Knowledge and understanding of the world	<p>Babies, toddlers and young children demonstrate growing awareness of diversity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They think critically, solve problems, and learn to respect and care for others.</li> <li>• They learn to use mathematical concepts and develop communication skills.</li> </ul>	<p>Life Skills (history, geography, science) Mathematics Language</p>

### 3.5.1.1 Well-being

Gill (2009) distinguishes well-being as a very complex concept that can be clarified depending on culture, discipline, and concerns. Davin and van Staden (2004) identify it as a complicated learning area to be implemented in isolation from other learning areas. However, Ebrahim and Irvine (2012) recognise it as a key ELDA to be integrated in the other five ELDA in the NCF. Well-being in the NCF was developed on the basis of the South African Constitution's tenet that children's well-being should never be at risk (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). It is the first ELDA for the development of young children who need to be well nourished and healthy in safe and secure environments where they can play and learn. (Department of Basic Education, 2015; UNICEF, 2012; 2017). Health and safety aspects of childhood development are prioritised for emotional, social, and physical growth from birth until the school-going age (UNICEF, 2005; Sharpley, 2014). Unhealthy and unsafe conditions affect equal learning opportunities and academic achievements and should be eradicated where children live and learn (Mbarathi et al., 2016).

ECCE teachers' prior knowledge about young children's development is a basis for their interpretation of the new experience introduced by the NCF (Mezirow, 1978b; 1996; National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2005; Roehrig, Kruse & Kern, 2007). The NCF includes examples of teaching and learning activities such as

discussions, conversations, songs, and telling and reading stories at the level of young children that will enhance their well-being and learning. Young children are also given the opportunity to draw, paint, and play for fine and gross motor skills development. Bradley and Lowe Vandell (2007) argue that sufficient attention should be paid to these teaching methods to achieve the desired outcomes.

### **3.5.1.2 Identity and belonging**

By developing young children's sense of identity and belonging they understand who they are and they are guided to feel proud of themselves as essential and worthy members of their communities (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012; Department of Basic Education, 2015). A sense of identity and belonging is linked to individual development, social interactions, and safe relationships and allows young children to embrace their individual differences in the real world. Children learn to respect the uniqueness of others while they are guided to grow strong and improve their relationships with their peers and adults (Sharpe & Breuning, 2009; Kirsten, 2017).

Identity and belonging relate to the Life Skills learning area in the Grade R curriculum as indicated in the table above. These attributes are best developed through group work and engagements in social interactions as it is in these contexts that young children's voices are heard and respected (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012; Leggett & Ford, 2016; Murriss, 2019). In the application of this ELDA, young children are guided to make decisions at a very early age, which is a skill that they are required to possess even outside the classroom environment. Examples of teaching and learning activities for this ELDA include organised discussions, drawing, and singing songs (Department of Basic Education, 2015). Haburu (2015) stresses the importance of play resources and other material to guide play-based learning. However, some ECCE centres, especially in rural areas, struggle to obtain such resources and material (Labuschagne, 2015; Ntumi, 2016; Aubrey, 2017).

### **3.5.1.3 Communication**

Communication requires consistent and contingent responses using verbal and non-verbal interactions for making sense of situations and learning content (Flippin & Watson, 2015; Department of Basic Education, 2011). It is argued that, in the ECCE phase, communication requires the development of language for the acquisition of thinking, listening, talking, and comprehension skills through play (Vorster et al., 2016). Young children play to learn and

therefore communication is also integrated with the other five ELDA's to advance language that is needed in Grade R and later formal schooling. Ebrahim and Irvine (2012) emphasise that young children need daily opportunities to communicate with one another and with the teacher inside and outside the classroom environment where it is safe and suitable for play-based learning. Communication is advanced as teachers model appropriate social and personal behaviour while children interact with the physical environment (Bornstein & Putnick, 2012).

Vorster et al. (2016) argue that communication as an early language development skill is very challenging in an environment where teaching and play learning resources are scarce. However, all ECCE teachers should endeavour to create resource materials such as labels, words, rhymes, songs and stories to generate the interest of young children. In this context I shall later deliberate on creativity and the use of indigenous and natural resources that are easily available even in remote locations (Department of Basic Education, 2015).

#### **3.5.1.4 Early mathematics**

Conceptual development of early mathematics is essential for the mathematics that is done later in the formal schooling context. Accessing early mathematical skills is an opportunity for young children to solve mathematical problems by using numbers, counting, and reasoning at their level (Samaras, 2011). Kortjass (2019) asserts that the early mathematics learning process has to be fun and exciting while children make connections with their environment. Bornstein and Putnick (2012) suggest that early mathematics activities should be well planned to extend young children's understanding of concepts that relate to a wide range of experiences both indoors and outdoors. When the classroom environment and play are linked to young children's real-world experiences, they develop a love for and value the subject.

In the South African ECCE context early mathematics is required as an ELDA by the NCF and teachers are guided regarding relevant activities that are suitable for babies, toddlers, and young children (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012; Department of Basic Education, 2015). The aim is to introduce young children to numbers, counting, classifying, sorting, and solving problems that are relevant to their developmental age and learning. Moreover, they are exposed to opportunities to explore shapes, space, and measurement through play.

### **3.5.1.5 Creativity**

Creativity in the early years of a child's development is the opportunity to enhance cognitive development and find solutions to the problems that young children need to solve (Department of Basic Education, 2015). Art forms are used to develop young children's creative skills and cognitive resources and therefore techniques for specific art-expressive opportunities should be developed for play (Kroftlic, 2007; Kindler, 2010). Teaching and learning resources are utilised to foster creative thinking and the development of relevant skills. Activities include singing, drawing, dancing, and dramatic play (Department of Basic Education, 2011). While creative skills are developed, communication and fine and gross motor skills are also developed as children play, scribble, and draw (Koster, 2012; Menzer, 2015). In the ECCE phase young children explore the world and learn in a playful way, and it is then when creativity enhances social and emotional skills development (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Menzer, 2015; Novakovic, 2015).

It is the ECCE teacher's duty to nurture early creativity as every child is born with creative potential (Menzer, 2015). They have to guide young children to think and utilise skills to master knowledge and new experiences that are relevant to them (Department of Basic Education, 2015). Teachers thus become the organisers, motivators, and stimulators of curiosity (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Menzer, 2015). ECCE teachers also have to develop new educational procedures for children to understand the world around them and to achieve the four aims of creativity that are expounded in the NCF.

### **3.5.1.6 Knowledge and understanding of the world**

Knowledge and understanding of the world is the last ELDA that the NCF prescribes. It relates to children's everyday experiences as well as their families, homes, people, and relevant physical surroundings in the real world (Ward, 2013). This learning area offers young children opportunities to learn through experimenting and exploring the world using relevant resources and engaging in activities that are relevant to their age (Department of Basic Education, 2015). Therefore, well-planned practical experiences in the physical environment are important. This learning area is linked to life skills subjects such as History, Geography, science and languages in the formal school setting (Table 3.1) (Department of Basic Education, 2009). ECCE teachers should also plan so that young children can explore, investigate, design, and use technology when it is available (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012).

One challenge is that the NCF is presented in English while IsiZulu is the language of teaching and learning the rural ECCE centres in KwaZulu-Natal where the research was conducted. Therefore, the infusion of the curriculum with meaningful content has to be carefully planned so that activities are natural and connect these young children to local realities and experiences (Ward, 2013) and expose them to opportunities and skills for life-long learning benefits (Clampett, 2016).

### **3.6 Guidance for Assessment**

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), (2009), assessment is a tool to monitor children's progress to determine if they have achieved the anticipated outcomes of the curriculum. Assessment is defined as a planned process to identify, collect, and interpret information about children's development and it needs to be continuous and informal in the ECCE phase (Morrison, 2009). Assessment in this phase also needs to be purposefully guided with reference to the desired curriculum outcomes (Department of Basic Education, 2011; 2015). Six steps need to be followed when planning for assessment (Department of Basic Education, 2015, p. 71):

- Preparing an observation book and addressing all the needs to assess young children
- Clearly making notes of what to assess in the observation book
- Recording all significant evidence and making notes about the child
- Selecting what has to be discussed with parents or carers
- Writing down findings to report to parents or carers in a planned meeting
- Planning assessment for upcoming activities

In support of planning for assessment, Myers (2004) argues that assessment guides should be clearly planned to direct what is to be taught and to report the findings. In the early years of childhood development observations and suitable interviews (conversations) and portfolios are commonly used as methods of assessment (Jiban, 2013; Naude & Meier, 2014; Meier & Marais, 2018) while the data are recorded and evidence of performance is placed in learner portfolios. Young children are observed and assessed on how they perform in executing activities inside and outside the classroom. Naude and Meier (2014) suggest that questions that are posed at the level of the child also guide assessment. They suggest that teachers record comments in their assessment books at all times as notes of all the milestones achieved and

challenges faced by young children need to be filed. Teachers thus have to be alert at all times to note all the issues that a child faces and they also need to decide when a child has to be assessed as an individual or as part of a group (Schaik, Leseman & de Haan, 2018).

Curriculum content, suitable teaching and learning activities, and the outcomes required by the curriculum guide assessment and therefore it is important in the planning process. It has to be properly planned to assess what, how, why, when, and where young children learn for the outcomes of each lesson to be achieved (Soni, 2015; Husni & Rouadi, 2016; Drake & Reid, 2018). It is also important that teachers trace the impact of the curriculum on young children to assess their development that should occur in a fun and interesting way. Thereafter, a record of all the observations and findings are presented to parents. Assessments are also used to identify children with barriers to learning in particular areas (Department of Basic Education, 2015; Schaik et al., 2018). The teaching and learning activities that children are exposed to should be integrated which requires meticulous planning. The literature that I reviewed in this regard emanated primarily from international studies as NCF guidance is a relatively new experience in ECCE in South Africa.

### **3.7 Planning Approaches for Integration as directed by the NCF**

Planning approaches are organisational compasses offering guidance to where teachers need to go (McKeown, 2012). Authors have referred to and recommended a range of approaches to integrate teaching and learning activities. Of all these, the multidisciplinary approach is the most commonly used in the ECCE sector (Meier & Marais, 2018; Fathima, 2014; Okoro & Okoro, 2016).

#### **3.7.1 Integrating activities based on a theme**

According to Zin et al., (2019), the thematic approach or thematic teaching is a way of accessing the curriculum by incorporating different subjects, teaching methods, learning resources, and activities based on a particular theme. This view is supported by many authors such as Drake and Reid (2018), Venugopal (2016), and Okoro and Okoro (2016). Thematic teaching is the term of preference used in this thesis.

The literature highlights theme teaching as an integrated approach to teaching and learning based on activities that provide natural experiences and to avoid an incoherent and confusing

nature of learning for young children (Fathima, 2014; Somantri et al., 2019). Learning concepts are not merely about mathematics in one situation and merely about language in another moment (Mangione & Monahan, 2016), but activities from different subjects are interwoven in themes for children to learn effortlessly. Salminen (2017) suggests that the approach contributes to positive outcomes where connections are also made to real-world experiences through thinking, reading, and writing that bring together different aspects of the curriculum in a meaningful way. Salminen (2017) ideas intensify the need to incorporate the interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches for essential skills development while ensuring that activities are related to the outside world (Drake & Reid, 2018). In such approaches young children acquire creative and innovative skills and become critical thinkers as the content becomes increasingly advanced.

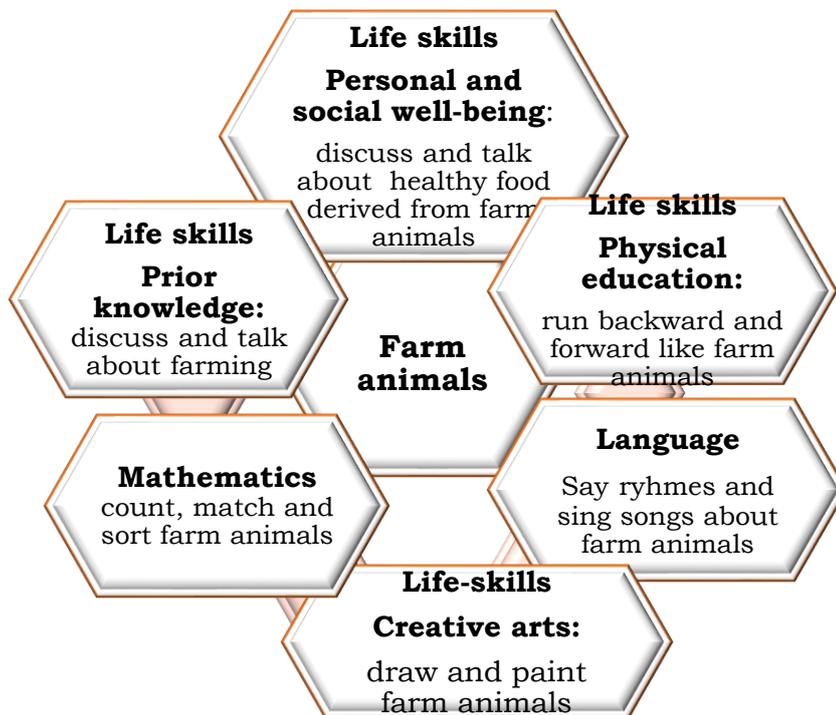
Thematic teaching draws from John Dewey's theory of meaning making that aims to develop the whole child (Dewey, 1990). The transdisciplinary approach is also known as the holistic approach that is used to help the child to explore the world around her (Mandic & Bojanic, 2019). In the context of this study thematic teaching found support in Mezirow's transformative learning theory that emphasises the use of a common frame that needs to change according to a new learning experience that occurs in different phases (Mezirow, 1978b; 1990).

Bjorklund and Ahlskog-Bjorkman (2017) identify thematic teaching as meaning making of the curriculum content based on collaboration and communication as a developmental pedagogy. Therefore, teachers have to work in teams to achieve the outcomes of the curriculum (Newell, 2014; New, 2005; Meier & Marais, 2012; Drake & Reid, 2018) and, in so doing, they share their views and experiences about themes and resources to help learners to learn (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005; Sicherl-Kafol & Denac, 2010; Drake & Reid, 2018). According to Okoro and Okoro (2016), preparation for thematic teaching needs to accentuate the needs, knowledge, and understanding required for learning the new content that the teacher wants to bring to young children. Planning is thus an opportunity to access curriculum content and to plan and organise activities that 'speak to' the curriculum. Malik and Malik (2011) suggest the following useful steps for planning thematic teaching in the ECCE phase:

- Reading relevant content
- Determining the required outcomes

- Developing or selecting relevant themes
- Formulating a comprehensive and appropriate timeline
- Selecting assessment methods

After thoroughly reading the curriculum content and determining relevant outcomes, teachers should plan by developing and/or choosing themes that will integrate teaching and learning activities. This point is illustrated in Figure 3.4 below. It is an example of Reception class (Grade R) subjects and activities that are integrated into the theme ‘Farm Animals’ and highlights my assertions:



**Figure 3.4: Integrating subjects and activities under one theme**

Source: Author

Zin et al. (2019) assert that themes can be planned on a monthly or weekly basis depending on the teacher and the availability of related teaching and play resources. Teachers sometimes use mind maps to incorporate subjects and learning goals similar to Figure 3.1 above. However, specific examples of themes are not included in the NCF for children from birth to four years and therefore teachers who use thematic teaching should develop or select themes that are relevant to their children.

### 3.7.2 Selecting a theme

According to Esu (2012), a theme needs to relate curriculum content to children's experiences. This choice needs materials that engage with the environment around the child and should enquire social and cultural experiences that interest young children (Cremin & Slatter, 2004). Researchers believe that meaningful themes are those that teachers direct at the level of children and that are relevant to their diverse developmental stages, ages, styles of learning, and interests (Adamu, 2003; Hedges, Cullen & Jordan, 2011; Fathima, 2014; Soni, 2015). Basic themes such as me, my body, my home, my family, transport, water, and many others should be considered (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

Meier and Marais (2018) suggest that choosing themes should preferably be done collectively at the beginning or towards the end of the year. Teachers should also share their creative skills and take the child's world into consideration. They need to communicate their thoughts with others about what young children have to achieve at the end of each particular year. Moreover, they need to explore ideas for integration under relevant themes to ensure the best learning experiences for young children. According to Jeder (2013), teachers need to extend learners' interest in a real-world area and thus decide on themes that will contain active components that relate to viewing (reading), writing (drawing), mathematics, and early science readiness for formal school. Depending on the teaching and learning resources that are available, children may explore themes such as soil, plants, and animals in an integrated manner for learning experiences. Such themes and activities should be meticulously planned for the achievement of curriculum objectives (Bilton, 2010).

Based on the study conducted in India, Reetu, Renu and Adarsh (2017) assert that training and orientation are required to choose appropriate themes but because this did not occur in India the lack of training became a major hindrance in the implementation of the curriculum framework in this country. Teachers identified lack of training as a dilemma that affected planning for integrated teaching and learning activities for young children. Therefore, the government of India, local role-players and academics working in the ECCE field collaborated to develop a resource book titled *Theme based Early Childhood Care and Education programme*. This book includes nine themes and related activities to support ECCE teachers (Soni, 2015; Varun & Venugopal, 2016). Reetu, Renu and Adarsh (2017) mention that the first theme in the resource book ('Myself') provides teachers with options

for weekly and monthly planning. As an example, I outline this theme in Table 3.2 below and indicate how it includes related subjects and activities.

**Table 3.2: Theme, subjects and activities in an Indian ECCE resource book**

Source: Adapted from Reetu et al., (2017)

<b>Theme:</b> Myself
<b>Language:</b> Listening and making sense of stories, picture reading and interpretation, reciting rhymes, making patterns, scribbling, and conversations.
<b>Mathematics:</b> Activities requiring classification, sorting, and exploring shapes and patterns
<b>Life Skills (art and craft):</b> Drawing pictures ('myself') and making finger puppets
<b>Life Skills:</b> Reciting rhymes about myself, the parts of the body, and listening to music.

This resource book has become a valued support document that teachers in India use as it provides all the information needed in the planning process (Reetu et al., (2017)). Additionally, guides teachers to successfully plan integrated activities for young children so that they will learn in a way that is meaningful for them. After the dissemination of this book, a positive difference was observed in the development of young children in India (Sharma et al., 2008).

In South Africa the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT, 2019) also decided to supplement the curriculum framework to support integration and theme development at the level of young children. This resource book contains ideas for classroom organisation, assessment strategies, exemplar lesson plans, and examples of teaching and learning resources that may be used when integrating teaching and learning activities in the ECD context. Various teachers contributed their ideas to compile this resource book and to enhance the schedule that was developed. This helps teachers who use this resource book to save time as they are guided in their planning and can thus utilise their time more meaningfully.

Davin and van Staden (2004) assert that when teachers are provided with guidelines when choosing themes they will better execute planning. Five guiding principles are proposed when choosing themes (p. 251):

- Link the theme to purpose and curriculum content.
- It has to be developmentally appropriate.
- It has to be meaningful to children.
- It has to be multicultural.
- It has to be fun and enjoyable for young children.

In light of the above, as well as my experiences as a teacher and teacher educator, I regard choosing themes as an important step in the thematic approach. However, pre-planned themes need to be supported by other teachers to ensure the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities (Jeder, 2013). Dowden (2006) supports the notion of pre-planned themes as this is a time saver for teachers.

### **3.7.3 Models for Integrated Teaching and Learning: International Experiences**

Using a model as a guideline for planning integrated teaching and learning activities is a strategy that some teachers use. Drake and Reid (2018) mention that models for integration need to be used as some teachers become overwhelmed with so many responsibilities while many also don't trust that they know enough about integration to engage in their planning confidently.

#### **3.7.3.1 Ontario, Canada**

In Ontario (Canada) ECCE teachers and experts collaborated in a cluster to peruse and understand the new curriculum and thereafter to design a plan to be followed for integrated activity planning. Boehme (2017) suggests that in such a process the first important step is to read the curriculum document and thereafter communicate with the learners to identify what they know and what their life experiences have been. This is because planning for integration is deemed an inquiry approach as teachers need to research what children know as a basis for development.

In the Ontario model all the role-players involved in the planning project set aside time to meet after school for a period of two months to plan appropriately. They realised the importance of making time available for the development of their planning strategies in the

interest of young children. They all had the common goal to plan in order to develop young children so that they would acquire 21<sup>st</sup> century capabilities. Lepone (2016) asserts that, together, they identified what they wanted the children to *know*, to *do*, and what they wanted them to *be* in the community. They collaboratively created the model with a clear view of the curriculum objectives and it has since been used effectively by teachers in Ontario. These collaborators recognised what Mezirow (1991, p. 93) identifies as “the importance of collaboration and meaning making for people to transform”. Collaborative planning thus assisted them in developing the planning of integrated activities for teaching and learning. The Ontario Government approved the model as it generated positive results for children’s learning at first. It is known as Drake’s Model to Know/Do/Be, or The KDB Model in short (Drake et al., 2015; Lepone, 2016). The KDB Model is followed at all levels of education in Ontario to integrate teaching and learning activities. It saves time for teachers as they know where to start with their planning and how to integrate teaching and learning activities. Below are the seven steps that this model proposes to support planning and to integrate teaching and learning (Drake & Reid, 2010, p 2):

- (1) Read and examine the curriculum document to identify suitable content for children to learn, skills to be developed, and ethical issues to be considered based on a real context. Drake and Reid (2018) add that after reading the document they did research to understand what their children knew and needed to know. They organised meaningful concepts and identified the Know, Do, Be (KDB) as clarified above.
- (2) Choose themes that are at the level of the child. Young children learn better when they are interested (Nasibi, 2005). Therefore, themes such as plants, animals, and fruit and vegetables are suggested (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016).
- (3) After choosing the themes, brainstorm teaching and learning activities that are theme related. These should be based on what young children know for instance about animals if this is the theme and they need to talk, draw, colour and do activities about animals.
- (4) Teachers finalise the content and skills and present the desired outcomes.
- (5) The next step is to plan the assessment tasks for children to demonstrate if the KDB expectations have been met.
- (6) Teachers then develop a broad instructional plan and include teaching and learning resources for the development of 21<sup>st</sup> century capabilities.

- (7) Lastly, teachers plan their lessons to ensure that the children acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to achieve the KDB objectives.

According to this model, children are provided opportunities to explore their prior and new knowledge and to develop new skills and values. They easily learn and enjoy subjects like mathematics and languages that could sometimes be challenging (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012; Fullan & Langworthy, 2014; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). Trilling and Fadel (2009) support the notion that clear planning is required before teachers teach, assess, and otherwise support children's development. Drake's model intends to meet all the needs of children in all grades (Drake & Reid, 2010; 2018) and it has aptly assisted teachers' worthy efforts to teach and support children after the introduction of the new curriculum (Boehme, 2017; Lepone, 2016). What has been achieved in Ontario provides insight into how forerunners can successfully work with and for teachers to ensure the successful implementation of a demanding new curriculum.

### **3.7.3.2 Trinidad and Tobago**

John (2015) mentions that the National Curriculum Framework that was introduced in Trinidad and Tobago had been designed to include seven themes and sub-themes to support integration. However, it was discovered that the introduction of themes was not the only support that was needed. Mohammed (2006) argues that teachers were not trained to follow a plan while teaching and learning resources were scarce in poor areas. Therefore, teachers resisted implementing the new curriculum and it was thus ineffective (Penuel et al., 2007; Buchanan & Engebretson, 2009).

### **3.7.3.3 Uganda**

Similar to Tobago and Trinidad, when a new curriculum was introduced in Uganda it was deemed a waste of time as teachers were comfortable with the planning strategies that they had been doing before (Altinyelken, 2010). The implementation of the framework became a failure as it was expected that teachers would be trained by the government but found this inadequate. They considered that their needs were not taken into consideration (Altinyelken, 2010).

Read and Enyutu (2005) assert that teachers' perspectives and needs should contribute to the implementation of a new curriculum framework, especially as the language of a policy

document may be new to teachers. They should thus be assisted while they work together to share their experiences and plan for the future. However, Altinyelken (2010) argues that teachers always expect clear guidelines and a curriculum that is transcribed in their home language and they don't appreciate challenges that affect their planning and the implementation of a curriculum. Winchester-Morris (2014) also identifies the importance of support, team work, and collaboration when teachers have to plan integrated activities. They need to be given time to share ideas and experiences and work together for the best experiences of the young children in their care. It was the absence of these requirements that undoubtedly led to the failure of the new curriculum in Uganda.

#### **3.7.4 The formulation of the instructional plan**

In the South African context, the new curriculum for the ECCE phase emphasises that team work, communication, and the previous experiences of teachers are essential in creating an instructional plan that can be implemented effectively (Department of Basic Education, 2015). Therefore, if teachers are expected to integrate teaching and learning activities without training, severe challenges may be expected. Mezirow (1978; 1991) argues that teachers' perspectives, critical reflections, and desire to change contribute to positive change and development and they will then be willing to use their combined strategies to successfully plan for integration. Understanding curriculum content also contributes positively to the successful implementation of a new curriculum (Soni, 2015; Zin et al., 2019). Moreover, if the language of the document is difficult to access (as it is in the case of South Africa where the NCF document was not presented in the Home Language of many teachers) teachers should be supported to access it successfully. Understanding context and culture and knowing children also contribute to positive instructional planning (Varun, 2014). Therefore Varun (2014) proposes the following three steps for instructional planning:

- Think about the experiences of the child
- Ask yourself if the chosen theme is relevant to the natural curiosity to the child
- Think about the child's background knowledge before a chosen theme is presented

Varun and Venugopal (2016) further argue that it is the knowledge that the teacher gains about the child that contributes to successful integrated activities, the creation of a conducive learning environment, the selection of effective resources, and sound planning for assessment.

Teachers also need to think about when to teach integrated activities appropriately and this requires an effective instructional plan.

The instructional plan is defined as the prepared plan of how integrated teaching and learning activities are presented so that children will achieve the objectives and outcomes of the curriculum (Snyder & McWilliam, 2003). Such a plan should support the guidance given to children which should occur in a well-organised and well-structured manner for their holistic development.

Clampett (2016) argues that a teacher who plans and knows what to do every day becomes confident and is organised. They should thus formulate a plan of when and how to teach what. An instructional plan includes the organisation of the learning environment and all the teaching and learning resources to be used when teaching. Meier and Marais (2012) identify weekly planning and daily lesson plans as the two most important examples of instructional plans.

#### **3.7.4.1 Weekly planning**

A weekly plan is a planning programme and is planned according to the weekly timetable to structure time, space, and materials for teaching and learning, usually across a five-day week (Department of Basic Education, 2009). All play and learning activities are structured in such a plan (Courson & Wallace, 2010) to ensure that progression is assured and that unnecessary repetition does not occur. The curriculum for ECCE centres states that a weekly plan is necessary for effective teaching and learning activities that are relevant to a particular group of children. A week-long programme is subdivided into daily activities that address specific teaching and learning activities according to a daily timetable (Meier & Marais, 2018). A weekly plan compels teachers to think ahead and make choices to deliver teaching and learning activities that are connected over at least five days within a particular theme. Courson and Wallace (2010) assert that the weekly plan should support the intellectual, emotional, physical, and social development of young children. According to David and van Staden (2004), a weekly plan also incorporates both indoor and outdoor activities that are flexible and understandable for young children. Teachers have to know children and their experiences when developing a weekly plan to achieve the curriculum goals (Courson & Wallace, 2010). However, in such a plan the context and culture of the relevant ECCE centre should also be taken into consideration (Hyde & Kabiru, 2003) and activities should progress and be

supported through consideration of the setting and the environment of the child (Mandic & Bojanic, 2019).

Meier and Marais (2012) argue that ECCE centre managers and teachers need to become involved in the planning of weekly plans as they need to discuss all the physical characteristics of a centre and other issues linked to the plan. They also need to consider weather and seasons in their selection of suitable themes and activities that need to be appropriate for hot summer and cold winter days. Meier et al., (2015) add that the ELDA's are pivotal in the weekly plan and that it should be shared with parents and carers. This research study considered the requirement for weekly plans and such a plan used by rural ECCE teachers is attached (Appendix L).

#### **3.7.4.2 Daily lesson planning**

Lesson planning is an important aspect of any lesson as it involves many decisions that the teacher has to take into consideration (Rutgers & Reddy, 2013). It is the designed plan of how lessons are taught in the classroom (Hernandez, 2008). Although there is no standardised format of lesson planning, teachers in the early years write down how teaching and learning activities are integrated with one another, the relationship between subjects, and how children can be assessed after learning. Meier and Marais (2012) add that daily planning takes age group, the type of presentation, duration of the presentation, and the chosen theme for that particular day into consideration. Moreover, when teaching young children, teaching resources and materials used in achieving the curriculum objectives are also regarded as important (Jansen, 2008). A daily plan must thus be clear and realistic so that the outcomes can be achieved in the limited time allocated for interaction per day.

Lesson planning must also consider the importance of the learning environment and all the support that the teacher will provide when teaching. Considering the learning environment is essential for both weekly and daily lesson planning as it is part of the strategy used to integrate teaching and learning activities. The planning of an effective daily programme takes the specific group of children into consideration. Teachers allocate a specific time for each activity and follow the same sequence to give the feeling of security to children as they know what will happen next.

### **3.7.5 Organising the learning environment**

The learning environment is an organised setting that provides a space where children can think critically while they are nurtured and engaged (Meier & Marais, 2012). French and Murphy (2005) argue that the learning environment should communicate a sense of respect and purpose and should be adaptable. The environment where they learn is the world around young children that best suits their interest in play for learning and development (Greenman, 2007). Hence, young children not only learn indoors but should explore spaces inside and outside the classroom where teaching and learning activities are organised (Elliott & Davis, 2008; Turkmen, 2010; Kernan, 2015; Kroeker, 2017). Davin and van Staden (2004) assert that organising the learning environment is a great opportunity for creative teachers to nurture their learners without restricting the available number of areas and activities they could explore.

Bento and Dias (2017) argue that teaching and learning resources that are age-appropriate and that stimulate the interest and development of young children are part of the learning environment. However, Tilbury (2005) states that some teachers in ECD centres are unable to integrate the learning environment with teaching and learning activities as they were not trained on how it should be done. Therefore, lack of training, limited resources, and an inaccessible curriculum document that does not guide such integration affect planning for integrated learning. Kellert (2005) asserts that the learning environment has to incorporate nature for cognitive, emotional, and physical development while children also learn about nature. It allows local resources to be explored for some teaching and learning activities. According to Shipley (2008), teachers are expected to create a safe learning environment for the exploration of structured materials, quiet play, creative materials, and fine and gross motor activities while the needs of children with disabilities should also be taken into consideration.

The safety of the learning environment and the play resources that are used when fine and gross motor skills are developed also forms part of the environment (Vaughan, 2007). Hence the importance of safety care and educational activities for young children is integrated in the first ELDA in the NCF, namely well-being. Safety both inside and outside the classroom is emphasised.

Sometimes ECCE teachers struggle to control young children's behaviour in a particular setting or learning environment. Vashon Maury Cooperative Preschool (2012) suggests that teachers should establish rules as a guide for good behaviour and care of play resources and the environment when organising learning spaces. Children should be given the opportunity to make their own choices (within reason) and to respond appropriately to their needs and experiences. They need to become involved in their learning experiences and social interactions in teams and groups in a suitable environment where they learn through play that is underpinned by integrated teaching and learning activities.

### **3.7.5.1 The indoor environment**

The indoor environment is an organised space or area for teaching young children, such as inside a classroom (Essa, 2014). This environment includes important areas such as a reading area, a mathematics area, a fantasy area, a music area, a block area, a manipulation area, and many others as identified by the teacher (Brewer, 2007; Yildirim & Akamca, 2017). It was my intention to explore the importance of learning spaces and how these should be incorporated in planning as each area needs to contribute to engagement for specific objectives. Labuschagne (2015) identifies the indoor environment as a space where the teacher guides children what to do and the play resources have to carry the message of what is expected.

In the reading corner, for example, emergent reading material that is at the level of the learner, such as (picture) books and puzzles, have to be provided (Cakirer & Garcia, 2010; Cakirer, 2010). The block area should have blocks of different sizes and shapes so that children can compare shapes, sizes, and colours while their creative skills are also developed when they stack and play with these blocks. Children learn as they build puzzles, match cards, and explore different kinds of toys that are available in different areas. During these learning experiences they develop fine motor and pre-writing skills. The indoor environment thus integrates different skills in various areas for young children's development where their safety is not compromised.

### **3.7.5.2 The outdoor environment**

The outdoor environment is an area outside the play room where young children can learn and develop different skills from those they acquire indoors (Essa, 2014). They have fun and make decisions to touch, count, and talk while their gross and fine motor skills are also

developed. Bento and Dias (2017) add that real objects such as sticks, leaves, trees, soil and flowers are local resources that also become part of the learning experience outdoors. According to Labuschagne (2015), equipment outdoors such as swings, a jungle gym, and slides are required for the development of fine and gross motor skills. Water and a sandpit area are also used to support learning as stated in the curriculum document. Knowing and understanding the curriculum content is essential for integrating activities effectively in the outdoor environment.

### **3.8 Teachers' Experiences of Planning Integrated Activities**

Teachers need to build their experiences of planning for integrated teaching and learning activities as there are some challenges that may impact the process. Pawilen, Arre and Lindo (2010) assert that it is an exciting adventure when teachers explore different ways of presenting knowledge while children's needs and interests are taken into consideration. In this section I thus discuss various experiences that may contribute to the way ECCE teachers integrate teaching and learning activities. The discourse includes their strengths, opportunities, and the challenges that might affect their experiences. The importance of training and support for the effective implementation of a new curriculum is also discussed below.

#### **3.8.1 Training and support**

The demands of any new curriculum will affect its implementation when teachers are not properly trained and also not supported to understand the content and the objectives of such a curriculum (John, 2015; Clasquin-Johnson, 2016; Ngwenya, 2019). Training and support are thus prerequisites for any curriculum implementation (Ntumi, 2016). Teachers who lack proper guidance, knowledge, and skills find it difficult to implement a new curriculum and to plan the best experiences for the children in their care. Labuschagne (2015) argues that it is worse in rural ECCE centres where teachers experience many other challenges such as a lack of teaching and learning resources while most of them are also not qualified. Ngwenya (2019) suggests that training and learning need to be embraced as an opportunity for growth and development and accessing a new curriculum should thus be a process of self-empowerment for teachers to build competence.

This process is in line with Mezirow's (1996) theory that learning begins when a disorienting dilemma occurs that directs critical reflections. People then act upon these reflections, change

their perspectives, and this results in transformation. Experiencing a disorienting dilemma is a period of confusion that happens to people when they don't know what to do in order to cope with a difficult issue. Such a dilemma influences their performance and they battle to acquire new knowledge or to change their practice and acquire new skills (Mezirow, 1996). Where knowledge is not sufficient, their previous experiences contribute to learning. This notion aligns with John Dewey's philosophy that there is no education without experience (Carver & Enfield, 2006). Teachers thus explore and build on experiences of their own school days in order to transform. In the same way they need education and training to lift them out of old habits and perspectives and to enlighten them about new knowledge and experiences. Transformation is thus defined by Mezirow as "the meaning making of experiences" (Hatherley, 2011, p. 3) which is also enhanced by training.

