EXPLORING THE VALUE OF AN EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIP WITHIN A MULTILINGUAL PRE-SCHOOL SETTING

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Anneliese Maritz

ORCiD: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8759-7521

Supervisor

PROFESSOR JACQUELINE AKHURST

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Abstract

This modest research project was situated in a multilingual Early Childhood Development (ECD) setting in the Eastern Cape (EC) province of South Africa. In the context of high levels of poverty and unemployment in the EC, issues such as under-funding, the nature of the training of practitioners, translating the importance of learning through play into practice, difficulties dealing with diverse cultural practices and the use of multiple languages, all impact ECD provision. Research has shown that parental involvement and creating parent-school partnerships can assist children to progress at school. The overall objectives of this project were to explore how a team in an ECD centre might communicate more effectively with parents and how early stimulation practices in home and school might benefit the child's development.

The theoretical framework draws upon Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural historical theory, Bernstein's (1971) elaborated and restricted language codes and Bourdieu's (1977) concepts of social reproduction. A research project in the Netherlands *Thuis in School*, used an education partnership approach (Iliás et al., 2019). They developed a manual that was adapted for our local context by drawing from the theories mentioned, and to counter the dominant approaches where parenting programs have often been offered from a deficit, narrow perspective.

Action Research guided the interventionist approach to workshop sessions, to enable mutual capacity-building of parents and practitioners. To ensure informed consent, participants' first languages were used. High risk factors related to photographs and videos of participating parents and minor children were successfully addressed. Pre- and post-interviews and workshop data were analysed using template analysis, within a constructivist paradigm.

Findings include vignettes to introduce the contexts and parents' ideas prior to the sessions. Then, sessions are summarised as action cycles, with key participants' responses. Finally, post-session evaluations highlight the topics the parents found most meaningful; and parents' and practitioner accounts of changes in practices. This research illustrates ways that educational partnership elements can influence practice and policy, to improve home and school environments for the benefit of children.

KEYWORDS: Parents, practitioners, participation, communication, pre-school

Declaration

I, Anneliese Maritz née Pierskalla, declare that this research is a result of my own work, except where otherwise stated. I have given the full acknowledgement of the sources referred to in the text. This study has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any university.

This thesis has been formatted according to the APA 7th Edition referencing technique.

Anneliese Maritz

13 June 2022

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Quotations

"When parents and teachers collaborate on behalf of children, they **create windows of light** for the generations that follow" Strawhun et al. (2014, p. 3).

We need to begin with the firm belief that all parents are interested in the development and progress of their children (Whalley, 2007).

"Because this is my thing – I know my child better than anybody else in this school…" Trina, mother, and advocate (McKenna & Millen, 2013, p. 10).

"Don't assume that low income means low intelligence or low caring. I raise my children to the best of my ability…" Latisha, mother, and advocate (McKenna & Millen, 2013, p.10).

"Giving children a healthy start in life, no matter where they are born or the circumstances of their birth, is the moral obligation of every one of us".

Nelson Mandela, April 2002

"The stability of cohesiveness of societies largely rests on the strength of the family".

Ban Ki Moon, 2018

"The real wealth of a nation is its people. And the purpose of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy, and creative lives. This simple but powerful truth is too often forgotten in the pursuit of material and financial wealth"

Mahbub ul Haq (Nussbaum, 2009)

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List of Abbreviations

DBE:	Department of Basic Education
DoE:	Department of Education
DoW:	Department of Welfare
DSD:	Department of Social Development
ECD:	Early Childhood Development
ICDP Trust:	The Integrated Community Development Programme Trust
LITASA:	Literacy Association of South Africa
LMICs:	Low-income and middle-income countries
LRD:	Little Red Dragon
MDG:	Millennium Development Goals
NCF:	National Curriculum Framework
NDP:	National Development Plan
NGOs:	Non-Governmental Organisations sometimes in literature referred to NPOs, meaning Non-Profit Organisations.
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
RSA:	Republic of South Africa
SA:	South Africa
SDG:	Sustainable Development Goals
SLC:	School Learning Community
SSLPs:	Sure Start Local Programmes
UK:	United Kingdom
UN:	United Nations
UNICEF:	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USA:	United States of America
WHO:	World Health Organisation

Chapter 1: Introduction and Orientation

Personal and Academic Motivation

I was blessed and privileged to have grown up in a loving stable home, which we often referred to as a "mishmash" home. My mother is Afrikaans and came from a small Karoo town now in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa (SA). My father was from Germany. My mother spoke Afrikaans to my younger brother and I; my father spoke German to us, and my parents spoke English to each other. My mother attended the Dutch Reformed church, and my father was Roman Catholic. These two religious denominations were diametrically opposed to certain aspects of theology and practice. Thus, getting married in SA in the early 1960's from these specific two religious denominations was unheard of. I therefore grew up with different languages, religions, cultural influences, senses of humour and this was all in the era of *Apartheid.* I can never thank my mother enough for constantly reminding us that all people are equal and that no one should be treated differently because of culture, class, race or religion and that God loved us all.

Furthering my studies after completing my school career was non-negotiable, as far as my parents were concerned. They saved my mother's monthly earnings diligently to ensure that my brother and I could study further. I enrolled at the University of Stellenbosch to pursue a music career and after two weeks switched to the field of Social Work and have never regretted it. After a four-year social work degree and obtaining a bursary in my last year of studies from the Department of Welfare, I started my social work career at the Department of Welfare: House of Assembly, as it was then named. This was during *Apartheid*, where race segregation determined the racial group to which you were confined to provide services.

Starting my Social Work career, I began to realise the challenges faced by those children who grew up in dysfunctional homes and the effects of poverty and instability, aspects I was unaware of while growing up. I can remember being conscious of class differences, as most of our clothes were "hand me downs" from older cousins or handmade as my maternal grandmother was a seamstress. While there was little money for extras, we were privileged to never go hungry.

During and after 1994 when services were integrated and rendered to all ethnic groups in SA, I started comprehending the true meaning and depth of inequalities in our society; and the magnitude that people who live in under-resourced communities faced daily and continue to face daily, nearly 30 years later. It was during these political transition years that I became passionate about community development work, with a focus on capacity-building and

empowerment of people. I realised how tertiary education and a privileged position had enriched my life in my views, thoughts, perceptions, and earnings.

During 1986 – 2008, I worked in different national and international community development settings and lectured in Social Work and Community Development at Rhodes University during this period. I started working at the *Lebone* Centre in 2009 and managed it for the next twelve years. The *Lebone* Centre was established in 2005 by a trust, to be further explained on p.14. My son was attending pre-primary when I remember a profound day at the Centre. I would see young children walking past the Centre aimlessly, not being in a pre-school or being watched by an adult carer. Initially dealing with surface challenges and temporary solutions by offering once a week a reading club, I then started questioning the intergenerational cycle of poverty and low literacy skills evident in the surrounding area, at a deeper level. I became acutely aware just how deeply inequalities in our society lead to power and privilege for only a small percentage; and started questioning how the reproduction of social and cultural capital in schooling systems and institutions continuously contributed to preserve the said power of language and privilege of the middle and upper classes (Bourdieu, 1977).

Furthermore, in SA historically *Apartheid* and the "patriarchal view of knowledge has remained prevalent" (Akhurst & Odendaal, 2018, p. 249) in various contexts and settings within SA. In these systems of oppression, authority figures dissuade individual thinking and any challenges that might be opposed to the ruling system (Dovey, 1980). These patriarchal and oppressive systems and approaches:

> entrench power differentials, where the expert supposedly knows what the student needs, impacting on students being fearful to express themselves, finding it difficult then to formulate or to ask questions; becoming more passive rather than actively constructing their learning; and encouraging dependency rather than independent learning. (Akhurst & Odendaal, 2018, p. 249)

While Akhurst and Odendaal (2018) refer to challenges that university students are experiencing, the same can be said within the Early Childhood Development (ECD) sector and settings in SA, including parents, schools, and pre-schools especially from previously marginalised communities and currently under-served communities.

I therefore started exploring ways and methods of disrupting[1] this intergenerational poverty and the resultant low literacy levels. Through a friendship with the Van der Meer family, I was exposed to a research project *Thuis in School* that Levineke van der Meer, an educational

[1] Disruption in this proposed study is referred to in a positive light; referring to a discourse of possibilities in attempting to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and low levels of literacy.

psychologist in the Netherlands was involved with, together with the researcher, Marina Iliás, a PhD candidate at *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*. This research project included elements of an educational partnership that I wanted to explore further, to assess whether it would be suitable to adapt in a SA context or not. I wanted to move away from the traditional top-down method of parenting programs that appeared to me to be typically applied in SA, which by the nature of the wording implies that parents need assistance with parenting skills, implying some sort of deficit on their part. The methods, approaches, and intervention that I was seeking was to explore the social and cultural capital that young children were bringing into a pre-school and how this could be developed for the benefit of the child. I believe such interventions could become more effective, especially if they are appropriately informed by theory and research (Dawes & Donald, 2005).

An educational partnership approach seemed more suitable, with the focus on learning from each other in a setting where, through active engagement, discussions and sharing of information could lead to constructs possibly being modified. The hopes embedded in such approaches are that discussions might start disrupting intergenerational poverty and low literacy levels, but also influence aspects of the ECD provision.

My research project and preference for a constructivist interpretivist paradigm are therefore strongly influenced by the lenses through which I view the world and these constructs have been formed since childhood.

These continue to be shaped daily by the variety of people that cross my path within my work, personal and academic environments. My position of power, of having been the Centre manager over the past twelve years will be addressed in chapter four. In the next section, I strive to provide some background to the focus of this research, by referring briefly to relevant aspects of the context including post democracy legislation and policy documents and moving from international to local levels.

The Early Childhood Development (ECD) Context

International

First World countries such as the United States of America (USA) started investing in early childhood education since the 1960s. With the need for women to enter the labour force during World War ll the demand for nursery education increased in the United Kingdom (UK). The forming of the Pre-school Playgroup Movement in 1960 and the recommendations made in the Plowden Report in 1967 of the state's responsibility to build new nursery schools as an educational priority area started highlighting ECD in the UK (Nutbrown & Clough, 2014). The members of the United Nations (UN) adopted eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

in 2000. These goals highlighted development that was needed in low-income and middle-income countries (LMICs), (Black et al., 2017). Of the eight MDGs it was Goal 4 *To reduce child mortality* that highlighted internationally the pivotal role of early interventions. The timeframe of the MDGs were from 2000 to 2015. In 2015 the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were developed by the members of the UN as an addition to the MDGs and these extend to 2030 (Statistics South Africa, 2015). According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), these additional goals and subsequent research emphasised the value of ECD, which contributes towards the successful development of young children into adulthood (UNICEF SA, 2016).

National: South Africa (SA)

Prior to democracy the ECD sector in SA was fragmented, segregated and uncoordinated (Atmore, 2013). Since the transition to democracy in 1994, there have been legislation and policy document changes and ECD initiatives that have directly changed and improved lives of many young children. However, the ECD sector continues to face various challenges to provide services to address the needs of all the young children of this country (Atmore, 2013). Within the ECD phase there are targeted services relevant to four different stages: pregnancy; infancy (0 – 2 years), which in combination with the first in the past few years have been referred to in some literature as the First 1000 days; “pre-school (3 – 4 years); and Foundation Phase (5-9 years)” (Berry et al., 2013, p. 29).

SA legislation and ECD policies, post democracy, provide a framework for the ECD sector and services. For the purpose of this study relevant SA legislation and policy documents that refer to parental involvement within formal and informal structures of the ECD environment will briefly be discussed in chronological date order.

Relevant South African Documents

White Paper on Education and Training no. 196 of 1995

A “White Paper” describes “the first steps in policy formation” (Department of Education [DoE], 1995, p. 13) for a specific ministry of the Government. The purpose of this White Paper was to address the changes under a democratic government with an inclusivity principle of education for all SA citizens. Appropriate and relevant Education and Training are regarded as a basic human right where all citizens, “irrespective of race, class, gender, creed or age, have the opportunity to develop their capacities and potential, and make their full contribution to the society” (DoE, 1995, p. 21). This White Paper clearly states that “parents have most at stake in the education of their children, and this should be reflected in the composition of the governing body, where this is practically possible” (DoE, 1995, p. 70). Part 5 mentions

reconstruction and development in the school system, which includes reference to school ownership, governance, and finance.

Due to the pre-democracy era of *Apartheid* with different educational polices for different ethnic groups, stark inequalities existed and continue to exist within the SA school system. To address these disparities, the Education White Paper 2 (DoE, 1996), proposes an alternative framework. The structures and processes within this framework include "a new structure of school organisation and system of governance which will be workable as well as transformative" (DoE, 1996, p. 7). Regarding parental rights, the framework suggests that the role parents fulfil in school governance should be "exercised in the spirit of a partnership between the provincial education department and a local community" (DoE, 1996, p. 9). The Ministry of Education "concluded that because of the legal and financial decisions for which governing bodies would be responsible, elected representatives of parents and guardians should be in the majority on public school governing bodies" (DoE, 1996, p. 15). The school governing body (SGB) therefore became the formal structure where parents can be elected to serve. The main aim is to enable the school to become a place where effective learning and development of their children can take place (DoE, 1996). It was however explicitly mentioned that allowance needed to be made "for the fact that such capacities may be underdeveloped in many communities and therefore need to be built" (DoE, 1996, p. 13). However, the lack of capacity-building of parents to fulfil their functions effectively within a SGB has been highlighted in literature as a challenge (Singh et al., 2004). SA research about parental involvement in the education of their children will be further described in Chapter three.

The SA Constitution No. 108, 1996

The SA Constitution (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996) directly addressed the Rights of the Child, founded on values of "human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedom, non-racialism and non-sexism" (RSA, 1996, p. 3). The Constitution is the "supreme law of the Republic" (RSA, 1996, p. 3) and no other law or government action can supersede the provisions of this Constitution. Section 28 of the Constitution identifies specifics of the rights of every child (RSA, 1996).

White Paper for Social Welfare, 1997

The White Paper for Social Welfare included the "restructuring of services and social welfare programmes in both the public and private sectors" (Department of Welfare [DoW], 1997, p. 2) and included a section on ECD. The ECD section referred to the registration of ECD programs with, which was later incapsulated in the SA Children's Act no 38 of 2005. Specific mention is made of the primary target being "disadvantaged children under five years of age…"

as being the “least serviced…” and “the most vulnerable group” (DoW, 1997, p. 65). The terminology of “vulnerable” will be explained later in this chapter.

Education White Paper no. 5 on Early Childhood Education (ECE), 2001

White Paper 5 (DoE, 2001) was the outcome and response to a pilot project of the Reception Year, known as Grade R or the year before formal schooling starts in Grade one. The purpose of this White Paper is “to close the gap in our programmes for five-year olds, thus giving effect to our Constitution and Education White Paper 1 on Education and Training” (DoE, 2001, para.5). It further addresses challenges within ECD regarding children younger than four years.

Five key areas of ECD provision were identified that mostly addressed inequalities that continued to exist post democracy. Parents and families were recognised as being the primary caregivers for the care and upbringing of young children. However, due to inequalities especially within the economic environment of income distribution, the DoE “sees it as the state’s responsibility to subsidise and assure the quality of ECD services” (DoE, 2001, p. 20). As part of protecting the rights of the child, this was evidence of increasing “consensus among professional and increasingly among parents that the care of young children should provide them with suitable educational experiences” (DoE, 2001, p. 7). Reference is also made to include parents in an integrated, cross-sectoral approach and plans, but no explanation or detail is provided as to “how” parents would be included.

The Children’s Act No. 38, 2005

The purpose of this new Children’s Act no. 38, 2005 (RSA, date enacted 2006) and the Children’s Amendment Act, no. 41, 2007 (RSA, date enacted 2010) were to protect and safeguard all minor children and included chapters on ECD programs and registration. This Children’s Act makes provision for the enforcement of the Act regarding inspection and registration of child and youth care centres as partial care facilities, according to stipulated regulations. A person authorised by the Director-General, “may enter any child and youth care centre, partial care facility, shelter or drop-in centre or any place which on reasonable suspicion is being used as an unregistered” centre or facility (RSA, 2006, p. 156). The appointed person can “inspect that centre, facility, shelter and its management; or observe or interview any child or cause a child to be examined or assessed by a medical officer, social worker, psychologist or psychiatrist” (RSA, 2006, p. 156). This authorised person assesses whether the said centre or facility complies with the stipulated requirements (structural, safety, health, or any other concern) according to the standards and procedures of the Children’s Act no. 38, 2005 and any other related Act.

A certificate of partial care is issued by the provincial directive when all the stipulated regulations and requirements have been fulfilled and it specifies the number of children that can be accommodated at the mentioned site (RSA, 2006). Currently the implementation or regulatory body is part of the Governmental Department of Social Development (DSD), but in April 2022 oversight will migrate to the directive of Department of Basic Education (DBE). This decision was partly to promote a shift away from child protection, which is the function of the Children's Act (2005), to an emphasis on quality early learning and services, which falls within the function of DBE (DBE, 2021).

The National Development Plan 2030

The National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 was drafted by the National Planning Commission (NPC), which was adopted by the Cabinet in 2012. The NDP "aims to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030" (NPC, 2012, p. 24). The NDP proposed to make ECD "a top priority among the measures to improve the quality of education and long-term prospects of future generations" (NPC, 2012, p. 300). Additionally, this was to encourage innovation in home and community-based ECD interventions that included a primary focus on the holistic development of young children and their families while offering comprehensive support. The State was identified as being responsible to deliver comprehensive ECD services to vulnerable families (NPC, 2012).

National Integrated Early Childhood Development (ECD) Policy, 2015

Subsequent to the prioritisation of ECD within the NDP, the National Integrated ECD Policy followed in 2015. This ECD policy is "the first in the history" of SA (Department of Social Development [DSD], 2015, p. 7). It was prompted by "overwhelming scientific evidence…" of the "tremendous importance of the early years for human development and to the need for investing resources to support and promote optimal child development from conception" (DSD, 2015, p. 8). The ECD Policy is divided into short-term (by 2017), medium-term (by 2024) and long-term (by 2030) goals. The policy stipulated that it was the government's responsibility to ensure a comprehensive ECD program included crucial components that needed urgent attention. These essential components were identified as:

- Health care and nutrition programmes
- Social protection programmes
- Parent support programmes
- Opportunities for learning
- National public early childhood development communications
- Water, sanitation, refuse removal and energy sources

- Food security (DSD, 2015, pp. 8-9).

Three objectives were articulated as part of the parent support program component, which mostly included the provision of accurate and factual information:

1. To provide parents and/or primary caregivers with the information, skills and understanding necessary to support the optimal development of their infants and young children in healthy and stimulating home environments;
2. To promote positive parents and early learning practices, including play and story-telling, and avoid the use of corporal punishment as a measure of discipline; and
3. To provide parents with specialised help to address particular challenges facing them or their child which impact on the child's early development, such as domestic violence, mental health problems, substance abuse, disability, and/or abuse or neglect. (DSD, 2015, p. 58)

The component of opportunities for learning includes multiple services and providers, but most importantly includes the home environment as one of the settings where the child's language and other areas of learning and development can be stimulated (DSD, 2015). As a "first in SA history" this policy provides essential components for the provision of an integrated comprehensive ECD service.

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for children from birth to four, 2015

The NCF "provides guidance for those developing programmes and working with babies, toddlers and young children from birth to age four" (DBE, 2015, p. 1). These adults include parents and caregivers, ECD practitioners, educators, and support staff. The NCF has multiple purposes, but the following are particularly relevant:

- promote young children's experiences of socially and culturally sensitive environments where attention is paid to inclusive, equitable and democratic practices;
- recognise the importance of the local context and indigenous resources for early learning and therefore provide a supportive structure for adults which would encourage and enable them to create, build and to develop curriculum to suit the needs and interest of children, families, neighbourhoods and communities;
- develop an asset-based approach when supporting adults who care for and educate young children. (DBE, 2015, p. 4)

Regarding further parental involvement in the NCF document, there is reference to assessments, during which "each child has at least two experiences:

- the home experience which is very important and
- the experiences in an ECD programme, whether is home-based or centre-based" (DBE, 2015, p. 73).

Each child has their own unique contextual experiences and therefore during assessments ECD practitioners need to ensure that "these two sets of experiences link together to form a seamless transition for each child between home and school" (DBE, 2015, p. 73). This is only possible when the practitioner works closely with the parents or caregivers of the child.

Project for Inclusive Early Childhood Care & Development (PIECCE), 2017

PIECCE was a collaborative multisectoral program development effort at national level, to develop an Early Childhood Care & Development (ECCE) 0-4 years olds Diploma/Degree (Harrison, 2017). The collaboration focused on identifying training needs and understanding how quality training and curriculum development could be achieved in ECD. With regards to teaching and learning, some findings identified that practitioners: understood the importance of learning through play but did not know how to use it in practice; sometimes found it difficult to deal with cultural practices; were also challenged by the use of multiple languages, which resulted in code-switching in the classroom to enable children to understand (Harrison, 2017, p. 118).

Practitioners acknowledged that parental involvement was important but mentioned that they found it difficult to communicate with parents about their child's development. Within the ECD environment, Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) have mostly followed a parent program strategy that typically includes the provision of information regarding the school as a unit and how this plays a role in the lives of their children. In a survey conducted with staff representing Higher Education training institutions, it is alarming to hear that 67% responded they "did not consider a parent programme to be an important aspect of their teacher training" (Harrison, 2017, p. 119).

Revised White Paper on Families in SA, 2021

The original White Paper on Families was published in 2013, but it has recently been revised, since activists and academic critics raised concerns regarding the narrow view presented of family life in SA. This revised White Paper includes an integrated consultative process of various stakeholders and gives an updated account of "the contemporary situation of families in SA" (DSD, 2021, p. 6). It is the family's responsibility to care for individuals but given the multi-layered and multifaceted levels of historic and current challenges, many families are unable to fulfil their basic responsibilities. The COVID-19 pandemic has further burdened the load on millions of SA families due to a further increase of unemployment, loss of income,

individuals going hungry and the increase of stunting amongst children (Van der Berg et al., 2021). When families are unable to fulfil their duties the state "is the most recognised caretaker of individuals and hence it is assigned to support families in their caregiving tasks" (DSD, 2021, p. 1). Three strategic priorities are highlighted in this paper: to promote family well-being; family relationship strengthening; and treatment and support for vulnerable families. The paper is set out to promote family well-being and strong family relationships and provides guidelines for policy implementation. Regarding vulnerable families, specific interventions are to "support families to manage particularly negative situations such as substance abuse, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse, neglect, and violence" (DSD, 2021, p. 29). The role of the state is clearly outlined in this paper regarding the functions and responsibilities it needs to fulfil, as the recognised caretaker of individuals when families are unable to perform them.

The above legislative and policy documents provide the ECD field with a comprehensive framework, that remains relatively new in the SA context. There are references to parents, families, and community members but much of the focus is on the formal structure of School Governing Bodies (SGBs), including the election of parent and community representation. There appear to be minimal guidelines of different cultural communication strategies that practitioners and educators might implement, to guide the development of building meaningful relationships with parents that will benefit their child's educational progress. Limited guidance is provided about ways that parents can be involved in their child's development while in the age group 0-4 years or while attending formal schooling.