### **3.8.2 Teaching and learning resources**

Chukwbikem (2013) intensively studied the purpose of early childhood education (ECE) and identifies resources such as finances, human capital, and physical means as vital in the support of young children's development. Teaching and learning resources that encourage integration and that need to be utilised include toys that need to be available in different corners inside a classroom while appropriate equipment needs to be available outdoors (Adediji, 2012; Vorster et al., 2016). If these toys and equipment are scattered haphazardly, chaos will prevail and limited learning will occur in the ECCE context. Therefore, Pawilen et al., (2010) maintain that planning and organisational strategies to integrate teaching and learning activities need to keep in mind specific toys for achieving curriculum outcomes while young children play to learn. Such materials and equipment stir children's curiosity and should be safe physical resources that stimulate child-centred ideas and that link learning activities. There is a great need for good planning regarding teaching and learning resources in the ECCE phase. Unfortunately, Labuschagne (2015) iterates that, while teaching and learning resources are important, many ECCE teachers in rural areas struggle to effectively plan lessons as they lack resources to link activities and therefore neither indoor nor outdoor settings are used suitably for young children's development.

The challenge regarding resources is also identified in a Department of Social Development (DSD) (2014) report where it is stated that some rural ECCE centres struggle to obtain funding to buy appropriate teaching and learning resources. Vorster et al., 2016; Akinrotimi and

Olowe 2016) suggest that there is a great need for teachers to learn to make their own resources to teach young children as they learn essentially through perceptions and play activities where they have to be exposed to solid objects that they can touch. In this manner they learn to understand concrete objects and abstract concepts (Ouvry, 2003; Yildirim & Akamca, 2017; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2018).

The NCF highlights the importance of indigenous resources and for children to learn in a natural way. Therefore, using teaching and learning resources that are available in the environment is important. Labuschagne (2015) adds that children and their families can collect suitable waste such as empty containers, plastic bags, and tins to create different resources for learning. Teachers can also make play resources from waste materials. However, when teachers are not creative they need to be trained and guided to create their own resources as it is a given that ECCE teachers are expected to enrich learning through play and materials so that they can guide and stimulate young children's learning.

### **3.9 Transformative Learning Practices**

Teachers learn and develop new skills when they work together to plan integrated activities for young children. According to Taylor (2007), this collaboration should be informed by common practices which will contribute to transformative learning.

#### **3.9.1 Collaboration and team-work**

Mezirow (1991) asserts that people with the desire to support and develop young children's learning should work collaboratively in teams to achieve their goals. This notion is addressed in the new South African NCF for children from birth to four years (Department of Basic Education, 2015; Rudolph et al., 2019). Teachers have to learn to work with one another in the best interest of young children's development (Husnil & Rouadi1, 2016). They learn from one another, develop confidence, and share experiences (New, 2005; Drake & Reid, 2010; Ebrahim, 2010; Pawilen et al., 2010; Meier & Marais, 2012) while they also need to and assist one another in order to unearth their strengths and achieve social transformation. Haddad (2002) identifies some challenges for teachers that plan their teaching activities in isolation as it is important to listen to others, build empathy, and work with other teachers who share their vision to develop their learners' capacities (Mezirow, 2000).

When teaching in the ECD phase teachers need to collaborate in teams to plan integrated teaching and learning activities using themes that are suitable for young children's development. Newell (2014) identifies integration as a jigsaw puzzle that requires teachers to find the pieces to complete the puzzle. Therefore, if there is lack of collaboration, teachers will struggle to select themes, understand concepts, and devise activities that will support young children to learn better. As teachers develop collectively, those that are not qualified become qualified as they learn from those with experience and training (Newell, 2014).

### **3.10 Knowledge Development**

Ebrahim et al., (2011) mention that adult learners create opportunities to learn and they thus transform together when confronted with new experiences. They develop new knowledge and new skills and attitudes to change the way they have been doing things in the classroom for the better and they thus improve their practice. Barnes (2015) mentions that they get opportunities to share their creative skills with others and they thus learn from and with other teachers.

#### **3.10.1 Teacher as an interpreter**

An interpreter is a meaning and sense maker who uses previous experiences to grow (Mezirow, 1981; Hatherley, 2011). In the education system teachers become meaning makers of the curriculum as they have to interpret it and show understanding of the learning content for the development of learners (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012; Department of Basic Education, 2015).

Dealing with curriculum requirements requires knowledge for the identification of the relationship among subjects and to link teaching and learning activities in an integrated manner (Chisholm, 2005). Maloney (2018) argues that qualified, experienced and trained teachers contribute positively to curriculum interpretation after gaining skills to facilitate learning. However, Mezirow (1991) also refers to other role-players and knowledge of the environment to help children explore new experiences for learning, while Schick (2004) asserts that context is a significant influence on curriculum interpretation and design. Teachers should thus embrace every opportunity to share what they know through discussions and collaboration to learn and transform their outdated practice (Mezirow, 1978; 1991). They

need to learn to design and plan lessons and to develop learning resources, amongst other skills.

### **3.10.2 Teacher as a curriculum designer**

As an interpreter and designer of the curriculum ECCE teachers plan lessons, organise the learning environment, and develop and utilise learning resources that address the objectives of the curriculum. This responsibility means that they need to take appropriate steps to integrate age-appropriate teaching and learning activities to prepare young children for school (Mezirow, 1991; Department of Basic Education, 2015). Moreover, when teaching resources are scarce, these teachers should develop and utilise natural resources to enhance their teaching and allow their young children to learn and develop to a point of school readiness (Ntumi, 2016; Aubrey, 2017; Azzi-Lessing & Schmidt, 2019).

### **3.10.3 Teacher as an implementer of the curriculum**

The effective implementation of a new curriculum is dependent on teachers' understanding of its content and the school culture to achieve its objectives (Park, 2008; Clasquin-Johnson, 2016). Mezirow (1990) highlights that effective implementation [of a policy or guidelines] relies on an adult's willingness to explore a new experience. Being familiar with children's needs and cultural diversity also helps teachers to implement the curriculum in a way that will be appropriate for the children in their care. Mokhaba (2005) declares that the success of curriculum implementation depends on the teachers' knowledge of their learners.

It is important that teachers share ideas about curriculum implementation to learn from one another (Mezirow, 1997). Therefore, working together, social transformation, and collaboration are the goals of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997; Habermas, 1979). In fact, positive teachers always find solutions to problems related to curriculum implementation.

### **3.10.4 Teacher as an assessor**

According to Mezirow (2000), assessment requires a pattern of thoughts that will determine if previous experiences were adequate to support new actions. Being familiar with the child's interests, strengths, weaknesses, and social and cultural interactions is significant (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2003). Assessments help

teachers to identify children's developmental needs and to improve their teaching methods in a way that will suit particular learners (Jiban, 2013). Moreover, teachers as assessors have to pay attention to the realities of children's developmental needs and growth.

Observation is a suitable method to assess young children (Department of Basic Education, 2015). Teachers watch children's actions inside and outside the classroom and put all the information on record (Smidt, 2005). However, in certain cases interviews (or more appropriately conversations) that are conducted at the level of the child may be used to probe the young child's thinking (National Research Council [NRC], 2009). Teachers also need to know how and where to keep records of learners' assessments and to share these with parents when appropriate.

Tests and examinations are not suitable for assessing young children as they are formal methods of assessment that do not belong in the ECCE phase (Department of Basic Education, 2011). In the ECD phase assessors thus identify, collect, and interpret information about children by observing them closely. The NCF includes assessment guidelines for teachers to peruse and they are then required to work in groups to learn together how to make notes on each child's achievement of milestones. Moreover, they need to discuss challenges and how to overcome them and they have to call meetings to discuss their young children's developmental status (Department of Basic Education, 2015). Any assessment methods that are employed should be planned in order to support and guide activities for assessment and to ensure that it is not done haphazardly. After the assessment plan has been devised, teachers need to reflect on lesson experiences as they are also reflective practitioners.

### **3.10.5 Teachers as a creative thinker**

Ofsted (2010) identifies creativity as a primary skill that ECCE teachers require to connect activities without losing sight of the importance of content and assessment. Creative thinking is needed when planning to make connections and when reflecting on ideas and outcomes in order to allow young children's unrestricted development. In a survey conducted by Ofsted (2010), outstanding schools and preschools were selected to explore children's enjoyment of learning and to identify teachers who were creative thinkers and who could best prepare curriculum content for learners to learn. He concludes that the most successful teachers were able to share ideas and subject knowledge, produce their own resources, organise internal

training, support children's development, and encourage autonomous growth in their classrooms.

Creative thinking is an important skill for planning as teachers are expected to link intellectual, emotional, and other important skills to curriculum activities. According to the Department of Basic Education (2015), teachers need to be creative in order to guide the children in their care to become creative thinkers and lifelong learners. White and Watson (2006) argue that creative thinkers collaborate and engender trust, create connections, and increase positive risk to engage in new experiences based on new curricular requirements. As a result, teachers who engage in such practices become positive and adapt to new experiences. They accept new challenges and play a new role altogether. Even when there are challenges, creative teachers reflect, plan, explore, and share ideas to make curriculum implementation meaningful in the best interest of the children they care for.

### **3.10.6 Teacher as a reflective practitioner**

Teachers' reflective practice is the basis for professional growth, meaning making, the transformation of everyday practices, and personal growth (Yelland & Kilderry, 2005; Burden & Byrd, 2013; Sankar, 2017). Such teachers devise artistic presentations of their everyday experiences and contribute to organisational and curricular excellence. Moreover, reflective and thinking practices elicit new information that drives creative decision making. After planning for teaching and assessment, teachers should look back and evaluate their methods and strategies, scrutinise their practice, and then make new assumptions based on the findings of these reflections (Schon, 1983). They need to consider what worked well and redress their challenges to improve their practice.

Reflective practice also requires collaborative work for people to change and transform as a group (Mezirow, 1978). Teachers should seek opportunities to share their perspectives at various forums (internal school meetings, cluster and district meetings, and at workshops and seminars) to showcase their work and learn from one another. Various people should bring their knowledge and experiences to the table for others to learn, grow, and develop so that they will plan their lessons and interactions with confidence. Kitchenham (2008) identifies this as learning for growth which is central to Mezirow's (1978b) transformative learning theory.

### **3.11 Embracing the new curriculum with enthusiasm**

According to Drake and Sherin (2018), understanding how teaching and learning activities need to mesh and how important creativity is in meeting the needs of a new curriculum are pivotal. Change occurs as a result of interactions between teachers and new curricular materials that speak to specific subject matter (Remillard & Bryans, 2004). Such an experience impacts teachers' frame of reference and will either encourage or discourage them in the process of transformation as they adapt to new experiences.

Remillard (2000) argues that transformation to embrace a new curriculum is an experience that is sometimes fraught with tension and challenges. However, passionate teachers acknowledge the value of a new curriculum and are excited to gain new insights and explore new patterns in their teaching (Mezirow, 2000). They think about fresh experiences and opportunities that the new curriculum brings to them, the children and the community and are keen to embrace and adapt to change. They strive to update their thoughts and to enhance and renew their professional perspectives (Cranton, 1994) and they are enthused to make meaning of their experiences in the best interest of the young children in their care. Their earlier experiences are the bedrock of their new experiences as they build on and transform them for the better when they gain new insights, change their thinking and perspectives, and then readily adapt to embrace the tenets of the new curriculum.

### **3.12 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter various theories and scholarly contributions to education in general and ECCE in particular were reviewed. It also provided the key factors and findings in relation to the planning of teaching and learning activities that the forerunners in this field contributed. The discourse commenced with a background to the phenomenon under study and elucidated on the strategies needed for planning the integrated teaching and learning activities in the ECCE phase. Some global perspectives on curriculum change and teaching and learning activities for young children are discussed and the important issues that need to be considered when planning for teaching, learning, and assessment involving young children in ECCE centres were discussed in relation to literature. The researcher reiterated that the new South African NCF curriculum includes six ELDA's and offers guidelines for assessment. She clarified that this document provides guidelines for the activities that ECCE teachers, also in rural areas,

need in the planning process. Moreover, the experiences of ECCE teachers and the roles that they should play in the planning process were also discussed. The essence of the review was based on the researchers understanding that ECCE teachers in South Africa needed to embrace change when they were confronted with a new curriculum (the NCF) that was issued in 2015 in the ECCE domain.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

*Research design and methods intend to effectually answer the research questions*

*-Creswell, 2014-*

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, literature in relation to the planning of teaching and learning activities in the ECCE sector were reviewed. The review provided an overview of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) education and acquainted the reader with the South African National Curriculum Framework (NCF) and the six Early Learning Developmental Areas (ELDAs) that are promoted as the key subjects in the ECCE phase. The literature also discusses transformational practices, integration procedures, approaches, methods that underpin the planning of activities for the development of young children. Literature also showed that models that guide planning for integration and transformation are developed for guidance (Drake & Reid, 2018). The reviewed literature was a platform from which the research study could be conducted to address the research questions and achieve its objectives.

This chapter presents the methodology of choice and describes all the procedures followed for data collection. It presents different research paradigms and justify the appropriateness of the researcher's choice (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, the discourse provides insight into the interpretive paradigm, elucidates the suitability of the qualitative research approach, explains the research design, and offers justification for using a case study approach in this research study. Suitable instruments that were used for data collection and data analysis are described in detail. The study context and purposive sample selection are discussed as well as the trustworthiness of the study and the ethical considerations that the study adhered to.

When the NCF was introduced in the ECCE sector in 2015, very limited training was provided to support rural ECCE teachers to its intricacies and demands. Having worked with ECCE teachers in the rural areas where pre-service teachers were placed for practical teaching experience, the researcher was sensitised to their struggles and the fact that accessing the NCF was the meaning making opportunity for them to devise their own measures of cooperation and team work to learn. The research study thus endeavoured to explore these dedicated

teachers' attempts to access the NCF and adherence to its guidelines to plan the integrated teaching and learning activities for better supporting young children in ECCE centres in a rural context. The following research questions paved the way and set the scene for this investigation as proposed by Cohen et al. (2018):

1. How is the NCF used for the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities in the ECCE phase in a rural context?
2. What are ECCE teachers' experiences of using the NCF for the execution of the teaching and learning activities that are integrated in rural ECCE centres?
3. To what extent do ECCE teachers reflect on the planning roles after using the NCF to integrate teaching and learning activities for young children?

## **4.2 Research methodology**

Lapan, Quartaroli and Riemer (2012) state that research methodology is all the decisions and procedures considered by the researcher for data collection to gain knowledge about the research topic. The researcher's choice of techniques and processes includes the research paradigm, the most suitable approaches derived from the research paradigm, the research design and the choice of instruments used to answer the research questions.

### **4.2.1 Research paradigm**

The research paradigm is generally the technique that the researcher uses to observe and to view the world of research (Cohen et al., 2018; du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2018). It is used as a guiding principle to find the meaningfulness of the phenomenon under study (Wahyuni, 2012; Thomas, 2010; Maree, 2016). The selected paradigm thus guided the data collection process in the quest to obtain data that would illuminate how and why the participants used the NCF and if they successfully managed to plan the integrated teaching and learning activities in support of their young children's development. The research paradigm assisted to the understanding of how the research components had to be connected during the research study (Creswell, 2009; Neuman, 2011). Thus, Knipe (2006) suggests that the choice of paradigm underscores the intent, inspiration, and the prospects of research.

Jonker and Pennink (2010) understand that a paradigm is the fundamental assumptions that relate to people's views about the world. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) provide four key

categories of people's views about the world, namely ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology. Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality, epistemology is the nature of knowledge, while axiology is the role of values and beliefs that scholars explore in research (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Cohen et al., 2018). These views constitute the opinions held in the research process as the methodology in relation to the research study unfolds (Wahyuni, 2012; Cohen et al., 2018).

Grounded on the researcher's knowledge, the aim and objectives of the study, the interpretive paradigm was used to direct the research study. A brief discussion of the other two research paradigms is provided to justify the researcher's paradigm of choice. The positivist, critical and the interpretive paradigms are illuminated.

#### **4.2.1.1 The positivist and critical paradigms**

According to du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2018), positivist researchers are known for the scientific nature of their investigations. Their work is therefore applicable to disciplines such as chemistry, biology, botany and the natural sciences. Creswell and Poth (2018) mention that these researchers generally hold the view that there is only a single truth and therefore reality is proven without being observed. Positivists primarily find meaning by drawing conclusions after testing particular hypotheses or a hypothesis (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Creswell, 2014). Such studies are more quantitative in nature which made it unsuitable for this case study research.

The critical paradigm, on the other hand, is concerned with ideas of power and ideologies that are relevant to participatory research approaches (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell, 2014). The focus in such research is to bring about change, to transform and improve societies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Adopting a critical paradigm is considered a means to construct rather than to discover (Lincon & Guba, 1994). The critical paradigm is thus about empowering people and is adopted to underpin both quantitative and qualitative research.

Lapan, Quartaroli and Riemer (2012) argue that although the critical paradigm relates to an interpretivist approach in believing that reality is experienced based on how it is perceived by people involved, the responsibilities and views of the world are dissimilar. It was thus also not relevant to this research that aimed to explore ECCE teachers' planning practices with reference to the NCF.

#### **4.2.1.2 The interpretive paradigm**

Interpretivists, however, believe that people create their own meaning based on their interaction with the world, and therefore reality is constructed through the meaning that they make regarding the situation or phenomenon (Lapan et al., 2012; Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Unlike positivists, interpretivists do not believe in a single truth and it is also not about changing people. It is about interpreting and understanding why and how people changed themselves by interpreting their beliefs, experiences, motivations, and world view. For instance, by adopting the interpretivist paradigm the researcher wanted to explore how rural ECCE teachers transformed themselves and why and how they committed to gaining new knowledge to change their practices in the best interest of young children. Therefore, based on my perusal of a suitable paradigm for this study, the interpretive research paradigm was selected as it was relevant for the exploration of planning practices to integrate teaching and learning activities from the six ELDA's of the NCF in a rural ECCE context.

Lapan, Quartaroli and Riemer (2012) assert that methods for data collection interpretive based on the interpretivist paradigm assist the researcher to understand how the role players make meaning in their setting and thus the views and experiences of participants are recognised (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest that this paradigm allows the researcher to view reality as subjective as it differs for and among individuals.

As this study endeavoured to understand ECCE teachers' experiences of using the NCF to plan the integrated activities for young children in ECCE rural centres, the researcher held the interpretivists ontological assumption that reality for them would exist in the wider social context through social communication (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). In trying to answer the 'what' and 'how' questions, selecting ECCE teacher participant was appropriate as they could elucidate their experiences to address the first and the second research question. In this regard their learning capabilities and the challenges they experienced in using the NCF for planning integrated activities were significant. Accessing the NCF and planning the delivery of six ELDA's as the curriculum content were a new experience and they had to consciously and willingly transform 'to make this work'. An objective of this study was thus to determine how they made their new experiences meaningful in the interest of young children. This phenomenon was explored by investigating meaningful social and instructive actions from the perspectives of participating ECCE teachers in a rural context. Thus, interpretivist paradigm was used to attain knowledge of the real truth from people with experience in the

ECCE field, which is an intention endorsed by scholars such as Wahyuni, (2012) and Bertram and Christiansen (2014).

Using the actual words of social actors (i.e., study participants) to illuminate the central situation serves to construct the philosophical assumptions of the interpretivist researcher (Wahyuni, 2012; Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Semi-structured and focus group interviews were thus conducted as the most relevant methodology for the clarification of all the procedures, practices, and planning efforts of the participants. Their words and in-depth knowledge were explored and evaluated to illuminate their viewpoints about the phenomenon under study. Moreover, supporting personal and public documents pertaining to planning were presented for evaluation and triangulation of the interview data as interpretivists embrace multiple realities (Creswell, 2013; Maree, 2016; du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2018). The documents that were perused included the official NCF (Annexure J) and teachers' theme books, daily programmes, lesson planning, and the assessment file. The participants further shared their background knowledge about the phenomenon to comprehend the insight of their own actions.

The nature of the knowledge gained about the phenomenon under study depended on the individual participants' lived experiences. The **epistemology** of the interpretive paradigm was thus subjective findings (Creswell, 2013). Although the researcher is an ECCE lecturer and a tutor, she remained objective throughout the study to allow the participants to give specific meaning to their experiences for the achievement of the research goals (Creswell, 2014; Lapan, Quartaroli and Riemer (2012); Maree, 2017). The focus was on how knowledge can be invented, attained, and communicated to other people. In the context of the study, knowledge was also presented as the reflections of the ECCE teachers after learning the guidelines in the NCF. The researcher therefore had to probe for the richness of information regarding their common context.

Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasise the importance of visible values as the **axiology** of the interpretive paradigm. The researcher developed good relationships with the ECCE centres managers and the participants even before the data collection process. They started communicating when the ECCE centres provided mentorship to the student teachers from the institution where the researcher was employed. The research approach directly derived from the research paradigm is discussed below.

### **4.3 Qualitative Research Approach**

Three research approaches may be considered in the social sciences namely the qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach (Cohen et al., 2011; Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Creswell, 2014; Cohen et al., 2018). In the quantitative approach the researcher intends to collect statistical data while qualitative researchers prefer texts and pictures that can be thematically analysed (Creswell, 2014; Maree, 2016). The mixed method applies where the researcher collects, analyses data and combines the research findings from both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Creswell, 2014; Cohen et al., 2011, 2018). According to Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2013), quantitative approaches are favoured by positivists seeking statements for objective realities while qualitative approaches are preferred by interpretivists who aim to find the subjective truth from people with experience of the research phenomenon. Such a research study strives for self-determination, openness, and flexibility that are preferred by qualitative researchers (Creswell, 2014; Cohen et al., 2018). The research study favours qualitative approach as the rationale is discussed below.

#### **4.3.1 Rationale for the qualitative approach**

Qualitative approaches are used to explore the motives behind human behaviour (Kothari, 2004) and for in-depth understanding of experiences related to a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The qualitative approach thus permitted the researcher to explore the planning of the integrated teaching and learning activities by giving credence to the participants' voices and perusing the documents used in the planning process. It aimed to understand all the events within the concrete and natural context of ECCE while focuses on the realities of ECCE teachers from the three rural centres. The data were collected using semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis. Qualitative research takes people's behaviour into consideration as it is affected by the environment in which people live. It allowed the researcher to explore teachers experiences by utilising a small sample of nine participants from three rural ECCE centres. The research design and researcher's choice are discussed below.

### **4.4 The Research Design**

The research design is the plan that the researcher uses to collect and analyse data to answer the research questions (Kumar, 2011; Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). This qualitative study adopted a **case study research design** to gather data from pertinent sources in order to

understand the phenomenon. The study of case is often qualitative (4.3 above) in nature thus a case study research design was appropriate as it allowed the subjects (ECCE teachers) to be explored in their natural setting (Henning, van Rensburg & Smit, 2004; Hammersley, 2013; Cohen et al., 2018). Data collection occurred in the ECCE centres where the participants were comfortable to freely explicate their experiences.

This research study focused on the cases of three ECCE rural centres located in the Umbumbulu area in KwaZulu-Natal. The focus was on the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities for young children (three to four years). The study was based on the assumption that these ECCE teachers had transformed their views and practices based on the guidelines contained in the NCF document that specifically address planning practices. The researcher thus took the stance that accessing, understanding, and implementing the NCF document were new experiences for them and that what they had learnt as new knowledge influenced their practices in the ECCE context. The case study research design is discussed in detailed below.

#### **4.4.1 Case study research**

Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2018) suggest that there is no one understanding of what a case is as it is defined differently by authors and researchers. Yin (2014, p. 43) defines a case as “an individual person, a group or an organisation”. Other authors refer to a case as a single case, multiple cases, a group, a community, an event, an episode, or a subgroup of a population that can provide accurate data and be relevant for data gathering (Stake, 1995; Kumar, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Lapan et al., (2012, p. 243) identify a case as “an instance or an issue that can be suitable to answer the research questions for this research study”. Moreover, it is identified as a systematic inquiry or a set of related events aiming to elucidate a phenomenon of interest within a natural contemporary setting (Creswell, 2009; Thomas, 2010; Kumar, 2019; Yin, 2014; Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). What is also important is that a case provides information that can communicate results using only relevant people and instruments to support or clarify a phenomenon.

Case study exploration depends on multiple sources of evidence. Simons (2009) notes that it is an in-depth exploration utilising multiple views regarding the complications and uniqueness of a particular policy, project, organisation, or programme in a real-life context. Such deep

study of a phenomenon provides a better understanding of a particular case being studied, which may not be the case with other research designs.

Exploring the case of three ECCE rural centres was relevant to obtain a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study. The centres are located in the same area and they share similar characteristics so that the information gathered was deep and thick. However, the researcher was aware of case study limitations as advised by Rule and John (2011) and acknowledge that the findings may not be generalised to other cases. The rationale for the case is presented below.

#### **4.4.2 Rationale for a case study research design**

A case study can be selected for in-depth understanding and detailed inspection of a particular activity or persons (Picciano, 2004). Cohen et al. (2018, p. 375) claim that “a case study provides a comprehensive exploration of a single case that constitutes a unique presentation of real people in real situations”. It provides an opportunity to use multiple sources of evidence such as different interviews and documentation (Yin, 2009) and thus triangulation is a major strength of the case study. The case study was relevant as the semi-structured and focus group interviews and document analysis (theme book, daily Programme, lesson plan and the assessment book) were utilised to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon studied. The intension was to explore the different approaches that the participants used to use the NCF and to identify suitable teaching and learning activities and assessment strategies. Moreover, the participants’ strengths and possible weaknesses in terms of their planning practices would be explored as the experiences. By utilising a case study, the researcher was thus able to elicit a deep understanding by posing the ‘how’ question to the participants. The researcher asked, for instance, *How is the National Curriculum Framework used to guide the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities for young children in your ECCE centre?* Their varied answers thus revealed all the practices that they employed.

Interaction with the phenomenon was thus the main concern. Although this was not a longitudinal case study, data collection was done over a six-month period as the ECCE teachers were committed to other duties and often asked to postpone the interviews. The case study was qualitative in nature valued the openness between the researcher and the participants. Each semi-structured interview lasted about forty-five minutes and one hour to

one and a half hour was allocated for each of the three focus group interviews. Data collection instruments are discussed below.

#### **4.5 Data Collection Instruments**

The instruments used for data collection were semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews and documents analysis. At the beginning of this research, the researcher intended to use semi-structured interviews and documents analysis only, but insufficient data collection during the semi-structured interviews necessitated an additional measure to obtain thick data and thus three focus group interviews were also conducted. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that amendments during research allow positive contributions of the variety of data and this is encouraged in qualitative studies. By shifting to the addition of focus group interviews the participants were allowed to remind one another of their approaches and planning experiences and the majority was also more comfortable sharing their views in a group context. To augment the interview data, ECCE teachers' theme books, daily programmes, lesson plans, and assessment files were also analysed. All the data were triangulated and evaluated against the requirements as set out in the NCF document.

##### **4.5.1 Interviews**

Interviews are organised for social interaction between the researcher and participants (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Maree (2016) views interviews as an opportunity for a two-way conversation where the interviewer asks questions for data collection to learn about the views, opinions, and behaviour of participants. The interaction between the researcher and the participants depends on the selection of the type of interview. Qualitative research interviews utilise open-ended questions to obtain rich data from participants who use their own words to talk about their experiences regarding the research topic. The participants should not be restricted and should be allowed to provide descriptive, narrative responses that address the research questions.

Denzin and Lincoln (2018) suggest that the purpose of interviews is to attain the researcher's goal of producing information that is needed to further studies or to make contributions to a particular field of study. On the other hand, Bertram and Christiansen (2014) argue that they are used to find out what a person knows, what a person values, and what a person thinks. Such interviews can be structured, unstructured, or semi-structured.

A structured interview can be based on one question prepared in advance so that the researcher can identify if the participants still remember the particular event or story (Conrad & Schober, 2008). Although such interviews can be useful, they are not relevant for open knowledge production. In contrast, unstructured interviews seek to emphasise some important issues but the key role of the interviewer is to become a listener. Semi-structured interviews pose pre-prepared questions but allow probing and free conversation for thick and revealing data and comprehensive knowledge production (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Semi-structured interviews were thus suitable for this research study that explored the knowledge and learning of the participants that could not be restricted to limiting questions. Semi-structured interviews are related to the focus group interviews and were both used in this research study.

#### **4.5.1.1 Semi-structured one-on-one interviews**

The qualitative nature of this research study permitted the use of semi-structured interviews for greater depth of data (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2018). Semi-structured interviews were chosen for the participants to freely talk about their experiences in relation to the topic. Arrangements were made for the interviews to be conducted in the afternoon. All the participants were from the community and could thus attend the interviews in the afternoons without undue challenges. They indicated a suitable of time to which the researcher adhered. The semi-structured interviews started with general discussions as an ice-breaker that contributed to the development of participant profiles (Table 4.2).

Direct interactions with the participants allowed deep responses guided by a one-on-one and focus group interview schedules addressed the research questions to a certain extent. The interview questions were posed in both IsiZulu and English and the participants were free to use their language of choice for clear narratives. I was also able to ask probing questions when needed (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009; Maree, 2016; Cohen et al., 2018). The researcher was also the interviewer and carefully listened to the interviewees' responses to make sense of all the information. The participants were given enough time to answer the questions and each interview lasted about forty-five minutes as explained above. The participants had the opportunity to ask further questions, explain their approaches, discuss their experiences, and explain the planning of integrated teaching and learning. Permission for their voluntary participation was provided as all the participants signed a declaration form (Appendix C). All

the participants also agreed that the interviews could be recorded using a voice recorder as well as the researchers cell phone recorder for accuracy and the security of the data.

#### **4.5.1.2 Disadvantages of semi-structured interviews**

Although semi-structured interviews are permissible for in-depth exploration of a phenomenon, participating in such interviews is sometimes a dilemma for some participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this research study, this posed a challenge as some participants were unable to express themselves clearly, confidently and unable to provide relevant information during the open-ended interviews as indicated in this research study above. Creswell (2014) and Creswell and Poth (2018) warn that this might happen. Some participants were excited to talk about what they knew and to be part of the research study, but some were not comfortable and were hesitant to share their knowledge. Therefore, focus group interviews were added as another research instrument to augment the data. These focus group interviews were arranged at suitable times for all the three participants from each centre.

#### **4.5.1.3 Focus group interviews**

According to Silverman (2016) a qualitative researcher often engages well with a small number of people at the same time. Moreover, focus group interviews allow using the same participants who were individually interviewed in a group (Thomas, 2010).

Focus groups interview questions were formulated prior to these interviews and some important questions that had been inadequately answered in the semi-structured interviews were repeated for further clarity. Similar to the semi-structured interviews, the participants were allowed to switch to the language of choice for clear communication (Appendix I). All the discussions were recorded for and later transcribed. Notes of all-important information were made after the focus group interviews.

Although all the participants contributed to the interviews, those who were more outspoken also provided more during the focus group interviews. It is therefore acknowledged that the tendencies and views of the more vocal participants dominated the findings, which is a common disadvantage of focus group interviews (Thomas, 2010; Cohen et al., 2018). The focus group interviews lasted about one to one and a half hours (as explained above). Two sets of group interviews were conducted in each centre with the three participants working there.

#### **4.5.1.4 Interview process**

The interview questions focused on planning the integrated teaching and learning activities within the new curriculum framework as introduced in the ECCE in 2015. Both interview types engaged the participants to share their experiences and to reflect on any new knowledge gained after learning to follow the guidelines of the NCF document. Prior to the interviews, all the participants were enlightened about the purpose of the research study, the interviews and the ethical considerations were explained. The participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the research study as they wished with no adverse consequences and they signed the consent forms voluntarily. The interviews included a variety types of questions requiring both simple and more complex responses as they reflected on their learning, transformation, and new practices. The participants were also permitted pauses for thinking and rephrasing questions for more detail. The participants preferred to use both IsiZulu and English and the responses were transcribed into English. Maree (2016) suggests that, when interviews are conducted, the researcher should be cognisant of all the verbal and non-verbal cues such as body language, facial expressions, and voice tone and therefore, the researcher paid attention to and made notes of these. Voice recordings were made (as clarified above) with the participants' permission. After the focus group interviews, the participants willingly submitted their planning documents for perusal.

#### **4.5.2 Documents analysis**

Similar to other qualitative research methods, document analysis involves investigation and interpretation of data to find out more about the phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Rapley, 2007; Creswell, 2013). Relevant planning documents (Table 4.1) were also analysed in this research for triangulation process and to produce rich qualitative data. The researcher decided to use document analysis to determine all the planning that contributed to the integrated activities. These data supplemented the interview data and facilitated triangulation. Bowen (2009) emphasises the orderly and critical inspection of documents for data collection.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) distinguish between personal and public documents, whereas Maree (2016) and Cohen et al., (2018) refer to primary and secondary documents. Primary documents are personal documents that reflect individual experiences and practices while public documents are official documents that were created by experts that might not be present during the data collection process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011). The NCF was available as an official document and theme books (Appendix K), daily programmes (Appendix L), lesson

plans (Appendix M), and assessment books were the teacher’s personal documents. Although ECCE teachers are not restricted to using the examples of teaching and learning activities included in the NCF, this document was used to check the appropriateness of the activities they had planned for young children’s learning and development since the examples are included. The documents were scanned for verification, quality, and to shed light on how the participants viewed the integration of teaching and learning activities.

**Table 4.1: Document analysis guide**

Source: Author

DOCUMENTS	ANALYSIS
National Curriculum Framework	Curriculum content and guidelines for young children (three to four years)
Theme book	Themes for young children used ELDAs Teaching and learning activities integrated around a theme
Daily programme	Days of the week Teaching times Weekly activities
Lesson planning	Theme Objectives of the lesson Resources Integrated teaching and learning activities Assessment Reflection
Assessment	Topics for assessment Individual or group assessment Final reports

Apart from the NCF, the researcher also relied on her own knowledge of the ECCE domain to understand curriculum content, themes, teaching and learning activities, and all the procedures involved in programme delivery planning. Comparisons were made to evaluate the personal documents. Yin (2009) declares that the problem with personal document analysis is that the required information can be incomplete. The researcher found this to be true in some of the documents. Since, some documents included all the required information while others were not orderly organised with some important information missing. Immediate consultation with these participants was made and the arrangement to go back and collect what was missing from their documents. The documents supplemented information obtained from the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews.

#### 4.5.2.1 The procedure for analysing the documents

The official NCF document provides examples of teaching and learning activities that are appropriate for young children's development. However, ECCE teachers are not restricted to those activities (as clarified above) and should use them as a guide to how young children learn. My perusal of the theme books shed light to the themes that were used by the participants, whether they incorporated activities from each ELDA, and whether these activities integrate the ELDAs. From the daily programme the researcher was able to analyse the number of teaching and learning activities per week as well as teaching times allocated to the integrated activities, if any. The daily programme for young children also includes routine activities (Meier et al., 2015) and that was taken into consideration. After analysing the theme books and the daily programmes, it was important to determine if and how the daily lessons integrated teaching and learning activities. Lesson plans included planning that indicates how the objectives of the lesson are to be achieved, what teaching and play resources will be used, and which assessment strategies for learning will apply. The lesson plans were thus closely examined. A separate assessment book or assessment file in which learner performance is recorded needs was used, and that was also perused. The analysis focused on the guidelines referred to above.

#### The phases of data generation

##### **1. Semi-structured interviews**

Informal discussion to get to know the participants better and to compile their profiles.

Conducted to obtain deeper understanding of the phenomenon: Approaches, experiences, learning and development

##### **2. Focus groups interviews**

Guided discussions in groups with three teachers from the same ECCE centre

Interview questions to support semi-structured interviews

##### **3. Document analysis**

To supplement data from the semi-structured and focus groups interviews. Planning documents scanned and analysed

**Figure 4.1: Phases of data generation in sequence**

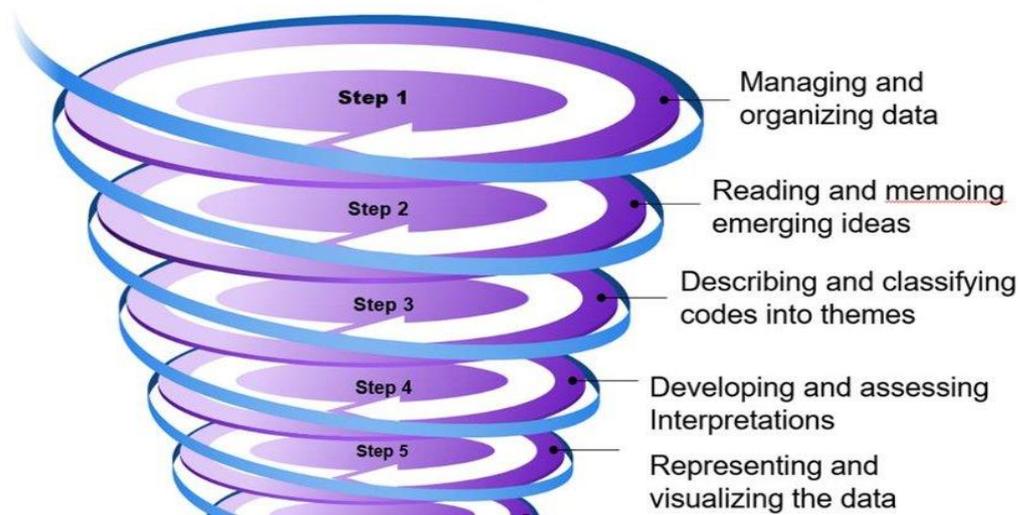
Source: Author

#### 4.6 Data Analysis Process

De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delpont (2011, p. 413) define data analysis as “the process of sense making of the social world by bringing order to the data that has [*sic*] been collected”. Yin (2011) adds that data analysis is the opportunity to bring together all the evidence collected in order to draw conclusions. Qualitative researchers analyse a large body of narrative and other data to arrive at findings and draw meaningful conclusions (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2018). In this research study, the researcher focused on data that would illuminate the approaches, experiences, new learning opportunities, and planning strategies of ECCE teachers to determine if their planning addressed learning and transformation.

After collecting sufficient data to the point of saturation using semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, and documents analysis, the difficult task of making sense of this large body of data commenced. This process required transcribing the data and then reading, re-reading, organising, and interpreting what the researcher had transcribed (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2018). The general process of analysing data using the data analysis spiral (Figure 4.2) was used (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This data analysis spiral follows similar procedures as thematic analysis and was therefore relevant to the study. The data were analysed in the form of text data using themes. Analysing the data was a comprehensive process that required reflective reasoning and continuous re-reading for analysis and interpretation. While qualitative computer data analysis is regarded as faster and more popular these days, the data analysis spiral permits hand coding which the researcher preferred as she then meticulously engaged with the data. The diagram below illustrates the data analysis spiral and also how it is used for data analysis. It is supported by more detailed information about how it was used in the research study.

## The Data Analysis Spiral



**Figure 4.2: The data analysis spiral**

Source: Adapted from Creswell and Poth, 2017

Figure 4.2 is an illustration of the data analysis spiral and indicates the complicated process of data reduction and analysis to reach meaningful findings and conclusions. This analysis spiral is an inductive approach of analysing data and is similar to thematic analysis. Creswell and Poth (2017) argue that all the steps are connected to form a spiral of activities related to the analysis and data depiction. All five the activities involved in the process were followed.

The first circle of the spiral process was to manage and organise the data. Maree (2007) refers to this as thinking about data collected and going back to the field if the need arises. After collecting the data using semi-structured interviews and document analysis, the researcher decided to go back to the field and augmented the data by means of focus group interviews. The reading and sifting process started to make sense of the raw data that had been collected by means of semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and the analysis of planning documents.

Data were organised in the second circle of the spiral process. Collected data were organised into files – semi-structured interview data together, focus group data together, and documents data together in one file – to make it easy for transcription. Instead of involving an experienced person to do the transcription, the researcher made the decision to read and transcribe the data in order to become familiar with the data and for sense making (Bailey et al., 2008). Thereafter, listened to the interviews and started typing them word for word to form texts. Du

Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2018) highlight that actual transcription occurs when reading is described, classified, and interpreted.

In conjunction with the reading process, the researcher started to make sense of all the interviews and the scanned document data. This was possible as the data were repeatedly read to find meaning as emphasised by Creswell (2014). While reading, some important notes were made for coding which is the third circle of the spiral process. This entailed the process of grouping data into codes for the purpose of developing themes. Detailed descriptions helped to make sense of all the interviews and documents to attach codes to the rough data. Coding was done using the three instruments to fuse the data into themes as they emerged and to ensure that triangulation featured prominently in the analysis process. Meanwhile, triangulation is the evidence that emerges when at least three methods were used for data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Different colour pens were used in the coding process to identify each single unit.

During the fourth circle of the spiral process, the researcher started developing and assessing interpretations for sense making. Lincoln and Guba (2000) suggest that the purpose is to organise a set of categories in order to provide a realistic reconstruction of the data. The arguments were also underscored by the reviewed literature and the theoretical framework. Thereafter, the fifth circle of the spiral process started when the data were arranged and presented systematically leading to the establishment of themes. Full and comprehensive data analysis was thus conducted according to the spiral process and clear findings emerged.

#### 4.6.1 Data collection guide

Table 4.2 below provides a summary of the data collection guide indicating research questions, data collection the methods and data sources.

**Table 4.2: Data collection guide**

**Source: Author**

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Data Collection Method</b>	<b>Data Source</b>
1.How is the NCF used to guide the planning of integrated teaching and	Semi-structured interviews	ECCE teachers
	Focus group interviews	ECCE teachers

learning activities for young children in rural ECCE centres?	Document analysis	Theme book NCF document Daily Programme Lesson plan Assessment book
2.What are ECCE teachers' experiences of using the NCF for the execution of the teaching and learning activities that are integrated in rural ECCE centres?	Semi-structured interviews	ECCE teachers
	Focus group interviews	ECCE teachers
3.To what extent do ECCE teachers reflect on the planning roles after using the NCF to integrate teaching and learning activities for young children?	Semi-structured interviews	ECCE teachers
	Focus group interviews	ECCE teachers
	Documents analysis	Lesson plan Assessment book

Themes and sub-themes were developed following the data collection plan above and the findings are presented in the next chapter.

#### 4.7 The Context of the Study Site

The Umbumbulu rural area in KwaZulu-Natal Province was selected as this area is characterised by poverty and many associated challenges, including a lack of teaching and learning resources in ECCE centres and schools (Sun, Rao & Pearson, 2015). Some education-related problems in the area were included in Section 2.2 and Section 3.3.1 of this thesis. The research site was selected based on the relevance of the community and in light of the research questions that needed to be answered (Wahyuni, 2012).

The NCF was developed to combat inequalities and to provide quality education and professionalism in the ECCE sector as part of the new vision for democracy that includes rural populations (Department of Basic Education, 2015). To my knowledge three ECCE rural centres had adopted the guidelines of the NCF after the NELDS had been found unsuitable as clarified in Chapter 1 of this research study (Ebrahim, 2011; Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012). The NCF document was reportedly used as a planning guide for the development of children from birth to four years in these selected centres.

The rural context of these centres was similar to the characteristics described in earlier research and the challenges highlighting in rural areas (Dawes et al., 2012; Mbarathi et al., 2016; Ntumi, 2016; Atmore, 2018; Azzi-Lessing & Schmidt, 2019). Sibanda (2018) studied rural ECCE centres and surprisingly discovered that some effort had been made for South African rural communities to benefit from the transformation in the ECD. The new NCF was introduced by the DBE in 2015 to support ECCE centres nationally. However, ECCE subject advisors were not allocated to support this sector and training of these teachers was limited. To my knowledge, after the NCF had been issued by the DBE in KwaZulu-Natal a half-day training session was conducted on how it has to be used. This information was later confirmed by the participants.

ECCE centres are maintained by the Department of Social Development (DSD) for services such as care, support, and the compliance of their infrastructure to the norms and standards of the DSD (DSD, 2017). Other education-related issues are provided by NGOs. Save the Children South Africa (SCSA) is one such organisation that focuses on rural ECCE centres and also organises community-based development forums for collaboration and sharing of resources (Human Sciences Research Council [HSRC], 2015). Under this organisation’s auspices ECCE teachers in the study area meet once a month to learn from one another.

In its 2016/2017 Annual Report the DSD refers to crises related to the cluster where the Umbumbulu ECCE centres belong. A summary of this report is presented in Table 4.3 below:

**Table 4.3: Risks identified in the Umbumbulu cluster**

**Source: Department of Social Development, 2016/2017 (Annual Report)**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Risk Name</b>	<b>Risk Description</b>	<b>Risk Rating</b>	<b>Major Root Causes</b>
1.	Organisational Structure	Non-Compliance	Critical	Non-finalisation of the reviewed organisational structure
2.	Children Services: Inadequacy	Inadequate care, support, and protection of children	Critical	Non-compliance with legislations Lack of management for transfer of learning
3.	Infrastructure Plan	Ineffective implementation	Critical	Insufficient funding Inadequate human resources

		of Infrastructure plan		
4.	Health and Safety	Inadequate health and safety measures	Critical	Inadequate health and safety measures
5.	Registration of Practitioners	Social Service Practitioners practicing without registration	Critical	Non-compliance with the requirements  Failure to meet cut off deadline for annual renewal of registration

The table above supports what Department of Basic Education subject advisors shared during informal discussions. They were concerned that only about 10% of the Umbumbulu sites were funded by the DSD. Rural forums were thus formed and were sponsored by SCSA, The Unlimited Child, and other NGOs that provide training and development in the Umbumbulu area. Through these interventions many centres in the Umbumbulu area transformed and adopted their practices to the ideas of the new NCF. However, these training interventions seemed fragmentary as they were provided by different organisations.

#### 4.8 Study site selection

According to Wahyuni (2012), site selection is driven by the research problem and the research questions of a research study. The researcher selected the research study sites based on the participants engagement with the NCF and the involvement with the planning of the integrated activities to support young children’s development. Two centres involved accepted student teachers from the private Higher Education Institution for mentorship. They became very excited to be part of the research study and encouraged and motivated one other centre to become involved after some discussions with the researcher.

The three ECCE centres involved in the research study had joined the Umbumbulu area cluster for collaboration and sharing of teaching ideas. All the centres in the cluster were passionate about the development of young children embraced change that happened in the ECCE sector. However, infrastructural challenges affected – and still affect – some of the centres. One centre operates in a community hall and the other two started in homes. They are now sponsored by the Coca-Cola company although they are still struggling for structural

completion of the buildings where they are now housed (Department of Social Development, 2017). All the centres accommodate children from birth up to the Reception year class (Grade R) and attract children from around the area where they are located.

The three centres were selected based on the following criteria:

- Located in the rural area of Umbumbulu
- Offer prioritised care and education for children from birth to four years
- Registered on the Department of Basic Education database and received the NCF document
- Adopted the guidelines of the new NCF for the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities
- ECCE teachers engage in the planning of teaching and learning activities that are integrated

#### **4.8.1 Participant selection**

As was discussed in the literature review chapter, Labuschagne (2015) argues that most rural ECCE teachers were not properly trained and that they are thus inadequately equipped to develop appropriate activities to enhance young children's learning. These teachers also experience other challenges such as a lack of resources and poverty among the local community (Azzi-Lessing & Schmidt, 2019; Kirsten, 2017). However, regardless of these limitations teachers in various ECCE centres transformed their practices by embracing the new NCF guidelines for guidance. They apparently learned to identify and integrate teaching and learning activities from the six ELDA's of the NCF.

Three participants from three identified centres, namely Phaphama, Senzakahle, and Sizamele (pseudonyms), were purposefully selected as they reportedly utilised the NCF in their desire to achieve school readiness for the young children in their care. In total nine ECCE teachers, three from each centre, signed the consent form indicating their willingness to share information about their planning practices. They were aware that their participation was voluntary. Purposive sampling was suitable as it was envisaged that these participants would possess the necessary knowledge to address the research questions. Table 4.4 presents the profile of each centre and participant. Pseudonyms are used for the centres and the participant's names for security and adherence to ethical requirements.

**Table 4.4: Participants' profiles**

<b>ECCE Sites (pseudonyms)</b>	<b>Participants (pseudonyms)</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Planning Support</b>	<b>Teaching Experience</b>	<b>Qualification</b>
<b>Phaphama-Centre A</b>	Ms Y	ECCE Manager (teacher)	49	Cluster A Forum: SCSA NGOs ECD Municipality Staff	13 years	FP Diploma ECD level 4
	Ms M	ECCE teacher	29		7 years	ABET Doing Level 4
	Ms K	ECCE teacher	31		3 years	ECD Level 1 and Level 2
<b>Senzakahle-Centre B</b>	Ms Z	ECCE Manager (teacher)	51	Cluster B Forum: SCSA NGOs ECD Municipality Staff	11 years	Level1, Level 2 and Level 4 Doing Grade R Diploma
	Ms B	ECCE teacher	24		2 years	Standard 10 Doing level 4
	Ms C	ECCE teacher	27		3 years	Level 2 Doing Level 4
<b>Sizamele-Centre C</b>	Ms D	ECCE Manager (teacher)	37	Cluster C Forum: SCSA NGOs ECD Municipality Staff	15 years	Level 4
	Ms N	ECCE teacher	32		11 years	Level 4
	Ms G	ECCE teacher	29		5 years	Level 4

All the participants were female teachers who reportedly used the new NCF to plan and teach young children. Their experiences and qualifications were varied, and their ages ranged between 23 to 50 years. It was discovered that unqualified had registered for ECD Level 4 qualification and they had thus, started the process of self-development. ECCE centres are supported by NGOs and the municipality in the area, and they organise cluster meetings for collaboration and the involvement of teachers to learn.

#### **4.8.2 Purposive sampling**

Purposive sampling is the considered selection of participants who will possess in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002; Cohen et al., 2018). Creswell and

Creswell (2018) add that the idea is to utilise participants with relevant information and that will support the researchers' learning about a phenomenon.

The managers in all the three centres were also teachers that are responsible for the planning of teaching and learning activities and were included in the research study. All the nine participants stated that they had transformed their earlier practices and that they plan the integrated teaching and learning activities for the appropriate development of young children. School readiness and social transformation became the vision of the country (Department of Basic Education, 2015). They were thus involved because they:

- Transformed and embraced the guidelines of the NCF
- Planned integrated teaching and learning activities for young children's development
- Taught and assessed children aged three to four years
- Utilised the NCF and kept evidence of their planning documents.

#### **4.9 Achieving Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research**

The systematic procedures and the empirical evidence of quantitative research are different from those of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative researchers believe that reality is based on the meaning that people construct within their social context and this needs to be determined in a credible manner. Therefore, in order to obtain the truth, the researcher developed earlier familiarity with the participants before the real data collection process commenced. Even the two sites that were visited for student teacher's assessment were re-visited before data collection process for the development of the research study. Therefore, all the participants established trust with the researcher and were provided clarity about all the research procedures. The participants teachers in all the centres were confident to participate including those from the third site. This was really not an easy exercise as some ECCE teachers were reluctant to participate in the research study.

Qualitative researchers search for participants' interpretation of multiple realities for in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. These four criteria are associated with achieving the fairness of the qualitative research study and this study achieved trustworthiness by adhering to the criteria that will be discussed below.

The researcher was allowed to take some pictures to reflect the realities at the sites. Moreover, the three data collection methods used facilitated triangulation which is a procedure that is

valued by qualitative researchers (Shenton, 2004; Creswell, 2014). The variety of data sources allowed adequate comparison of the data which contributed to the credibility of the study (Wahyuni, 2012; Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams & Blackman, 2016).

According to Hammond and Wellington (2013 p. 147), spending sufficient time with participants on site facilitates rich engagement. I thus made sure that I spent lengthy periods with the participants to share their experiences. I also allowed them to use their language of choice which eased their tension. The participants were aware that the researcher trusted their subjective experiences and that there would be no wrong or right answers (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2018). They were allowed flexibility to share what they knew without feeling anxious about losing credibility. All the participants were fully aware of their rights to pull out from the research whenever they felt uncomfortable. Therefore, all the participants were sincere and keen to be part of the research.

After data collection and transcription member checking was done to verify the correctness of the information they provided. Member checking is to ask participants' views of the reliability of the findings. Guba and Lincoln (1985) view this as a very important provision for qualitative research case studies as the researcher needs to check if all the information was correctly captured.

According to du Plooy-Cilliers et al., (2018), transferability allows for some measure of the generalisation of qualitative research findings. This means that the context of a study can be 'transferred' or simulated so that comparable results may be obtained from a similar context. However, transferability cannot be positively applied in qualitative research studies as such studies are specific to a small sample which makes it impossible to apply findings to another population. Therefore, dependability is related to credibility and had to be achieved for the trustworthiness of this study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss the close connection between credibility and dependability. It is attained by checking the researcher's documentation of the data, the methods used, and all the conclusions drawn. To achieve this all the processes of the study are described in detail to enable future researchers to develop the study further without specifically obtaining similar results. The research design and the variety of methods used for data generation are thus detailed in this thesis. Moreover, the systematic research processes are clarified and the

participants were also fully informed of these processes and their implication. They were also informed of the data collection process and they were selected purposively to address the purpose and objectives of the study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) discovered that confirmability is attained once credibility, transferability, and dependability have been attained. Confirmability is an inquiry audit where the findings of a study are checked to confirm if the results reveal the experiences of the participants and are reflective of the researcher's ideas (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). Confirmability is similar to the objectivity of quantitative research. Merriam (2009) explains that the confirmability of findings relies on the researcher's critical thoughts about the assumptions, biases, theoretical orientations, and the world views expressed by all role-players.

Therefore, although I am also an ECCE specialist, I consciously refrained from imposing my personal interpretations of what emerged from the discussions and what was evident in member checking. The participants were given time to check their responses and to clarify any confusions or unclear information. They also checked if all the information had been correctly captured, was meaningful, and was without errors in the transcripts. Cross checking was also done by the ECCE research cohort without compromising the confidentiality of the participants. The ECCE research cohort also cross checked the coding that I developed. Moreover, all the raw data are safely stored and only the supervisor and I have access to the files.

#### **4.10 Ethical Considerations**

According to Cohen et al. (2018) there are certain behaviours that are unethical in research such as causing harm to participants, breaking confidentiality, and using and manipulating information inappropriately. Therefore, ethical issues have to be carefully considered during all the phases of research development. Creswell and Poth (2018) mention that ethical issues need to be considered before conducting a research study, at the beginning of the research, during the data collecting process, and when analysing and reporting data.

The consideration of ethical matters is thus compelled by professionals and governmental bodies to ensure that research studies are conducted in a way that guards against the abuse of

the rights and welfare of study subjects (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Before conducting this research study, the research proposal and the research plan were presented to other university researchers and the Ethical Committee, ECCE discipline leaders, and the research supervisor for approval. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Research Office for the study to commence and the ethical clearance certificate is attached as (Appendix A).

The targeted ECCE centres fall under the Department of Social Development (DSD) while they are also registered on the DBE database. It was important for these departments to be informed of the research<sup>4</sup>. The relevant DSD officials were informed in writing of the project and ensured that the safety of all the teachers and centres involved would be paramount. Creswell (2014) identifies the process as negotiations to seek approval before conducting research. Permission to conduct the study was thus sought from the DSD after the full nature of the research had been presented to the Head of Department (HOD). Permission was granted and the certificate is attached (Appendix B). Gatekeepers' approval (Appendix C) was also obtained from the ECCE centre managers after discussions with Board members and all stakeholders involved. The full nature of the research was presented and my and my supervisor's details were provided.

The ECCE teachers who were involved in this research were provided clear direction for their voluntarily participation in the research study. Cohen et al. (2011) suggest that the nature of a research project and all the aspects involved, including public information and the information that will be kept confidential, need to be discussed with participants. All the participants were thus informed of the purpose and nature of the research in writing and the researcher ensured that the dignity and welfare of the participants were protected at all times. The participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity and pseudonyms were used for the participants and the centres. The participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time and they were made aware that the interviews would be recorded and their planning documents perused, to which they agreed. They were allowed enough time to read the information letter and to understand the nature of their involvement

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<sup>4</sup> However, it was announced on the Media briefing on the 24<sup>th</sup> of July 2021 that the President of South Africa, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa signed the National Proclamation to effect the Early function shift from the DSD to DBE. As from 1 April 2022, DBE will become responsible for delivering, funding, registering, monitoring and supporting ECD.

before signing a voluntary consent form. I also received the permission of the centre managers and the teachers to peruse relevant documents and to record the interviews. The interviews were conducted in safe and secure locations at the three centres and no interruptions occurred. To ensure the safety and security of the data files were created on my personal computer and the data were stored in a secure location where only the supervisor and I have access to them.

#### **4.11 Chapter Summary**

The chapter presented the research methodology employed in unambiguous detail. The research approach, design and data collection methods were discussed and the rationale for these choices was provided. The research paradigm and its relevancy to the research study were discussed in light of the undesirability of two other commonly used paradigms. The case study design was explained and the rationale for selecting this approach was discussed. The suitability of the qualitative approach for this study and the decision to use three instruments for data collection was elucidated. The clarification of the site selection, participant selection, and the sampling procedures were presented. The issue of the trustworthiness of qualitative research was highlighted and how the research study adheres to this requirement was explained. The limitations of the study were highlighted, and also how these were addressed were described.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

*Data analysis is the classification, interpretation and meaning making in linguistic material<sup>5</sup> to make intensive statements*

-Flick, 2014-

#### 5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter detailed the methodology used in this research study. It thus outlined the research paradigm, the approach and the research design that guided the research study. It discussed the data collection process and the data generation instruments that were used in my attempt to answer the research questions. Furthermore, the issue of trustworthiness and the ethical considerations in a qualitative research study was addressed.

This chapter focuses on data presentation, analysis and interpretation. It presents data collected using semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and the document analysis. These instruments were employed to best collect data that could be analysed and interpreted in the exploration of the strategies that teachers use to make the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) meaningful for the planning of teaching and learning activities to prepare young children in rural ECCE centres. Accessing and utilising the NCF to plan was presented as a new learning experience for ECCE teachers who transformed their practices and roles in the ECCE context. A paradigm shifts thus had to occur in rural ECCE centres where teachers needed to embrace change in order to better execute their mandate to prepare young children for school readiness (Department of Basic Education, 2015).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) identify data analysis as the process of making sense of the collected data. The method utilised to analyse the qualitative data was inductive in nature (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Data analysis spiral guided data analysis that resulted in the development of themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2017) argue that the data analysis spiral guides a qualitative researcher to engage in a comprehensive description of a case. The researcher engaged with the textual data manually, refined it into categories and identified emerging themes.

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<sup>5</sup> The 'linguistic material' referred to here is the narratives of the participants that I analysed and evaluated.

Themes emerged from the raw data after cautious inspection and continuous evaluation to draw conclusions (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The major themes were analysed to achieve the following objectives of the study:

1. Investigate how the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) is used to guide the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities for young children in rural ECCE centres.
2. Explore ECCE teachers' experiences of using the NCF for the execution of the teaching and learning activities that are integrated in rural ECCE centres.
3. Examine ECCE teachers' planning roles after using the NCF to integrate teaching and learning activities for young children.

The objectives guided the data collection from the three ECCE rural centres where teachers had followed the guidelines of the NCF for the planning of teaching and learning activities that are integrated to support the development of children from three to four years. As was mentioned in the methodology chapter, nine ECCE teachers from three ECCE centres participated in the study. Information was elicited to understand the context of the ECCE centres and the participants' backgrounds and this was presented in Chapter Four of this research study.

## **5.2 ECCE centre context**

The three ECCE centres were located in a rural background in the Umbumbulu area. All the centres were registered under the Department of Basic Education database and had been provided with the NCF document for children from birth to four years that was introduced in 2015 to support ECCE development. Although not all the centres received government funding, they were administered by the Department of Social Development (DSD) that evidently played a very slight role in their educational activities. These ECCE centres were also registered with the Save the Children South Africa (SCSA) community-based development forum for collaboration and knowledge sharing with other centres in the area (HSRC, 2015). In brief, the following points are reiterated.

- ECCE rural centres are sometimes supported by NGOs but they are generally privately owned and managed while some are affected by socio-economic challenges (Sun, Rao and Pearson, 2015; Labuschagne, 2015). Irrespective of such challenges, the centres under study had adopted the NCF. The practices and approaches had been transformed in line with the guidelines that distinguish three phases of development as babies, toddlers, and young children (three to four years) (Department of Basic Education, 2015).
- As the preferred planning approach in the ECCE phase, teachers needed to integrate teaching and learning activities to prepare these young children for school readiness.
- Instead of subjects as in formal schooling, six ELDA's (see Chapter One and Chapter Three) are prioritised in the ECCE phase to support young children's learning and development (Department of Basic Education, 2015).
- The language that is spoken in the study area is IsiZulu which is also the language of learning and teaching in the early years (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

A brief context of each centre is presented below. Pseudonyms were used for the names of the centres and the centres and they were also allocated codes as per data analysis spiral used for analysing data.

- **Phaphama-Centre A**

Phaphama started operating in 2007 using teaching and learning material provided by the NGO in the area. In 2010 the centre attempted to access the guidelines of the National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS) as its primary teaching resource (Department of Basic Education, 2009). However, the document was not user friendly (Ebrahim, 2011). It was only in 2017 that they were introduced to the NCF guidelines for the development of children from birth to four years. The centre was unable to meet governmental requirements for funding but they managed to obtain sponsorships from private companies and they started building the ECCE centre infrastructure. The centre also relies on school fees paid by the parents for all their teaching and learning resources. The innovations that were implemented allowed the teachers in this centre to learn from one another and to devise and utilise more appropriate teaching and play resources. At the time of this study, forty-two young children

were enrolled at this centre. The young children were divided into two groups and were taught by three ECCE teachers.

- **Senzakahle-Centre B**

Senzakahle started operating in 2009 and immediately used the National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS) as the primary resource for the planning of teaching and learning activities for children from birth to four years. However, NELDS did not provide proper guidance and the teachers later started using a supportive NGO's material for the planning of teaching and learning activities. Towards the end of 2016, the NCF was introduced to the centre and has been used since 2017. The centre now follows the guidelines of the NCF for the planning of teaching and learning activities and assessment.

The centre is funded by the Department of Social Development. At the time of the study thirty-one young children were enrolled at the centre. They were divided into two groups and three teachers were allocated for teaching.

- **Sizamele-Centre C**

This centre opened in 2005 and used teaching and learning material provided by an NGO. The centre did not adopt new guidelines even after the advent of the National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS) in 2009. Similar to Centre A and Centre B, Centre C adopted the NCF guidelines and started using them for the planning of teaching and learning activities in 2017. There are challenges of the floor space and teaching and play resources, similar to Centre A. The centre can only afford to buy teaching and learning materials such as charts and paints and they are used to improvising. At the time of the study, 37 young children were enrolled at the centre. They were also divided into two groups under the care of three teachers. The teachers work in teams when planning for teaching. Each participant related involvement in the research study is presented below.

### **5.3 The Participants related involvement in the ECCE**

Sun, Rao and Pearson (2015) argue that certain skills are required for teaching very young children. Ngwenya (2019) argues that strong motivation and opinions also enhance teaching practices. The teachers included qualifications, and their years of experience in the ECCE phase.

- **Ms Y [Centre A]**

Ms Y is a teacher with 13 years' ECCE teaching experience in this centre. Ms Y is one of the co-founders of the centre that started operating from her house until they were sponsored by private companies to build a proper ECCE centre structure that is still incomplete. Ms Y started teaching before the NCF was introduced. She attended a 'Waste to Toys' workshop and started sharing her creative skills with other teachers in the centre. They make much of their own teaching and play resources. She attended training workshops organised by NGOs in the area to improve her teaching skills. Ms Y is grateful to the DBE for issuing the NCF as the guidance to proper teaching. She is always looking forward to making changes in the community by preparing children for school readiness. Ms Y has a Level 4 ECD qualification and she is now doing her part-time Grade R Diploma at a private institution.

- **Ms M [Centre A]**

Ms M has seven years' ECCE teaching experience. She studied Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) and is now doing ECD Level 4 which is sponsored by the Municipality. Ms M started teaching in the ECCE phase after six months' experience as a volunteer at an ABET centre. Ms M was very much eager to learn and to follow the guidelines as expounded in the NCF for the planning of teaching and learning activities for young children.

- **Ms K [Centre A]**

Ms K worked as an administrator in Centre A but embraced the opportunity to teach when it was offered. Ms K started her ECCE teaching journey in 2016 and now has three years' teaching experience. She studied and obtained an administration certificate but now registered for ECD Level 4 with a private college supported by the Municipality in the area. The NCF document was introduced to her in her first year of teaching and finds it very easy to access as it is clear and understandable. Ms K plans her teaching and learning activities with other teachers in teams. Moreover, she is always keen to staff development and she attends cluster workshops to learn more about ECCE teaching.

- **Ms Z [Centre B]**

Ms Z has eleven years' ECCE teaching experience. Ms Z studied ECD Level 2, Level 4 and is now doing a Grade R Diploma at a private institution. Ms Z was lucky to attend a half-day

NCF workshop that was organised by the DBE to introduce the NCF. She shares what she learnt with other teachers in the centre. According to her, everyone at the centre works very hard and faces their challenges to better prepare their children for school. She admits that they are in friendly competition with other ECCE centres in the area and that they work hard to prepare the children for formal schooling.

- **Ms B [Centre B]**

Ms B has two years' ECCE teaching experience. She finished matric and started working at Centre B. She is now doing ECD Level 4 and is looking forward to registering part-time for a Grade R Diploma next year. Ms B enjoys teaching young children and gets valuable guidance from other teachers in the centre and in the cluster. The NCF supports and guides her and she finds it easy to follow the necessities.

- **Ms C [Centre B]**

Ms Cele has 3 years' experience in ECCE teaching. She likes teaching young children and always offers her level best. Ms C lives in the area and started teaching after the NCF was introduced. She also taught Grade R at the beginning of the year. She gets teaching and learning support from other teachers and also attends cluster meetings and workshops. She studied ECD Level 1 and is now doing ECD Level 4.

- **Ms N [Centre C]**

Ms N has 15 years' experience in ECCE teaching and started before the NCF was introduced. She loves working with young children and also assisted in a Grade R classroom. Ms N was at first excited about the new framework but she was scared that the content might be too difficult for them. However, she finds the support from other teachers and feels that they work better as a team. Ms N studied ECD Level 4 and wants to further her studies in ECD. She intends to work hard with other teachers to improve the level of learning of the young children in the centre.

- **Ms D [Centre C]**

Ms D is 32 has 11 years' experience of ECCE teaching. She studied ECD Level 4 and would like to study further. Ms D works well with other teachers in her centre and they use the new framework content to plan activities and to teach young children. She started teaching before

the framework was introduced but learns new things from the document every day. She is also excited that the cluster has arranged for someone to help them to develop their own teaching and learning resources as they sometimes struggle to get play material for their children to learn better.

- **Ms G [Centre C]**

Ms G has 5 years' experience of ECCE teaching. She studied ECD Level 4 but is waiting for the certificate. She is discouraged as there are many challenges, including a lack of resources in the centre, but they try hard to plan teaching and learning activities appropriately as they are guided by the new framework.

#### **5.4 Data Analysis Process**

This is a process utilised to organise, synthesise, and make meaning of the research data gathered using semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis. The data analysis spiral was used to analyse the data (Creswell and Poth, 2018) and the findings were underpinned by the transformative learning theory (TLT) of Mezirow (1991; 2000). The research study conducted at Phaphama, Senzakahle and Sizamele ECCE centres. Pseudonyms were used as clarified in Chapter Four. However, ECCE centres and the participants were assigned codes as the third stage of data analysis spiral. The context of each centre and teachers' experiences are provided before the is presentation of themes and sub-themes as the contribution to the data analysis process.

The context and teacher's involvement were relevant as the experiences that are important in the transformation process (Mezirow, 2000). Moreover, NCF was design as a flexible teaching tool that is context related (DBE, 2015). It was noted that, although the centres were in the same area, they all had unique structures, floor space, and teaching resources. However, is was common that they all transformed to the guidelines of the NCF for the planning of teaching and learning activities are integrated. All the teachers were eager to learn and to support the development of young children in an appropriate manner. The participants all agreed that they work very hard and that they learnt from one another at all times. The research questions, themes, and sub-themes are presented below.

## 5.5 Themes that Emerged from the Study

Four major themes and various sub-themes emerged from the data analysis process in the quest to explore the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities for young children in ECCE rural centres. The NCF document was pivotal as the planning in this investigation. Table 5.1 presents a summary of the research questions and the themes that emerged in relation to each.

**Table 5.1: Research questions and emerging themes and sub-themes**

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	THEMES	SUB-THEMES
How is the NCF used to guide the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities for young children in rural ECCE centres?	A desirable learning opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Traumatic meaning-making experience</li> <li>▪ Collaborative learning</li> <li>▪ Communication learning</li> <li>▪ Identifying the activities from the ELDAs;</li> <li>▪ Selecting themes for integration</li> </ul>
	The creation of a conducive learning environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Inside learning space</li> <li>▪ Outdoor learning spaces</li> <li>▪ The formulation of the instructional plan: Planning the daily programme, planning the lesson, preparing the assessment</li> </ul>
What are ECCE teachers' experiences of using the NCF for the execution of the teaching and learning activities that are integrated in rural ECCE centres?	Challenges encountered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Active play resources</li> <li>▪ Physical learning space</li> <li>▪ Continuous support</li> </ul>
To what extent do ECCE teachers reflect on the planning roles after using the NCF to integrate teaching and learning	Development of new roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interpreter of the NCF</li> <li>▪ Creative thinker</li> <li>▪ Assessor for the purpose of learning</li> <li>▪ A reflective teacher</li> </ul>

activities for young children?		
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Below is a detailed discussion of the two themes and the sub-themes that emerged in relation to the first research question: *How is the NCF used to guide the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities for young children in rural ECCE centres?*

### **5.5.1 Theme One: A desirable learning opportunity**

The data showed that the ECCE teachers from the three ECCE rural centres identified the NCF as a desirable learning opportunity for them to learn and to develop young children for school readiness. The participants discussed the past experiences of inequality in the ECCE sector and stated that this had inspired them to learn and to value the change that was heralded by the NCF in the ECCE. They further explained that it became an opportunity for them to make a difference and to bring the kind of education that they had been waiting for into their communities. They all appreciated the learning opportunities that were offered by NGOs and they valued the cluster workshops over the years as they felt unnoticed by the Department of Education (DOE), later the DBE, and they showed much appreciation for the guidance that they had received to utilise equal learning opportunities. It also emerged that when they accessed and started using the NCF for their planning of teaching and learning activities, they started to consider how this new learning experience meaningfully transformed them in the best interest of the young children. Vaughn (2016) reported similar findings that transformation lead to further development.