The Location of this Research

Provincial: Eastern Cape Province

The Eastern Cape (EC) Province is one of the nine SA national provinces and the second largest. It incorporates two cities on the coastline and inland extends into a vast rural area, which in totality covers an area of close to 169 000 square meters; an area larger than the Netherlands, Belgium and Denmark combined (Hamann & Tuinder, 2012). *Apartheid* created homelands such as the Transkei and Ciskei, which were both incorporated back into the EC after 1994. The legacy of homelands limited educational, economic, and infrastructural development (Hamann & Tuinder, 2012). This resulted in:

> spatial dualities and inequalities within the Eastern Cape Province, such as urban industrial areas versus marginal rural areas (often locked into dependence on social grants and remittances from migrant labour), and the well-developed commercial farming sector contrasted with struggling subsistence farming. (Hamann & Tuinder, 2012, p. 11)

The vast extent of the EC together with challenges of access to rural areas, mostly only by vehicles with high ground clearance, often contributes to service delivery challenges. Due to the legacy of *Apartheid*, the continued limited-service provision and corruption and opportunities for employment, the majority of children in the EC are living in previously disadvantaged communities (Hamann & Tuinder, 2012).

According to Pepper (2017), "22 million of South Africa's 56 million people are living in poverty, with around 3.9 million living in poverty in the Eastern Cape" (p.2). Home circumstances often include at least one, but mostly a combination of the following challenges: extreme poverty and severe child neglect, alcohol and or drug abuse, domestic violence, extremely low literacy and educational levels and limited employment opportunities (Hall et al., 2018). According to Bloch (2009), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) noted that close to 40% of children in the Eastern Cape sometimes or always go hungry. These children often arrive at school in no condition to learn not just due to hunger, but also due to profound socio-emotional burdens as described above. In a recent survey, Van der Berg et al. (2021), highlight the disastrous effect that the three waves of COVID-19 had on food insecurity[2] in households. According to the authors, "hunger is just one manifestation of poor nutrition. It is often the more visible and also one of the most acute forms of nutritional deficiencies" (p. 3), which often results in stunting[3]. Stunted growth in children is caused by a combination of factors, but mostly include malnutrition and poor sanitation. A survey conducted in 2016, indicated that 27% of SA children below 5 years are stunted. The increase of food insecurity during waves 1, 2 and 3 of COVID-19 with increased child and household hunger to around 30%. Child hunger is "likely to contribute to increased malnutrition in children in SA, and further to higher rates of stunting" (Van der Berg et al., 2021, p. 9).

Local: Makhanda

Makhanda is a city with an approximate population of 70 000 people (Pepper, 2017). Previously it was known as Grahamstown and is situated in the EC, slightly inland and almost midway between the two cities of East London and Gqeberha (previously known as Port Elizabeth). Makhanda is situated in the Makana municipality, which falls in the Sarah Baartman district. It is estimated that approximately 40% of the Makana population lives in

[2] Includes indicators of hunger and a lack of money to buy food.
[3] Stunting is the impaired growth and development that children experience from poor nutrition, repeated infection, and inadequate psychosocial stimulation. Children are defined as stunted if their height-for-age is more than two standard deviations below the World Health Organisation (WHO) Child Growth Standards median (WHO 2020).

poverty (Pepper, 2017), an estimate prior to the pandemic. The two main township[4] areas, Joza and Scott's Farm are located in Makhanda East. Joza is the main area where most Black Africans reside and is made up by approximately 10 Extensions[5]: areas with a mix of housing that includes government-provided brick houses; and informal dwellings that are built with wood and corrugated iron sheets or off-cuts. The Scott's Farm area is predominantly an area populated by people of mixed race, known in SA as "Coloured[6]" people, and includes the areas called Ghost Town, Sun City, Hooggenoeg and Vergenoeg, with a similar mix of housing as described above. These facts are drawn from a needs assessment survey (Pepper, 2017), completed with 340 respondents from Makhanda East with the majority identifying: unemployment, lack of money (which can be linked to poverty, poor or no quality housing and water), crime and violence, no or poor- quality education, and drug abuse as the most challenging factors they faced. In the areas referred to, the predominant home languages are isiXhosa (in Joza) or Afrikaans (in Scott's Farm), whereas in the broader city area English is widely spoken; thus the municipality is a multi-lingual environment.

After 1994, municipal service delivery and budgets were transferred from national to local level and therefore managed locally. The Makana local municipality is responsible for service delivery in Makhanda and recently has been ineffective in delivering essential services to the residents of the above-mentioned township areas. The municipality has been under receivership since 2017 due to a complete breakdown of municipal service delivery, not providing safe and reliable water, and not repairing inadequate roads with substantial potholes[7] (Pepper, 2017). Judgement by the High Court was passed on 14 January 2020, finding Makana Local Municipality in breach of the Constitution, as it failed to deliver these mentioned services and ruled that the Council must dissolve. The Council argued that they had reasonable grounds to appeal the dissolution (Makana Municipality, 2020). While the legal battle continues, residents in Makhanda currently only have running tap water every second day and with the added burden of COVID-19, the shortage of basic service delivery such as water and refuse collection, places unsurmountable challenges and hardships on local residents, especially in Makhanda East.

Parents in Makhanda often enrol their children in either a perceived or better functioning school located closer to the city centre, than the schools in the local township. These better

[4] Refers to the often underdeveloped racially segregated urban areas that, from the late 19th century until the end of apartheid, were reserved for people categorised as Africans, Coloureds, or Indians (the nomenclature of the Apartheid government)'.
[5] A township often has adjoining sections, with the same name as the original township, but with a numbered "Extension".
[6] Whilst in other countries this term might be seen as derogatory, it is still in everyday use in SA, not only because of the racial categories designated by the pre-1994 government, but also chosen as a form of identify by people of mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds.
[7] A pot-shaped hole in a road surface

functioning schools are often conducted in a language different to the child's language spoken at home. Homework is then expected to be completed in the classroom language for example Afrikaans, while the child and parents are mainly isiXhosa-speaking. Given this situation, the drive by the *Lebone* centre was to offer a fully multilingual Little Red Dragon (LRD) pre-school, to allow pre-schoolers to be exposed to all three languages in a caring learning environment; as well as enabling them to adapt more easily should they be enrolled in a class where the spoken word is different to their first language. First language in this research context will refer to the dominant language that the main parent or caregiver speaks in the home and when a mix happens, the languages being referred to will be highlighted.

The Integrated Community Development Programme Trust

The Integrated Community Development Programme (ICDP) Trust is a registered NPO issued with a registration number: 043-669, which was established in 2005 in Makhanda. This resulted from a partnership with Kingswood College, an Independent School in the same geographical area. Although it originated from Kingswood College, the ICDP Trust operates as an independent NPO entity. The main objective of the Trust is to serve and partner with previously and current disadvantaged communities through the *Lebone* centre, which is at present the Trust's main vehicle of operation. The *Lebone* centre is the focus of this study.

The Lebone Centre

The *Lebone* centre (hereafter referred to as the "Centre") works mostly in Wards 3 and 4 of Makhanda, which is the Scott's farm area and other earlier noted communities. The organisational goal is to provide educational support to families and children aged 0 – 9 years, through an innovative *Pipeline Program*. There are various projects within the *Pipeline Program* that range from the #Every Baby Matters (First 1000 days), the Multilingual Storytellers and LRD pre-school, to an aftercare and enrichment program for Foundation Phase (Grade 1, 2 & 3) learners who attend on weekdays, after going to school. If children progress successfully from one grade to another in SA, they are usually around 9 years old when in Grade 3. The Centre's overall strategic goal is that learners entering the Intermediate Phase, that is Grade 4 of schooling, should be at their appropriate level of development, and confidently read for meaning. The Centre has built strong relationships in the surrounding communities and believes in a stakeholder approach that sees partnering with parents, caregivers, teachers, schools, other Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and educational institutions such as Rhodes University, as essential to support young children's development, also ensuring organisational and human resource sustainability.

The socio-economic realities of the surrounding largely Coloured, and mostly Afrikaans-speaking community are the burdens of high unemployment and poverty (Pepper, 2017, pp. 11-12). According to Grantham-McGregor et al. (2007) these are regarded as high-risk factors that impact on children's development and their school performance. The motto of the Centre is *because children matter* with the focus on the ECD phase. The aim is to partner with parents, to provide learning experiences for children between 0-9 years that will contribute to developing confident and able learners. This focus is supported by The Integrated ECD Policy (DSD, 2015), together with national literature Berry et al. (2013) and international literature (e.g., Richter et al., 2017) highlighting the essence of partnering with parents. Thus, a strategic decision was taken (The ICDP Trust, 2019) on developing relationships and partnerships with parents. The focus was affirmed as to provide educational support for young children, together with access to educational resources, to enrich learning environments at home and at the Centre through a *Pipeline Program*.

The Centre's *Pipeline Program* was developed during 2018 and 2019 and provides a range of projects that create a "pipeline" of support for children living and attending school in disadvantaged areas[8] and non-fee-paying schools[9]. The *Pipeline Program* covers two early phases within the child's lifespan: ECD or 0-5 years and the Foundation Phase for learners aged 6-9 years. Within these two phases the Centre provides various on-and off-site projects.

The development of projects within the Centre's *Pipeline Program* is guided by Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory focusing on a play-based curriculum and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. The person who has the closest relationship with the child forms a microsystem, which is the most influential and where direct contact and lasting relationships hope to be developed. The Centre staff have limited contact hours during the week with the children, but the child's parent/caregiver has far more opportunity and time to positively influence their lives, hence the investment in building partnerships with parents.

The Multilingual Little Red Dragon (LRD) Pre-school

The LRD pre-school is one of the Centre's on-site projects and accommodates 28 children from both the Joza and Scott's farm areas. Parents complete an application form to enrol their child. The main criterion for selection is the age of the child, which should be the year before Grade R. The LRD charges school fees but provides bursaries for parents who are mostly

[8] Previously disadvantaged and marginalized people of various ethnic groups living in designated community areas as stipulated by *Apartheid.* Most of these areas continue to be disadvantaged and under-resourced regarding infrastructure with limited economic possibilities.

[9] There are mostly three different school systems in SA; Independent or private schools, "Model C" schools that are mostly situated in largely white suburban areas where quality education is received, and parents pay school fees; non-fee-paying schools are mostly situated in townships and under *Apartheid* were under-resourced and designated for black pupils

dependent on social grants as their only income. The number of bursaries per year, which varies between two to six, depend on the funding that has been secured. Being one of the projects of the Centre allows the pre-school to function within an organisational environment with management and administrative support. The ECD Co-ordinator and the practitioners have weekly team meetings to discuss themes, lessons, the integration of play-based learning, challenges, and possible solutions. Communication with parents is through a combination of formal letters, verbal communication and generally quarterly meetings are held with parents to discuss relevant topics, such as healthy snacks, the importance of sufficient sleep and the value of reading stories to young children.

Within the LRD pre-school, multilingualism refers to the three local languages that are spoken including isiXhosa, Afrikaans, and English, which are used for instruction and communication with pre-schoolers. Where possible written communication or forms are available in all three languages. To accommodate multilingualism there are two qualified ECD practitioners in the classroom. One practitioner is isiXhosa-speaking, and the other is Afrikaans-speaking, while both translate into English.

Background to the Problem

There is no longer a dispute, but rather a "broad consensus in research and policy that early childhood is important in laying the foundation for later development" (Boyden et al., 2019, p. 49). Furthermore, that "growing up in poverty generally has a deleterious and long-term impact on children's wellbeing and development" (Boyden et al., 2019, p. 49). According to UNICEF (2015), 171 million people could possibly be lifted out of poverty if all children in "low-income countries left school with basic reading skills" (p. 5). The crucial necessity of early stimulation and the delivery of integrated services during the early development years from birth to five years are highlighted in various literature sources for example, Berry et al. (2013). These authors further recommend that broad categories of nutritional support, social services, maternal and child health services, support for primary caregivers and stimulation for early learning be included in this integrated ECD service package. The failure of millions of young children, "to fulfil their developmental potential and achieve satisfactory educational levels plays an important part in the intergenerational transmission of poverty" (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007, p. 60). Millions of children's healthy growth and development in LMICs, which include SA, are affected by multi-layered challenges, some caused through under-nutrition and limited access to resources and services (Boyden et al., 2019).

Research further supports the value of intervening early, since these early years are crucial to the child's social, emotional, cognitive, and intellectual development for example in Ashley-Cooper et al. (2019). Berry et al. (2013) argues that increasing access to an integrated ECD

service package for 0–4-year-olds will benefit the most vulnerable children in SA. It is accepted that parents are the child's first educator until they enter pre-school or school, whereafter it becomes a partnership between the parent, child, and school. Once young children start attending pre-schools, their world is further extended, which includes additional spheres of influence. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Model, schools are one of the child's microsystems, where activities and interactions directly impact their development. When teachers, parents, children, and community partners work together in the meso-system as a school learning community "to improve the school and enhance students' learning opportunities" (Epstein & Salinas, 2004, p. 12), the interconnections and networking opportunities are strengthened within the micro and meso-systems.

The South African socioeconomic context is varied: in some cases, there are extreme differences in a mix of first and third world features, with reports that the country has the highest inequality rate globally, which also leads to exclusion (The World Bank, 2018). The latest OECD (2020) reports that "the COVID-19 outbreak is worsening an already fragile economic outlook" (p.10). SA's child support grant, which is "one of the largest unconditional cash transfer programmes for children in the world…" (OECD, 2020) dominates "the income profile of many poor households, accounting for as much as 71% of total household income for the poorest 20% of the population" (pp. 10-11). Furthermore, the report notes that the pandemic is "hitting employment, threatening livelihoods of millions of individuals and affecting social achievements of government policies" (OECD, 2020, p. 11). The complexities of poverty and inequality and consequences thereof, limited resources together with limited exposure to the kinds of language and literacy practices valued in schools, have an impact on scholastic achievement (Fleisch, 2008). Literature clearly indicates the high-risk influences multiple layers of poverty, environmental factors, psychosocial and biological factors on the developmental potential of the child (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007). This underlines the crucial importance of early integrated interventions, since the factors mentioned above directly affect and influence poor school performance as well as achievement of educational levels (Berry et al., 2013).

All the above factors feed into what has been called the South African education crisis, where SA performs "worse than many low-income African countries" (Spaull, 2013, p. 2). Crucial to literacy development at home is young children having access to a variety and choice of age-appropriate books. In research conducted across 27 countries, that included SA, Evans et al. (2010) claim that "having books in the home has a greater impact on children from the least educated families" (p. 17). They then assert the following in relation to children's access to books, "children growing up in homes with many books (minimum of 20) get 3 years more

schooling than children from bookless homes, independent of their parents' education, occupation, and class" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 1).

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2016, indicates that 78% of SA Grade 4 learners cannot read for meaning in any language (Howie et al., 2017). Overall SA achieved the "lowest results of the 50 participating countries" (Howie et al., 2017, p.169). While the rigour of some of the assessments used for the PIRLS 2016 report and interpretations of some of the findings are disputed by Gustafsson and Deliwe (2020), the results highlight the importance of the home environment. The report notes that the home environment is where early stimulation takes place; and the availability of reading resources and pre-school attendance as strong indicators of developing good readers (Howie et al., 2017). Recommendations made in the PIRLS 2016 report place emphasis on a national campaign for increased parental involvement in schools and learner activities (Howie et al., 2017). This should be a shared responsibility between schools, teachers, parents, learners, the broader community, and government departments to promote the importance of reading and the general value of this on the child's success in life. A further recommendation by these authors focused on a pre-primary campaign, that included parents and teachers, highlighting the critical role of early literacy activities at home. However, an evident challenge from the SA-based research of Singh et al. (2004) was that parents and teachers were dissatisfied with each other's involvement, as parents believed the teachers were responsible to teach their children.

As noted earlier, children from vulnerable and poverty-stricken families have a greater risk of cognitive challenges and performing more poorly at school (Fleisch, 2008). Cognitive neuroscientist Wolf (2007) explains the importance of both telling stories and reading to children; this "pre-wiring" needs to take place through the exposure to language and books over time in the early years. Studies of USA families with young children have shown a 32-million-word gap between middle to high- and working-class families. Young children from disadvantaged backgrounds therefore may start school with an immense word-gap disadvantage. Spaull and Kotze (2015) also reported this discrepancy with regards to maths, stating that:

> it was possible to estimate empirically and illustrate graphically the learning trajectories of wealthy and poor students in South Africa. Thus one can say that poor children in South Africa, who make up the majority, are starting behind and staying behind. (p. 26)

The above challenges have directly been observed at the LRD pre-school, an onsite ECD program where it has been realised that the children entering ECD start at a disadvantage.

Their verbal skills appear limited, some have never built a puzzle before or owned a story book. This does not imply that the pre-schoolers have limited cultural capital, but this is an indication of a multifaceted set of circumstances. Additionally, multilingualism contributes to the complex SA schooling system where children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds also come without prior exposure to what Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) refer to as "scholarly language" (p. 73). The latter favours middle to upper class children, since in their homes they have been exposed to language that is similar to the language in schools. A similar finding was noted in an USA study of Lee & Bowen (2006) that examined Bourdieu's concepts of inequality, in relation to race/ethnicity, poverty, and parent educational attainment. Their finding is consistent with the theory that the "parents from dominant groups, showed the strongest associations with achievement suggests the better fit of these parents' habitus to the field of education" (p. 213).

Parents and children from disadvantaged communities in SA continue to face a multitude of challenges. Current parents, who themselves were raised in vulnerable families, may have had little positive role modelling to influence the upbringing of their children and therefore "need to be supported in providing nurturing care and protection to their young children" (Britto et al., 2017, p. 91). Even at pre-school level, parents do not easily engage with ECD practitioners and may feel intimidated or that they lack language competence. The SA study referred to earlier by Singh et al. (2004) noted that 68% of the parents interviewed reported that they felt the schools "intimidated" them (p. 304). Furthermore, the recent lockdowns and restrictions as a result of COVID-19 "has turned South Africa's schooling crisis into a ticking time bomb…" with learning disruptions being felt "most acutely by the under-resourced schools" (Davis & O' Regan, 2021, p. 1).

Purpose and Relevance of this Research

The issues referred to above: the fundamental value of early stimulation; the role that parents fulfil as the child's first informal teachers; the challenges being experienced in South African education; and the positive outcomes of educational partnerships on a child's learning and development; could no longer be ignored by the Centre as the overseer of the LRD. Capacity-building and empowerment of parents within a relational approach thus became a strategic focus area at the Centre. The majority of the LRD learners attend the pre-school for one year before they start their formal schooling career in Grade R at a primary school. The aim of the research project evolved to explore the learning practices at homes and in the pre-school, through a program that included six contact sessions within a multilingual reflective research environment, where mutual exchanges of knowledge were planned to take place between parents, practitioners, and myself as the researcher and the ECD Co-ordinator.

Theoretically, this approach is situated within the field of Community Psychology, which supports interventionist research, building relationships and collaborative work during the research process (Visser, 2012), rather than doing research “on” people. This research focused on building partnerships aimed towards mutual capacity- building, hoping to improve early stimulation practices at home and at school, which would then benefit the development of the child to prepare them for formal schooling. The research furthermore aimed to explore the value of educational partnerships as a tool within a multilingual EC pre-school environment. The relevance of this research was that it ultimately hoped to make a modest contribution towards restitution in the sense that it hoped to lead towards addressing past inequalities in SA. The research questions to be outlined below, guided, and addressed the purpose and relevance of this research project.

Research Aim and Questions

The overarching research aim is to explore the learning practices at homes and in the pre-school, during six sessions within a multilingual reflective research environment, where mutual exchanges of knowledge will take place between parents, practitioners, and the researcher.

This aim was then divided into the following questions, to guide the data collection and analysis:

1. What are parents’ perceptions and experiences of their roles and responsibilities in preparing their children for formal schooling?

2. How might an educational partnership approach be utilized within the ECD space within a multilingual SA context?

3. In what ways does the implementation of a transformative interventionist approach contribute to mutual capacity-building between practitioners, parents, and the Centre?

The main aim of the above research questions was exploratory while implementing an interventionist approach, implying the need for a methodology that encouraged the mutual capacity-building to take place.

Research Approach

To answer the research questions, I was initially going to apply Engeström’s (2001) Expansive Learning Cycle but changed to a more open-ended Action Research (Mc Niff, 2002) methodology when it became clear that the problem was multi-faceted, and the process needed to be flexible. Engeström’s (2001) Expansive Learning Cycle is a collective process where participants “learn new forms of activity which are not yet there” (p.138) and therefore go beyond what is already known in the entire activity system. Action Research is a

methodology that is open ended and self-reflective, seeking transformative change (McNiff, 2002). Research participants were part of the implementation plan and process and identified the topics of interest to them, which guided the discussions within the six intervention sessions. These intervention sessions were named *iStoep Talk* sessions, which will be clarified further below.

The research participants included the parents who signed informed consent forms, one ECD pre-school practitioner, the Centre ECD Co-ordinator and an amaXhosa[10] translator. Due to the multilingual and mutual capacity-building aspects of the *iStoep Talk* sessions, the team of co-facilitators included the researcher, the ECD pre-school practitioner, the Centre ECD Co-ordinator and the amaXhosa translator. The Centre ECD Co-ordinator (referred to as the co-ordinator) represented the structures and policies of the Centre as a NPO and the pre-school's policies and procedures. The co-ordinator was also responsible for mentoring the two LRD practitioners. The Afrikaans and English-speaking LRD ECD practitioner gave her consent to participate and undertook to explain and share classroom practices during the *iStoep Talk* sessions (hereafter she is referred to as the practitioner). The amaXhosa translator (hereafter referred to as the translator) was trained as a social worker and was at the time enrolled for a Master's degree in psychology at Rhodes University. I fulfilled the role of researcher, administrator, facilitator and also translated between Afrikaans and English.

All co-facilitators were part of the implementation process by participating in the planning sessions, actual *iStoep Talk* intervention sessions and reflective sessions, which included decision-making towards improvements and changes. The planning sessions were held a day or two days prior to the session and the reflective session always took place the next morning after the session at 8:00. The format of the planning and reflective sessions will be further discussed in the design section of Chapter four. The discussions and individual contributions within the planning and reflective sessions will be reviewed in Chapter six, which contains a summary and reflection on the planning, actions, and observations of each session.

Given the history of colonization and *Apartheid*, the choice of research methods and awareness of aspects of social justice and decolonization are crucial when undertaking research in SA. Olivier (2020) agrees with Amiel's argument that "there is a need to foment the production of local knowledge and indigenous ways of knowing in order to foster adequate learning opportunities" (p.26). Using an educational partnership approach is an attempt to stimulate learning opportunities within an environment where relevant local knowledge and pre-school knowledge could be discussed and engaged in. The creation of an informal

[10] isiXhosa refers to the language and amaXhosa refers to the human being, the person who speaks isiXhosa.

environment for the *iStoep Talk* intervention sessions to take place in was crucial, which was underpinned by a constructivist paradigm.

This research approach therefore included a combination of the value-based underpinnings of social justice (addressing the legacy of non-parental involvement in supporting their children with their schooling careers) and mutual capacity-building hoping for changes in agency for parents and practitioners. The educational partnership approach is based on relationships within the micro and meso-systems that include family, school, and community, with the child's learning and development placed in the middle.

It was hoped that participants in this research would collaboratively gain agency (Engeström, 2001) to work together in preparing the pre-schoolers for their schooling careers.

Reasons for selecting an Educational Partnership approach

In the twelve years of working at the Centre, I have experienced that often the content of parenting programs with parents of disadvantaged communities follows a top-down approach implying a deficit, since parents are "told" how to parent with little engagement from them, during a mostly one-way communication. I was therefore seeking an approach or method that focused on strengths and relationships rather than deficits.

Through the friendship with the Van der Meer family, as noted earlier, the Centre and the *De Activiteit*[11] formed a partnership in 2017. It was through this partnership that I gained more insight into the *Thuis in School* research project that included seven primary schools in and around Amsterdam. Some of these schools had parents and children from refugee circumstances who were exposed to a minimum of two languages, their first language and secondly, Dutch, while other schools were not ethnically very diverse. This extensive research project included different elements, which will be described later, but my focus was on the notions of a school learning community and an educational partnership approach (Iliás et al., 2016). The latter research article focused on four out of the seven schools during year one of the research project. The other three schools implemented school learning communities in the second year. They focused on the value of equality (open communication), learning from each other (diversity) and reflection on practices within a school learning community (SLC) environment (Iliás et al., 2016).