#### **5.5.1.1 Traumatic meaning-making experience**

Using the NCF for the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities emerged as a new learning experience that initiated transformation in ECCE centres in this rural area. The data collected from the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews indicated that the first action for change started early in 2017 as the participants had to validate this new guideline document, particularly as they perceived that it would supported their efforts to enhance the development of young children. The discussions revealed that most of the participants appreciated the introduction of the NCF as they identified it as a life changer and they embraced the change it brought. Moreover, they perceived it as the facilitator of meaning-making activities. However, while some welcomed the NCF with excitement, others

experienced feelings of fear as the terminology used for subjects in the document was dissimilar to their experiences. During a focus group interview, teachers from Centre C shared their frustration as they had expressed in the one-on-one interviews about the NCF. They explained that it at first created a dilemma in their centre as they were provided copies of the framework which they had to start reading as individuals at home. Ms N said:

*I became very worried that the new framework was prescribed in English. We were given copies of the document and I noticed that the six Early Learning Developmental Areas were new, especially 'identity and belonging' as well as 'knowledge and understanding the world'. After the [first] excitement, I struggled to find meaning to it [Ms N, Centre C].*

During the focus group interviews, other teachers from the same centre supported the notion that reading and learning to use the NCF individually was traumatic at first. Ms G said:

*The six ELDA's were presented as more work for me and I thought what we had been doing was better. I knew the three subjects as Mathematics, Language, and Life skills. I didn't know where to start reading the document as we also did not use NELDS in our centre. Ma'am said we have to start reading and also think about where to start [Ms Gasa, Centre C].*

What emerged from the above excerpts is that the teachers struggled to make meaning of the NCF as it was new and looked complicated at first. They had each been given a copy of the document to start reading to learn all the determinants at home. The researcher learnt during the pre-interview discussions that in Centre C, they had never used the NELDS as a resource before the introduction of the NCF. What the participants experienced signposted the pre-existing stage to meaning making and transformation that is known as a 'disorienting dilemma' (Mezirow, 2012; Raikou, 2018). As asserted by Mezirow (1991), where new experiences do not match with what we know, a phase of uncertainty, or a disorienting dilemma, occurs. Elaborating on the impact of this dilemma, the participants explained that they were so confused as the meaning making experience became traumatic. They started thinking about setting time aside to read the NCF together with other colleagues at the centre. Teachers from Centre C indicated that they read and accessed the NCF together before they started planning their new teaching approach, similar to Centre A and Centre B. In this manner

ECCE teachers shared and clarified their understandings and made meaning of the NCF together as a team.

### **5.5.1.2 Collaborative learning effort**

The data revealed that the participants embraced the opportunity to access the NCF and to enhance their understanding of it collaboratively after a while. The teachers in all the centres thus learnt about and understood the necessity for planning integrated teaching and learning activities as a team. They arranged suitable times to collaborate and unpack the NCF. Even the teachers from Centre C later collaborated to access the document's requirements. Even though the participants used different words, they confirmed Sanchez's (2018) suggestion that collaboration among teachers has significant impact on learning, growth, and development. This finding is supported in the literature which states that working in collaboration will capacitate teachers in the best interest of learners (Husni & Rouadi, 2016). During the semi-structured and focus group interviews, the participants indicated how useful it was to work together in their centres:

*In our centre, those who teach similar groups of learners (three to four years) plan together. But immediately after the NCF was introduced we made time for all of us in our centre to collaborate for learning. We started on a Tuesday but agreed to continue and also used Wednesday and Thursday after school. We focused on reading the six ELDA's to learn, identify the activities and also to read about assessment after teaching [Ms B, Centre B].*

The same positive attitude was evident among teachers from Centre A. Ms K said:

*We decided that we had to work together when reading the NCF for planning so that we could share and help each other. We are lucky that most of our children don't stay till 17:00. We read and started planning from Monday to Thursday when children were gone. Some of us also attended forum planning workshops organised by the NGO [Ms K, Centre A].*

Similar to the Centre B and the Centre A teachers, the Centre C teachers realised that the idea to unpack the NCF individually did not work for them. Some of them experienced accessing the NCF as a struggle but they also started collaborations in to learn and plan. Ms D said:

*After sharing our frustrations with each other, we started sitting together to read the NCF and mostly looked at the teaching and learning activities that are relevant to the group of learners that we teach. As we teach young children, we looked at the activities that are relevant to us. Although there were no fixed times for planning, we tried to be together most of the time after school to learn from each other [Ms D, Centre C].*

It emerged from the discussions with the participants that collaboration in their centres and cluster meetings was a wonderful solution after the DBE had organised only a half-day training session to introduce the NCF in the area. They confirmed that very few of them had attended it as the session was held during the day while they had to take care of the children in their centres. A teacher from Centre B said:

*Only two of the ten teachers from our centre attended the NCF training organised by the Department of Basic Education. I thought that each one of us would get the opportunity, but we were told that subjects advisors were not going to come back as they were still not allocated to very young children (birth to four years) [Ms B, Centre B].*

A teacher from the Centre A added:

*In our centre only one teacher attended the NCF training that was organised by the Department of Basic Education. When we started reading in our centre, she led us and assisted us to understand what they were told during the half day training [Ms K, Centre A].*

Another teacher from Centre C said:

*I don't even remember who attended the NCF workshop in our centre. What I know is copies were made for all of us to read [Ms G, Centre C].*

Ms K from Centre A also shared this complaint. She said:

*I was expected to share what we learned as I was the only one that attended the NCF training in our centre. Although it was not a full-day training, I was able to share what we learned and all other teachers ended up assisting each other [Ms K, Centre A].*

From the extracts above, it was clear that although ECCE teachers were not all properly trained by the DBE to use the NCF in rural ECCE centres, they made an effort to make it

work. The researcher could also discern from the gestures and tone of voice of some participants that the DBE had enthused them and encouraged them to cooperate and learn from those who had attended the training session. I could frame what emerged with Mezirow's assertion in his TLT that the collective learning experiences of people transform them (Mezirow, 1991). Moreover, the weakness on the part of the DBE in not providing extended training to all ECCE teachers and the obvious inability to support teachers to unpack a document they had not produced, became a strength for ECCE teachers as they made the effort to communicate with one another in order to access and make the NCF more meaningful.

### **5.5.1.3 Communicative learning effort**

During the semi-structured and focus group interviews the researcher discovered that interacting with one another and teamwork became a norm in rural ECCE centres after the NCF had been introduced. It emerged that using the NCF made teachers realise the importance of their colleagues in the centre. Ms K mentioned that the communication skills (understanding jargon and vocabulary) of those who had attended the DBE training session developed to such an extent that they could share vital information with other teachers in their centres. Reading and learning to access the NCF were encouraged in these ECCEs and also became an opportunity for the teachers to develop and embrace team work. They confirmed that their communication skills developed as they learnt the content, identified teaching and learning activities, and learnt to understand and follow the guidelines for assessment contained in the NCF. In this regard, a teacher from Centre B said:

*I was surprised that, after working with other teachers, reading the NCF became easy to understand. Most importantly, I realised that six ELDAs are similar to the three subjects that I taught in Grade R. The difference was the life skills that was divided into four ELDAs but communication is the same as language and early mathematics is mathematics. Even the activities based on all the ELDAs are not different [Ms B, Centre B].*

A teacher from Centre C said:

*I am happy to share that although the NCF is written in English, after some explanations from other teachers I find it easy to understand the content. Hey, 'Sasingazi ukuthi kanti kukhona esikwaziyo'. We didn't know that there is something that we know (laughing) [Ms N, Centre C].*

The teachers from Centre B supported the views of the other centres' teachers. One of them stated:

*As we read the NCF we communicated as a team and all ended up explaining to relate the ELDA's to the subjects that we know. We have been observing children when assessing and that is also emphasised in the NCF. Next to the activities, we identified how and what can be assessed each time [Ms C, Centre B].*

This is what Ms M from Centre A said:

*We ended up finding NCF as a simple document to understand. We shared what we knew while reading and following the guidelines of the NCF with ease. After reading, we started looking at the teaching and learning activities [Ms M, Centre A].*

When these experiences were analysed, it emerged that most teachers highlighted communication as an effort and a determiner of learning in teams. It was also evident that, because these teachers worked in teams, they shared valuable prior, new knowledge, experiences and this contributed to their learning and understanding the content of the new framework. In many instances their fears were allayed as they realised that much of the new NCF was similar to what they had been doing all the time. When the researcher perused the NCF to carefully analyse, realised that this communication effort and team work was exactly the intention of the Department of Basic Education (Department of Basic Education, 2015). The designers of this framework ingeniously wanted teachers and adults working with young children to work in teams to communicate and understand the vision and requirements of the NCF

The above finding challenged the researcher's assumption at the conceptualisation of the study which was that ECCE teachers were neglected and marginalised by the DBE as they did not provide sufficient training to capacitate them. In fact, if the researcher had considered the expertise and insight of the major writers of and contributors to the NCF (Prof. Ebrahim and Ms Irvine) in ECD and ECCE, would have understood earlier what value they attached to communication and supportive learning where adults are concerned.

#### 5.5.1.4 Identify the activities from the ELDAs

Data from the semi-structured and focus group interviews showed that collaborative and communication efforts assisted the participants in making the NCF meaningful. When interrogating this deeper, the participants explained that after reading the content of each ELDA they identified teaching and learning activities for the development of young children. They also confirmed meaningful guidance to the aims of each ELDA to understand what young children are expected to learn. Ms C from Centre B said:

*Young children activities for language development are included in the ELDA 'Communication'. In this ELDA young children learn language through play. Activities included children story reading, rhyming, singing songs, and speaking about what young children know and do inside and outside the classroom. In exploring mathematics, they count small numbers and play with shapes and colours. Young children explore using available safe materials, toys, and games. They also need to play with sand and water to solve problems that are at their level while we make sure that they are safe when they play and learn [Ms C, Centre B].*

In addition, Ms B said:

*In the first ELDA, 'Well-being', there are activities that we have been doing in the life skills in Grade R. The importance of safety and good health is emphasised as children tell stories, show, and tell about health and hygiene. We have to plan for children to talk about cleanliness and also walk up and down as they play with toys to learn [Ms B, Centre B].*

Another teacher said:

*I learned that the activities for 'Identity and belonging' and 'Knowledge and understanding of the world' should include opportunities for children to talk about themselves and about the world around them. In the 'Identity and belonging' [ELDA] young children have to talk [for instance] about families or the weather and tell stories they know about their gender. They also need to talk about what they do, imitate other people, and also play to learn using safety toys. We also plan excursions for children to learn about the world outside our ECCE centre [Ms N, Centre C].*

Ms Y from Centre A stated:

*In creativity young children draw, paint, cut, paste, sing and play in the environment that is safe to learn and play. We also include make-believe play activities, guide children to use scissors and to use play dough to make different shapes. That help them to develop small muscles” [Ms Y, Centre A].*

Ms D from Centre C said:

*Physical development and safety activities that are connected into the selected themes are emphasised in all the ELDAs. Children have to be taken care of at all times [Ms D, Centre C].*

The researcher noted that all the teachers identified the relationship between the ELDAs and formal school subjects while the teaching and learning activities they referred to were similar to what they had been doing before the introduction of the NCF. From these discussions, the researcher learned that in all the ELDAs young children perform different activities as they play to learn. After identifying teaching and learning activities from each ELDA, teachers explained that they link them into selected themes for young children to learn activities that are integrated (Meier and Marais, 2018).

#### **5.5.1.5 Selecting themes for integration**

Data supported Mandic and Bojanic’s (2018) assertion that thematic-based teaching is the best approach in the ECCE sector to integrate teaching and learning activities. This is exactly what the researcher discovered when analysing the data as there was sufficient evidence that teaching and learning activities are integrated around selected themes that are explored in weekly chunks. Theme selection emerged as a sub-theme from the semi-structured and focus group interviews that were supported by the theme books and the lesson plans that the participants presented for the researcher’s perusal. The participants raised the point that they integrate teaching and learning activities into selected themes.

While themes are part and parcel of data analysis and elucidation of information (Creswell, 2014) and it is appropriate that the researcher mention the themes that the participants for integration link up with how young children learn in the ECCE. They showed how they select themes that were appropriate for young children. The following excerpts illustrate this point. One teacher said:

*In our centre we use a theme book that includes ten themes that I was given by the NGO called 'Training resources in Early Education' or we call it TREE. I was given this resource when I started teaching in this centre. Although we use similar themes every year, we sit in teams when planning, to discuss teaching and learning activities, and resources that connect into the themes. Our theme book is written in English but we also use Isizulu when teaching. In facts, we mix English and IsiZulu when teaching (smiling) [Ms D, Centre C].*

Another participant said:

*In our centre we simply take themes from the CAPS Grade R IsiZulu Life Skills document. There is a list of themes that we identified as relevant to our children. What we do at the beginning of the year is to sit together as staff to select twelve themes to use in each particular year as there are many themes in the document. We always try to think and select themes that relates to the teaching and play resources that are available in the centre. Usually, we don't change themes every year [Ms Z, Centre B].*

Attesting to the value of theme selection, a teacher from Centre A said:

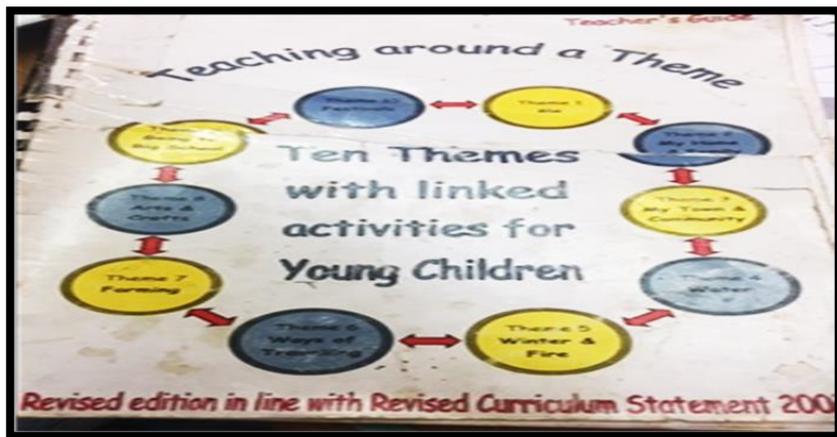
*When choosing themes, we think about the experiences that young children bring to school. What children know and what can be interesting to them. Every year we sit as staff to select themes at the beginning of the years and decide on teaching and play resources we can use. We also include natural themes such as **plants** and **animals** to relate to the environment. At the beginning of the year we usually use easy themes such as **me, my body, my family, my home, my classroom, my school**, and develop to **plants, animals** and **transport** towards the end of the year. We usually use English themes but we use IsiZulu to teach [Ms Y, Centre A].*

From the above extracts the researcher deduced that theme selection is done differently in all the three ECCE centres. The teachers from Centre B and Centre B favoured themes that had already been formulated and presented in trusted sources. The teachers of Centre C used themes from the NGO theme book as they are, while teachers from Centre B take them from the Life Skills (Grade R) CAPS document. The importance of young children experiences to learning were highlighted important by the participants from Centre A. However, the researcher discovered that the relevancy of the selected themes to young children's development were noted in all the centres. It also emerged from the discussion with all the

participants that themes were recycled and updated as they were not changed every year. The teachers' ideas are corroborated by Bjorklund and Ahlskog-Bjorkman (2017) who state that children's experiences and interests should be taken into consideration in theme selection. Moreover, Dowden (2007) is also of the view that re-using themes saves time to think about related teaching and play resources and provides the opportunity for teachers to focus on other teaching responsibilities as well.

The data showed that theme-selection was done by all the teachers at the beginning of the year and it is part of the planning process. The importance of selecting easy themes at the beginning of the year while natural themes such as plants and animals are also used was highlighted at Centre A. Therefore, the approach to theme selection was consistent with the objective of the NCF to use natural themes and resources that reflect the reality around the child (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012; Department of Basic Education, 2015).

The data also exposed that both English and IsiZulu resources were sourced by Centre C and Centre A teachers. If the teachers taught these themes in English they were in contravention of the NCF which requires that the young child's mother tongue should be used at all times (DBE, 2009). However, as the researcher did not actually observe their teaching, cannot vouch for this and may only surmise that they used English themes and then translated their interactions with the children into IsiZulu in order to develop home language. The researcher viewed the use of English themes to teach in IsiZulu demonstrated the versatility and creativity of these teachers as well as their understanding that themes from as wide a basis as possible need to be sourced to support their teaching. Only the teachers from Centre B specified that they used primarily IsiZulu themes as they selected them from the IsiZulu Life Skills CAPS document. Figure 5.1 below presents images from the theme book with the selected themes used by the teachers from Centre C.



**Figure 5.1: Theme book**

**Source: Department of Education, 2005**

The document revealed that ten themes were generally sourced over the years to support the learning of the young children in these centres. The participants indicated that although the themes were sourced from a resource that had been made available in 2005, the themes were still relevant. These resources guided them to integrate their teaching and the learning activities according to NCF directives. Data showed evidence that teaching and learning activities are identified from the ELDA's while themes are not suggested in NCF document. After theme selection, teachers organise the environment for young children to explore teaching and learning activities that are integrated into the selected themes.

### **5.5.2 Theme Two: The creation of a conducive learning environment**

The data showed that after the planning of teaching and learning activities and selecting themes, teachers organise the environment for young children to play and learn (Meier & Marais, 2018). In agreement with Bento and Dias (2017), learning environment for young children consists of both indoor and outdoor spaces. This is where children explore and discover their world in relation to the planned activities that are integrated.

### 5.5.2.1 Indoor learning spaces

The data that addressed the first research question also revealed that planning the integrated teaching and learning activities also includes planning the inside learning spaces appropriately to allow the children to learn through play inside the playroom. The research study used the term playroom in relation to the classroom since young children play to learn in the ECCE sector. All the participants viewed indoor learning spaces as significant for young children development. One teacher stated:

*In my classroom I organised a reading corner, a construction corner, a fantasy corner, and a theme corner. In each corner I also prepare play resources for children to play and learn. In the construction corner I have building blocks that are bright in colour and I also have resources such as small kitchen utensils and a fantasy area for children to identify and fantasise. Most of the resources I have in the inside learning spaces were sponsored by a particular NGO in the area [Ms C, Centre B].*

Ms G from Centre C said:

*My classroom is very small but I have some books in a reading corner, a fantasy corner, and a theme table. On the theme table I keep theme-related resources each time after teaching [Ms G, Centre C].*

The data showed that creative teachers organised suitable indoor learning spaces and made their own play resources for the children to play and learn. Ms M said:

*In our centre we organise indoor learning corners and make our own resources for young children to learn and play in those corners. I will show you what we have done. We have no funds and most teaching and play resources are made by us [Ms M, Centre A].*

In addition, another teacher said:

*I have only three corners in my classroom. I have some reading books, I have a reading corner, fantasy resources in a fantasy corner, and puzzles and blocks in the construction corner. At least there are some sponsors who give us some resources [Ms B, Centre B].*

Ms K's narrative astonished the researcher and wanted to understand the playroom situation where floor space is challenging. What she said differed from what the other participants pertaining to the use of space for learning development. This is what she said:

*I don't want to lie. Although I consider areas when planning the activities, I am unable to organise permanent corners in my room as I have no space at all. I move resources in the areas for my children to have space to sleep. Books are moved from the reading corner to the cupboard and building blocks are moved [from the construction area to the cupboard as well]. The fantasy corner is the only permanent area with small stoves and cupboards that cannot be hidden [Ms K, Centre A].*

The participants affirmed the notion that organising indoor learning space is an essential step towards thematic teaching (French & Murphy (2005). It was also noticeable from the data that a reading corner and a fantasy corner were common indoor learning spaces that were available in almost all the ECCE rural centres. This is in line with Kroeker (2017) who argues that young children learn as they fantasise in the space that is organised. The indoor learning space thus needs to be stocked with play resources that are relevant for young children development (Bento & Dias, 2017). However, some comments suggested the evidence of challenges of space and play resources in other centres, while some teachers are creative enough to make own play resources. Figure 5.2 below are photographs of play resources that the teachers made for young children to learn and fantasies in the Centre A.



**Figure 5.2: Play resources (left) and a fantasy corner (right) created by Centre A teachers**

**Source: Author**

### **5.5.2.2 Outdoor learning spaces**

The data revealed that outdoor learning spaces were also organised in these ECCE rural centres. Yayla et al. (2014) assert that young children should explore theme-based activities

outside the classroom. When the participants discussed the outside learning spaces that they utilised some were enthusiastic while others lamented the lack of physical space. Ms C stated:

*Our children also play and learn activities outside the classroom. In our centre we have a jungle gym that is used by all the children and I also plan activities in the water and sand pit area. Ma'am bought big basins that we use in the water and sand pit area. It is where children do early mathematics problem solving activities such as full and empty using water and sand [Ms C, Centre B].*

Ms M from Centre A said:

*Our outdoor area is a mess. We have one small swing that does not accommodate all the children but we organise tyres for children to play outside the classroom for gross muscle development. Children exercise as they run up and down and it is healthy. We were advised by the Health inspector to organise a wooden jungle gym where it will be safe for our children to play. Hey, we don't know, but we are still looking for sponsors [Ms M, Centre A].*

A teacher from Centre C said:

*All our children play outside on a jungle gym and swings that were bought by the centre. We also go outside for children to run around and play [Ms G, Centre C].*

This is what a teacher from Centre B said:

*My children do creative arts outside the classroom. When they have to draw and paint I place an art table outside the classroom. They also play outside to learn other theme-related activities [Ms B, Centre B].*

The literature is adamant that ECCE teachers should make effort to think about learning spaces outside the play room for children to explore teaching and learning activities (Bento & Dias, 2017). The participants considered the value of play and the need for young children to move around and climb up and down for gross motor development. When they discussed teaching and learning activities associated with the ELDAs, they were cognisant of the fact that physical activities are part of the ELDA 'Well-being' for young children to exercise as they run to play. The researcher also discovered that doing different activities is guided by

the daily programmes and there after lesson planning. It is important for the teachers to be directed on what and when to teach.

### **5.5.2.3 The formulation of the instructional plan**

The formulation of an instructional plan emerged as another important step in planning to teach young children. Meier (2014) states that the instructional plan should include a daily programme and lesson plans that include assessment. The NCF guides ECCE teachers regarding when, how, and what to teach. Therefore, the formulation of an instructional plan emerged as a sub-theme from the interview data and this finding was supported by the documents that were analysed. The participants described the formulation of an instructional plan as the guidance to achieve the objectives of the NCF to establish learning opportunities.

- **A daily programme**

Daily programme emerged as the instructional plan that determines the times in the day when certain activities have to be done. As explained in the literature review chapter, daily programme is identified as a time-table in formal schooling (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Courson and Wallace (2010) state that the daily programme takes the holistic development of young children into consideration. It needs to include activities for cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development and should take the organised learning environment and integrated activities into consideration. It emerged from the interviews and the document analysis that the daily programmes that were followed in all the rural ECEE centres had primarily been planned by members of the NGO after the introduction of the NCF. However, the participants indicated that they make amendments as their own contributions in the daily programme. Data showed that in all the three centres the participants meet as staff members to discuss the activities on the daily programme. Therefore, the researcher discovered that the daily programme includes times the identification of suitable times for the activities. One participant elucidated the development of the daily programme as follows:

*I really appreciate the readymade daily programme, but in my centre, we sit together to make alterations, swap some activities, and enlarge the daily programme to display it in the play room. We discuss indoor and outdoor activities included in the programme and decide which group will be inside and which one will be outside. We avoid sending all the groups outside at the same time as we have limited play space and a very small jungle gym. We also don't want toddlers to play outside at the same time as the older children. The daily programme includes pictures for children to see what they have to*

*do. However, after enlarging it the pictures become faint (smiling) but we want all the children to see all the activities [Ms Y, Centre A]*

Another teacher from Centre A supported Ms Y, Ms M said:

*Our daily programme follows the same order of activities every day but we sometimes adjust it based on what the teacher is doing [long activities] in the classroom. We also change the activities and disrupt the daily programme when noticing that children are bored. We also don't do outside activities when the weather is too hot or when it is raining [Ms M, Centre A].*

Ms B said:

*We discuss when the activities can be done in the areas and corners organised inside and outside the classroom. We sit together as a whole staff to discuss all the activities in the daily programme and the framework. The activities are indicated as pictures instead of words for children to easily see what is going to be done. Although they don't associate with times, they get ideas about what is happening [Ms B, Centre B].*

Ms C from Centre B said:

*Children don't know about time but they can see in the pictures that it is play time, reading time, and all the other activities. We follow the same sequence of teaching and learning activities as included in the framework [Ms C, Centre B].*

Ms N added:

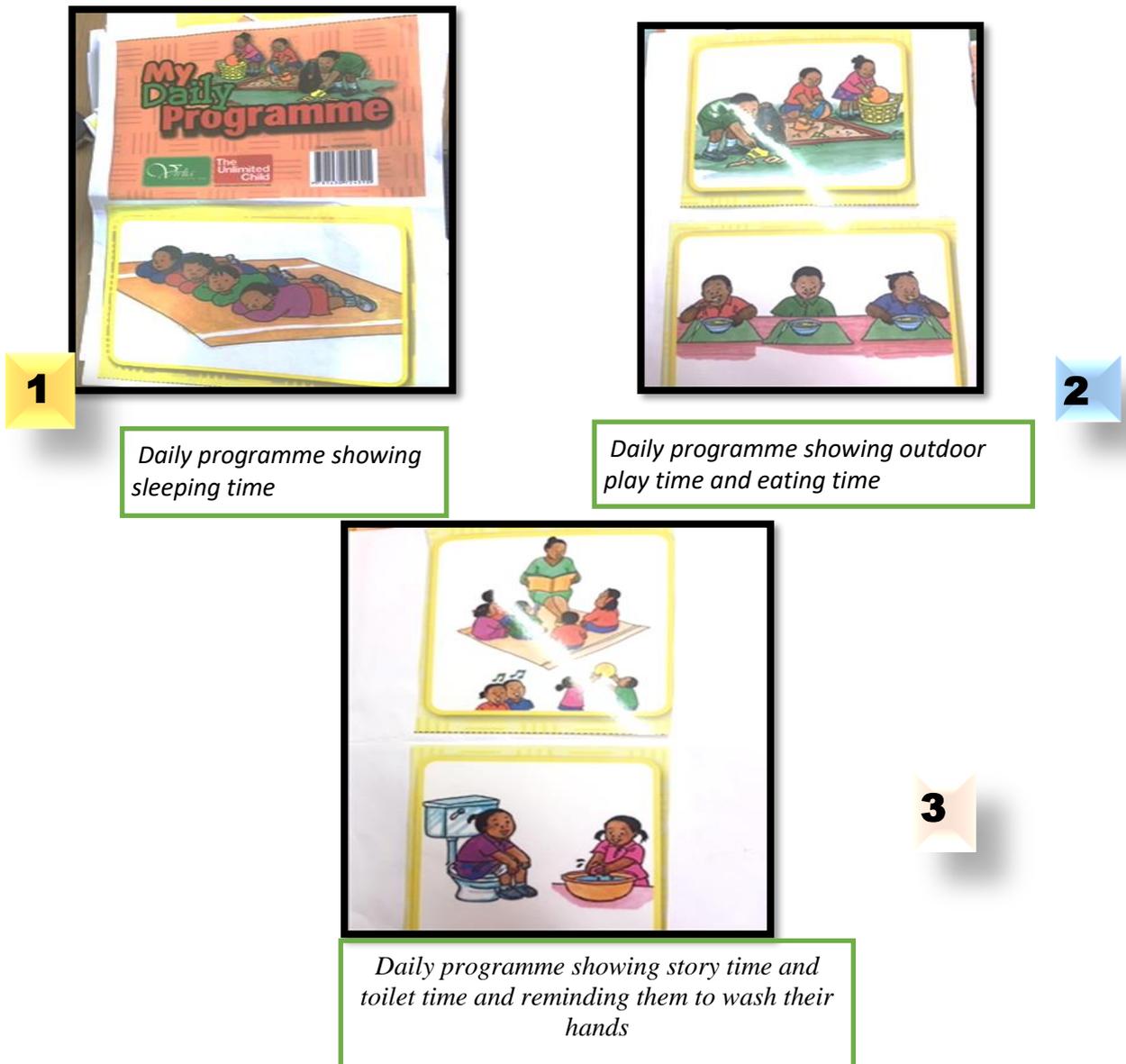
*All the activities from the ELDA's are included in the daily programme. Although we don't plan the daily programme, we discuss the activities in the daily programme when planning for teaching [Ms N, Centre C].*

Ms G also supported what the previous participants had said:

*Our daily programme includes routine activities such as morning greetings, toilet time, and sleeping time. It also includes times for teaching activities such as news reading, mathematics, play time, talking time, and quiet time. We thereafter link a related theme to the activities. The daily programme guides our teaching [Ms G, Centre C].*

Data from the semi-structured and focus group interviews and document analysis suggested daily programme as the guidance to achieving the outcomes of the NCF. The researcher could discern that instead of words, pictures of different activities to be done were included for young children to know and understand what to do in the playroom. Young children view pictures and interpret daily activities to be done. The participants complied with the need for young children to be involved and taken as important in the learning environment. As proposed by Meier and Marais (2018), young children's needs were accommodated as the involvement to understand all daily activities while the objectives of the curriculum were considered. Daily programme was planned and supplied by the NGO in all the centres. However, altered by the ECCE teachers where possible.

The responses above also indicated that teachers were flexible to informally alternate activities and make changes on that particular day. They indicated that when the weather is not conducive for outdoor activities, they do indoor activities. Figure 5.4 is an example of a daily programme that the participants followed in all the three ECCE centres in the area. Pictures show the activities as the participants explained that children had to know what activities they had to engage in.



**Figure 5.3: Daily programme with pictures instead of words**

**Source: Author**

- **Lesson planning**

Data demonstrated that ECCE teachers follow the lesson plan template and consider lesson planning as important to present teaching and learning activities integrated on the selected themes for the development of the young children. It emerged from the interviews and the document analysis that lesson planning includes teaching and learning activities, themes, teaching and play resources and the ideas for assessment as contained in the NCF. The document data corroborated with what the participants discussed during the interviews that proper lesson is planned in the ECCE. Ms K stated:

*When planning the lesson, I first indicate the selected theme and the resources to use. As I explained before, in this centre we make our own resources or get ones that are sponsored. Giving an example: Where the theme is my body, for the **'Well-being' and 'Identity and belonging'** and **'Communication'** [ELDAs] we plan a story about my body, rhyme, talk, and make demonstrations about keeping our bodies clean. To **'Explore mathematics'**, we count body parts and draw, cut, or paint for **'Creativity'**. We also use playdough to make body parts. For the **'Knowledge and understanding the world'** ELDA we organise fantasy play. They dress up to cover their bodies and during free play they run and play for **'Physical development'**. The resources for that theme include a story book, cardboard, counters, paint, and paper and scissors. I thereafter observe to assess the children working as individuals or in groups. Here is the lesson plan template that we follow [Ms K, Centre A].*

Ms G said:

*When planning the lesson, I sit with my partners to identify the **aim** of the ELDAs that we want to achieve. We relate the activities to a chosen theme and agree on the teaching and learning resources that are available for use. We also discuss how children can be **assessed** for learning [Ms G, Centre C].*

Another participant, Ms N, said:

*When planning the lesson, we follow this template that was designed in a cluster meeting [showing the template]. I write the topic for the day, the ELDA, the aim that I want to achieve in that week, developmental guideline, and the week date. We then plan for the main activity – say **mathematics** – and do story reading or storytelling about a theme, individual choice activity in any corner, music/song or rhyme about a theme, design activity about the main ELDA, outdoor activity, resources, assessment and watch point. If the main ELDA is **'Knowledge and understanding the world'**, the designed activity can be a talk about young children's experiences about the theme [Ms N, Centre C].*

Data collected from the planning documents indicated all the teachers follow similar lesson plan template. As indicated in the extract above, the template was collectively design by the cluster. The participants mentioned the fact that lesson planning was not just simply about integrating the activities but also about achieving the identified objectives of the NCF. They

related to the selecting of the theme, deciding on the suitable play resources and thinking about where the lesson objective can be met. That is organising the learning at the best of interest to the child. The literature review (Chapter Three) contended that lesson planning is a guide to determine how the outcomes of a lesson can be achieved (Jansen, 2008). The researcher discovered that the participants sought alternative solutions in circumstances where related story books and other related resources were not available to relate the story into the selected theme. This is what Ms Z said in this regard:

*I always try to integrate all six the ELDA's into the lesson each day while activities are also linked to a theme (showing the lesson plan template). Our theme for this week is 'farming.' We integrate the activities into the theme and plan for children to talk about a farm, draw or paint farm animals, sing songs, recite rhymes, and make animals using playdough. The NGO sponsored these related pictures but I didn't get a story about farm animals and that is why I decided to write my own story, as you can see [Ms Z, Centre B].*

The responses above showed that ECCE teachers identify teaching and learning activities from all the six ELDA's to integrate around the selected theme. The researcher discovered that where the theme is 'my body' in *well-being* they talk about keeping bodies clear; in *communication*, the story is about my body; when *exploring mathematics*, they count body parts; in *creativity*, they draw parts of the body; in *identity and belonging* and *knowledge and understanding the world*, they discuss and talk about any related topic. It was also interesting to know that, teachers observe how children play to learn as all the activities are linked to play resources. The collected data related to Varun and Venugopal (2016) that activities are integrated around the theme and play resources. What some all the participants mentioned is the importance of assessment when planning the activities. The participants pointed out the importance of achieving the aims of each ELDA and to adhere to the assessment guidelines provided in the NCF (DBE, 2015). Children's ages are taken into consideration all the time in the ECCE playroom. It was also interesting for the researcher to note the creativity of the participants that tended to write own stories to relate into a selected theme (Figure 5.4).

The images in Figure 5.4 depict farm animals and the story that the teacher created to relate the activity into the selected theme for young children.



**Figure 5. 4: Thematic learning: Pictures and a creative story about animals**

**Source: Author**

Data also revealed that the participant from Centre B overcame the challenges of limited resources as she created a story for children to learn all the required activities. This finding is consistent with the literature and the theoretical framework that encourage creative thinking in the transformation learning process (Mezirow 1990; Kitchenham, 2008). Since, the NCF guidance was identified as a transformative learning opportunity in the ECCE sector.