Janssen-Vos & Weijers (2012) emphasize the necessity of "fostering teacher-parents contacts… we find interesting opportunities and potential in what is called 'educational

[11] A National Centre for Developmental Education, which provides training and in-service training for teachers in primary education in the Netherlands.

partnership'" (p.166). The educational partnership creates the space for parents and teachers to develop a relationship and to "create optimal conditions for children's development and learning in the context of school and family" (Janssen-Vos & Weijers, 2012, p.167). Hence, an environment of equality, striving to minimise my position of power; sharing of information and learning from each other was created, hoping to benefit the development of the learner.

During 2018 the Centre ran a small educational partnership pilot with LRD parents, one practitioner and the ECD Co-ordinator (this was not part of my research project). I presented a paper "Exploring the replication of a school learning community approach in a South African context" at the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA) Conference held in Budapest, Hungary between 28-31 August 2018. This small educational partnership pilot project, called *Kuier Saam*[12] was implemented with the Afrikaans-speaking LRD parents, whose children were bursary recipients. Prior to the advent of coffee shops, these conversations in SA often happened when friends and neighbours walked past your home and you would invite them in to sit on the veranda (in Afrikaans it translates to a *stoep*) and talk, while having a cup of coffee or tea. The name was intentionally chosen as an attempt to diminish the power differential that is often the result of naming projects "Parenting Programs". Such traditional labels represent a narrow view of partnerships, since the focus is on the parents whereas it should include parents, the school and community members, who share the responsibility for a child's learning and development (Feasey, 2017). Parents in the *Kuier Saam* sessions highlighted that they were unaware of the importance of informal learning at home and that the parent is the child's first teacher.

In the Centre's #Every Baby Matters (First 1000 days) project, parents are asked at what age they should start reading to their young child. The general answer was the age range between four and five years old. This research project therefore intended to expand on these ideas and to influence earlier parent reading within and outside an educational partnership, as a form of disruption to move away from the narrow traditional method of "Parenting Programs".

Definitions and Explanations

Historically Disadvantaged Persons (HDPs) and Vulnerability

According to the National Empowerment Fund in Mokoena (2006), HDPs means: "persons or categories of persons who, prior to the new democratic dispensation…" of 1994 were "disadvantaged by unfair discrimination on the basis of their race" (p. 10). Historically disadvantaged individuals (HDIs) refer to "black people that comprises Africans, Coloureds,

[12] Directly translated in English means "visit together". In Afrikaans it implies sitting and talking together with friends over a cup of coffee – in a manner of description a group of friends meeting at a coffee shop to catch up with each other.

and Indians …who were by design, socially, economically, educationally, and otherwise, underprivileged and deprived by the previous SA government's political history of white supremacy and inequitable racial treatment" (Mokoena, 2006, p. 11). These groups of people "collectively constitutes the previously/historically disadvantaged communities" (Mokoena, 2006, p. 11). HDPs and communities have mostly continued to be disadvantaged after the advent of democracy and therefore the terminology that will be used in this project will be "disadvantaged people or communities" as it includes HDPs and currently disadvantaged persons.

The vulnerable groups identified in SA are children, the youth, women, and older persons (Statistics South Africa, 2011). Within each vulnerable group there are multiple broad layers of difficult living conditions and the lack of quality of services that are considered. These are: "household characteristics and living arrangements; vulnerability to hunger; health; poverty and social grants; economic participation, education and finally housing and access to basic services" (Statistics South Africa, 2011, p. ii).

Reference in this project to "vulnerability" therefore refers to "heightened or increased exposure to risk as a result of the child's circumstances" (DBE, 2015, p. 79). Additionally, the terminology includes possible aspects of violence and forms of neglect or abuse. These conditions therefore contribute to children remaining multi-dimensionally poor, a result of intergenerational poverty.

Early Childhood Development

Depending on the country's preference or author, early childhood development (ECD) is at times interchangeably termed as early childhood education (ECE). The age of the ECD phase is also an element of contention, it either refers to the age group 0 - 5 years old or 0 - 9 years. Within this research project, the terminology of ECD (the preferred SA term) will be utilised as an "umbrella term that applies to the processes by which children from birth to at least nine years grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially" (DBE, 2015, p. 78).

First Language

The LRD pre-school is a fully multilingual pre-school including isiXhosa, Afrikaans, and English, which are the dominant languages spoken in Makhanda. The Centre subscribes to the value of the learner's first language, including whole language exposure. This includes providing multiple literacy activities in which children can participate to create meaning. Furthermore, it includes the emotional connection to the language of the associated culture and what the children bring with them, their "'lived experience', carries the prominence of

relationships and shared meaningful experiences" (Bloch, 2006, p. 12). These values have led to members of staff exploring ways to enhance the possibilities of this rich language exposure for children at the LRD.

The first language is easier to determine when one language is spoken in the household by one parent. However, when parents mix their languages, it makes it more difficult to identify the first language, for example when Afrikaans and English words are mixed in the same sentence. A mix of languages in South Africa often occurs when speaking two or three different languages, therefore often using words from different languages in the same sentence.

Pre-school and School

While there is a clear difference between the ages of children attending a pre-school and a school, these terminologies can at times be used interchangeably in the spoken word. In this specific research pre-school refers to a registered or unregistered partial care ECD facility that children can attend from infancy until school going age. Formal schooling at schools starts in Grade 1 although many primary schools also include Grade R (a year prior to Grade 1). The registration guidelines and the partial care certificate for pre-school ECD operations are currently issued by the DSD and it stipulates the age group of children according to the requirements that the facility is able to provide.

Pre-schoolers/learners/children/young children

As noted above pre-schoolers will refer to children between the ages of 3- to 5-years. As the LRD is situated within the community, the terminology "learners" will be applied to children who already attend Government-funded schools.

Child and children refer to all "babies, toddlers, and young children whatever their abilities, gender, background, language or culture" (DBE, 2015, p. ii).

A pre-school child or pre-schooler is a "child under six years of age not attending formal school" (DBE, 2015, p. 79).

Parent/primary caregiver/family

An invitation was extended to all LRD parents and caregivers of pre-schoolers who attended the LRD during 2019, to attend a Recruitment and Introductory session (this will be explained in detail in Chapter four) about this research project.

The parent participants who signed consent forms to participate in this research project were all biological parents of the pre-schoolers. The non-participating parents also received material, which will be explained in detail in Chapter four. Parents within this research context

refer to the primary caregiver of the child, which generally in South Africa indicates that "children are not necessarily cared for by a biological parent; relatives or other adults often assume parenting responsibilities for children whose biological parents have died, live elsewhere or who are not available to provide daily care" (Berry et al., 2021, footnote i). Phakeng (2018) noted that the 2017 Statistics South Africa's General Household survey indicated that "about 22% of South African children are not living with even one biological parent" (p. 7).

Family refers to the "individuals, who either by contract or agreement, choose to live together and provide care, nurturing and socialisation for one another" (DBE, 2015, p. 78).

iStoep *Talk*

In seeking for terminology that would be understandable in all three local languages meaning informal and relaxing conversations, while sharing information with each other, I remembered a conversation I once had with the Director of Child Welfare, who referred to the value of walking in the community and talking on the *stoep. Stoep* is a generally accepted and widely used Afrikaans word, by adding an "i" in front of the word it becomes an acceptable isiXhosa use of the word. As the focus was to be on the development of the child at home and at the pre-school, the exchange of information was done in a relaxed atmosphere at the Centre. Chairs were placed around a table; refreshments were available, and conversations took place around the specific topic that was selected by both parents and the practitioner. Hereafter the intervention sessions will be referred to as the *iStoep* sessions.

Non-profit Organisation (NPO) and Non-governmental Organisation (NGO)

In everyday language in SA, Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are often used interchangeably. These types of organisations are mostly concerned with developing and improving society or the individual. NGOs are "private, self-governing, voluntary organisations operating not for commercial purposes, but in the public interest, for the promotion of social welfare and development, religion, charity, education and research" (DoW, 1997 Glossary section). NGOs are however a form of NPO governed by the NPO Act and an NPO certificate is issued that allows operation.

Taxi

Refers to the local mode of transport, which is a minibus that can usually seat six to seven People and mostly transports children to school and back, as well as adults to work and back.

Thesis Outline

This introduction chapter introduces the reader to the research project and the relevance thereof within a South African, Eastern Cape context.

Chapter two outlines the theoretical framework starting with an overview of concepts used by Vygotsky, Bernstein, Bourdieu, and Community Psychology that are interwoven in this research project, highlighting the complexity of various elements that contribute towards the development of the young child.

Chapter three provides the reader with a summary of the early childhood development sector internationally and nationally with a specific focus on educational partnerships.

Chapter four describes the research design and program implementation of the *iStoep* intervention sessions.

Chapters five to seven present the findings, which include the participants' evaluation of the program.

Finally, chapter eight is a discussion and concluding summary of the findings in relation to the overall aim and research questions of this study.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

The motivation for the research project was seeking an understanding of the possible value of an educational partnership, in which to improve communication and collaboration with parents, for the benefit of their children's development. It draws ideas from various disciplines of community psychology, psychology, education, sociology, and linguistics. Since the project was situated across these disciplines, I broadened my understandings of Vygotsky's (1962; 1978) socio-cultural theory, Bernstein's (1971) sociolinguistic theory and Bourdieu's (1977) basis for a theory of symbolic power and social reproduction, all framed and applied within the field of community psychology. All three theorists started developing their theories in the 20th century and although Vygotsky was working in the field of psychology, their agreement of the influence of socio-cultural conditions, albeit from different angles, on the child's development provided a rich theoretical framework for my research project. The intention of this theoretical framework is therefore not to demonstrate critical responses to the selected theories, but rather to present a creation of interwoven fragments of their thoughts, notions and constructs that informed the intervention of the *iStoep* sessions, as intentional praxis. Furthermore, relevant notions were selected that focused on how we construct meaning in the world and what might influence these meaning-making constructs.

It was complex to try to do justice to Vygotsky (1962; 1978), Bernstein (1971) and Bourdieu (1977) who started to develop their theoretical notions during the turbulent times of the first half of the 20th century, with the latter two continuing until the end of the century. Their notions were developed against the backdrop of social, economic and political uncertainty and challenging times (including wars and recoveries from the resultant devastation) in Europe and Russia, which resonate with the oppression of many people, yet are very different from South Africa's history of colonialism, apartheid, inequalities, economic and educational restrictions and "a society that defaults to violence as a standard for expressing discontent" (Public Universities South Africa, 2021). It is within this South African context that notions were purposefully selected that were relevant to applying an educational partnership approach with parents and practitioners from previously under resourced communities within a multilingual setting. The selected concepts focus on informing the application of an intervention within an environment where meaning could be constructed that could possibly benefit child development.

Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky

Vygotsky was born in 1896 in Russia into a middle class non-religious Russian Jewish family. His father was a banker and although Vygotsky was initially home schooled, he later followed an education as a lawyer and philologist, prior to following a career as a psychologist (Cole &

Scribner, 1978). During the volatile period of the Russian Revolution and World War 1 (1917-1923), Vygotsky (1978) started exploring different perspectives on child development compared to his contemporaries and focussed on the progression of the child from birth, which later contributed to the field of child psychology. There are various debates around the specific meaning of some of Vygotsky's concepts and with his untimely death at a young age as a brilliant, creative scientist, he left it to his students, such as Luria, Leont'ev and others to continue working in the various psychological fields (Davydov, 1995). The translation and interpretation of his work has been controversial, as his work was initially banned in Russia until the mid-1950s and then only translated in the West much later in the twentieth century (Davydov, 1995). This contributed to meanings being misunderstood and misinterpreted by non-Russians and some translators apparently purposefully omitted the influence of Karl Marx on Vygotsky's thoughts, as translations were conducted during the Cold War period when Marxism was downplayed (Sève, 2018). These possible misunderstandings and interpretations are acknowledged, but this study will be drawing from selected notions as they developed from Vygotsky's work.