The findings below relate to the theme and sub-themes that emerged in relation to the second research question: *What are ECCE teachers’ experiences of using the NCF for the execution of the teaching and learning activities that are integrated in rural ECCE centres?*

**5.5.3 Theme Three: Challenges related to planning practices**

The collected data related to the literature as discussed in Chapter Three of the research study that rural ECCE teachers often experience challenges, particularly as far as the planning of teaching and learning activities is concerned (Labuschagne, 2015; Ntumi, 2016; Aubrey, 2017). When analysing the participant’s responses, it was clear that challenges were indeed evident in the integrated planning of teaching and learning activities. The challenges include play resources for active learning, physical learning space and continuous support from the Department of Basic Education.

### 5.5.3.1 Play resources for active learning

Pertaining to the teacher's experiences, the researcher put Labuschagne's (2015) comments into perspective as the scarcity of teaching and play resources in rural ECCE centres. Young children learn as they see, touch, and play with appropriate resources in an organised environment (Vorster et al., 2016). The Department of Basic Education in the NCF also highlighted play resources as significant to enhance the learning of young children (Department of Basic Education, 2015). However, data from the participants showed that they sometimes struggle to obtain the necessary resources for young children development. Based on the data at my disposal, I view resources as *instructional aids for active learning inside and outside the classroom*. Most participants shared the frustrations that flared up due to a lack of teaching and learning resources. This sentiment was strongly expressed by the teachers as Ms C said:

*Unfortunately, we have very few toys and resources to use for young children to play and learn. Learning corners are there but play resources are very limited. I sometimes use any stories even when they are not related to the theme for my children to listen and learn [Ms C, Centre B].*

Another participant added:

*Learning corners are affected as I don't have and can't afford enough resources for all the corners. I only have a reading corner and a fantasy corner as I explained at the beginning. I am unable to organise enough learning corners for the holistic development of my children. There are no puzzles and no play books for cognitive development and for children to open the book at their level and play [Ms N, Centre C].*

This is what another teacher had to say:

*Although we try very hard to organise resources to teach, I think we need more skills to make the resources better. Look, there are no wheels on the toy cars that we made! (laughing). We utilise the little we have but I can see that is not enough. It is not easy for us to share how we make our resources as we see that we are not perfect [Ms K, Centre A]*

It was thus evident that the challenges of teaching and play resources also affects the creation of the conducive learning environment as the spaces or corners are identified by the resources available. Data also confirmed what Rakabe (2016) asserts that some rural ECCE teachers struggle to meet funding requirements and therefore, have no funds allocated to buy teaching and play resources. There are limited or no reading books that reflect some selected themes, and thus lesson objectives were achieved by using any other reading book or teachers' creative stories. The participants' innovations and creativity in their lesson planning and teaching refuted Labuschagne's (2015) contention that lesson planning is not properly done in ECCE centres where learning resources are scarce. Therefore, the participants from Phaphama and Senzakahle demonstrated creative skills to develop their own teaching and play resources as confirmed in (Figure 5.2) and the story in (Figure 5.4) above. The researcher noted what the participants raised that admitted they need more creative skills to develop better resources.

### **5.5.3.2 Physical learning space**

Data showed that physical learning space or the floor space affect the development of indoor areas in the playroom as discussed above. It emerged from the interviews that some playrooms are small and the space is not enough for the teachers to create enough learning areas. This is what the participant said

*In our play room the space is not enough for children to move up and down during indoor physical activities. We make sure that we monitor children at all times as they are unable to move freely when they play and learn [Ms D, Centre C].*

Another participant added:

*Every day I organise my theme table and store the teaching and learning resources after teaching. But it becomes sad that I have to move all those resources during sleeping time as the space is not enough for my children to sleep. As you can see now, it is as if I don't have a theme table. You will only see it when you come before sleeping time (looking sad) [Ms G, Centre C].*

This is what another participant had to say:

*As I mentioned at the beginning, our ECCE centre's structure is not complete. Play rooms are not enough and not safe for children to play and learn [Ms Y, Centre A].*

Data showed that integrating teaching and learning activities includes the creation of learning space where those activities will be done as mentioned above. The participants consider safety as the well-being for all children to freely move. However, that was compromised at Sizamele and Phaphama as they were restricted by the space. Spaces were limited, incomplete ECCE centre structure, playrooms not in conducive condition for young children development.

### **5.5.3.3 Continuous support**

Continuous support by the Department to monitor quality educational delivery is vital for the implementation of the new curriculum (Ntumi, 2016). When the researcher probed more ECCE teachers' experiences, the participants raised the issue of support that they expected as follow up training and continuous assistance from the Department of Basic Education after introducing the NCF in the ECCE centres in the area. Their needs were confirmed by the literature that teachers always need proper guidance and constant support from the Department to implement the ideas of the new curriculum (Clasquin-Johnson, 2016; Ngwenya, 2019). This is what the participants said:

*I was selected by the Department of Basic Education for training and then supporting other ECCE teachers who were unable to attend the NCF training session. I expected that they would make another day available to come and visit us and to provide further support...specially to see if what we are doing is correct [Ms Y, Centre A].*

Expressing a similar view, a teacher from Centre B said:

*It is unfortunate that I haven't seen any trainer from the Department. I was trained and supported by the NGO and other teachers in our cluster and in the centre. I thought I was going to be given the opportunity to attend when the Department of Basic Education came back to the area [Ms B, Centre B].*

Another participant said:

*Although we are trying hard to cope with the situation, I expected to get more planning ideas from the Department of Basic Education. I really appreciate the support from other teachers but the Department of Basic Education introduced the NCF and hasn't come back to check what we are doing [Ms G, Centre C].*

Although all the participants appreciated the DBE effort to extend the introduction of the NCF in rural ECCE centres. The data above showed that the participants had earlier expected further assistance from the Department of Basic Education that introduced NCF a new experience in the ECCE sector, but this never happened. Their view is corroborated by Aubrey (2017) who states that planning support is inadequate in rural ECCE centres. Nevertheless, it was exciting for the researcher to hear that these ‘marginalised’ teachers showed understanding of the situation while they made the NCF meaningful for themselves. They collaborated and communicated to learn and also appreciated the NGOs in the area and from other teachers. The researcher discovered that lack of support by the Department of Basic Education actually assisted the participants to explore new roles after learning the framework. The participants mentioned the importance of teams to learn.

Below are the findings related to the theme and sub-themes that emerged in relation to the third research question: *To what extent do ECCE teachers reflect on the planning roles after using the NCF to integrate teaching and learning activities for young children?*

#### **5.5.4 Theme Four: Development of new roles**

The data showed that the rural ECCE teachers learned from one another to plan integrated activities. The researcher discovered the participants willingness to collaborate and communicate to make the NCF meaningful in the rural centres contributed to the exploration on the new roles. That was reflected in their planning strategies while challenges were still there. Although they expressed themselves variously, the responses that addressed the research question above showed that the participants had learned and adopted appropriate insights after accessing the NCF document in team contexts. They therefore worked around difficulties and valued the transformation they experienced in the ECCE sector.

##### **5.5.4.1 ECCE teachers as interpreters of the new curriculum**

Data showed that the NCF was introduced to guide the new planning practices where teaching and learning activities are identified from the six ELDA's. The participants frankly and openly discussed their responses to conditions and circumstances that prevailed in their ECCE centres. While Gardner (2017) classifies rural teachers as underprivileged, the participants did not view themselves as such and enthusiastically described their realities and accomplishments in accessing and continuously learning. After they had been made aware of

new developments in the ECCE domain (Sibanda, 2018), they resolved to embrace new opportunities to benefit their children in the rural ECCE centres. This is what they said:

*Before going through the activities, the aim of each ELDA written in a child's voice assisted us to learn what each child is expecting to learn. It clearly explains what children need to learn in a very simple English. After reading 'the voice' together as staff, we read the aims of each ELDA and thereafter identified teaching and learning activities that are suitable for young children [ Ms G, Centre C].*

Ms K said:

*Understanding the information written in a child's voice in each ELDA made the new framework exciting for me. In the first ELDA, 'Well-being', the child is expecting to be happy and to learn in a safe and suitable environment to enjoy good health and nutrition. For all the ELDAs there is the voice of a child that guides teaching. After that, there are different aims, teaching and learning activities, and assessment [Ms K, Centre A].*

Another teacher from Centre C expressed her surprise that all the teaching and learning activities were summarised right at the beginning and the NCF was made clear and suitable for the development of all children from birth to four years. This is what she said:

*I always ask myself where this NCF comes from (laughing). The NCF is very clear and the English used is very easy to understand. It includes developmental guidelines for young children, teaching and learning activities, and ideas for assessment. It also includes ideas to identify children with problems to learning and activities for them. The activities are not new and only the name ELDA is new. But after some clarifications from other teachers, I realised that they are also similar to the subjects [we used to focus on] [Ms D, Centre C].*

In the discussions with a teacher from Centre B during interviews, it emerged that the participants interpreted the visions of the NCF. This teacher said:

*The ideas to identify children with barriers to learning included in the NCF are very helpful in my assessment for learning. I keep them in mind all the time when teaching*

*to assist children that are struggling. I also include them in the lessons that I plan and make notes [Ms B, Centre B].*

Ms C concurred:

*Although teaching and learning activities are included in the NCF, we learned that, as teachers, we can use our own related activities that are suitable for our children. What is also important is that the first ELDA, ‘Well-being’, is very important and needs to be integrated with all other ELDA activities. This is because children have to be healthy and safe at all times [Ms C, Centre B].*

There is evidence in the excerpts above that the ECCE teachers learned to interpret the NCF and that they had thus become adept at identifying teaching and learning activities and other planning ideas. The discussions enlightened the importance of a child’s voice in the content that they taught and in the objectives of young children’s learning when they planned their teaching activities. It also emerged during the interviews that knowledge was continuously gained as the participants shared their knowledge, understandings and experiences as they engaged in teaching young children. Ebrahim and Irvine (2012), who made pivotal contributors to the NCF, state that teachers were expected to make meaning of the new NCF, learn and understand it as a flexible document to guide the development of the young children in their care. As was previously highlighted, the participants were rural teachers who, according to Labuschagne (2015), should have experienced many challenges that would have affected the planning of the integrated activities negatively. However, these teachers proved the opposite and the readiness to the ECCE transformation.

#### **5.5.4.2 ECCE teachers as creative thinkers**

As stated by Afande (2015), ECCE teachers have to be creative in their planning of lessons. It emerged from the data that some participants had developed creative thinking skills to make own teaching and play resources for young children to learn. These participants identified themselves as creative thinkers and explained their views in this regard. Ms Y stated:

*As I explained in the beginning (pointing at the resources they had made) we make cars and many other materials for the fantasy corner and for children to play. Although I need to learn more, I make sure that I plan my lessons in advance to organise suitable*

*resources and think about solutions [to the problems I may encounter] during the lesson for the development of my young children in the correct way” [Ms Y, Centre A].*

Another participant shared similar sentiments and said:

*We don't have a printer in our centre, but I make sure that I trace pictures and draw for children to see as they learn. We have charts that we use for drawing. We improvise for children to see and touch to learn [Ms N, Centre C].*

The two participants above concurred with the literature (Pawilen et al., 2010) that lesson planning requires teachers to think in advance to achieve the objectives of a lesson. Moreover, they raised that they still need more skills. Other participants also discussed their creative thinking roles. Ms M said:

*As I know that young children play to learn, I organise a few resources that are suitable for them. In our centre we are poor in resources but we even organise tyres for children to play, move their hands, and run around while playing [Ms M, Centre A].*

Ms K said:

*We organised a water area and sandpit area for mathematics activities. Ma'am bought two large basins for children to take turns to fill with water and sand. We ended up with water and sand pit areas and our children learn [Ms K, Centre A].*

The excerpts above provide evidence that although there were some challenges in the ECCE rural centres under study, the participants acknowledged change and they thus worked hard to learn and transform their approaches and practices for the development of a child. As proposed by the TLT of Mezirow (1991), they reflect to past experiences, knowledge and skills. Although not all the participants were creative, the point they made to improvise and used various options to the problems uncounted is important. The participants mentioned tyres and basins as the cheap and easily available play resources as their dedication to quality learning and equal opportunities to the rural child. Their enthusiastic discussions revealed their creative thinking skills, their willingness to make positive connections and ensure engagement as a new learning experience for them.

### 5.5.4.3 ECCE teachers as assessors

The participants responses indicated assessment as an essential step in the planning of teaching and learning activities to identify the developmental needs of children (Husni & Rouadi, 2016). The participants explained that they had conducted assessments before accessing the NCF, but learned to play the assessor role better as the NCF included the ideas to identify children with barriers to learn all the activities of the ELDA. They raised the provision of clear assessment guidelines in the document. When explaining how they read the NCF they extended to talk about assessment. Ms K said:

*I decided to use two exercise books for assessment after reading more [about it] in the NCF. There is guidance to assess teaching and learning activities and guidance to assess everything that I want to report to the parents. I record everything that I observe as assessment both inside and outside the classroom. I take the second [book] as an informal assessment book but I write the date, the child's name, and what I observed. The first one is to assess teaching and learning activities. It includes all my children's names, dates, and what to teach and assess on daily basis [Ms K, Centre A].*

A teacher from Senzakahle also showed clear understanding of assessment. This is what she said:

*Using the NCF assisted me to know that I assess every day. I am guided to see if the child is having problems in learning a particular topic. I observe and keep records of the important issues to discuss with the parents. I sometimes observe one child at a time and also assess group activities [Ms B, Centre B].*

In addition, Ms M said:

*I prepare and include assessment in my lesson plan. In the assessment book I copy what I planned to assess and show if children will be assessed in groups or as individuals. Sometimes I organise children to play in different corners of the classroom and focus on assessing one group at a time. I keep all the children occupied and I know they learn as they play in each corner. I integrate assessment into the activities that I plan to teach every day [Ms M, Centre A].*

Ms Bhengu added the importance to know what to observe to assess under each ELDA.

*I know what to assess and who to assess. The lesson plan, as I explained earlier, includes guidance for assessment. But I always observe and record everything that I think is important. In our centre we also read the steps for assessment and the importance of keeping records to tell the parents about their children [Ms B, Centre B].*

The participants' comments showed that they understood the new direction that the NCF introduced on how they are expected to assess. A participant from Centre C used the new term, 'watch points', as used in the NCF:

*The 'watch points' are explained as what to watch when teaching. This gives all of us the ideas about what to observe in all the teaching and learning activities. We learn to see children that are struggling and take action to support them. We make reports to discuss with parents during suitable times [Ms D, Centre C].*

Another teacher from Centre C said:

*Assessment guidelines in the new framework assist me to know what is necessary to report to the parents of the children that I teach. I watch and make notes in the assessment book but I immediately report emergencies to the parents [Ms G, Centre C].*

The participants raised the point that all the assessment guidelines in the NCF document assisted them to play their assessor role well. They confirmed that, as they assessed, they reflected on their teaching to identify children's strengths and challenges and also to improve their own teaching strategies. They deemed assessment an important part of the planning process and they agreed that it allowed them to know what to assess and when. The data also revealed that observation was the predominant method of assessment in the ECCE. This finding concurs with Meier and Marais's (2018) assertion that observation is pivotal when assessing young children as they play and learn and that teachers need to look at them all the time (Husni & Rouadi, 2016).

#### **5.5.4.4 Reflective teachers**

The participants responses to the last question related to assertions that a reflective teacher looks back on the teaching practice to assess if the children's growth and development were appropriate. My argument about reflectiveness centres around Meier and Marais's (2018) view that it should be an everyday practice to think about learning after each lesson and to

accentuate new experiences and/or insights. As confirmation of this notion, the participants referred to reflection as an opportunity that they had learnt to utilise and that reflection was included in their lesson plan template as proposed by the NCF. In this regard, Ms M said:

*After each lesson I think about my teaching methods, the teaching and learning resources, and everything that happened during the lesson. The importance of reflections was discussed in our centre during the staff NCF. [Ms M, Centre A].*

Similarly, another participant from the same centre said:

*Although we plan lessons together, I reflect on my own way after teaching the lesson. I think about the activities and the resources that I used for teaching. I also think about how I can improve my teaching every day. Reflections are also included in the lesson plan template that we use [Ms K, Centre A].*

Ms G from Centre C said:

*After teaching and assessment I automatically reflect as I think about the lesson. But now it is easy as I write my notes on the lesson plan as I have to write all my observations about the lesson. Where I struggle to write in English, I make my notes in IsiZulu [Ms G, Centre C].*

Data showed the participants skills and clear understanding of what to reflect and the meaning in the ECCE. The participants highlighted reflection as a topic that was also included in the lesson plan template that they presented as one of their personal planning documents. However, the researcher discovered that all the participants understand what to reflect but some who had submitted the lesson plans engaged in reflection while others did not, as this section was blank in some of the lesson plans. I referred to this earlier (Chapter Two) as Yin (2009) also found that some personal documents had been left incomplete. However, the participants explained that they tended to reflect on their planning practices when they shared their meaning-making experiences with other teachers. The researcher also discovered that when language (English vs IsiZulu) was a barrier, they reflect using the language in which they could best express themselves.

## **5.6 Chapter Summary**

The chapter has presented the analysis and the interpretation of data collected to achieve the three objectives of the research study. The three data generation instruments used were semi-structured, focus group interviews and document analysis and four major themes emerged from the data that were analysed inductively using the data analysis spiral. These themes were: A desirable learning opportunity, the creation of a conducive learning environment, challenges encountered and the development of new roles. The findings revealed that all the participants learnt and utilised the NCF document for the planning of teaching and learning activities that are integrated for the development of young children. The data showed learning that started as a dilemma in one ECCE centre but the decision to collaborate and communicate in all the centres assisted. ECCE teachers shared prior and new knowledge and; the experiences to better understand what was expected. In all the three centres, the participants utilised thematic teaching for integration and the planning happened in different learning steps. The key finding established that teaching and learning activities from the six ELDAs of the NCF are integrated into a selected theme for young children to learn at their best. While the challenges were also experienced, rural ECCE teachers made every effort to learn and develop new planning roles. The next chapter presents the discussion of findings.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **THE DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

*The research findings refer to the totality of the research outcomes.*

*-(Denzin & Lincoln, 2018-*

#### **6.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented, analysed, and interpreted the qualitative data generated through semi-structured, focus group interviews and document analysis. This chapter discusses the findings in relation to the three research questions that guided the research study. To understand the integrated planning of activities, the researcher used Jack Mezirow's (1978a; 2000) transformative learning theory that views new experience as a collaborative learning opportunity to find new meaning, the notion of paradigm shift from the purposive actions related to Thomas Kuhn's (1970) and the contributions of Jurgen Habermas's theory of communicative action theory. Moreover, the reviewed literature in relation to the phenomenon was taken into consideration.

#### **6.2 Establishing the basis for the research findings**

The point of departure that the researcher adopted was to dissect the research topic to find the meaning and to make sense of the findings. Taking this stance was to ascertain whether the interpreted data was actually in line with the intentions of the research study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The essence of the research topic stresses the guidance of the NCF for the planning and offering of the activities that are integrated to meet the needs of young children in rural ECCE centres.

The three questions that guided the research study were:

1. How is the NCF used to guide the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities for young children in rural ECCE centres?
2. What are ECCE teachers' experiences of using the NCF for the execution of the teaching and learning activities that are integrated in rural ECCE centres?
3. To what extent do ECCE teachers reflect on the planning roles after using the NCF to integrate teaching and learning activities for young children?

The above questions guided the research findings that are discussed below.

### 6.3 The findings and the discussions

The research findings are presented in Figure 6.1 and discussed under the five headings below.

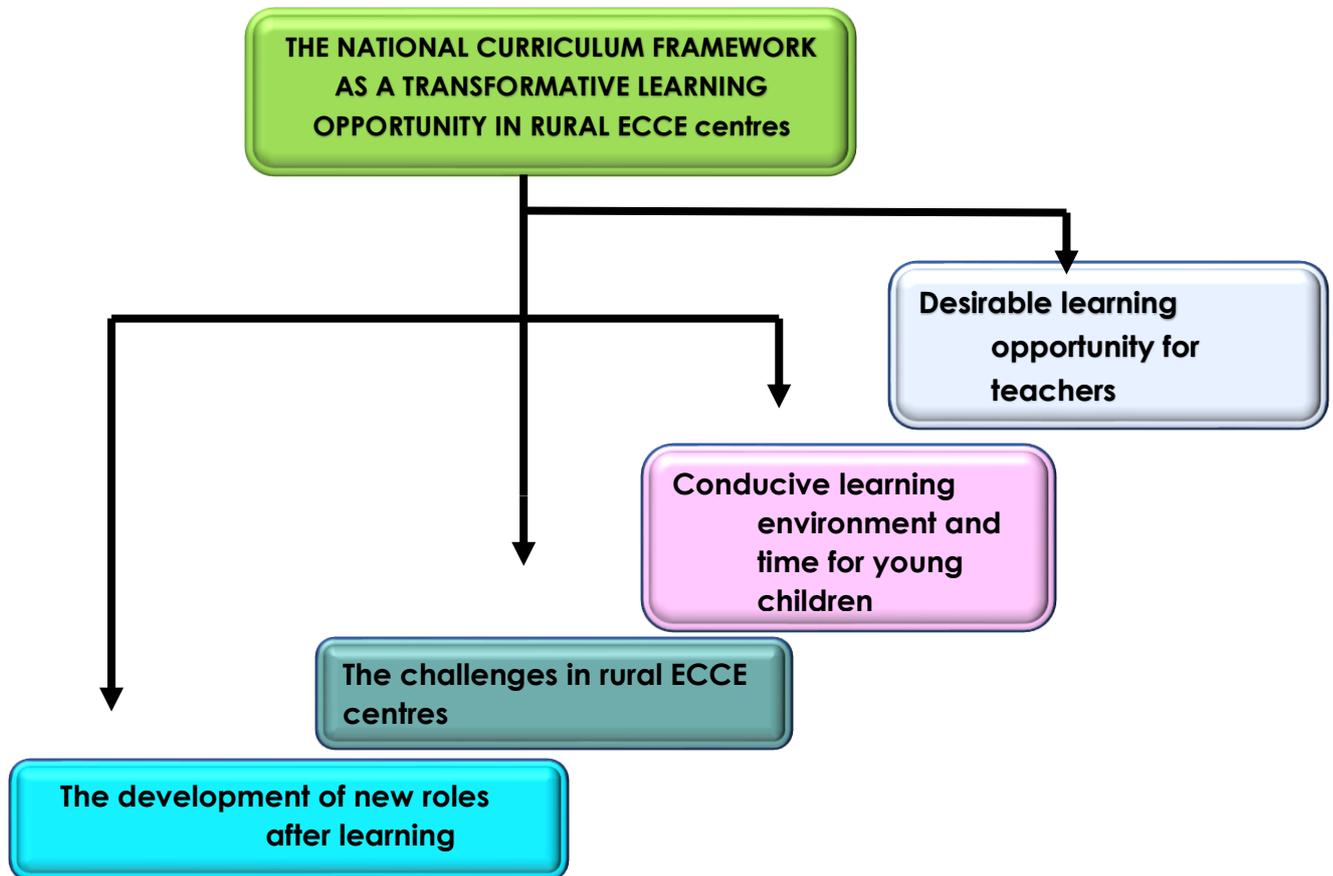


Figure 6.1: The Transformation process

Source: Author

#### 6.3.1 The NCF as a transformative learning opportunity in rural ECCE centres

The findings from this research study revealed the National Curriculum Framework for children from birth to four, as a form of transformative learning for the development of young children before schooling in rural ECCE centres (DBE, 2015). According to Mezirow (1994; 2000) transformative learning is a multifaceted, insightful and structural shift in basic premises of thought as an act to the challenges of life. The study ascertained that transformative learning developed as rural ECCE teachers previously witnessed inequities, disaggregation, and lack of proper early education. Campbell-Barr & Bogatic (2017) raised that the global demands pertaining to young children's education and improved equality of

learning directed ECCE teachers' conviction to make positive choices about the new framework. The past inconsistencies in South Africa affected the development of young children in ECCE rural centres (Sun, Rao and Pearson, 2015). Therefore, after experiencing irregularities in the early years, ECCE teachers weighed different options for change. They started to examine ideas and identified new knowledge to support their plan of action (Mezirow, 1995; Christie et al., 2015). Subsequently, the participants decided to follow the guidelines of the NCF for the development of young children for school readiness. Therefore, positive contributions and global perspectives created the new learning foundation in the ECCE sector (Campbell-Barr & Bogatic, 2017). The introduction of the NCF became the priority, the new action and new decision to fight inequalities. It was presented as a new knowledge, new experience, expertise, and the new vision of the country (DBE, 2015). It set the scene for transformation as the participants to embrace new ways of learning and in all the three ECCE centres, teachers voluntarily transformed their attitude by embracing the new framework and conforming to its requirements. The findings showed that the participants in the study engaged in transformative learning experience.

Mezirow (1997; 2000) revealed that transformative learning transpires in ten different stages. However, five of the transformative learning phases matched the findings of the research study as a disorienting dilemma, self-examination, assessment of assumptions, recognising that transformation is shared, and the exploration of new roles in the ECCE centers. Mezirow identifies the first phase *a disorienting dilemma* as an internally or externally introduced experience that can sometimes be similar to searching for something that is missing in one's life. It effects as a positive or negative impact on people's performance. When the new experiences do not match the existing knowledge and depending on the age, experiences and the approaches to facilitate transformation, people withdraw or embrace the new ways of thinking (Roberts, 2006).

It transpired from the semi-structured interviews and the focus group interviews that accessing the NCF became a challenging experience for the participants as they needed to read and understand the NCF and the ELDA's that are presented in English. The findings displayed a confusing situation as the new experience conflicted with some of their earlier experiences of the ECCE teachers. In accordance with the Mezirow's transformative learning theory, unpacking the NCF became a traumatic experience and a period of uncertainty a (Mezirow, 1997). The data presented by the teachers from Centre C affirmed the worst scenario after the

copies of the NCF were provided for the teachers to start reading the document as individuals in their homes. The findings were revealed from the following extracts:

*I became very worried to see that the new framework was written in English and included the six ELDAs, especially 'Identity and belonging' and 'Knowledge and understanding of the world' [Ms N, Centre C].*

*The six ELDAs presented more work for me. I even thought that the old method was better. I didn't know where to start reading the document. I just waited for the planning meeting" [Ms G, Centre C].*

Although they started to embrace transformation, there were some uncertainties regarding the six ELDAs and the language of the NCF document that were not meaningful for them at first. The frightening experience is identified as a pre-existing stage, meaning making opportunity to planning teaching and learning activities that are integrated. After that experience, the participants engaged in mental consideration of the process to transform. They started thinking about meaning making schemas as an effort to solve problems. Thus, Mezirow (2000) identified the thinking process as the second phase of transformation, *self-examination with feelings of fear and doubts*. The study discovered that the participants critically reflected to their past (as explained above) and therefore, considered the NCF as a paradigm shift and positive change as a result they facilitated new ways of thinking (Mezirow, 2000; Green & Malkki, 2017). Thus, Thomas Kuhn's (1962) identified the notion of paradigm shift as the bases of transformative learning and a new direction which requires willingness to adjust despite all challenges.

As an individual and in groups, ECCE teachers made plans and consciously develop beliefs about the new of life. They *critically assessed their expectations*, as the forth phase of transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000). The participants possessed adults' qualities, self-direction and positive intention to learn the vision of the NCF to promote effective guidance to young children under their care. Hence, teachers in the ECCE sector are also identified as adults who work with young children in ECCE centres or in their homes (DBE, 2015). The introduction of new curriculum framework inspired teachers to become learners (Uyanik, 2016). They started recognising that the process of transformation can be shared, as a forth phase of transformation (Mezirow, 1978; 2000). Where adults shared the desire to change their practice, they engaged in teamwork for collaborative and communicative learning to

transform (Habermas, 1979; Mezirow, 2000). This research study, ECCE teacher engaged in similar learning opportunities to follow the provided guidance in teams.

#### **6.3.1.1 Collaborative learning**

This finding revealed that teachers' mandate to read and understand the new framework encouraged collaborative learning (Kamara et al., 2018) and team work that heralded progressive initiatives in rural ECCE centres. It transpired from the semi-structured interviews and the focus group interviews that the planning of the integrated teaching and learning activities became a joint process for teachers to share ideas and work together for successful learning. In all the three centres, the participants started organising internal training sessions and cluster workshops to unpack the objectives of the framework. The research study established they organised suitable times as they shared a similar vision to grow and to develop young children that are school ready. These findings concur with Johnson-Barley and Alfred (2006) that collective and collaborative learning practices are essential for people to transform. The participants started acknowledging others' skills and knowledge which initiated a greater sense of inter-connectedness among them. However, after analysing the NCF as primary planning document, the research study discovered it was indeed the vision of the new democratic government and the intention of the Department of Basic Education through the NCF to ensure cooperation among teachers for meaning-making and knowledge building (DBE, 2015). It intended to be used as a flexible tool for teachers and adults working with young children to make it meaningful with more attention to quality experiences (Murriss, 2019). Although the participants were initially not aware of the intensions, the findings revealed that working together is also a transformative learning practice as envisioned by Mezirow's (1978a) transformative learning theory and Habermas's (1981) communicative action theory. Hence, ECCE teachers developed communicative learning skills in their learning process.

#### **6.3.1.2 Communicative learning**

Communicative learning influenced Mezirow's theory of transformative learning. Habermas (1971) identified communicative learning as the attempt for the learners to understand what is meant. Similarly, in this study established that the participants engaged in communicative learning as they engaged in discussions and taking turns to share what they know in order to make the framework meaningful to them. They communicated their understanding as a form of transformation to express their ideas and also listen to others (Stray & Saetra, 2017). This

was confirmed as a positive effort to learn in order to achieve the anticipated aims. The participants unpacked the developmental guidelines, the examples of teaching and learning activities, and perused the assessment process. The findings revealed during the communicative learning process, ECCE teachers realised that, instead of the normal three subjects in the Foundation Phase (Language, Mathematics and Life Skills), the NCF incorporated six ELDAs for children from birth to four years namely ‘Well-being’, ‘Identity and belonging’, ‘Creativity’, ‘Communication’, ‘Early mathematics’, and ‘Knowledge and understanding of the world’.

It emanated from the semi-structured interviews and the focus group interviews that after the introductory presentations during internal workshops in centres, ECCE teachers started realising and related their experiences which they were also keen to share. It happened as most participants identified similarities between the six ELDAs in the NCF document and the three subjects offered in the Grade R (Chapter Three, Table 3.1). The participants gradually understood the content of the NCF and were enlightened about appropriate activities for young children’s development according to each of the ELDAs. Therefore, using the NCF for planning also became a meaning making activity. It was discovered as the desirable learning opportunity for the development of young children.

### **6.3.2 The NCF as a desirable learning opportunity for teachers**

When investigating the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities in light of the new curriculum framework, the researcher also sought to identify rural ECCE teachers’ level of understanding of the term *integration*. The findings showed that all the participants integrate teaching and learning activities around the selected themes. Metin (2017) asserts that the term clarifies how teaching and learning activities have to be integrated. Therefore, the participants shared the that it is commonly held in the ECCE sector that learning is better and more natural for young children when teaching and learning activities are incorporated into a particular theme that relates to the teaching and play resources (Meier & Marais, 2018). This approach is internationally used as a multidisciplinary approach (Drake & Reid, 2010; 2018; Mandic & Bojanic, 2018). It defines learning that occurs when young children connect different activities into themes and play resources to effortlessly explore their world in the playroom. During the planning process, teachers had to read the content of the curriculum to identify activities and learning areas that could be integrated (Drake & Reid, 2018).

In this study, findings confirmed that ECCE teachers collectively engaged with the curriculum content to identify the examples of teaching and learning activities, and the process of assessment. As the participants followed the guidance of the NCF, the study discovered that integration become a desirable opportunity for teachers to learn the framework as they identify activities from the six ELDAs to integrate into age-appropriate selected themes and resources. Therefore, the NCF document is accessed intensively for the development of young children,

### **6.3.2.1 Teaching and learning activities for young children**

According to Ebrahim & Irvine (2012), care and education are intertwined in all the teaching and learning activities for the holistic development of children from birth to four years. Therefore, teachers identified activities that are developmentally appropriate to the particular age. They indicated that they equipped each other with the required skills to plan the integrated activities for effective and age-appropriate learning. The finding aligns with DBE (2015) in the NCF that unpacking the NCF is a team work for teachers and adults working with young children to make it meaningful. The findings also correspond with the theory as highlighted by (Habermas, 1971) that communicative learning is a kind of transformation for people to discuss and share skills with each other. The findings participants mentioned that together they identify the activities from the six ELDAs *Well-being, Identity and belonging, Communication, Exploring mathematics, Creativity, and Understanding of the world* for the provision of the appropriate care and education for young children development (DBE, 2015).

- ***Well-being***

The participants stated that Well-being activities are necessarily integrated into all other five ELDAs as highlighted in the NCF document (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012). They revealed that every day they observe that young children are in good health and safety as the main aims of the ELDA. The finding correlates with literature emphasising safety, health, and teaching and learning activities that are age appropriate to young children (Kamerman 2006; UNESCO, 2010; Richter et al., 2012). This ELDA is achieved through the teaching and learning activities such as stories, talks, songs, and physical activities both inside and outside the playroom. All the activities are planned for young children to play and learn. This is supported by (Sharpley, 2014) who reported that sufficient attention has to be paid for the holistic development of young children in the environment that is safe for them to play and learn. The participants related the content and the activities of this ELDA to the Life Skills (personal and social well-

being) subject in Grade R. They identified this ELDA as the best to identify children that are not feeling well as the assess all the barriers to learning.

- ***Identity and belonging***

In the identity and belonging, the participants raised that the activities are developed to create opportunities for children to interact with each other as they learn about the whole world at their level. The findings of the study revealed that they incorporate activities for children to read stories sing songs and talk about the weather, families, and their culture in the organised indoor learning space or outdoor learning space. Most participants elaborated on the importance for young children to respect themselves and other people as they learn through play. This finding corresponds with Kirsten (2017) ideas that in identity and belonging, young children learn to respect the uniqueness of others while they are guided to grow strong and improve their relationships with other children and adults. Other studies found that it is where young children are guided to make decisions as they engage in social interactions (Leggett & Ford, 2016; Murriss, 2019).

- ***Communication***

The participants identified Communication as an early language development ELDA to be developed through songs, rhymes, music, stories, and talks at the relevant level. This finding corresponds with (Vorster et al., 2016) that at a very young age children communicate through language as they are guided to listen to the teacher, talk, speak while they played inside and outside the playroom to learn. These skills are also aligned to the listening and speaking in schools (DBE, 2011). The participants further stated that communication is automatically integrated into all other five ELDAs as young children are guided to talk all the time as they play to learn. The findings are supported by the literature that correct language usage has to be modelled in all the activities in the ECD phase (Bornstein & Putnick, 2012).

- ***Exploring mathematics***

The findings reported that exploring mathematics are the foundations of mathematics that is done in formal schools. The participants indicated that young children begin to use numbers as they count different objects, sort shapes, colour and solve different problems at their level. This study discovered that ECCE teachers understand the the importance for young children enjoy and explore mathematics using play resources that are safe to them. This finding aligns

with Kortjass (2019) that learning mathematics has to be made fun and exciting for children to learn and enjoy.

- ***Creativity***

The findings revealed that creativity in the ECCE is similar to the creative arts component of the Life Skills learning area in Grade R. The participants indicated that activities include singing songs, dramatising, drawing, painting, pasting, and cutting while children play to learn in a safe environment. They highlighted that children develop small and large muscles as they draw, play, and learn. When looking at the official document in relation to this ELDA, I realised that activities to develop this ELDA also include rhythm and sound, so children need to act out stories by for example using rustling shakers to imitate the sound of leaves in the wind (Department of Basic Education, 2015). However, such activities were not mentioned during my discussions with the participants.

- ***Knowledge and understanding of the world***

The findings revealed that the participants understand this ELDA as another opportunity for young children to learn about the world around them. They specified they include activities for children to explore the world, conduct age-appropriate experiments and solve problems while the play to learn. The findings are supported by Ward (2013) that children learn about families, homes, people, and relevant physical surroundings in the real world. The study also discovered that activities also include imitating real-life situations inside and outside classroom. For instance, one teachers' planning indicated the importance of daily news reading through imitation and through play. The participants also stated that they encouraged the young children to ask questions and give reasons for their decisions that they take in the playroom. This finding in accordance with the literature which argues about the importance to expose young children to real-life experiences (Clampett, 2016). They all claimed that they follow the guidelines of the NCF to achieve the aims of this ELDA. For instance, as indicated in the document they also organise excursions for children to learn about the world outside the centre. The finding relates to the excerpt below:

*We also plan excursions for children to learn about the world outside the ECCE centre. [Ms N, Centre C]*

All the participants emphasised the importance of play-based approach as three to four years children learn in the play room. However, the findings revealed that due to a dearth of relevant resources, the participants were reportedly not as well explore all the activities planned at the interest of all children. This finding was also made clear in the lesson plans as Centre B teacher presented the lesson and the story that was not related to the theme. Moreover, they indicated that they create own story for young children to read. What was highlighted from the findings are the teacher's passion to develop young children that are school ready with all the challenges associated to them. Moreover, the participants indicated that they plan to integrate activities from all the six ELDA's into the selected themes.

### **6.3.2.2 Selecting themes to integrate activities**

The findings revealed that after reading the content of the NCF, the participants identify teaching and learning activities and select themes to integrate those activities. The participants stated that they collaborate and work in teams at the beginning of each year to discuss and select themes from different reliable sources as they are not provided in the NCF documents. The findings relate with Meier and Marais (2018) that theme selection should be preferably done collectively at the beginning or towards the end of the year in preparation for the good start. Similarly, Mezirow in his theory highlight collaborative learning as a way of transformation for teachers to learn from each other (Mezirow, 1997; 2000). In this regard, they compared the NCF and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for Grade R (Department of Basic Education, 2011). The latter includes the examples of themes and all the planning requirements. It was discovered themes from the Grade R CAPS document were relevant to young children and teaching in the ECCE phase. This was easily facilitated as the centres also accommodate Grade R learners and teachers shared their policy document with each other.

The findings also revealed that some teachers used themes from the theme book (Figure 5.1) provided by an NGO in line with the Revised Curriculum Statement 2005. Themes were not collated by the teachers but some were amended from time to time. The findings on using CAPS document and theme books indicated that teachers preferred a resource book similar to India where ECCE teachers are resource book has become a valued support document that teachers in India where teachers worked together to compile a resource book with all the relevant themes and planning guidelines (Reetu, Renu & Adarsh (2017)). A common understanding was that teachers had to consider their children's knowledge and experiences

when choosing themes and they thus considered themes that would be ‘appropriate’ for their development. The findings showed ECCE teachers were not restricted to common themes but utilised themes that were suitable to young children and the activities they could devise. This aligns with Esu (2012) to selecting a theme that relates to the curriculum content and to young children’s experiences. One day lesson plan supported what Ms N, Centre C teacher said where the theme is my body. The finding also correlates with the ideas of the Department of Basic Education (2011) that basic themes such as my body, my family, my home are recommended for foundations.

**Topic: My Body**  
**Week 2: Well Being**  
 Aim: 2. Children are healthy from birth and have a sense of Good hygiene  
 They can wash their hands or feet  
 DEVELOPMENTAL GOALS: Children wash hands and feet and they can wash their nose  
 AGE CATEGORY: Preparing Primary DATE: 2023

Day	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Activity	Children sing and enjoy role-play with personal hygiene	Children sing songs and role-play about health and hygiene routine	Role children to help with simple routine tasks such as cleaning washing or using soap	Role children to help with simple routine tasks such as cleaning washing or using soap	Role children to help with simple routine tasks such as cleaning washing or using soap
Individual Choice	Creating Area	Fantasy Area	Quiet Area	Free Writing	Recap
Toilet Routine & Wash	Children go to toilet and wash their hands	Children go to toilet and wash their hands	Children go to toilet and wash their hands	Children go to toilet and wash their hands	Children go to toilet and wash their hands
Out Door Activity	Teacher will show them how to plant vegetables	Play Ball	Swing	Magalotsa	Play - Wheel & wheels

Topic/Theme & Objectives	Build up our body strength by singing	Hand and mouth, nose & toes	Body parts where are they		
Language Activity	Teletalk game	colouring the face picture	Teletalk game about body parts	Stamping with hand & feet	
Story Telling	Story about the skeleton garden	Story about the who has the most teeth	Story about a family that washes hands	Story about cleaning commencing	Story about washing your hands
Resources	Story book	Story book	Story book	Story book	Story book
Assessment	Questioning observation	Questioning observation	Questioning observation	Questioning observation	Questioning observation
Workshop Points	Does an child live in a hygiene environment	Do he/she eat healthy food	Do they wash their bodies		
Reflection	How many body parts can you name? How many body parts can you name? How many body parts can you name?				
Conclusion					

**Figure 6.3: A lesson planned around the theme my body (Centre C)**

**Source: Author**

These findings are congruent with the literature that teachers find suitable themes that are interesting and appropriate for young children’s learning and development (Meier & Marais, 2018). The findings were discovered after analysing the excerpt that:

*When choosing themes, we think about our children’s experiences. We think about what they know and what will be interesting for them. Therefore, we also consider natural themes such as **plants and animals**. We use themes such as **me, my body, my family, my home, my classroom, my school** and develop to **plants and animals**. Every year we*

*sit as a staff, choose themes, and discuss activities and resources that we can do in that year [Ms Y, Centre A].*

The participant from Centre A raised that natural themes are also suitable and interesting to young children. They mentioned that such themes are easily related to the teaching and learning resources can be easily available in the community. The findings relate to Cremin & Slatter (2004) who affirms that theme selection is the engagement with the environment that experience the child. The findings also revealed that mostly similar themes were used in all the centres. However, in only one centre the participants explained that they use IsiZulu themes as the mandate of the department of basic education to use the home language of child in the early years (DBE, 2015) and English theme books and selected English themes are used in the two centres. For instance, the participants mentioned using *my body* instead of *umzimba wami* or *myself* instead of *mina*. However, classroom observations were not done where the researcher could verify whether code switching is during their interactions with the children. The findings were incongruent with the intentions of the NCF to lay foundations in the home language of a child in the ECCE as IsiZulu is the language used in the community. Importantly, all the participants mentioned that they integrate teaching and learning from the six ELDAs into the selected themes which was evident in their lesson planning documents.

The study discovered that the participants were not restricted to the number of themes to be selected per year, but generally ten or sometimes twelve themes were used per year. This finding also speaks to the flexibility as the vision of NCF included in the document (Department of Basic Education, 2015). After choosing themes, the participants mentioned that they create the conducive learning environments including suitable times for the presentation of the integrated teaching and learning activities.

### **6.3.3 The creation of a conducive learning environment and time**

The findings revealed that after selecting themes teachers organise time and space for young children to explore learning through play. Two of the sub-themes that emerged from the discussions were ‘suitable learning spaces’ and ‘the formulation of the instructional plan’. The participants mentioned the importance to where, when, and how young children are expected to learn.

### **6.3.3.1 Suitable learning spaces**

The findings revealed that learning spaces were generally used in conjunction with teaching and learning resources to allow the young children to play and learn. These spaces were available both indoors and outdoors depending on available floor and area space. The findings concur with Labuschagne (2015) that an effective learning environment for young children includes indoor and outdoor learning areas where they can play and learn.

- **Inside learning spaces**

The findings revealed that young children explore teaching and learning activities in an organised space inside the playroom. The participants explained that in different corners of the playroom they organise play resources to identify the value of that area. The findings relate to Labuschagne (2015) that play resources have to carry the message of what is expected for young children to do in an indoor learning environment. They mentioned that they had at least a fantasy corner, a reading corner, a theme corner, and a construction corner. They added that this was made possible as they sometimes get sponsorships of the resources, create their own resources and improvise. The participants mentioned that they compromised to create conducive learning opportunities regardless of the challenges they experienced in their centres. What was also highlighted from the findings is the passion for the rural ECCE teachers to achieve the curriculum goals for the holistic development of young children. The findings concur with transformative learning theory that with all the challenges, teachers creatively think to transform (Mezirow, 1997; 2000).

- **Outside learning spaces**

The findings revealed that play-based learning was highlighted as a necessity in the ECCE centres. The participants explained that they also organise outdoor learning spaces and the relevant resources for young children to play and learn. The findings concur with research conducted in ECCE centres that children play for the development of small and large muscles outside the classroom (Essa, 2014; Labuschagne, 2015). The participants explained that they use outside play resources such as jungle gyms, swings, and tyres for children to play. At Phaphama centre the participants mentioned that they use big basins with water for water area and use same basins with sand for the sand pit area for young children to play mathematics activities and solve related problems at their level. They highlighted These findings revealed ECCE teachers' creative skills in utilising their available space while the safety of play

equipment is considered. The participants confirmed their engagement and willingness to transform learning areas for the young children to be prepared for school readiness. The findings were supported by Shipley (2008), that creating a safe and appropriate learning environment includes organising relevant material and activities for children to learn at their best. It has also been confirmed that even the skills that are developed outside the classroom are important for young children development (Badara, 2011). The participants also mentioned that they formulate instruction plan that guide when and how indoor and outdoor activities has to be done.

### **6.3.3.2 The formulation of the instructional plan**

It emerged from the findings that the participants formulate instructional plans that includes daily programme, lesson plans and assessment that guides the teaching and learning of young children. The findings concur with Snyder & McWilliam (2003) that an instructional plan defines how teaching and learning activities will be presented.

- **The daily programme**

The findings of the study revealed that a daily programme was used as a time table to guide teachers on when and what to teach on each particular day. The finding concurs with Snyder and McWilliam (2003) suggestions that it is the plan that guides the achievement of the curriculum objectives. From the discussions with the participants it was discovered that a supporting NGO had provided this daily programme that had been planned ahead to all the centres that utilised the NCF. However, the participants mentioned that they get together in their respective centres to discuss the times and activities in the daily programme. This finding suggests that the daily programme was used as a collaborative opportunity for teachers to discuss activities for each day and to avoid clashes that might occur when the children have to do outdoor activities. They mentioned the importance of knowing what they had to teach every day to plan appropriately. These findings correspond with Clampett (2016) ideas that teachers who plan each day become confident and know what to teach.

The activities in the daily programme included morning greetings, news reading, basic mathematics activities, play time indoors, conversations, quiet time, and outdoor play activities. The study discovered that young children's needs were taken into consideration as the activities were clear as pictorial illustrations (Figure 5.3 and attached as Appendix L) for

young children to easily identify what they have to do every day. These findings were supported by Courson and Wallace (2010) that young children have to be assisted to know and identify activities from the daily programme. They have to be involved and considered as important in their learning. The participants also explained that daily programmes were flexible with no demand for outdoor activities when the weather was inclement. They could adjust their daily activities based on the situation. This finding is supported with literature that states that weather and seasons should be taken into consideration when daily programmes are planned (Meier & Marais, 2018). That was confirmed as a teacher from Centre A said:

*Our daily programme follow the same order of activities every day but we sometimes adjust based on what the teacher is doing (long activities) in the classroom. We also change the activities and disrupt the daily programme when noticing that children are bored. We also don't do outside activities when the weather is too hot or when it is raining. [Ms M, Centre A]*

The findings showed that after discussing the daily programme, the participants plan the lessons.

- **Lesson planning**

The findings revealed that all the participants follow the lesson plan template (Appendix M). including the selected theme, the age group, the lesson aims, teaching and learning activities the resources to be used when teaching and the ideas for assessment. After teaching, the participants reflect to think about what went well and all the lesson challenges and the reflection is included as an important section in the template. The findings were supported by Meier and Marais (2018) who stated that daily lesson planning takes age group, the type of presentation, duration of the presentation, and the chosen theme for that particular day into consideration. It has been confirmed that lesson planning is the opportunity to show how teachers integrate the teaching and learning activities from the six ELDAs into the selected theme and the resources. Gordon et al., (2018) also support connecting different learning ideas into a common theme and related play resources for young children to learn activities that are related.

The planned lessons showed that the participants include play for learning activities such as story reading (emergent), counting, talks, songs, drawing and painting that is appropriate for young children development. Although the activities from the ELDA were still new, the participants indicated their similarities to what they had been teaching before the advent of the NCF which they embraced enthusiastically. Below is the lesson plan (As per template in Appendix-M) where farming was used as the selected theme.

CATO MANOR ECD CENTRES  
NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK (NCF)  
WEEKLY PLANNER 2018

TOPIC: Farming - Farm Animals  
 SUBJECTS: Knowledge and Understanding of the World  
 AIMS: Children explore and investigate farm and place  
 DEVELOPMENTAL GUIDELINES: Show interest in the world they live in and benefits of  
 AGE CATEGORY: 3-5 DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Day	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Individual Choice	Individual Choice	Individual Choice	Individual Choice	Individual Choice	Individual Choice
Indoor	Fantasy Area	Buildings & Construction Area	Music equipment Area	Auto Area	Creative Area
Toilet Routine & Wash	Washing hands after using toilet				

Our Door Activity

Activity	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Play	Play jungle gym	Playing balls	Play sand & pit	Play relay	Play kite & see
Artistic / Songs & Rhymes	English rhymes: Patsy, Masha, simple words	English rhymes: Masha, simple words	English rhymes: Masha, simple words	English rhymes: Masha, simple words	English rhymes: Masha, simple words
Design Activity	Touch floor and plant food on vegetable, fruit that we use	Touch floor and plant food on vegetable, fruit that we use	Touch floor and plant food on vegetable, fruit that we use	Touch floor and plant food on vegetable, fruit that we use	Touch floor and plant food on vegetable, fruit that we use
Story Telling	My grandmothers gardeners	My grandmothers gardeners	The big tiger	The big cow	The very elephant
Resources	- Pictures - Charts				
Assessment	Questioning & Observation				
Watch Points	Fear and anxiety related to trying out new things	Lack of attention	difficulty in vocabulary	problems with information processing	unwilling to participate in activities

Reflection	How do the parents and community need for hand on practice opportunities for children through practical activities	How are children need for hand on opportunities exploration, experimentation, observation	Are there sufficient opportunities for children to share their understandings and do practical	How do adults support children's need for the use of different techniques, resources, materials	How will we re-act we the see from animals?
Remedial	Redo the lesson	Redo the lesson	Redo the lesson	Redo the lesson	Redo the lesson

Figure 6.4: A lesson planned by Phaphama teacher

Source: Author

The findings from the lesson plan above revealed teaching and learning activities that are integrated around the theme *farm animals*. The participants mentioned that, the activities included stories, drawings, rhyme, songs, and making models of farm animals. All the activities revolved around the theme *farm animals* for young children to learn the aspects of all the ELDA through play. The participant mentioned that they easily related to the resources as many children had farm animals in their homes. This finding concurs with the literature (Drake & Reid, 2018) that integration offers a variety of related learning opportunities. The finding also relates to the ideas of the department of basic education for young children to learn through integration and play based. The safety of play resources and the health of young children were taken into consideration as the hand washing activity was included in the lesson plan. Identifying and integrating the activities of all the ELDA into a selected theme was a new practice adopted after accessing the NCF. However, they easily related to the teaching and learning activities. The findings also revealed challenges that the participants encountered when using the NCF to integrate teaching and learning activities for young children.

#### **6.3.4 Challenges Encountered**

In response to the research question, '*What are rural ECCE teachers' experiences regarding the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities?*' most participants admitted that they had experienced some challenges during the planning process. The participants alluded to some essential aspects affecting the development of young children. The finds relate to the literature that refers to different challenges that affects rural ECCE centres (Ntumi, 2016; Labuschagne, 2015). They highlighted lack of resources as one of the challenges.

##### **6.3.4.1 A lack of resources**

Although the participants expressed their appreciation and the support they received from NGOs that visited the area, they also lamented the lack of reading books and a variety of toys for the holistic development of young children in some ECCE centres. Teaching and play resources are highlighted as the necessities since young children learn as they play. The findings concur with literature emphasising the need for appropriate indoor play resources such as picture books, puzzles, building blocks, matching cards, and different toys that are safe and suitable for young children's development. Nevertheless, such teaching essentials were limited in other rural ECCE centres as well (Aubrey, 2017; Labuschagne, 2015; Yildirim & Akamca, 2017). The findings revealed that such shortages are undesirable and adversely

influence learning through play and the planning of activities to support learning in ECCE centres.

The participants mentioned they lack play resources as they relied on the limited monthly contributions by parents, and these funds were not enough to address all their needs. This finding concurs with literature that rural ECCE centres struggle to meet the government's requirement to qualify for funding (Sitati et al., 2017; Kirsten, 2017), and thus notoriously struggle to afford play resources (Ntumi, 2016; Labuschagne, 2015).

When analysing the NCF as the planning document, it was discovered that the intentions of the Department of Basic Education was to encourage teachers to use indigenous and local resources for the teaching of young children (Department of Basic Education, 2015). Therefore, planning the integrated activities requires the creativity of all teachers identify culturally related resources to stimulate and excite young children (Akinrotimi & Olowe, 2016). Therefore, this finding surprisingly encouraged rather than discouraged teacher and to learn, create, and utilise local resources to relate young children's experiences to the realities of the world around. However, waste was used at Centre B to create resources. Learning space was also identified as a challenge to some ECCE teachers.

#### **6.3.4.2 Limited learning spaces**

The findings revealed that inside learning spaces of the ECCE centres under study were often restricted by physical spaces and play resources in the playroom. The findings align with literature that lack of space and resources is very challenging in rural ECCE centres (Labuschagne, 2015; Mbarathi et al., 2016; Ntumi, 2016).

A variety of learning spaces are needed in the ECCE environment where young children can develop physical, social, emotional and cognitively as they play to learn. This is to provide activities that are necessary for the holistic development of children (Meier & Marais, 2018). In this regard, the findings revealed that some ECCE centres had limited space for directed movement activities in safe outdoors and playroom environments. As a result, the teachers were compelled to move play resources from one activity area to another to accommodate movement and ensure enough space for sleeping time. In light of the emergent importance of learning through play in the ECCE phase, the literature bemoans the fact that most rural ECCE centres lack proper infrastructure to accommodate indoor games, a science corner, dramatic play, and artistic activities (Labuschagne, 2015). This limits preparation for young children

to learn and play in an environment that is safe and suitable for them. The findings revealed that both indoor and outdoor learning spaces in the rural centres were compromised as the participants mentioned. The participants also mentioned that they lack continuous support from the department of education that introduced the NCF in the area.

#### **6.3.4.3 The lack of constructive support**

The findings revealed that teachers in the rural ECCE centres expected continuous and constructive support from the Department of Basic Education to monitor the implementation of the NCF. The participants expressed gratitude for their exposure to the NCF, but they were concerned and wanted more guidance to learn. They wanted to know if their practices met the expectations of the Department. In support of this finding, Clasquin-Johnson (2011) recommends positive and continuous support when a new curriculum has to be implemented. However, this was not the experience of the current research participants.

The findings revealed that the NCF document for ECCE centres differs from the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for Grade R in that the latter document is far more restrictive in terms of activities and times. The NCF endorses flexibility for adults, teachers, and practitioners who need to share their experiences as the meaning making opportunities (DBE, 2015). This finding showed the as a uniqueness of the framework for ECCE teachers to collaborate, communicate, and work in teams for curriculum delivery. However, after learning the NCF without needed support, they celebrated their growth and development as the development of new roles.

#### **6.3.5 Development of new roles after learning**

The findings of this study revealed that ECCE teachers embraced each other as they had collectively learned to make the NCF meaningful and accessible. The findings revealed learning opportunity as the fifth phase of transformative learning to explore new roles (Mezirow, 1997; 2000). The participants explained four new roles they explored after learning to follow the guidelines of the NCF for the planning of teaching and learning activities. They learned to interpret the NCF, to be creative thinkers, assessors and reflective teachers.

### **6.3.5.1 ECCE teacher as an interpreter of the NCF**

The findings for this study revealed the interpretation of the NCF content as the important role that the participants played when attempting the document for planning of the integrated activities for young children. The participants mentioned that collaborative learning and communicative learning contributed to their ability to access the guidelines of the new framework. They mentioned that after reading the introductory notes presented in a child's voice from the NCF document, they were inspired to understand what each child is expected to learn. They thus set out to read and understand the aims of each ELDA, access the developmental guidelines, identify the examples of teaching and learning activities and assessment strategies that would be accessible for the young children in their care. They mentioned that at first, they were stunted by this English document but later found the language of the document easy to understand. They embraced the guidelines to identify children with barriers to learn the activities and the ideas of how they can be guided to learn and develop.

The participants also mentioned that they learned to identify the links between school (Grade R) subjects and the ELDA's (Chapter Three, Table 3.1) of the NCF. They realised that terms were different but the activities were very similar. All the participants mentioned that they easily applied their experiences and knowledge to the new experience. They related the knowledge of Grade R subjects to understand the content of the ELDA's. The findings relate to the vision of the NCF that adults and teachers are competent human being who can share their knowledge and skills to learn (DBE, 2015). As the participants experiences are presented above, some of them mentioned that used their experience of the National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS) for children from birth to four years to assisted them to interpret the new curriculum. The findings concur with the ideas of transformative learning for people to think about their previous experiences to learn (Mezirow, 2000). The participants also mentioned that they developed to be creative thinkers.

### **6.3.5.2 ECCE teacher as a creative thinker**

Creative thinking is an important attribute when people need to acquire new ideas and knowledge for future growth and development. Although it is a hard skill for some people to acquire, many adults and teachers display adequate reasoning skills to find solutions to problems and to overcome challenges. Teachers need to learn to think critically and make connections to achieve creative results (White & Watson, 2006; Ofsted, 2010). The

participants in this study identified regarded themselves as creative thinkers who took responsibility to support the development young children to embrace transformation introduced to them. They mentioned that they creatively developed teaching and resources to link to the activities and to the themes for children to learn at their level. They also highlighted creative thinking as they were able to create children's stories to achieve the objectives of the lesson. Therefore, guided play and learning in the best interest of young children. The findings also showed that the participants created suitable learning environment as they improvised to enhance the children's learning. One participant stated:

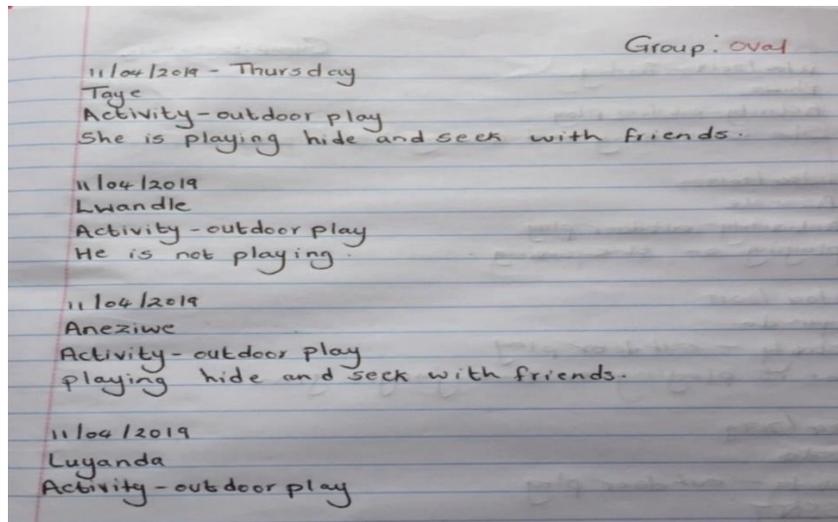
*In the learning corners we use the resources that we make in our centre. I also give myself enough time to think about the resources that I need during the lesson. Therefore, I learned to make resources that are related to the chosen theme [Ms Y, Centre A].*

The findings of the study also showed that the participants learned to think about what they have to teaching to be ahead and to organise teaching and play resources on time. This finding resonates with the literature that all lesson needs are identified and arranged before teaching (Pawilen et al., 2010). The planning strategy is endorsed by the department of basic education for the teachers to be critical thinkers in the classroom (Department of Basic Education, 2011). The teachers thus needed the skill to promote integration and to engage with the new curriculum.

### **6.3.5.3 ECCE teacher as an assessor for the purpose of learning**

The findings of the study revealed that the participants followed the assessment plan provided in the NCF document to assess young children as they play to learn inside and outside the playroom. The participants mentioned that guidelines for assessment assisted them to know what to assess and how to assess every day. Therefore, when planning the lesson, they include the ideas for assessment. The findings showed that assessment ideas are included to assess the activities of all the ELDA's while also the process for reporting the findings to parents and guardians is also clarified in the document. Assessment records were filed and reportedly to be used during teacher-parent consultations. The participants mentioned that they continuously assessed all the actualities of child development as mentioned in the NCF document (DBE, 2015). The participants mentioned that they keep records of what they observed. They further revealed clear understanding that assessing young children is different from assessing older learners where formal examinations are included. The findings confirm

the policy that tests and examinations are not suitable for assessing young children as there is no formal assessment in the early of schooling (Department of Basic Education, 2011). In the ECCE phase assessment is continuous and never formal. Below is the one-page evidence taken from the Phaphama teacher's assessment book:



**Figure 6.5: Group assessment in the ECCE**

**Source: Author**

It was discovered that observations were used as the predominant assessment method in the ECCE. This finding concurs with the literature that observations are effective for the assessment of young children (Smidt, 2005; Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012). The participants also indicated that they assessed children as individuals and in groups. They would keep other children occupied in the learning spaces while they focused on a particular group. The assessment of the activities is included in the lesson plans that the teachers used as on the template provided as Appendix (M).

The findings showed that the participants used two assessment books, one for recording the assessment of teaching and learning activities and another for everyday observations inside and outside the classroom. The participants mentioned that assessment assist them to identify children with barriers to learning and how they included 'watch points' (Appendix M) in their records as proposed by the NCF. The participants appreciated the ideas for assessment provided in the NCF as they argued that it made assessment clear and it was thus easy for them to identify early challenges.

#### 6.3.5.4 The ECCE teacher as a reflective teacher

In response to my question about ECCE teacher's reflection, the participants presented themselves as reflective teachers who always tried to review their teaching practices and to identify their strengths and challenges in teaching. They relate to Sankar (2017, p. 76) as he describes reflective practices as the professional growth attempt to assess if the experiences were meaningful. The findings also confirm reflection as an opportunity to gain transformative insight and to improve everyday practices (Mezirow, 2000). The participants explained that, at the end of a particular session, they would think about their teaching and make notes of everything that had happened during the lesson. They think about the suitability of the resources they had used, teaching methods and the whole lesson preparation.

It was discovered that the participants learned to reflect as an attempt to solve problems that affected lesson development or when they had to make sense of lesson presentation. They mentioned that they make notes of their daily experiences to determine if the activities had made sense to children. They thus evaluated their daily activities and reflected on what could be done better. They claimed that this process helped them to identify their strengths and weaknesses and that it helped them to provide better guidance to the young children.

The excerpt below is an example of what a teacher from Centre A mentioned about her reflective practice:

*Although we plan lessons together, I reflect in my own way after teaching the lesson. I remember that after teaching about senses my resources were not enough for children to touch, play and learn and ended up fighting (smiling). I therefore, decided to re-do the lesson and brought more resources [Ms K, Centre A].*

The finding from the excerpt showed teachers' willingness to improve teaching and to think about what would best trigger children's interest. Their planning thus included assessment of how and what children learned and this formed part of their reflections.

The participants identified reflection as an important topic in the lesson plan template. However, it became evident when I perused all the planned lessons that some teachers had not completed the reflection section and they thus did not tend to engage actively in this process. That was evident from the lesson plans of the five teachers including the plan above. The literature also refers to the inability of some teachers to complete documents

appropriately (Yin, 2009), which suggests that some vital planning process might be done half-heartedly or not at all and that some teachers might be poorly organised.

However, when I perused the data I realised that some teachers reflected on their entire planning process. They highlighted what affected the planning process and included the challenges and the opportunities they encountered. Some even underscored everything that affected the achievement of the curriculum goals. In this regard they adhered to Mezirow's (2000) theory as they identified all the challenges related to and opportunities for transformative learning. One teacher said:

*“In our centre we organise indoor learning corners and make our own resources for young children to learn and play in those corners. I will show you what we have done. We have no funds and most teaching and play resources are made”* [Ms M, Centre A].

I realised that teachers developed creative skills for the development of teaching and learning resources that are important for young children to play and learn in the integrated way. The participants also indicated that identifying natural resources from the environment became the best solution to the planning of the activities at the level of young children.

#### **6.4 How the Findings Answered Each Research Question**

The study used qualitative research methodologies to answer the research questions. The participants were given the opportunity to talk about what they know and they willingly presented their planning documents. In this section, the research study presents how the findings answered each research question.

##### **6.4.1 The findings pertaining to question 1**

*How is the NCF used to guide the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities for young children in rural ECCE centres?*

The findings related to the interviews revealed that the teachers understood integration as a process to connect teaching and learning activities with the six ELDA's based on a selected theme or themes. They agreed that this made learning better and relevant for young children. After the introduction of the NCF, the ECCE teachers accessed this document – albeit cautiously at first – and then, when it started making sense to them, they transformed and

adhered to the guidelines of the framework when they planned integrated teaching and learning activities for young children. In this regard, understanding curriculum content in order to identify teaching and learning activities became a necessity. The researcher discovered that the ECCE teachers in the rural centres collaborated, learned together, and shared their experiences which contributed to their ability to access and learn more about the NCF content. The findings made it clear that communicative learning experiences also assisted these teachers to realise that the six ELDAs in the ECCE phase are similar to the three subjects in the Grade R curriculum. They were familiar with the Grade R curriculum and this made it easier for them to access the NCF curriculum eventually, which underscored the value of prior knowledge in the educational context.

After familiarising themselves in groups with the new curriculum content and the required activities, the teachers were able to utilise the pre-designed planning template effectively. They selected themes relevant to their context and the young children and they were also able to organise the spaces available to them for teaching and learning. Some created their own teaching and learning resources that were appropriate for activities inside and outside the classroom. The ECCE teachers followed their daily programme (the time table) and displayed pictures of routine activities so that the children would understand what was expected of them during the day. It was evident that the teachers made the effort to integrate teaching and learning activities in order to prioritise the six ELDAs every day.

The documents that I scanned supported the interview narratives and confirmed that every effort was made to integrate the six ELDAs around selected themes in the activities in which the children were guided to engage. Furthermore, they adhered to NCF guidelines for their planning of assessment and their reporting of their observations to parents.

One area that neglected by some teachers was reflection. The teachers all claimed that they engaged in reflection to improve their practice but the reflection section in the template for planning had not been completed by all the teachers. One may argue that some people engage in reflection mentally and that this is enough, but written reflection is prioritised by the NCF (Department of Basic Education, 2015) and this area should not be marginalised as it is pivotal to planning and improving one's practice.

#### **6.4.2 The findings for question two**

*What are ECCE teachers' experiences of using the NCF for the execution of the teaching and learning activities that are integrated in rural ECCE centres?*

The findings regarding the teachers' experiences revealed some challenges that affected the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities for young children. The researcher discovered that the participants experienced challenges regarding the intentions of the Department of Basic Education for the development of the NCF. These findings revealed that the participants expected continuous support from the Department of Basic Education to monitor their implementation of the framework, but it was clear that the Department expected adults and teachers using the document to share their experiences and to work together to access the NCF meaningfully. The NCF was designed so that it will be flexible for users, particularly when they plan integrated activities. In this regard the researcher must commend the main contributors, Prof. Ebrahim, Ms Irvine and the Department of Basic Education, for their insightful understanding of adult learning and how this would impact real transformation through collaboration and teamwork that was so urgently required in the ECCE domain.

As it is considered that teaching and play resources are expensive and scarce in some rural ECCE centres, the importance of using indigenous and local resources is highlighted in the NCF. It includes a section on themes that refers to plants and animals that are available in most environments. Natural resources such as leaves, grass, and trees could thus be included in activities when learners play and learn. In this regard, Labuschagne (2015) asserts that teachers may even involve parents and learners to collect waste material and thus contribute to 'home-made' resources. In this regard, the researcher identified references to the use of such natural resources in the interviews as well as in the lesson planning that were perused. The participants referred to the use of old tyres in the outdoor play area, some play material that they had created themselves from waste materials (a photograph in Chapter Five provides evidence of this), and one teacher provided evidence of a theme-related story that she wrote herself (also evidenced by a photograph in Chapter Five) which is highly commended. However, it was evident that, although these teachers were able to access the NCF and transform their practices to a large extent, additional training during workshops in creating 'something from nothing' is required. Such workshops could be arranged by Departmental

officials while experienced and creative colleagues could offer hands-on training in recognition and extension of the principle of collaborative and peer learning.

The lack of learning spaces also limited the teachers' ability to plan more creative activities for integrated teaching and learning. Although there were quite a few activity-related corners in two of the centres, one teacher admitted that her ability to establish permanent activity corners was severely limited due to a lack of space, while none of the teachers referred to a science corner, which in my experience is vital in play activities for school readiness and future cognitive development.

Some teachers alternated play activities so that one group of children played freely outside and another group played inside in the activity corners. These activities were then alternated, which indicated some flexibility in their planning. Although they found the planning process time consuming, the teachers generally achieved the outcomes of the NCF for children to learn in spaces that were safe. In this process they were supported by an NGO whose representatives had earlier accessed the NCF and developed a planning template which the teachers used. This template obviously directed their planning and embedded the activities they devised in the NCF guidelines while they embraced its most important principles namely learning through play, integrated learning, and safe learning spaces.

### **6.4.3 Findings pertaining to question 3**

*To what extent do ECCE teachers reflect on the planning roles after using the NCF to integrate teaching and learning activities for young children?*

The findings pertaining to this question focus on the different new roles the teachers embraced after having accessed the NCF and learning about its requirements. This happened as the teachers had worked together to interpret the new framework which is directed by the child's voice that depicts what young children are expecting to learn from the six ELDA's. The findings showed that the teachers followed the developmental guidelines, planned and executed teaching and learning activities, utilised the ideas for assessment, and were able to identify children with barriers to learning. They also understood and addressed the importance of suitable teaching and learning resources and most utilised their creative thinking ability. Some also created teaching and play resources within the limits of their contextual realities.