Daniels's (2005) view that "The 'Vygotskies' who are being created in the early years of the twenty-first century in the West as well as in post-Soviet Russia are diverse and must be seen in their own cultural context" (p.4). The same applies to the diverse and multi-layered, complex context and meaning-making constructs and applications of Vygotsky's work of pre- and post-apartheid in South Africa. Selecting relevant aspects of Vygotsky's work, I have drawn from the writings of Vygotsky (1962; 1978) an edited book by Daniels (2005), Daniels (2008), Mahn (2012), and Lerman (2014), to guide my understandings of the processes of meaning-making.

Contextualising Vygotsky

While Sève (2018) questions whether Vygotsky's (1962) work was influenced by Marx or not, there seems to be some agreement that in developing his thoughts on human consciousness, Vygotsky was influenced by the writings of Marx and Engels's dialectical logic and their methodological approach. Vygotsky's approach includes the key principle of "dialectical logic that nothing is constant but change and that all phenomena are processes in motion" (Mahn, 2012, p. 103). Vygotsky (as cited in Mahn, 2012) describes this as "to study something historically means to study it in motion. Precisely this is the basic requirement of the dialectical method" (p. 103).

In developing his concept on materialism, Marx linked human consciousness with the individual's material circumstances (capital) while growing up, in relation to class, labour and socio-economic interactions. Growing up in different "class" circumstances would therefore provide the individual with different knowledge formations and therefore influence aspects of

consciousness. Marx's theory further made the connection between consciousness and access to resources and how the differences in access to resources that were present in the working class versus the elite influenced the development of the consciousness of humans (Cole & Scribner, 1978; Daniels, 2008)

It was the focus on the external conditions of the child, such as materialism, that Vygotsky (1978) started drawing on, when examining the psychology of the child. He furthermore "believed that the internalization of culturally produced sign systems brings about behavioural transformations and forms the bridge between early and later forms of individual development" (Cole & Scribner, 1978, p. 7). Vygotsky built on the notions of Marx and Engels, that the "mechanism of individual developmental change is rooted in society and culture" (Cole & Scribner, 1978, p. 7).

Vygotsky disagreed with his contemporaries such as Pavlov who proposed the classic conditioning theory (external stimulus and response); and with Piaget who claimed children progressed through specific stages of mental development irrespective of their culture (Hardman, 2016). Vygotsky argued that social, cultural, historical and language contexts influenced the child's development from the beginning with special importance being accorded to the relationship between the child and the "significant other before turning inwards and becoming part of the child's psychology" (Hardman, 2016, p. 43).

Given the different dimensions of my research project, the processes used by individuals to make meaning of their worlds needed to be explored and understood to develop an appropriate approach and strategies for the intervention phase of the research project. Vygotsky made it clear in his analysis of how children made meaning of their worlds, that one had to include the physical, social, cultural milieus and specific historical period that surrounded the child (Mahn, 2012). His theory resonated with the multicultural and diversity issues that evolved during different political and historical periods within the South African context. These directly impact on the individual's psychology and the meaning-making processes that influence learning and development. These processes were taken into consideration while exploring an understanding of the home-based practices of families in under-resourced communities and school-based practices in a multilingual pre-school setting.

The Development of Vygotsky's ideas

Meaning-making processes

The meaning-making notions of Vygotsky's (Hardman, 2016) inter- and intra-psychological processes, mediation together with the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) are all intertwined, but also separate in creating pathways for developing thinking and speech, which eventually lead to the child being able to communicate meaning. Vygotsky further examined the child's development and use of tools such as thinking and speech to influence their environment and the "sociocultural world into which the child is born, including cultural practices" (Mahn, 2012, p. 101), distinguishes the human being from higher primates.

Vygotsky "creatively elaborated on Engels' concept of human labor and tool use as the means by which man changes nature and, in so doing, transforms himself" (Cole & Scribner, 1978, p. 7). The communicative use of language therefore includes historical period-specific signs and symbols such as objects made by humans, for example the use of bows and arrows for hunting to provide food, to modern-day technology where shopping for food can be done online. Vygotsky further makes it clear "that the central focus of his research is the examination of the relationship between the processes used in thinking and the processes involved in the reception and production of spoken and written speech and their unification (literally "speech thinking")" (Mahn, 2012, p. 101). This starts establishing the foundation of Vygotsky's general genetic law "that higher cognitive functions begin as real relations between people before being internalised" (Hardman, 2016, p. 43), which resulted in him distinguishing between inter- and intra-psychological processes.

Inter-psychological and Intra-psychological

Vygotsky (1962) differed from other period psychologists such as Piaget who while analysing the thoughts of the child, studied mental functions as if they could be isolated individually and independently. He reasoned that the origins of human mental activity and consciousness needed to be examined and understood as the development of two separate pathways: one the natural biological pathway where basic mental functions develop; and secondly the social or cultural pathway that enables higher cognitive functions to develop, such as problem-solving, reasoning, thinking and deliberate memory. These pathways are intertwined and do not run in parallel; however, the natural pathway forms the basis for the introduction of material through the social pathway that then allows for the development of higher cognitive functions (Hasan, 2002; Hardman, 2016). The social pathway that contributes to the child's consciousness and higher cognitive functioning is strongly influenced by the context of the child. Regarding the context, Stroud et al. (2016) place further emphasis "on how the social,

cultural and historical milieu impact on a child's developmental trajectory" (p. 142). It is thus in the context of the child where social interactions occur and subsequently thoughts and thinking develops.

Inter-psychological functioning therefore appears first on a social level and between people (Hardman, 2016). After birth, children first develop relations with their main caregivers (significant other) in a social environment where the caregiver's language, the manner in which words are spoken and cultures that surround the infant are all internalised by the child (Vygotsky, 1978). Intra-psychological aspects then develop on an individual level as if within the child's consciousness, which is referred to as words being internalised as "inner speech" (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 149). He further clarifies that:

> inner speech is not the interior aspect of external speech – it is a function in itself. It still remains speech, i.e., thought connected with words. But while in external speech thought is embodied in words, in inner speech words die as they bring forth thought. (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 149)

Inner speech is linked to thought processes and the language of our thinking. The process of "speech thinking" develops into higher cognitive functions (thinking, reasoning and problem-solving), which are internalised and become part of the child's cognitions (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky theorised that children's thoughts, the nature of interactions and cognitive development are influenced by their specific context.

The content of human thoughts are constructs that are influenced by being exposed to a variety of cultural influences all the time. Individuals are therefore able to "construct their own sense from socially available meanings. Inner speech is the result of a constructive process whereby speech from and with others has become speech for the self" (Daniels, 2008, p. 27). Vygotsky (1962) further explains inner speech as a function on its own and that external speech is thoughts voiced in words, which results in a "continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought" (p. 125). Vygotsky (1962) describes inner speech to a large degree as follows:

> thinking in pure meanings. It is a dynamic, shifting, unstable thing, fluttering between word and thought, the two more or less stable, more or less firmly delineated components of verbal thought. Its true nature and place can be understood only after examining the next plane of verbal thought, the one still more inward than inner speech. That plane is thought itself…every thought creates a connection, fulfils a function, solves a problem. (p. 149)

It is therefore thought that performs a function, which translates into an action that is unique to individuals due their specific sociocultural environments. Akhurst & Odendaal (2018) explain that “action is at the centre of Vygotsky’s analysis of humans’ use of signs, words and symbols, and these ‘tools’ are used first interpersonally before they become intrapersonal ‘tools’ in mental functioning” (p. 250). These notions of inner and external speech, the social influences upon them and their impacts on thinking were all aspects that I believed could be impacted through intentionally selected activities, in the planning of my program.

The following quotations summarise aspects of importance to me as I planned this research project: “the most significant moment in the course of intellectual development, which gives birth to the purely human forms of practical and abstract intelligence, occurs when speech and practical activity, two previously completely independent lines of development, converge” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 24). In addition, “for Vygotsky, a child develops uniquely human capacities to think in particular ways through interacting with others in the social world and internalising cultural tools, which have a history” (Stroud et al., 2016, p. 142).

Mediation and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

These ideas followed observations of infants waving their hands and Vygotsky’s (Lerman, 2014) interest of the wolf-child phenomena where children biologically were human, but for whichever reason had no contact with humans and therefore had not developed understandable speech, human mannerisms, or higher consciousness. Vygotsky therefore started exploring the notion of mediation as a “mechanism by which culture, knowledge, all kinds of human intellectual thinking developed in the child” (Lerman, 2014, p. 6). Examining how children developed speech, acquired different forms of knowledge and how humans used tools to change and master the environment, Vygotsky argued that the “mechanism of individual developmental change is rooted in society and culture” (Cole & Scribner, 1978, p. 7), through inter-psychological processes as described above, essentially influenced by mediation by a significant other. Mediation therefore is a process whereby the external meanings provided by another (inter-psychological) become internal (intra-psychological) and with the assistance or “active guidance of a more expert peer or teacher which moves a child from a state of not knowing to a state of knowing” (Hardman, 2016, pp. 43-44).

Vygotsky (1960a, as cited in Minick, 2005) linked mediation with his notions of higher mental functions, and psychological processes, which he argues that:

> Any higher mental function was external (and) social before it was internal. It was once a social relationship between two people…We can formulate the general genetic law of cultural development in the following way: Any function in the child’s cultural

> development appears twice or on two planes… It appears first between people as an intermental category, and then within the child as an intramental category. This is equally true of voluntary attention, logical memory, the formulation of concepts, and the development of will. (p. 38)

As mentioned before, the action of mediation by a significant other, which allows the child to develop and learn through a process from an unknown state to a known state, starts long before the child enters either a pre-school or formal schooling. “Learning and development are interrelated from the child’s very first day of life” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 84).

It is within the sphere of learning and development, which can occur in formal or informal settings, that Vygotsky (1962) presented the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), to emphasize that children could reach higher levels of functioning though mediation. After extensive research Vygotsky (1978) indicated that children with the same chronological age, could be at two different levels of mental functioning, but with mediation the gap between the child’s actual level and potential level could be closed. The ZPD therefore differentiates between a child’s actual level of development and potential level of development (Vygotsky, 1978). In determining these two developmental levels, he further explains that the actual level of mental functioning is the “result of certain already completed developmental cycles” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 85). Going back to the same aged children, Vygotsky’s (1978) research established that when children were faced with a problem-solving exercise, one child was able to solve the problem while the other child solved the problem, but only after receiving guidance from a teacher through posing questions, which highlighted that the “subsequent course of their learning would obviously be different” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Their mental functioning was different, in that while both eight years old, one functioned at the level of a twelve-year-old while the other at the level of a nine-year-old.

The zone of proximal development “is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

The child’s mental development is therefore determined by clarifying their actual developmental level and the ZPD relates to the individual’s potential for further development. When the teacher applies appropriate instruction to the individual child’s actual development level, the instruction stimulates various inner developmental processes. “Thus the zone of proximal development is an analytic tool necessary to plan instruction and to explain its results” (Hedegaard, 2005, p. 228).

By implication, instruction or mediation by adults, peers, or significant others within a variety of socio-cultural settings, whether formal or informal, intentional, or unintentional, a child's development can be influenced or improved. Hardman (2016) refers to the ZPD as a "teachable space" (p. 44). The intentional application of mediation within an informal ZPD setting (*iStoep* sessions) were explored in this study, with the possibility of both sets of participants (parents and practitioner) fulfilling the role of mediator.

Every day and scientific concepts

The interplay between thought and word, the sociocultural experiences of the child, mediation, and the role of the "teachable space", leads Vygotsky (1962) to differentiate between every day or "spontaneous" and "scientific" concepts. Spontaneous concepts mostly develop from processing daily or regular events and experiences at home and other informal social and cultural settings. These spontaneous concepts form part of the child's reality and are used and understood in their context. Scientific concepts are nonspontaneous and not part of the child's everyday language, but rather gained from formal instruction that takes place in school settings or learning environments. Teachers within the schooling system and through pedagogical preparation, systematically build up knowledge (scientific concepts) on various subjects over time in the classroom. The child's understanding and use of these concepts is further dependent on the relationship between the teacher and child, the child's level of maturity, emotional experiences, and willingness to co-operate (Daniels, 2008).