However, the researcher realised that it was only teachers who consistently collaborated and communicated with other creative teachers who had developed these skills. Some teachers still struggled to procure or create resources and seemed to rely on outside help as they commented on the need for sponsorships while they made do with the limited resources at their disposal. It also transpired that, while all the teachers seemed to attend cluster meetings for collaboration and communicative learning, the focus of some was on reading the NCF document and not on sharing and then executing any creative skills. Some thus made things happen while others still waited for things to happen.

On a positive note, in terms of assessment all the participants had developed confidence – some more than others – as they had learned what to assess, how to assess, and how to report their observations to parents. In this process they also supported one another. The research study also discovered that planning was generally well executed as it was directed by a planning template and that most had become reflective practitioners. The participants admitted that they endeavoured to identify their weaknesses and embrace opportunities in order to positively ensure the best learning experiences for the young children in their care.

## **6.5 Chapter Summary**

The chapter presented the discussion of findings pertaining to the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities for young children using the NCF. Three critical questions guided the research study and four major themes and associated sub-themes that emerged from the data were discussed. The research study revealed the NCF as a desirable learning opportunity, the creation of a conducive learning environment, challenges encountered, and the development of new roles after learning. The data had endeavoured to and ECCE teachers succeeded in accessing the NCF and making the planning meaningful. They were thus able to ensure the development of young children within the parameters of the challenges they experienced in their respective centres. The Centre B and Centre C teachers struggled to obtain sufficient and appropriate teaching and learning resources while floor space was a problem at Phaphama. Moreover, the NGOs operating in the area were supportive but all the teachers expected more support from the Department of Basic Education. No significant mention was made of any interventions or support offered by the Department of Social Development, which is the registrar body of these centres. The centres and teachers differed in some respects to expectations and some of the assumptions as the teachers had made every effort to overcome the challenge of marginalisation by working collaboratively in teams to

access the NCF and to plan activities that would be suitable for young children's learning. The data revealed that these teachers had transformed, albeit to various degrees, and that they embraced the challenge of new teaching and learning experiences based on the new knowledge that they had gained from their learning about the NCF.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

*Learning is the problem-solving effort to interpret meaningful experiences leading to a new understanding that guides future actions*

-Mezirow, 1978-

#### **7.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented the discussion of findings of the research data that answered the research questions to achieve the research objectives. This final chapter provides a summary of the findings, the researcher's conclusions and recommendations pertaining to the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities using the NCF for young children's development. There seems to be an agreement among rural ECCE teachers that the NCF became a transformative learning opportunity for the ECCE teachers to learn for the development of young children that are school ready. The opening quotation, 'Learning is the problem-solving effort to interpret meaningful experiences leading to a new understanding that guides future actions relates, Mezirow, 1978' relates to the ECCE teacher's effort to fight inequalities in the ECCE sector. Their learning experience enlightened the researcher's contribution to planning and support in the ECCE sector. The literature reviewed and the theoretical framework were used to draw the conclusions of this study.

The findings of this study were based on data gathered from the semi-structured interviews with nine ECCE teachers that used the NCF to plan the integrated activities; three focus group interviews with the same teachers in the three ECCE centres and from the official and personal documents they use in the planning process. A brief overview of the research study capturing the research purpose, the research questions and the essence of the reviewed literature, the theoretical framework, and the research methodology are provided. The focus is to summarise the research findings under the four main themes that emerged during the transformative learning practices of the rural ECCE teachers.

#### **7.2 Overview of the thesis**

Chapter one, provided the orientation to the study that includes the background of the study, a brief history of the care and education of young children and the importance of integrated learning in the ECCE sector. The chapter also provided backgrounds of the National

Curriculum Framework (NCF) as a new curriculum for the ECCE and the briefly discusses the six ELDA that includes teaching and learning activities to be integrated young children to learn through play (three to four years). The chapter also presented the problem statement to outline the research purpose. The rationale for conducting the research study is also presented and the three objectives as well as the three research questions that guided the study. A brief overview of the theoretical framework, the research design and the methodology are discussed and the limitations that impacted the execution of the study are presented. Definitions of the key terms are outlined, the layout of all the chapters and a chapter summary are presented.

Chapter two presented the theoretical framework and the conceptual framework that shaped the research study. The discourse clarifies how and why adults (teachers in this instance) engage in and learn from new experiences. Related concepts are presented and Mezirow's phases of transformation are presented as five of these were particularly important for the research study.

Chapter three discussed both international and national literature in relation to integration as a phenomenon of interest in study. The findings of various related studies on countries that adopted formal and structured ECCE curricula for the development of young children are discussed as this information underpinned the research questions. The review focuses on ECCE teachers' experiences for the planning of integrated activities in ECCE and on different learning opportunities and roles that can be played in the teaching environment during a process of change.

Chapter four presented the methodological approach to the study. It commences by situating the study within the interpretivist paradigm and by noting the philosophical assumptions of interpretivists. The case study research design and the qualitative nature of this research study are discussed. Moreover, the research field and the qualitative sampling procedures utilised are described. The data collection methods (semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis) and the data analysis procedure for qualitative data evaluation are discussed and finally how this research study achieved trustworthiness and validity is clarified. The ethical considerations that were adhered to are also iterated.

Chapter presented the findings for the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities for young children based on the NCF guidelines in the rural ECCE centres. The nine participating ECCE teachers' experiences are discussed while the roles that they played in the

three rural ECCE centres as study sites are unpacked, with specific reference to their understanding of integrated learning activities for young children as proposed in the NCF. Verbatim data obtained during the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews are presented and analysed while data from document analysis also contribute to the findings. The data and findings are presented under the various themes that emerged from the qualitative data.

Chapter six provided the discussion of the research findings on the qualitative data that were collected using semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis. Four main themes emerged as a desirable learning opportunity, the creation of a conducive learning environment, challenges encountered, and the development of new roles after learning are discussed.

The final chapter, presented the Transformative Planning Model to Integrate Activities [TPMIA] in Early Childhood Care and Education. This chapter also presents a summary of the whole thesis, indicates how key limitations were addressed, and offers relevant recommendations and brief concluding remarks.

The research study aimed to explore the integrated planning of activities in three ECCE centres in the Umbumbulu district in rural KwaZulu-Natal. The main aim was to understand the extent in which rural ECCE teachers make the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) meaningful in the quest to prepare young children for school readiness. Although the content of the NCF is not designed to be used in a prescriptive manner, it provides the examples of activities to improve learning experiences in a variety of settings (DBE, 2015). It has to be used in a suitable, developmental and contextual way. ECCE teachers presented their unique planning strategies, positive and negative experiences that were considered important in this research study. The researcher as an ECCE teacher intended to learn from the rural ECCE practices and experience to develop a planning model that can be used in the related context.

To understand ECCE teachers integrated planning practices, the researcher used Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory as influenced by Thomas Kuhn's (1970) notions of the paradigm shift and Jurgen Habermas's (1981) communicative action theory. The theories and the related concepts recognise shift in thinking for adults who share similar desire to engage in communicative and collaborative learning to transform their practices. Mezirow (2002) made his unique contribution and added that the importance of the diverse phases in transformative learning process. Three critical research questions guided the research study.

1. How is the NCF used to guide the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities for young children in rural ECCE centres?
2. What are ECCE teachers' experiences of using the NCF for the execution of the teaching and learning activities that are integrated in rural ECCE centres?
3. To what extent do ECCE teachers reflect on the planning roles after using the NCF to integrate teaching and learning activities for young children?

Inequalities and unfair distribution of education led to the development of the South African NCF for children from birth to years to combat racial segregation and to support early childhood education (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012; Rudolf, 2017; Murriss, 2019). It became a panacea to the marginalised early education (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2015; Aubrey, 2017; Rudolf, 2017; Atmore, 2018; Ashley-Cooper, van Niekerk & Atmore, 2019). The NCF provides guidance to the planning of the integrated activities to meet the needs and interest of all children from birth to four years (Murriss, 2019). Three rural ECCE centres in this researched study transformed to the guidelines of the NCF as an attempt to address past education challenges that affected young children development (Whitebread & Bingham, 2011; Aubrey, 2017; Atmore, 2018). Literature below was reviewed to show the current trends and the forerunners of the research topic with more focus to the rural context.

### **7.2.1 The reviewed literature**

The literature revealed that planning for learning in the ECCE sector is not merely about languages, mathematics and other subjects (Mangione & Monahan, 2016) but teaching and learning activities from different subject areas are integrated. Integration is identified as a suitable approach in the early years for young children to explore a variety of activities that are integrated into a selected theme and play resources for comprehensive learning (Stoian, 2016; Verun & Venugopal, 2016; Meier & Marais, 2018). That integration is internationally identified as a multidisciplinary approach (Drake & Reid, 2010; 2018; Mandic & Bojanic, 2018). In South Africa, it is also known as thematic approach or thematic teaching (Meier & Marais, 2018; Wardani et al., 2019). Salminen (2017) suggests that the approach contributes to positive outcomes where connections are also made to real-world experiences through critical thinking and reading, to bring together different aspects of the curriculum in an expressive way.

The international literature reviewed indicated that preparing for thematic teaching accentuate the need to understand the curriculum content for the outcomes to be achieved (Okoro & Okoro, 2016). The researcher discovered theme selection as an organised opportunity to engage with the curriculum content as a learning experience to identify related activities to prepare children for school readiness (Eliason & Jenkin, 2008; Kitchenham, 2008; van der Vyver, 2012. Malik and Malik (2011) identified useful steps to planning for thematic teaching as reading the content, determining the outcomes, selecting themes, formulate timelines and select methods for assessment. As also confirmed by this research study, teaching and play resources are also integrated for young children to learn through play (Aubrey, 2017; Meier & Marais, 2018). In the context of this study, ECCE teachers read the new NCF and identify teaching and learning activities from the six ELDA's that are appropriate for the development of babies, toddlers and young children (DBE, 2015; Murriss, 2019).

Similar to this research study, the reviewed literature indicated that theme selection is a collaborative opportunity at the beginning of the year to formulate or select themes that link to the curriculum, developmentally appropriate, meaningful, multicultural, fun and enjoyable for young children (Davin & van Staden, 2004; Meier & Marais, 2018). Reetu, Renu and Adarsh (2017) asserted that orientation can be required for teachers to choose appropriate themes. Therefore, in India, local role-players and academics working in the ECCE field collaborated to develop a resource book titled *Theme based Early Childhood Care and Education programme* including nine themes that the teachers can use. Similarly, in Ontario ECCE teachers and ECCE experts collaborated in a cluster to examine related themes, read the curriculum content and to design a plan to be followed to integrate activities. Thinking about what the learners know and their life experiences into consideration in the planning process was also considered as the vision of the NCF in the document (Boehme, 2017. The researcher discovered that at the end, teachers designed the seven steps model to support the planning of the integrated teaching and learning activities to save more time for teaching (Drake et al., 2015; Lepone, 2016). Thematic selection found support in Mezirow's transformative learning theory that identified planning for teaching is a collaborating learning and meaning making opportunity to share experiences and knowledge (Mezirow, 1997; 2000).

Literature revealed after selecting themes, ECCE teachers organise the learning environment for the presentation of activities, gather teaching and play resources and plan the lesson (Meier & Marais, 2018). The researcher discovered that they plan the daily programme to follow and

to know what to teach every day (Clampett, 2016). Daily programme supports the intellectual, emotional, physical, and social development of young children (Courson & Wallace, 2010). It includes time for interactive and quiet activities for young children that are integrated for young children to play and learn while their development is assessed (Meier & Marais, 2018).

### **7.2.2 Research methodology**

The research study adopted a qualitative case study that was interpretive in nature to explore the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities for young children in rural ECCE centres. The qualitative approach allowed an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon from the participants' point of view and thus apposite information was elicited (Cohen, et al., 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Nine purposively selected participants from the three rural centres represented ECCE centres in the Umbumbulu area. They created their own meaning, unique and varied experiences to the planning process. Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews, augmented during focus group interviews with the same participants in three groups and supported by the planning documents that the participants used (Cohen et al., 2018). During the interviews ECCE teachers freely discussed how they interpreted the NCF, their experiences and their reflections after learning during the planning process. Similar to Creswell and Poth's (2018) experiences, some participants were competent in providing related data during the semi-structured interviews while a few really struggled. Therefore, multiple sources of evidence used contributed to obtain the envisioned results (Creswell, 2014).

The collected data was analysed using the data analysis spiral (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Hand coded texts were transcribed to be reported as themes. The meaning making process involved the actual transcription of raw data, readings, descriptions, classification, and interpretation (Creswell, 2014; Cohen, et al., 2018). The data analysis process was supported by the TLT of Mezirow (1978) and the contributions made by Kuhn (1970) and Habermas (1971) in the development of the theory. The theory assisted to understand ECCE teachers as self-directed adults with common goals to share their experiences to learn and transform for the development of young children. It contributed to explore NCF as paradigm shift, transformation, learning opportunity and a meaningful professional development that happen in different phases that depend on the experiences.

### **7.3 Summary of the research findings**

This research study yielded four major themes as desirable learning opportunity for teachers, conducive learning environment and time for young children, the challenges in rural ECCE centres and the development of new roles after learning. These themes were generated from an analysis of data from semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis. The four themes are presented as transformative learning opportunity in rural ECCE centres.

#### **7.3.1 A transformative learning opportunity in rural ECCE centres**

The findings of this research study showed that the introduction of the NCF in rural ECCE centres became a transformative learning opportunity to the teachers to collaborate, communicate for planning integrated teaching and learning activities.

##### **7.3.1.1 A desirable learning opportunity for teachers**

The findings of this study showed that ECCE teachers deliberately considered the guidance of the NCF as a learning opportunity to transform their planning practices for the development of young children. In this context, accessing the NCF meaningfully became *a desirable learning opportunity* to prepare teaching and learning activities that are appropriate for young children transition to school. However, it transpired from the interviews that learning started as a challenging experience as the NCF content was transcribed in English. A *traumatic experience* was exacerbated as the term ELDAs was used instead of subjects that are commonly used in schools. A *disorienting dilemma* emerged and experienced as the *first phase* of transformation learning during the planning process (Mezirow, 1997; 2000). After the dilemma, ECCE teachers decided on the approaches to make the new experience meaningful. Instead of rejecting change, they considered it a *collaborative learning* and a *communicative learning* (see sections 5.7.1.2 and 6.2.1.2) to share knowledge and experiences to learn. They started sharing previous experiences and learning skills thereafter, realised that ELDAs were similar to the subjects. Their *previous experiences* of the CAPS document contributed to understanding the NCF content. Therefore, transformative learning emerged as ECCE teachers considered the importance of each other, experience and skills in a new learning process.

The findings showed that when planning for integration, ECCE teachers identified teaching and learning activities, selected suitable themes and integrated teaching and play resources as

young children learn through play. At the beginning of each year, they collaborate to discuss and select suitable themes for young children. In this regard, teachers mentioned that themes were not suggested in NCF (as the Grade R CAPS document does) and therefore theme selection was a *flexible* practice for teachers in each centre to decide. The importance of themes that are age-appropriate and interesting to young children development were emphasised. However, the researcher also noticed that more similar themes were used by the participants.

Collaboration was also extended as the rural ECCE teachers *shared* their experiences of the NCF content, their teaching and learning activities, and their *challenges to solve the problems* they experienced. As required, the teachers endeavoured to create *suitable learning spaces* both indoors and outdoors but were unfortunately limited by *contextual challenges*. For some sponsorships seemed the solution while others utilised their creativity to address shortcomings and challenges.

The most profound finding is arguably the fact that these teachers ‘matured’ in the sense that they learnt not to rely exclusively on the DBE or any other body to shape their learning and practice. In fact, being left somewhat in the dark soon after the introduction of the NCF to them early in 2017 was probably the best experience for them as this compelled these ECCE teachers to become *self-reliant*. The majority of these teachers became *interpreters* and not merely recipients of the new curriculum, which was an emancipatory and rewarding experience. As such they have all become leaders in their field, ready to tackle more challenges and to use their *creativity to enhance the learning experiences* of the young children in these centres. Moreover, their enthusiasm may undoubtedly stand other teachers in good stead as they collaborate in *clusters* where they share their knowledge, newly acquired expertise, and dream of a better future for the children in their care.

### **7.3.1.2 A conducive learning environment**

The research study revealed that a conducive learning environment was enhanced by organising learning spaces and the formulation of instructional plans. The findings revealed that learning spaces that include indoor and outdoor spaces are organised regardless of the challenges in rural ECCE centres. The participants mentioned that the playrooms commonly allowed indoor spaces such as reading corner, fantasy corner, theme corner and construction corner. Outdoors they have equipment such as jungle gyms, swings, and tyres and also water

and sand pit area in one ECCE centre. Their instructional plan included the daily programme, lesson planning, and the assessment processes. What the participants explained during interviews was supported by the planning documents that the secondary document a daily programme was provided by an NGO after the participants started using the NCF. The daily programme (time table) in the ECCE centres included teaching and learning activities instead of subjects (Meier & Marais, 2018). Instead of text or words, the daily programme included the activities displayed in the form of pictures for young children to understand what they have to do all the time. Although it was designed by the NGO, the researcher discovered that in all the centres the participants discuss the activities as staff to avoid conflicts and clashes outdoors and arrange times for different ages to play and learn outdoors at different times.

Daily lessons were also planned to follow a lesson plan template provided by the NGO. Evidence from the discussions and the daily lesson plans indicated that lesson planning comprised of the lesson topic, selected theme, age group, lesson objectives, teaching and play resources to be used when teaching, the main activities from the ELDAs, assessment and reflection. Although teaching and learning resources were challenging, it emerged from the interviews that teachers from the two centres improvised and had learnt to make use of cheaper and natural resources such as soil, plants, and other available resources in the environment. Challenges that affected planning are discussed below.

### **7.3.2.1 Challenges encountered in the planning of integrated activities**

The findings of this study revealed that rural ECCE teachers expected continuous and more support from the Department of Basic Education for further clarities about the NCF. However, Departmental officials were not available for further training after they introduced the framework in the area. The situation was likely to prevail for some time to come as the participants mentioned that the officials informally shared that they were not specifically allocated for birth to four years in ECCE centres.

The literature affirms that young children learn through play in an environment that is suitable indoors and outdoors. In these spaces age-appropriate and safe play resources are pivotal. Limited indoor play spaces and resources impacted comprehensive to the planning practices. Although Centre B and Centre A teachers mentioned their creative skills in making teaching resources, at Centre C they planned integrated activities with very limited teaching and

learning resources. The planning for young children to touch, see and play for holistic and equity development as emphasised in the NCF was compromised. The study realised that ECCE teachers struggled to share creative skills and to identify local resources that can be used for the development of young children. The findings showed that indeed ECCE teachers in the area needed follow-ups workshops from the Department officials for more guidance to share skills and to identify local and indigenous resources that can be integrated into the activities and themes for young children. What Centre A teachers highlighted as the selection of local themes such as plants and animals were common in all the three centres but, the issue of play resources was challenging as the teachers were unable to identify relevant resources in the environment. The findings also showed that limited physical space affected the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities at Centre A and Centre C. That was because of the incomplete structure of the centre and very small playrooms for young children to move up and down for physical development. This situation was due to limited funds and lack of enough sponsorships in the area.

#### **7.3.3.1 New learning opportunities and development**

The research study revealed that after learning the NCF content for the planning of integrated activities, ECCE teachers reflected after the new learning experience. In this regard, they identified themselves as being capable teachers to interpret the curriculum content, think creatively, plan for assessment and reflective teachers.

The role as the interpreter of the new curriculum was clearly strengthened by the voice of a child in the NCF document as that summarised what young children expected to learn. This enthused ECCE teachers to clearly understand the content of the six ELDA as they collaborated to share what they understand. The findings revealed that guidelines of the NCF were easily interpreted as the participants showed the understanding of the developmental guidelines, the activities and guidelines for assessment. The guidelines for assessment were adopted and adhered to and included identifying children with barriers to learning. The participants developed confidence as they learned what and how to assess and how to record and report their observations to the children's parents. The extent of their transformation and planning practices thus reached surprising levels that were beyond the initial expectations.

The findings showed that as emerging creative thinkers, the ECCE teachers critically thought about theme-related resources and arranged relevant activity spaces for young children to play and learn both indoors and outdoors. The teachers were hard-working and endeavoured to

meet the objectives of the NCF. As creative thinkers nurtured the learning environment by utilising suitable resources within their means (Sharpley, 2014; Meier & Marais, 2018). However, only those teachers who were keen to collaborate and who persistently communicated with other creative teachers seemed to develop more creative skills. Some still struggled and seemed to rely on donations. It appeared that some focused on reading the framework and not on sharing their creative skills and knowledge.

The assessment guidelines in the NCF contributed to the ECCE teacher's role as assessors inside the playrooms as well as outdoors. The participants highlighted this role as a collaborative process that also contributed to topics for assessment in their lesson plans. They understood that assessment is continuous and informal in ECCE and they utilised observations and record keeping as their main assessment tool. The participants used 'watch points' and assessed children with barriers to learning. They observed all the children while they played in groups and as individuals. Assessment observations were recorded in observation books and they stated that they shared this information with parents. Some were reflective practitioners while others marginalised this valuable practice to identify their weaknesses, strengths, and opportunities for better teaching.

Although transformative learning was not standardised, the participants collaborated and communicated to share their knowledge and experiences. The researcher presents these as a Transformative Planning Model to Integrate Activities (TPMIA) in the ECCE phase. The Model indicates the steps for planning and integration as adopted by rural ECCE after they had accessed the NCF and learned to follow its guidelines. This Model is an original contribution that emanated from this research study.

#### **7.4 The TPMIA as an Original Contribution Emanating from the Study**

The NCF was introduced to address the issue of inequality in the ECCE phase and to prepare young children for school readiness. Teachers in rural ECCE centres had previously planned teaching and learning activities without policy guidance and thus needed transformation by adopting the tenets of the NCF. This original contribution emanating from this research study is mainly embedded in the Umbumbulu rural ECCE context and the three ECCE rural centres where the study was conducted. As the researcher gained greater insight into the notion behind rural ECCE teachers' motivation and effort to follow the guidance of the NCF for the planning of appropriate activities for young children. The Model is designed as a motivation to other

ECCE teachers in similar situations. Although the findings may not be generalised, rural ECCE teachers brought insight into the new learning experience presented as a Transformative Planning Model to Integrate Activities [TPMIA] (Figure, 7.1) that can be used in other ECCE centres.

#### **7.4.1 Learning Areas for the Transformative Planning Model**

While the NCF is a new learning experience for ECCE teachers, it is a guidance to what young children are expected to learn for school readiness. Although it is transcribed in English, it provides clear guidelines for parents, care-givers and teachers working with young children to follow. If the instructions are not clear to the teachers, they support each other to learn and to understand. Although the participants in this study identified teaching and learning activities relevant to them, they were provided as the examples since the NCF was designed as flexible to be used in relation to the context. That gives a sense to transformation learning in the ECCE. Therefore, the Transformative planning model below is a flexible guidance to bring about ideas and related concepts to be followed in a similar context. However, understand its content to develop appropriate learning experiences for young children wherever they are is important. Thus, the researcher briefly reiterates the content and examples of activities related to the six ELDAs that guides proper planning before the presentation of the Model.

- 1. Well-being:** The content addresses good health, good hygiene and the safety measures that are imperative for the growth and development of young children (UNICEF, 2014; 2017). Teaching and learning activities include stories, talks, songs, and physical activities that are enjoyed inside and outside the classroom using a play-based approach. This ELDA needs to be integrated with all five the other ELDAs.
- 2. Identity and belonging:** This ELDA is to guide the development of social skills for young children to interact with the world. The content includes talks about the weather, families, and cultures while teaching and learning activities include stories, talks, and songs (Kirsten, 2017; Ford, 2016).
- 3. Exploring mathematics:** Young children explore mathematical terms at their level to acquire mathematical skills that are needed in the primary school (Bjorklund, van den Heuvel-Panhuizen & Kullberg, 2020). Activities include age-appropriate

problem-solving skills development, working with patterns, making connections, recognising relationships, sorting, classifying, and using numbers in play activities.

4. **Communication:** Communication is a skill that requires the development of language (or languages) before primary school. It is integrated with all other ELDA as language is used for learning. Maluleke et al. (2019) confirms that activities include songs, rhymes, music, stories, and speaking at the level of children while they play inside and outside the classroom.
5. **Creativity:** Young children sing songs, dramatize, draw, paint, paste, use safety scissors to cut, and play to learn in a safe environment. Creative skills are also encouraged for social and emotional development as young children work in groups to share their emotions.
6. **Knowledge and understanding of the world:** ECCE teachers need to guide young children to talk about whatever they do as they learn, imitate other people, and play to understand the environment around them using safe play resources. This is a Life Skills area as children learn more about the world they live in (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012; Department of Basic Education, 2015).

#### **7.4.2 Learnings underpin the Transformative Planning Model**

Transformative Planning Model to Integrate Activities [TPMIA] is adopted from the rural ECCE teachers' actions guided by Mezirow transformative learning theory and the reviewed literature reviewed in the research study. TPMIA accentuates the idea that rural ECCE teachers embraced change and expanded their learning capabilities after the NCF was introduced to them. ECCE teachers shifted the focus from the challenges including teaching and play resources, physical space and lack of support from the Department of Education to achieve the common goals to learn, fight inequalities and develop young children for school readiness. The action was maintained by Kuhn (1997) in his notion of paradigm shift as the involvement of collective ideas and the influence of attitudes is solving the problems that affect our lives. In the educational practices identified a paradigm shift as the new achievement for the learners to prepare themselves for the new professional practice (Pajares (2004). Mezirow (2000) in his theory of transformative learning adopted paradigm shift as the action that entails different forms to make decisions, make associations, solve a problem or to produce a change in behaviour. Teachers thus, shifted their ideas from challenges that affected rural areas, perceptions, and attitudes to share better problem-solving practices for

the best experiences and development of children. Kuhn (1979) asserted that people shift the focus from income, utility and wealth to achieve what they value the most.

Mezirow in his theory of transformative learning also adopted communicative learning as an important category from Habermas' theory of communicative action to clarify learning as the opportunity to understand others and the education concepts that are related. Communicative learning is about understanding the world, other people and ourselves (Habermas,1984). Therefore, in transformative learning, people learn to understand meaning as they communicate with others. In the ECCE, teachers and all adults that work with young children are identified as capable people with skills and knowledge to share (DBE, 2015) which is similar to the rural ECCE teachers' action. However, in his theory, Mezirow highlighted the importance of the learning atmosphere.

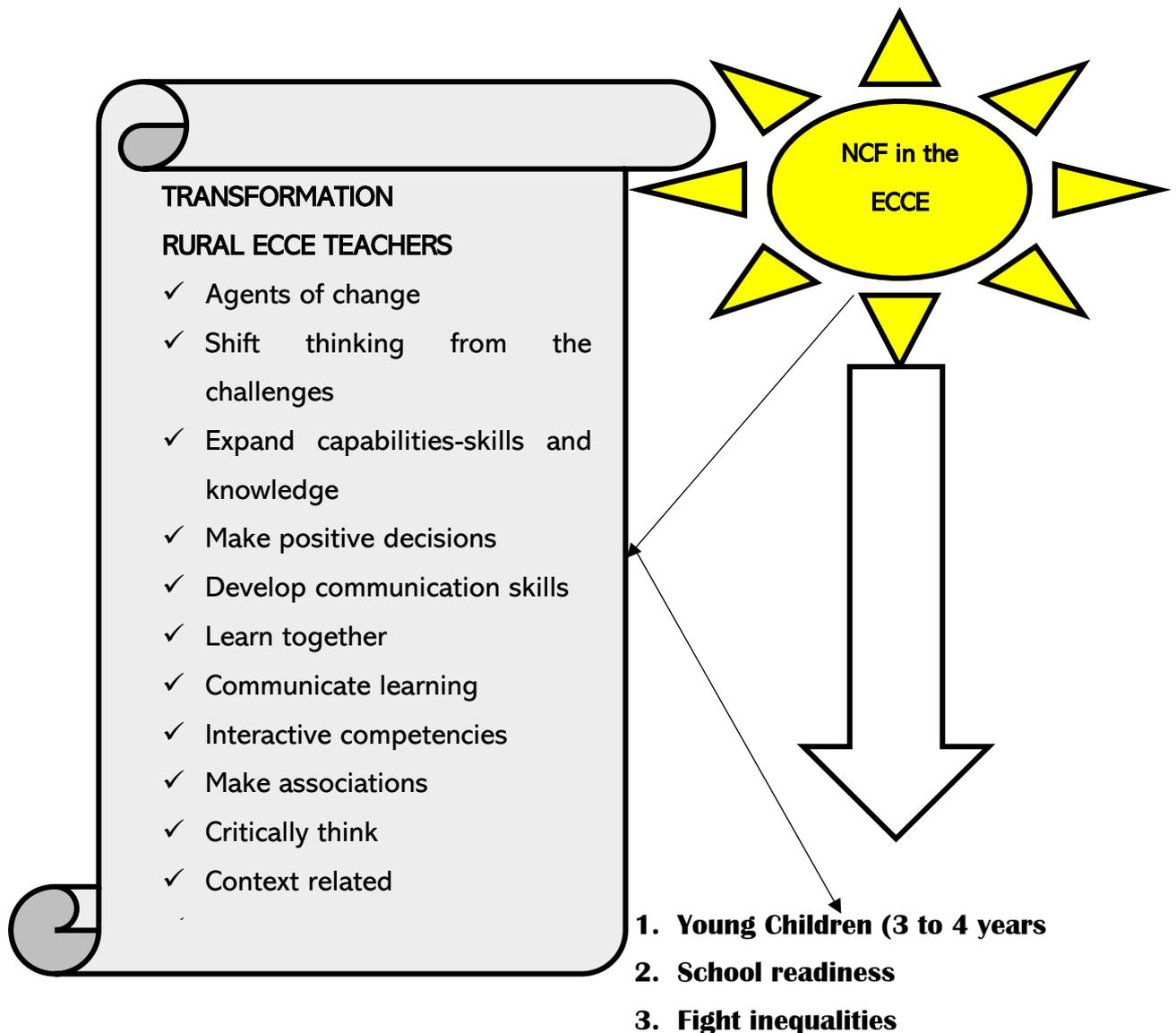
The important aspects in transformative learning that happened in the ECCE included communicative learning, interactive competencies, sharing of skills, knowledge, experiences and collaborations for teachers to solve any problems during the planning process. They suggested the importance to challenge all the problems together with other teachers. That action in practice shows ECCE teachers as the agents of change and adults that desired change and valued the given opportunity.

An essential finding that generated new learning for the research was that ECCE teachers make the NCF meaningful and to select themes that would be and appropriate to the age made positive contribution to the integrated planning process. The findings revealed that pre-planned, natural and local themes are preferred by the participates and ten themes that are interesting, meaningful, fun and relates to young children's experiences were collectively identified and selected as Me (or Myself), My body, My family, My home, My classroom, My school, Water, Plants, Animals and Transport. In the ECCE, planning for integration is not only about planning the lesson but also include the creation of a conducive environment to deliver the activities in a safe and suitable indoor and outdoor learning space. Common age-appropriate indoor spaces are fantasy corner, reading corner, theme corner, and construction corner, outdoor learning spaces are water and sand pit area and outdoor resources are swing, jungle gym and tyres for development of gross-motor skills. Teaching and play resources are scarce but teachers create or develop and improvise for their holistic development of young children. An instructional plan to guide teaching and learning is

devised as a pictorial daily programme (time-table), lesson plan, and assessment plan. The activities are integrated into the selected suitable themes and into teaching and play resources for young children to learn through play. It was interesting and new for the researcher to learn that activities from the six ELDAs are integrated into a single lesson everyday as the teachers followed the lesson plan template providing guidance to planning a lesson. Lesson plan template incorporate the lesson outcome, main activities from the six ELDAs, teaching and play resources, ideas for assessment and reflections. Assessment observations are recorded to prepare reports to share with parents. The challenges include lack of teaching and play resources, physical learning space and support from the Department of Basic Education. However, ECCE teachers reflected to their experiences and identified themselves as the interpreters of the NCF, creative thinkers, reflective thinkers and assessors for learning with all the challenges in the rural ECCE sector.

Figure 7.1 below provides a diagrammatical representation of the Model. This format is used for easy interpretation by teachers in the ECCE context. The emphasis is on the flexibility of teachers, adults, and care givers when using the framework. The model expounds the four major themes that illuminate using NCF as a transformative learning opportunity in the ECCE as:

- Challenges are encountered
- But, ECCE teachers identified the opportunity to learn
- They created learning opportunities
- Explored new roles



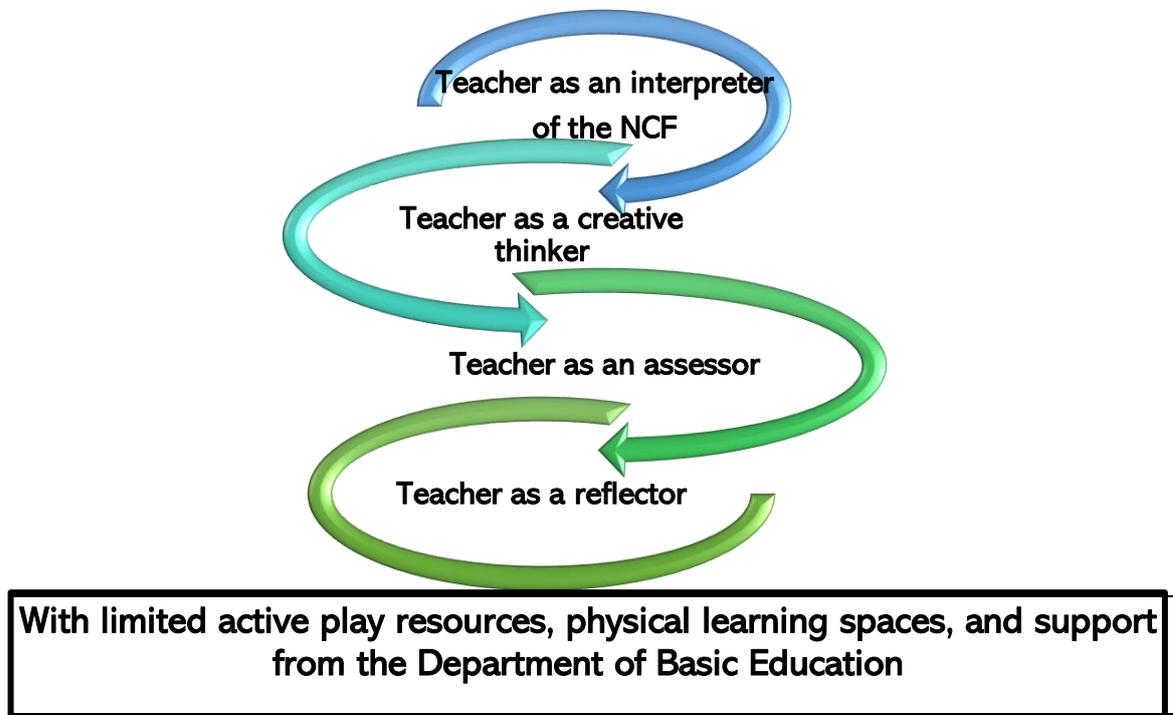
**Figure 7.1: Transformative Planning Model to Integrate Activities in ECCE**

Source: Author

The NCF provided light for ECCE teachers to identify their capabilities in order to plan for the development of young children. They played different roles as they explore the new learning experience. They learned from each other to grow.