Scientific concepts are not only related to the field of science, but all types of concepts that need instruction to enable understanding. Vygotsky claimed that a child needs both spontaneous and scientific concepts to understand their world; both concepts have their strengths and weaknesses. Vygotsky (1987a, as cited in Daniels, 2008) describes the contribution of each concept as follows:

> the formation of concepts develops simultaneously from two directions: from the direction of the general and the particular… [T]he development of a scientific concept begins with the verbal definition. As part of an organised system, this verbal definition descends to concrete; it descends to phenomena which the concept represents. In contrast, the everyday concept tends to develop outside any definite system; it tends to move upwards toward abstraction and generalisation…[T]he weakness of the everyday concepts lies in its incapacity for abstraction, in the child's incapacity to operate on it in a voluntary manner… [T]he weakness of the scientific concepts lies in its verbalism, in its insufficient saturation with the concrete. (p. 16)

Mediation and the ZPD is the link between the development of these two concepts as “instruction usually precedes development” (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 101). During instruction and mediation, Vygotsky (1962) notes that the child “acquires certain habits and skills in a given area before he learns to apply them consciously and deliberately” (p.101). It is therefore the regular and intentional use of scientific concepts that evolve into spontaneous concepts that becomes part of the child’s integrated thinking and speech system and thus contribute to higher cognitive functions (Daniels, 2008).

In the early 21st century González and others (Gonzáles et al., 2001) developed the framework of Funds of Knowledge, which has diverse definitions, interpretations, and perspectives, but it originated from Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory, focusing on his notions of social interaction, mediation and ZPD (Hogg, 2012). Funds of Knowledge is defined by Gonzáles et al. (2001) as the “historically accumulated bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household functioning and well-being” (p. 116). Highlighting the role of everyday and scientific concepts within this framework, their findings show “a reciprocal relation” (Gonzáles et al., 2001, p. 128) between these two concepts and that one is not school based, and the other home based. The authors recommend that educational practices should create “zones of practices" (2001, p. 128) where children can engage meaningfully in concrete activities with these two concepts.

The role of play and self-regulation

Understanding the socio-cultural formation of Vygotsky’s (1962; 1978) concepts, as described above, are essential to enable the implementation of these concepts in a play-based approach within pre-school settings. He was instrumental in advocating that while “play is not the predominant feature of childhood, but it is a leading factor in development” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 101). He furthermore highlighted the importance of moving from predominantly imaginary play to the rules that applied in a game and “pointed out internal transformations in the child’s development brought about by play” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 101).

The “earliest forms of play, Vygotsky argued, are the child’s attempts to reproduce a situation or action that he has actually experienced” (Minick, 2005, p. 47). For example, the child playing and taking care of a doll, represents the child being cared for by a caregiver. Intentionally designed play-based themes may be a tool or mechanism that practitioners use to link the child’s socio-cultural world with a broader outside world.

Various interpretations, perspectives and definitions of play exist together with the application of the meaning thereof within home-based and pre-school-based practices. In following a Vygotskian perspective, Van Oers (2012) clarifies and re-defines the foundations of play as referring:

> to the way an activity is carried out, i.e. to the *format of cultural activities* (practices). Formats of activity can be characterised by the values of three parameters: the type of *rules* that constitute the activity, the level of *involvement*, and the *degrees of freedom* that the cultural community allows to the player. (Van Oers, 2012, p. 23)

He concludes and argues that a play-based curriculum within pre-school and school settings should not be perceived as a curriculum allowing children to play occasionally, but "as a curriculum that basically takes playfully formatted cultural activities as contexts for learning" (Van Oers, 2012, p. 24). Janssen-Vos & Van der Meer (2017) uses Van Oers's notions in developing classroom themes that are based on socio-cultural practices, linking activities to a meaningful content. Teachers introduce a story or theme based on a social cultural practice. Children together with the teachers start to play and in their play talk about, discuss and agree upon joint activities. By participating as a teacher in these activities communication and language are developed, next to other broad and specific learning outcomes. Scaffolding is the main ingredient in collaborative learning in play. This development extends across key physical (fine and gross motor skills), social, cognitive, emotional, and organisational, skills and further includes creativity, imagination and problem-solving (Janssen-Vos & Van der Meer, 2017).

It is the creation and development of these collaborative stories and themes to provide relevant play activities that Vygotsky saw as "providing the foundation for the emergence of new forms of behaviour and for the development of forms of imagination and abstract thoughts that are connected with them" (Minick, 2005, p. 48). Janssen-Vos & Van der Meer (2017) identified six groups of core play activities that are critical in the developmental period of pre-schoolers. These include:

- manipulative and role-playing games
- construction play and visual activities
- communication (conversation) activities
- read and write (draw) activities
- numeracy (arithmetic) activities
- their first explorative (research) activities

These core activities are not an extensive list but provides a framework that assists in identifying the current development of the child. It also offers the teacher a direction of future activities that will enable the development of higher cognitive functions especially self-regulation. Creating various engaging or imaginative play areas and "zones" for young children where they can participate in fantasy play activities, where mediation is present, are essential

building blocks at pre-schools (Janssen-Vos & Van der Meer, 2017). Research in a South African pre-school class “found that mediated fantasy play had a developmental impact…and points to the importance of fantasy play in developing self-regulation” (Stroud et al., 2016, p. 146).

As the child’s maturity levels increase and inner speech evolves into private speech, they start participating in games with rules, which further enhances self-regulation.

Vygotsky (1978) emphasises that:

> play continually creates demands on the child to act against immediate impulse. At every step the child is faced with a conflict between the rules of the game and what he would do if he could suddenly act spontaneously. A child’s greatest self-control occurs in play. (p. 99)

As a mental process, self-regulation is the person’s ability to cope and respond appropriately to an ever-changing environment (Vygotsky, 1978). Informal and intentionally created play situations, where the six core activities referred to above are intertwined, naturally creates “zones” for young children where opportunities of self-regulation arise (Berk, 2001). Through mediation the child is guided for example to wait for their turn to play with the car or to share a piece of cake. Self-regulation guides older children to adapt to rules within games such as chess or to classroom rules. It is through play that pre-schoolers understand the social cultural rules, are able to delay gratification and develop self-regulation (Janssen-Vos & Van der Meer, 2017).

Inner speech or self-talk is initially used by young children as a means of problem- solving within play activities, a running commentary of actions and explanations. Very young children usually start with playing with an object, which expands to later stages of play that include purposefully built construction or make-believe play, discussing, and dividing different roles. It is crucial that ECD practitioners understand the contexts of the pre-schoolers and the stage of play they are functioning in. This guides the practitioner to create meaningful “zones” where scientific concepts can be introduced to link with the pre-schoolers’ everyday concepts with which they are familiar within their socio-cultural milieu. (Worthington & Van Oers, 2017).

Vygotsky (as cited in Stroud et al., 2016, p. 145) said, “play contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form; in play it is as though the child were trying to jump above the level of his normal behaviour”. With the drive towards improved school progress and success, especially in a country such as SA where school performance is generally low and with the development of the NCF 2015, for children from birth to four, play time has become limited.

The NCF is often mis-interpreted by practitioners to imply that pre-schoolers should sit with worksheets and memorise numbers and letters. Little time is given for children to play, where learning and development can be guided through creating activities and mediation as suggested by Janssen-Vos & Van Der Meer (2017). In a recent study, Pompert et al. (2022) advocate for the professionalisation in a play-based curriculum for practitioners and teachers, to enable the practical concepts and practices within such a curriculum. It was this essential role and importance of play that Vygotsky and others supported and encouraged that I wanted to explore, within home-based practices in under- resourced communities and school-based practices within a multilingual pre-school setting.

Applications of concepts in the current context

Vygotsky was the first psychologist to examine "how meaning develops in a historical, natural, sociocultural context from humans' first use of language to the fully developed systems of knowledge in modern times" (Mahn, 2012, p. 116). The infant is born into an environment that is fundamentally part of their development: where change, constructs and sociocultural meaning-making are interwoven – the mind in an ever-changing society. Lerman (2014) noted that he thinks Vygotsky sensed he was not going to live long and therefore poured out his ideas, to enable his followers to continue developing and interpreting his notions within various contexts. Hardman (2016) notes that "being able to situate mind in society and provide a nuanced notion of the social and its interrelationship with the individual is extremely important for a developmental theory, especially in a South African context" (p. 294). The legacy of *Apartheid* inequalities and related struggles of the majority, especially access to sound education, continues to create divisions related to both class and ethnic groups. Vygotsky made it clear that we cannot understand individual development outside the person's physical, social, cultural, and historical contexts. Therefore, interventions need to be explored within specific sociocultural contexts in SA to address the current inequalities and challenges faced regarding school performances.

Basil Bernard Bernstein

Like Vygotsky, Bernstein was Jewish, but born after the First World War and raised in London's East End as part of an immigrant family. Bernstein's career "reflected his concern for understanding and eliminating the barriers to upward social mobility" (Sadovnik, 2001, p. 1). He worked in a club for underprivileged Jewish boys and engaged in other menial employment, while earning money to pay the costs associated with completing his degree in sociology. Thereafter he taught various subjects including mathematics until he enrolled for his Ph.D. in linguistics in 1960. Upon completion of his Ph.D. Bernstein moved to the Institute of Education in London where he remained for his entire career (Sadovnik, 2001).

Contextualising Bernstein

Bernstein was a leading sociologist and the development of his sociolinguistic theory over four decades, during the latter part of the 20th century, influenced the fields of sociology, education, and linguistics (Jenks, 2010). Bernstein's work produced "a theory of social and educational codes and their effect on social reproduction" (Sadovnik, 2001, p. 2). Although Bernstein's theory was influenced by the theoretical works of Durkheim, Weber, and Marx, he leaned more broadly on Durkheim's key concepts of structuralism during the beginning phase of conceptualising his theory (Jenks, 2010). Bernstein's awareness also evolved due to his contextual sensitivities, leading to development of "ideas were largely a response to a growing awareness in Britain of the inequality faced by the working class in general, and their social disadvantage regarding educational possibilities in particular" (Bolander, 2009, p.196). Bernstein and Vygotsky both theorised "the ways in which the outside shapes the inside, and the inside reveals itself and shapes the outside" (Daniels & Tse, 2020, p. 12). Bernstein (in Niati, 2018) also argued that his work was complementary to that of Bourdieu, seeing "Bourdieu's work as an explanation of the structure of reproduction and his as the process of transmission" (p. 1).

The development of Bernstein's ideas

While being exposed to various teaching settings, such as with trainees at the Post Office and motor mechanics, Bernstein became aware of the "social context regulating the form and expressive power of speech" (Jenks, 2010, p. 72). He observed that people working as mechanics had a specific contextual language that they understood within their working environment – a social context; and that it was based on their relationships within this social context, "a society where the division of labour is based on sameness not differentiation" (Jenks, 2010, p. 72). Therefore, when learning and development takes place in a context of language similarities, in conversations people understand the words and meanings thereof and can relate to each other.

Holland (1981), one of Bernstein's Ph.D. students, had access to background information of young children and divided them into two groups: working class children and middle-class children (Lerman, 2014). Due to their age, she gave them verbal instructions to sort out a pack of cards upon which each had pictures of food. They were given the choice to sort the cards however they wished. The outcome was that working-class children had fewer sorting strategies than the middle-class children and that the latter had somehow learnt forms of scientific concepts and knew what type of language school expected of them (Holland, 1981). Ivinson (2018) was involved in a similar small project with Bernstein and found comparable findings, in that people from "manual and skilled labour backgrounds sorted the items

according to only one code, while those from parents from non-manual jobs more often had two codes" (p. 540). It was from these various observations, as well as extensive research conducted in middle class homes and working-class homes within the political and educational climate in Britain, that Bernstein linked the terms "restricted code" to the working class and "elaborated code" to the middle class (Sadovnik, 2001).