Reflections are done after proper teaching has taken place and they are included as topic in the lesson plan template. However, ECCE teachers reflected on the new learning process and identified new roles they explored after learning to follow the guidelines of the NCF for planning the integrated teaching and learning activities and ignored all the challenges. The

new roles that the ECCE teachers explored are illustrated in the figure 7.2 below. The circular shapes indicate the uniqueness of each role while the arrows indicate their inter-connectedness in the learning process.



**Figure 7.2: Teachers' new roles after transformation**

Source: Author

### 7.5 Addressing the limitations of the study

The study was limited in its focus as it was a case study of only three rural ECCE centres and nine ECCE teachers in the Umbumbulu area in Kwa-Zulu Natal. Consequently, the findings of the study regarding the planning of integrated teaching and learning activities within the new curriculum framework may not be generalised to the entire ECCE population in the area, in this province or elsewhere. However, the study has managed to show how the planning of integrated activities for young children is done on a small scale and this may be emulated in similar contexts, with possible adaptations.

The study elicited in-depth understanding of how teachers in rural ECCE centres effectively managed to follow the guidelines of the NCF and identified teaching and learning activities young children who needed to be prepared for school readiness and equal development. This

was successfully achieved within the contextual limitations of each centre. The findings may thus be utilised with adaptations in another similar context.

Another limitation of the study was that the young children in these centres were minors and were thus not able to express themselves. Their voices were thus silent in this study. However, it often referred to ‘The voice of a child’ in the NCF document itself and strongly urge readers and scholars to access this document intensively to understand the power of a child in the ECCE sector. The study was also limited to pre-Grade R education hence the first grade of formal schooling was peripherally referred to but not studied in depth for the confirmation of results. Moreover, the study acknowledges planning using the NCF as an effort to equality and school readiness that can be clearly explored in formal schools and investigating these aspects was thus not a goal of the current.

Another limitation was that due to the lack of training and support some participants might find it extremely difficult to verbalise their understanding of the NCF in English which may contribute to limited data during the one-on-one semi-structured interviews. However, this limitation was contributing to the overcome by arranging follow-up focus group interviews using similar questions for clarities were conducted in each centre where the three participating teachers were allowed to ‘open up’ and share their experiences and insights in the language of choice. This initiative worked a treat, rich and thick data were obtained to address the research questions and achieve the objectives.

## **7.6 Conclusions**

The fundamental aim of this research study was to explore the extent in which teachers make the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) meaningful for the planning of the integrated teaching and learning activities in the quest to prepare young children for school readiness in rural ECCE centres.

To achieve this, the researcher used Mezirow’s (2000) transformative learning theory (TLT) and the conceptual contributions to the educational development by Kuhn (1970) and Habermas (1971). The researcher aimed to understand the approaches used for integration, ECCE teachers learning efforts to understand the NCF content, strengths, weaknesses, and

challenges as the experiences during the planning process. Moreover, what the ECCE teachers explored as the new roles after learning.

Relying on Mezirow transformative learning theory, the related concepts and the contributions made by Kuhn (1970) and Habermas (1971) to the theory, the researcher learned to consider ECCE teachers as self-directed adults who are very passionate about the development of young children with all the challenges associated to them. In their quest to transform, teachers deliberately engaged in collaborative learning and collective learning to share their experiences and made the NCF meaningful for the best experience to their children. It became very interesting that ECCE transformed their practices and considered themselves as capable people to share knowledge and skills that are important in a new learning experience. ECCE teachers learned in teams to identify teaching and learning activities from the six ELDA that are used as subjects in the framework, selected relevant themes and identified teaching and learning activities that are suitable for young children to play and learn.

The research learned that these teachers also plan indoor and outdoor spaces, formulate instruction plan including daily programme and assessment to identify children with barriers to learning. During the integrated planning process ECCE teachers experienced some challenges. However, learned to explore new roles as the interpreters of the new curriculum, creative thinkers, assessors and reflective teachers after learning the guidelines of the NCF.

All the experiences and the phases of planning were considered learning and presented in a new model that the researcher refer to as the **Transformative Planning Model to Integrate Activities** with particular focus on ECCE. Without generalising the findings, the researcher is confident that this model is flexible enough to be utilised, even in an adapted form, by teachers in ECCE centres or in similar contexts where young children have to be prepared for school readiness

The recommendations that will be offered later are based on their realities and the meaning that people made of their world in their unique social contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## **7.7 Recommendations**

The researcher offers the following recommendations with respect for and as the contribution to ECCE centres and ECCE teachers' learning experiences, particularly those who still face some challenges in planning using the National Curriculum Framework.

### **7.7.1 ECCE centres**

The researcher recommends the expansion of capabilities for all the stake holders to be involved for best learning experiences for babies, toddlers and young children (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012; Department of Basic Education, 2015). This can be the expansion of creative skills for all ECCE teachers to learn and make own teaching and play resources for children to learn. Waste such as papers, card boxes, empty containers, cans and other cheap resources available in homes can be collectively collected to make toys for children to play and learn.

The researcher also recommends more internal trainings and continuous workshops for rural ECCE teachers to capacitate each other. Moreover, to include NGOs in the area to offer further and more learning assistance than resources in all ECCE centres.

The participants touched on the issue of using local themes when planning the integrated activities. Therefore, expansion to indigenous, local and natural teaching and play resources is strongly recommended to use available plants, animals, water, and other context related resources. Using the indigenous and local resources is also encouraged in the NCF (DBE, 2015). These are resources that can be easily accessible in the environment to support quality learning and equality of opportunities for children in different rural ECCE centres. For example, exploring mathematics can be the colour and shapes of different leaves while they count them and solve problems as their level.

The researcher recommends the importance of foundations in the home language as the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) in the ECCE phase in all the ECCE centres. The researcher discovered that English themes were mostly used in the ECCE centres that were involved in the study. This recommendation is presented while the researcher understand NCF as flexible tool and the complexities of many children's home environments to learn English. However, this recommendation is supported by the literature that learning foundations are laid

in mother tongue while the child will learn a first additional language at a later stage (Lenyai, 2011).

### **7.7.2 ECCE teachers**

The researcher recommends further learning for ECCE teachers to identify indigenous and natural teaching and play resources in the environment to integrate into the teaching and learning activities.

From the findings the study recommends ECCE teachers to share creative skills with other centres for all teachers in the area to learn and make own resources. They can organise a creative teacher from one centre to on a cluster meeting. This is because of the findings that out of three centres involved in the study, only the participants from one centre showed great capabilities in the development of materials and resources.

The study recommends for ECCE teacher to embrace the value of reflections as a vital step in improving their practice. This recommendation is based on the fact that reflection included as the lesson plan topic was not completed by other teachers. That shows that reflections were not done for teachers to easily identify their strengths and weaknesses after presenting the lesson.

### **7.7.3 Recommendation for further research**

This study looked at the integrated planning of teaching and learning activities using the National Curriculum Framework in rural Early Childhood Care and Education centres of the Umbumbulu Area in Kwa-Zulu Natal and, therefore, the results cannot be generalised. The researcher has the following recommendations for further research:

- The researcher recommends that the study would consider a larger population and a variety of contexts for the generalisation of the research results.
- A longitudinal study may also be conducted to determine the actual impact of the integrated activities over a period of time.
- The researcher also recommends research should to be conducted in a formal Grade R classroom to determine if the school readiness goal for young children has been

achieved, with specific focus on the effectiveness of the NCF for quality and equality of learning opportunities.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



20 November 2018

Mrs Cynthia Zanele Zama 211560590  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mrs Zama

**Protocol Reference Number : HSS/1668/0ISD**

**Project title: Integrated planning for early childhood care and education teaching activities for young children in rural centres**

**Full Approval - Expedited Application**

In response to your application received 19 September 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has 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 Shamila Naidoo (Deputy Chair)  
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee**

/pm

Cc Supervisor: Professor Nontokozo Mashiya  
cc Academic Leader Research: Dr SB Khoza  
cc School Administrators: Ms Sheryl Jeenaarain

---

**Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee**

**Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)**

**Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building**

**Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000**

**Telephone:** +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4557 **Fax/Intle:** +27 (0) 31 260 4609 **Email:** [ximban@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximban@ukzn.ac.za) / [awmanm@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:awmanm@ukzn.ac.za) / [mohunn@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mohunn@ukzn.ac.za)

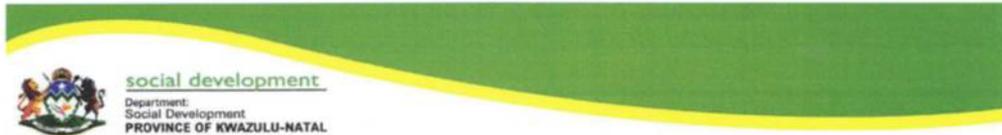
**Website:** [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)

**191D,2010**

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## APPENDIX B: PERMISSION FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



FAX : 033-264 2075  
Telephone/Ucingo/Telefoon : 033 264 2078  
Enquiries/Imibuzo/Navrae : Mr. VW Gumede  
Email address : velaphi.gumede@kznsocdev.gov.za  
Reference/ Inkomba/ Navrae: S6/2/1

**HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT**  
174 Mayors Walk Road  
Private Bag X9144  
Pietermaritzburg  
3200

**Mrs CZ Zama**  
20 Fleischer Street  
Marrianhill Park  
Pinetown  
3610

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

Dear Mrs Zama

### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

This matter has reference.

Kindly be informed that permission has been granted by the Head of Department for you to conduct research in Early Childhood Development Centres funded by the Department of Social Development under EThekweni South District Umbumbulu area to fulfill the requirement of your PhD in Education Psychology: Early Childhood Care and Education.

The permission authorizes you to: -

- (a) Approach and distribute your survey questionnaires to employees that are willing to participate in your research.
- (b) Interview early childhood Practitioners at their consent deemed relevant to your research project and maintain high level of confidentiality; and
- (c) Share your findings with the Department.

Wishing you success during your research project.

Yours Faithfully

  
**MS NG KHANYILE**  
**HEAD OF DEPARTMENT**

DATE: 02/12/2018

## **APPENDIX C: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH FROM ECCE CENTRE A**

School of Education, College of Humanities,  
University of KwaZulu-Natal,  
Edgewood Campus  
4 November 2018

The ECCE Manager  
Centre A  
Umbumbulu Area

Dear Madam,

### **Request to conduct research study in your ECCE centre**

This is to request your permission to allow me to conduct a research study in your ECCE centre. I am a lecturer at Embury Institute of Higher Education, currently doing my PhD at the University of KwaZulu-Natal South Africa. The title of my research study is:

### **The integrated planning of teaching and learning activities for young children using framework in Early Childhood Care and Education rural centres**

The general purpose of this study is to explore ECCE teachers learning experience in the planning of the integrated teaching and learning activities for young children (three to four years) using the National Curriculum Framework. The research will involve conducting semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and analysing the documents that ECCE teachers use for planning the integrated activities for young children development. All teachers teaching young children that will be individually interviewed will also participate in a focus group interview.

Kindly note that:

- Attempts will be made not to disturb the day-to-day operations of the centre;
- The privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of the ECCE centre shall be upheld; and

- Data collected from the ECCE centre will not be used to the disadvantage of the centre and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research study and any other publications that might arise from the study.

Should you require more information, please contact me on the contacts given below. You may also contact my supervisor Prof J.N. Mashiyaj of the University of KwaZulu-Natal on (031 260 4276) Email: Mashiyaj@ukzn.ac.za. I look forward to your positive response.

Yours sincerely,



Cynthia Z. Zama

University of KwaZulu-Natal: Edgewood Campus

College of Humanities: Faculty of Education (Early Childhood Education)

Private Bag X03, Ashwood, 3605

Durban, South Africa

Cell: (+27) 824294936

Tel. (031) 700 2401

Email: zanelezama42@yahoo.com

If you understand the contents of the letter and grant permission, please sign this declaration form.

### **Declaration Form**

I.....(full name of the ECCE manager) hereby confirm that I have read and understood the contents of this letter and the nature of the research project and I give consent to the researcher to conduct her study at the centre.

## **APPENDIX D: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH FROM ECCE CENTRE B**

School of Education, College of Humanities,  
University of KwaZulu-Natal,  
Edgewood Campus

4 November 2018

The ECCE Manager

Centre B

Umbumbulu Area

Dear Madam,

### **Request to conduct research study in your ECCE centre**

This is to request your permission to allow me to conduct a research study in your ECCE centre. I am a lecturer at Embury Institute of Higher Education, currently doing my PhD at the University of KwaZulu-Natal South Africa. The title of my research study is:

### **The integrated planning of teaching and learning activities for young children using framework in Early Childhood Care and Education rural centres**

The general purpose of this study is to explore ECCE teachers learning experience in the planning of the integrated teaching and learning activities for young children (three to four years) using the National Curriculum Framework. The research will involve conducting semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and analysing the documents that ECCE teachers use for planning the integrated activities for young children development. All teachers teaching young children that will be individually interviewed will also participate in a focus group interview.

Kindly note that:

- Attempts will be made not to disturb the day-to-day operations of the centre;
- The privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of the ECCE centre shall be upheld; and
- Data collected from the ECCE centre will not be used to the disadvantage of the centre and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research study and any other publications that might arise from the study.

Should you require more information, please contact me on the contacts given below. You may also contact my supervisor Prof J.N. Mashiya of the University of KwaZulu-Natal on (031 260 4276) Email: Mashiya@ukzn.ac.za. I look forward to your positive response.

Yours sincerely,



Cynthia Z. Zama

University of KwaZulu-Natal: Edgewood Campus

College of Humanities: Faculty of Education (Early Childhood Education)

Private Bag X03, Ashwood, 3605

Durban, South Africa

Cell: (+27) 824294936

Tel. (031) 700 2401

Email: zanelezama42@yahoo.com

If you understand the contents of the letter and grant permission, please sign this declaration form.

**Declaration Form**

I.....(full name of the ECCE manager) hereby confirm that I have read and understood the contents of this letter and the nature of the research project and I give consent to the researcher to conduct her study at the centre.

## **APPENDIX E: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH FROM ECCE CENTRE C**

School of Education, College of Humanities,  
University of KwaZulu-Natal,  
Edgewood Campus  
4 November 2018

The ECCE Manager  
Centre C  
Umbumbulu Area

Dear Madam,

### **Request to conduct research study in your ECCE centre**

This is to request your permission to allow me to conduct a research study in your ECCE centre. I am a lecturer at Embury Institute of Higher Education, currently doing my PhD at the University of KwaZulu-Natal South Africa. The title of my research study is:

### **The integrated planning of teaching and learning activities for young children using framework in Early Childhood Care and Education rural centres**

The general purpose of this study is to explore ECCE teachers learning experience in the planning of the integrated teaching and learning activities for young children (three to four years) using the National Curriculum Framework. The research will involve conducting semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and analysing the documents that ECCE teachers use for planning the integrated activities for young children development. All teachers teaching young children that will be individually interviewed will also participate in a focus group interview.

Kindly note that:

- Attempts will be made not to disturb the day-to-day operations of the centre;
- The privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of the ECCE centre shall be upheld; and
- Data collected from the ECCE centre will not be used to the disadvantage of the centre and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research study and any other publications that might arise from the study.

Should you require more information, please contact me on the contacts given below. You may also contact my supervisor Prof J.N. Mashiya of the University of KwaZulu-Natal on (031-260 4276) Email: Mashiya@ukzn.ac.za. I look forward to your positive response.

Yours sincerely,



Cynthia Z. Zama

University of KwaZulu-Natal: Edgewood Campus

College of Humanities: Faculty of Education (Early Childhood Education)

Private Bag X03, Ashwood, 3605

Durban, South Africa

Cell: (+27) 824294936

Tel. (031) 700 2401

Email: zanelezama42@yahoo.com

If you understand the contents of the letter and grant permission, please sign this declaration form.

### **Declaration Form**

I.....(full name of the ECCE manager) hereby confirm that I have read and understood the contents of this letter and the nature of the research project and I give consent to the researcher to conduct her study at the centre.

## **APPENDIX F: REQUEST FOR THE OFFICIAL APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH (ENGLISH)**

School of Education, College of Humanities,  
University of KwaZulu-Natal,  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Research Participant

### **INFORMED CONSENT LETTER**

My name is Cynthia Zanele Zama, I am a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus, South Africa. My student number is **211560590** and my interest is in the Early Childhood Education (ECE).

I am attracted by change that happened as the introduction of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for children from birth to four years in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector. I am interested in doing research in your area and I discovered that your ECD centre transformed to follow the guidelines of the NCF for the development of babies, toddlers and young children. As part of my doctoral (PhD) studies, I am undertaking a research study to understand how the NCF is used for the planning of teaching and learning activities that are integrated for young children (three to four) development. My topic is:

#### **The integrated planning of teaching and learning activities for young children using Framework in Early Childhood Care and Education rural Centres**

I will be interested in learning all the realities including your capabilities and the challenges when using the framework. The study requests your participation in this case study research of the three Early Childhood Care and Education rural Centres. Three teachers from each centre will be selected for participation and data will be collected using semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and the document analysis. Open ended questions will be asked and recorded; and all the documents used for the planning of teaching and learning activities will be analysed.

The following undertaking will be provided:

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person, but reported only as a population member opinion.
- You are allowed to speak IsiZulu or English, depending on your language interest.
- The interview may last for about 1 hour and may be split depending on your preference.

- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years. It will be in the lock up office where only the researcher will have access to.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- The research aims at understanding how early childhood care and education teachers integrate teaching activities when planning for the teaching and learning of three to four-year-old children in rural centres. It will also include challenges and opportunities in the planning process.
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.
- If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		

I can be contacted at:

Email: zanelezama42@yahoo.com

Cell: 0824294936

My supervisor is Professor Nontokozo Mashiya who is located at the School of Education, Edgewood campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Contact details: email: Mashiyaj@ukzn.ac.za Phone number: 031 2604276

You may also contact the Research Office through:

P. Mohun

HSSREC Research Office,

Tel: 031 260 4557 E-mail: [mohunp@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mohunp@ukzn.ac.za)

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

Yours faithfully: [REDACTED]

C. Z. Zama

**DECLARATION**

I..... (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project. I consent my participation in the research project titled: **The integrated planning of teaching and learning activities for young children using Framework in Early Childhood Care and Education rural Centres**

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

**SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT**

**DATE**

.....

.....

## **APPENDIX G: REQUEST FOR THE OFFICIAL APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH (ISIZULU)**

School of Education, College of Humanities,  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Edgewood Campus

### **INCWADI YEMVUME YOKUQOQA ULWAZI**

Igama lami ngingu Cynthia Zanele Zama. Ngingumfundi weziqu zePhD eNyuvesi yaKwaZulu-Natali, ophikweni lwase-Edgewood, eNingizimu Afrika. Inombolo yami yokufunda **211560590**, nginothando lokwazi kabanzi kwezemfundo yabantwana abasebancane (Early Childhood Education-ECE).

Ngithatheke kakhulu ngoshintsho lokusungulwa koHlaka Lukazwelonke Lwezifundo [National Curriculum Framework (NCF)] lwezingane ezisukela ekuzalweni kuya eminyakeni emine. Ngikujabulele kakhulu ukuthi isikhungo senu (ECD centre) ingenye yalezo eziguqukele ekulandeleni imigomo emisha ye NCF. Ngifisa ukwenza ucwaningo mayelana nohlelo lokuxhumanisa izifundo olwenziwa ngothisha ukuze bafundise ngokuyiko abantwana abaneminyaka emithathu kuya kwemine. Isihloko socwaningo:

**Ukuhlelela ukufunda nokufundisa okuhlanganisile kwabantwana abaneminyaka emithathu kuya kwemine kusetshenziswa u Hlaka Lukazwelonke Lwezifundo ezikhungweni zokufunda abantwana abancane ezisemakhaya. (The integrated planning of teaching and learning activities for young children using Framework in Early Childhood Care and Education rural Centres)**

Lapho kubhekeke ukuba kuvele konke okuyiko, kuhlanganisa izingqinamba nezinhlelo ezisizayo lapho othisha besahlala. Ngingefiso sokusebenzisana nezikhungo ezintathu nothisha abathathu kuleso naleso sikhungo. Ulwazi luzoqoqwa ngokubuza imibuzo ehlelelwe uthisha ngamunye, babuzwe sebebonke esikhungweni bese kubhekwa amabhuku okuhlelela ukufunda abawasebenzisayo. Othisha balindeleke ukuphendula bachaze ngokwanele, imibuzo nezimpendulo kuzoqoshwa bese kucutshungulwa amabhuku okuhlelela ukufunda.

Nakhu okunye okuzobhekeleka:

- Lo msebenzi uyimfihlo futhi uyokwethulwa njengombono wengxenywe yomphakathi.

- Uvumelekile ukukhuluma ngesiZulu noma isiNgisi okuyohamba ngesifiso sakho.
- Izingxoxo ezihleliwe zingathatha isikhathi esingange Hora elilodwa noma zihlukaniswe ngokwesikhathi esingavumelana nawe.
- Ulwazi oyolunikeza ngeke lusetshenziselwe ukukulimaza. Lolu lwazi luyosetshenziselwa ucwaningo kuphela.
- Ulwazi luyogcinwa endaweni ephephile, luhlakazwe emva kweminyaka emihlanu. Indawo evikelekile lapho kungena kuphela umcwaningi.
- Ungakhetha ukuba yingxenywe, ukungabi yingxenywe noma ukuhoxa ekubeni yingxenywe kulolu cwaningo. Awuyukujeziswa ngaleso senzo.
- Ucwaningo luhlose ukuthola ukuthi othisha bahlela kanjani ngokuxhumanisa izifundo ukuze bafundise ngokuyiko abantwana abaneminyaka emithathu kuya kwemine. Kubhekeke ukuba kuvele izingqinamba nezinhlelo ezibasizayo emkhankasweni wabo wokuhlelela ukufundisa.
- Ukuba yingxenywe yalo msebenzi kumayelana nezemfundo kuphela. Akuyukubakhona imali eyinzuzo.
- Uma ufisa ukuba yingxenywe, khombisa ngokuqhwebisa endaweni efanele ukuthi uyavuma noma cha ukuthi izingxoxo ziqoshwe ngomshini:

Ngiyavuma

Angivumi

Isiqophamazwi

Ungaxhumana nami:

i-Emeyili: [zanelezama42@yahoo.com](mailto:zanelezama42@yahoo.com) Inombolo yocingo: 0824294936

Umeluleki wami uSolwazi Nontokozo Mashiya othalakala eEdgewood Campus eNyuvesi yakwaZulu-Natali. i-Emeyili: [Mashiyaj@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Mashiyaj@ukzn.ac.za)

Inombolo yocingo: (031) 260 4276

Ongaxhumana naye ehhovisi locwaningo: UMnu. Premlall Mohun – uMabhalane Omkhulu  
i-Emeyili: [mohunp@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mohunp@ukzn.ac.za)

Inombolo yocingo: (031) 260 4557

Ngiyabonga ukubamba iqhaza kwenu kulolu cwaningo.

Ozithobayo: 

C.Z. Zama

### Isivumelwano

Mina ..... (amagama  
aphelele) ngiyaqinisekisa ukuthi ngiyakuqonda okuqukethwe umqulu nohlobo locwaningo  
futhi ngiyavuma ukuba yingxenye yalolu cwaningo olusihloko sithi: **Ukulelela ukufunda  
nokufundisa okuhlanganisile kwabantwana abaneminyaka emithathu kuya kwemine  
kusetshenziswa u Hlaka Lukazwelonke Lwezifundo ezikhungweni zokufunda  
abantwana abancane ezisemakhaya**

Ngiyaqonda ukuthi nginelungelo lokuhoxa kulomusebenzi noma nini uma ngifisa.

**Isiginesha yoyingxenye yocwaningo**

**Usuku**

.....

## **APPENDIX H: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTION**

### **DATA GENERATION INSTRUMENT:** Semi-structured interview

The National Department of Basic Education introduced the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) provisioning and the holistic development of children from birth to four years (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2015; Murray, 2019). It became the fulfilment of the promise of equal education for all children made by the Government of National Unity led by the African National Congress (ANC) that came into power in 1994 (Rudolph, 2017).

This instrument seeks to explore how Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) teachers use the National Curriculum Framework for the planning of teaching and learning activities that are integrated in Early Childhood Care and Education rural centres.

There are no right or wrong answers to the questions and please respond as honestly as possible using the language of choice. You are not expected to provide your personal details or any information that will reveal your identity.

Your willingness to participate in this research study is very much appreciated.

**MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION:** How is the National Curriculum Framework used for the planning of teaching and learning activities that are integrated in Early Childhood Care and Education rural centres?

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

How is the National Curriculum framework used for the planning of the integrated teaching and learning activities for young children in ECCE rural centres?

### **PROMPTS**

Teaching and learning activities for are integrated for young children to transfer knowledge and skills acquired from one context to another pertinent situation. Please share your understanding of the term ‘integration’ in relation to the planning the activities in the ECCE sector/Ngicela ungivezele ulwazi onalo ngokudidiyela okusetshenziswa ukuhlela ukufundisa ku ECCE.

I found that in your ECCE centre, you transformed to the guidance of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for the planning of teaching and learning

### **RESPONSES**

activities that are integrated for young children to appropriately learn. It is most likely that NCF is a new experience to you.

How do you learn to understand the objectives of the NCF? Ufunda kanjani ukuqonda izinhloso ze NCF?

Please share how do you use the NCF for the planning of teaching and learning activities that are integrated for young children? Uyisebenzisa kanjani I NCF ukuhlelela ukufundisa abantwana abancane ngokudidiyela?

What are the ECCE teachers experiences in using the NCF for the execution of teaching and learning activities that are integrated in the ECCE rural centres?

Please share your strengths/capabilities in using the NCF for the planning of the integrated teaching and learning activities for young children? Ikuphi okuyikhono lakho/impumelelo oyibonayo njengoba usebenzisa iNCF ukuhlelela ukufundisa abantwana abancane ngokudidiyela?

Can you also share the challenges that you encounter when using the NCF for the planning of teaching and learning activities that are integrated? Iziphi izinqinamba obhekana nazo uma usebenzisa iNCF ukuhlelela ukufundisa abantwana abancane ngokudidiyela?

To what extent does ECCE teachers reflect new roles after using the National Curriculum Framework for the planning of the integrated teaching and learning activities for young children?

Can you please share the new roles that you presented after using the National Curriculum Framework for the planning of the integrated teaching and learning activities to develop young children? Ngakube ikuphi okufundile nosukwenza ngokuhlukile emuva kokusebenzisa iNCF ukuhlelela ukufundisa ngokudidiyela nokuthuthukisa abantwana abancane?

## APPENDIX I: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### DATA GENERATION INSTRUMENT: Focus group interview

As ECCE teachers, you are the agents of change and role players to bring in new experiences, new thinking and new possibilities to the sector for the development of young children (Sharpley, 2014; Aubrey, 2017).

After semi-structured (individual) interviews, we agreed on the group interviews. There are no wrong or write answers. Please take your time to answer these questions using the language you like. Anyone who is ready can begin to answer.

Thank you so much for being part of this journey.

**MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION:** How is the National Curriculum Framework used for the planning of teaching and learning activities that are integrated in Early Childhood Care and Education rural centres?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	PROMPTS	RESPONSES
1.How is the National Curriculum framework used for the planning of the integrated teaching and learning activities for young children in ECCE rural centres?	During the semi-structured interviews, you all gave information that after reading the NCF you identify teaching and learning activities and organise them around the selected themes and the resources.	
	Please share how many themes do you cover in each year? Mangaki ama themes eniwenzayo ngonyaka?	
	Where and how do you get the teaching and play resources that you integrate into the themes? Ngabe nizithaphi izinsiza kufundisa enizididiyela kuma themes eniwasebenzisayo?	

<p>2.What are the ECCE teachers experiences in using the NCF for the execution of teaching and learning activities that are integrated in the ECCE rural centres?</p>	<p>Please share the challenges of teaching and play resources in your ECCE centre. Iziphi izingqinamba enibhekana nazo uma nihlela izinsiza kufundisa kwi ECCE centre yenu?</p>	
	<p>Please share other challenges that you encounter when using the NCF to plan young children activities? Ake nibeke nje ezinye izingqinamba enibhekana nazo uma nisebenzisa iNCF ukuhlelela ukufundisa abantwana abancane.</p>	
	<p>Is there any support of teaching and play resources that you get? Ngakube kukhona yini usizo lwezinsiza kufundisa enilutholayo?</p>	
	<p>Except the examples of teaching and learning activities provided, what other guidance provided in the NCF to assist the planning process. Ngabe ikuphi okunye enikuthola kwi NCF bese nikusebenzisa ngesikhathi nehlelela ukufundisa?</p>	
<p>3.To what extent does ECCE teachers reflect new roles after using the National Curriculum Framework for the planning of the integrated teaching and learning activities for young children?</p>	<p>What is new knowledge you gained after using the NCF to plan the activities that are integrated? Ngakube ikuphi okusha enikufundile emuva kokufika kwe NCF eniyisebenzisa ukuhlelela ukufunda nokufundisa okuxhumene?</p>	
	<p>Please share new roles that each one of you play after learning to use the NCF</p>	

	<p>for the planning of teaching and learning activities that are integrated? Ngakube iyiphi indima omunye nomunye ayidlalayo emuva kokufunda ukusebenzisa iNCF ukuhlelela ukufunda nokufundisa?</p>	
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## APPENDIX J: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS GUIDE

<b>PERSONAL DOCUMENTS</b>	<b>ANALYSIS</b>
Theme book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Themes</li> <li>▪ Teaching and learning activities</li> </ul>
Daily programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Days of the week</li> <li>▪ Teaching times</li> <li>▪ Teaching and learning activities</li> </ul>
Lesson planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Theme</li> <li>▪ Objectives of the lesson</li> <li>▪ Resources</li> <li>▪ Teaching and learning activities</li> <li>▪ Assessment</li> <li>▪ Reflection</li> </ul>
Assessment book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Topics for assessment</li> <li>▪ Individual or group of children assessed</li> <li>▪ Final reports</li> </ul>
<b>PUBLIC DOCUMENT</b>	<b>ANALYSIS</b>
National Curriculum Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The objectives of the framework</li> <li>▪ Examples of teaching and learning activities</li> <li>▪ Guidelines for assessment</li> <li>▪ Appropriate for the age</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX K: THEME BOOK

THE THEME PROGRAMME			
<b>THEME ONE - "ME"</b>			
Part 1 Pg. 10	"Me"	Our Gardens	Sense of Smell.
Part 2 Pg. 25	Caring for Myself.	Healthy Food.	Sense of Taste.
<b>THEME TWO - "My Home and Family"</b>			
Part 1 Pg. 36	My Home.	Trees and Wood.	Sense of Touch.
Part 2 Pg. 47	My Family.	Growing Things.	Sense of Sight.
<b>THEME THREE - "My Town &amp; Community"</b>			
Part 1. Pg. 60	Doctor/Nurse/Hospital.	Red in Nature.	Mass.
Part 2. Pg. 67	Dentist & Teeth.	White in Nature.	Shape - Rectangle.
<b>THEME FOUR - "Water"</b>			
Part 1. Pg. 74	The Water Cycle.	Water-loving Creatures.	Floating/Sinking.
Part 2. Pg. 83	Uses of Water.	All Living Things need Water.	Wet/Dry.
<b>THEME FIVE - "Winter &amp; Fire"</b>			
Part 1. Pg. 94	Winter.	Sheep & Wool.	Hot & Cold.
Part 2. Pg. 105	Fire & Firefighters	Burning changes things.	Fire Colours.

## APPENDIX L: LESSON PLAN TEMPLATE

NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK (NCF)  
WEEKLY PLANNER 2016

TOPIC: \_\_\_\_\_

ELDA'S: \_\_\_\_\_

AIM: \_\_\_\_\_

DEVELOPMENTAL GUIDELINES: \_\_\_\_\_

AGE CATEGORY: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Day	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Activity					
Individual Choice Indoor					
Toilet Routine & Wash					
Out Door Activity					

Music /Songs & Rhymes					
Design Activity					
Story Telling					
Resources					
Assessment					
Watch Points					
Reflection					
Remedial					

**APPENDIX M: PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK**



## APPENDIX N: TURNITIN REPORT

The screenshot displays the Turnitin interface. At the top, the document title is 'THE INTEGRATED PLANNING OF TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN USING FRAMEWORK IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION RURAL CENTRES'. Below this, 'CHAPTER ONE AN ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY' is shown. A highlighted sentence reads: 'Teachers are adult learners and their development is a form of adult education to bring about change in the teaching practice and the improvements in children learning (Gregson & Starke, 2007)'. The 'Match Overview' panel on the right shows a total match rate of 1% and a list of seven submitted papers, each with a match rate of 1% or less. The bottom of the interface includes a word count of 69363 and a 'High Resolution' toggle.

feedback studio Cynthia Zanele Zama THE INTEGRATED PLANNING OF TEACHING AND ... /100 1 of 3

Match Overview

1%

1 Submitted to University... Student Paper 1% >

2 Submitted to Embury I... Student Paper <1% >

3 Submitted to University... Student Paper <1% >

4 Submitted to University... Student Paper <1% >

5 Submitted to Mount K... Student Paper <1% >

6 Submitted to University... Student Paper <1% >

7 Submitted to Merrin U... Student Paper <1% >

THE INTEGRATED PLANNING OF TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES  
FOR YOUNG CHILDREN USING FRAMEWORK IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE  
AND EDUCATION RURAL CENTRES

CHAPTER ONE  
AN ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

Teachers are adult learners and their development is a form of adult education to  
bring about change in the teaching practice and the improvements in children  
learning (Gregson & Starke, 2007).

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is the orientation of the research study, outline the aims to achieve the objectives.

1 of 206 Word Count: 69363 Test-Only Report High Resolution On 1451

## APPENDIX O: LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATE

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SARS Income Tax No. 9249355208; CC Founding Statement No. CK94/16841/23 SARS; Tax Clearance Certificate No. 1994/016841/23  
SACE REGISTRATION NUMBER: N.D. COERTZE – 1082433 (2003)

### DECLARATION OF PROOF-READING

#### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I, Nicolina D. Coertze, declare that I meticulously perused the manuscript referred to below for language editing purposes. I identified and corrected linguistic and stylistic inaccuracies to the best of my knowledge and ability. Using the *Word Tracking* system, I kept track of any changes that I made for consideration and review by the author. I declare that I adhered to the general principles that guide the work of a language editor and that I remained within my brief as had been agreed with the author of the manuscript.

#### TITLE

INTEGRATED PLANNING OF ACTIVITIES USING THE NATIONAL  
CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION  
RURAL CENTRES

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<b>REFERENCING STYLE</b>	APA

Respectfully submitted on: 26 August 2021



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