The restricted code is part of a family or group's language, as in the above example of car mechanics, where elaborated speech is often not necessary to understand the meanings being conveyed, also often referred to as being able to "read between the lines". Due to similar contextual or cultural settings, assumptions are made between the speaker and the listener. Therefore, oral language can be restricted and to the point, with minimal chances of misinterpretations when people share settings and have similar experiences (Blackstone, 2010).

Elaborated speech is more specific, detailed, uses a wide range of linguistic resources, descriptive grammatically correct sentence structure and often includes scientific explanations, which minimize misunderstandings and interpretations (Aliakbari & Allahmoradi, 2014). It within systems such as education where the elaborated code is needed, to make meaning and progress. As such it favours middle-class children through the dominant code of instruction and their position in reproduction (Jenks, 2010). Bernstein argued that the "difference became deficit in the context of macro-power relations" (Sadovnik, 2010, p. 3). It is therefore in the reproduction of the elaborated code within institutions or groups that working-class people experience challenges to progress. Bernstein reasoned that those institutions used the power of processes and policies to further entrench inequalities. Bernstein "believed in education as the vehicle for social change" (p. 75) and having experienced first-hand the injustices of the English educational system, he was instrumental in changing the policies in Britain to allow "free secondary education for all" (Jenks, 2010, p. 74).

Bernstein (1971) explains that when the speaker uses an elaborated code, they "will select from a relatively extensive range of alternatives…" but in the "case of a restricted code the number of these alternatives is often severely limited" (p. 125). Bernstein's work was not without controversy, because his differentiations of speech codes between social classes was often labelled as a deficit theory (Savonik, 2001, p. 2). Bernstein argued in response that the identification of these codes was not highlighting the deficiency of language, but rather highlighted the disadvantage that working class people faced due to reproduction (Savonik, 2001). In support of Bernstein's ideas about the elaborated and restricted codes and the complexity of their effects in education, further research highlighted that "teachers and program developers should consider learners' social class differences, design correct

curriculum to help working class students achieve elaborated codes and look for ways to hinder the waste of student's talent in the lower social class" (Allahmoradi & Aliakbari, 2014. p. 86).

Bernstein (1971) cautions against negative views of restricted codes, especially within school systems where the demand for the use of elaborated codes is heightened. He notes that the restricted code psychologically "unites the speaker to his kind and to his local community. A change of code involved changes in the means whereby social identity and reality are created" (p. 136). The complexity of elaborated and restricted codes is amplified within a South African education system where there are 11 official languages. In such a context where African languages have not been developed for use with Western scientific terminology, first language speakers may experience difficulties. On the other hand, the narrative nature of these languages may also promote elaboration, if their usage is permitted in multilingual ways.

Pierre Bourdieu

As indicated earlier, selected aspects of both Bernstein's (1971) and Bourdieu's (1977) concepts are relevant to my research project. Although Bourdieu initially trained in philosophy and is regarded as a key thinker in this field, his writings embraced the field of sociology, while influencing other disciplines such as anthropology, education, arts, and culture (Grenfell, 2014). Bernstein's career followed a similar pattern where his career started in linguistics, but his work is best known in the field of sociology of education (Jenks, 2010). While Bourdieu and Bernstein both worked in the field of sociology, Bernstein stated that his work is complementary to that of Bourdieu in relation to social reproduction and habitus, but acknowledged that they were addressing the concepts from two different perspectives (Niati, 2018), addressed in the respective sections above and to follow.

Since Bourdieu disliked traditional autobiographies, little is known of his childhood, but that he was born in 1930 in a small village in the French Pyrénées and his family were traditional rural farmers. Bourdieu's birth date also coincided with the historical period that was known as the last decade of the French Third Republic, which was "marked by economic crisis, political corruption and a growing sense that Third Republic institutions no longer provided what France required" (Grenfell, 2014, p. 15). Due to Bourdieu's academic abilities, he was able to access prestigious schools and graduated with a degree in philosophy in 1955 (Grenfell, 2014). Shortly afterwards Bourdieu was dispatched to Algeria to complete his military service, where a cruel war was raging between Algerians who wanted their independence from the French colonialists (Robbins, 1991). The Algerian "experiences were clearly formative, at one

and the same time challenging and inspiring" (Grenfell, 2014, p. 13), which resulted in Bourdieu's first principal publication (*Sociologie de l' Algérie*) in 1958.

From the outset Bourdieu claimed that his personal life did not influence his work, however, at his final lecture in 2001, he referred to his work as a type of "auto-socio-analysis, as a way of making sense of the social forces which had shaped his life trajectory" (Grenfell, 2014, p. 12). In his final book in 2007 he further includes his socio-historical background and context to his work, while highlighting that his ideas were set within a historical period of national and international intellectual trends (Grenfell, 2014).

Contextualising Bourdieu

Bourdieu lived much longer than Vygotsky and was able to continue developing a "range of empirical topics and theoretical themes" (Webb et al. 2002, p. 2) within a changing world over a period of five decades during the second half of the twentieth century. Being regarded as one of the most influential French thinkers, he made extensive contributions to "contemporary cultural theory (which crosses fields such as cultural studies, literary studies, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, gender studies, psychoanalysis and firm and media studies)" (Webb et al. 2002, p. 1). The influence of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, the "founding fathers" (Grenfell, 2014, p. 20) of sociology can be seen in some of Bourdieu's work, especially during the 1960s with the rise of sociological thinking to international level. He was also especially inspired by the philosopher Wittgenstein's thoughts on following rules or a rule, which Bourdieu refers to as "*doxa*" (Grenfell, 2014, p. 83) of each field. In developing his main features as a theorist, Bourdieu, being influenced by Marx and Wittgenstein, has the "ability to take bodies of theory and give them a 'practical' or political edge…" he "sees his scholarly work as a means to an end - as changing or 'doing' things" (Webb et al., 2002, p. 8). Lévi-Strauss, a French social anthropologist and structuralist, broadened Bourdieu's approach in not wanting to follow the philosophy route, which he viewed as "writing or theorising as a form of 'disinterested reflection' - a position traditionally associated with philosophy" (Webb et al., 2002, p. 8). Bourdieu also became dissatisfied with the "inability of structuralist anthropology to take into account or make sense of the practical (and strategic) dimensions of everyday life…", which resulted in him focusing on "two other areas of study: education and culture" (Webb et al., 2002, pp. 2-3).

Bourdieu's journey in developing his framework was broad and crossed over various disciplines, which was regarded by some as a positive influence, but it also contributed to the critique of his work (Webb et al., 2002). Wacquant (2013) "traces the impetus behind the key conceptual shifts Bourdieu effects, from class structure to social space, from class consciousness to habitus, from ideology to symbolic violence, and from ruling class to field of

power" (p. 274) of Bourdieu's work, over a 50-year period. However, for the purpose of this research project the focus will be on Bourdieu's particular notions of habitus, field, the various forms of capital and symbolic violence, implying that patterns and the layers of advantage and disadvantage between different sectors of society are replicated through social processes from one generation to the next (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

These concepts from his framework will be used for the following reasons:

1. They can be applied across disciplines of psychology, education, and sociology to social issues (Webb et al., 2002).

2. These lend themselves to being a "springboard from which to open up new vistas" (Yang, 2014, p. 1522) within this exploratory study.

The development of Bourdieu's ideas

Bourdieu (1984, as cited in Dumais, 2002) explains that his theoretical framework of "capital, habitus, and field all work together to generate practice, or social action" (p. 46). It is therefore the interaction and interwoven relationship of these notions that are regarded as his "thinking tools" (Yang, 2014, p. 1523) that he uses in developing his Theory of Practice and that formulate practice.

Forms of capital

Bourdieu's notions (Grenfell, 2014) were developed against the backdrop of social class inequalities within the French system. His concept of capital included economic capital, but he concentrated more on the meaning and consequences of symbolic capital. As such, they appear to be eminently transferrable within the South African context, with its history of apartheid, inequalities, and poverty. Bourdieu differentiates between these two main forms of capital: economic capital where the exchange is monetary or in economic terms, and symbolic capital. Moore (2014) explains symbolic capital to include "sub-types such as cultural capital, linguistic capital, scientific and literary capital, depending on the field in which they are located" (p. 100). While economic capital is transparent and more easily noticed, symbolic capital is often subtle, hidden and has "intrinsic worth", mostly related to knowledge and skills within a specific field that usually is linked to class and power (Moore, 2014, p. 100).

Within symbolic capital Bourdieu differentiates between social and cultural capital. Cultural capital includes a wide range of resources, for example, knowledge, skills, educational accomplishments, use of language, dress, taste, art, and general cultural awareness (Moore, 2014). It is these resources drawn from cultural capital that translate into societal power relations within various fields and their *doxa* (rules) that intrinsically provide forms of

dominance and hierarchy, which lead to inequalities. Bourdieu further highlighted how traditionally gender played a key role in the application of specific cultural capital practices and ideas that are transferred from parents to their children, for example in educational qualifications such as in science (mostly men) and caring professions (mostly women) (Dumais, 2002). He argues that "these different uses of cultural capital imply that social actions take place in different fields for men and women, with different forms of capital serving as currency" (Dumais, 2002, p. 47). While gender equality challenges have been addressed in the past two decades in SA, there are still challenges to tackle inequality in all areas.

Bourdieu (1997, as cited in Dumais, 2002) differentiates between three forms of cultural capital: objective capital, embodied, and institutionalised capital, which he explains as follows:

> objectified cultural capital, which refers to objects that require special cultural abilities to appreciate, such as works of art; institutionalised cultural capital, which refers to educational credentials and the credentialing system; and embodied cultural capital, which is the disposition to appreciate and understand cultural goods. (p. 46)

Bourdieu started questioning institutionalised capital within the higher education system, where the use of academic language and educational achievements represent the dominant culture within academic institutions (Sullivan, 2002). It is the third source of embodied capital that essentially represents or describes the individual's cultural attitudes and practices since they are integrally part of the person (Dumais, 2002). The correct use of objective capital, the possession of educational qualifications and the successful conversion of embodied capital as applied within the educational system, is reproduced within education, society, and culture (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

For Bourdieu, social capital represents the

> economic and cultural forces at play, at any particular time or place, that limit the range of possibilities that certain individuals or groups (based on their marginalized economic or cultural status) have for creating networks or drawing on the resources inherent in them. (Arneil, 2006, p. 201)

Although this favoured the upper classes and disadvantaged the lower class, Arneil (2006) argues that within Bourdieu's analysis his "theory of social capital is rooted in networks and their resources" (p. 201) and does not take into consideration aspects such as shared norms and trust. Vygotsky appeared to argue that "language alone maximized the qualities that are necessary for something to function as a psychological tool capable of mediating the development of the mind" (Hasan, 2002, p. 3). Hasan (2002) indicated that Bourdieu "might

sneer that this view of language is simply a signifier for linguistic imperialism" (p. 3). Hasan supports Vygotsky's notion that clearly indicates the "qualities of language are relevant to its capacity for acting as an effective abstract tool, and nowhere is this more evident than in the formation of the growing child's consciousness" (2002, p. 3).

Bourdieu developed his social capital concept during the 1970s and 1980s, whilst Putnam expanded on similar ideas during the early 21st century (Putnam, 2000). Siisiäinen (2003) describes it as one concept, but two approaches; Putnam's "concept is rooted in the tradition of American theories of pluralism and system integration whereas Bourdieu makes use of ideas developed by structuralist and conflict theoreticians" (p. 183). Bourdieu links social capital to being part of or a member of a group that subsequently has access to certain resources, whether physical or human, and these are used to advance individual interests (Yang, 2014). "From a Bordieuan perspective, social capital becomes a resource in the social struggles that take place in different social arenas or fields" (Siisiäinen, 2003, p.184). Arneil (2006) notes that Bourdieu's social capital is situated within the political, economic, and cultural spheres at any given time and place and represents a notion of power that denies or marginalises individual access to certain resources and economic benefits.

Putnam (2000) and Arneil (2006) maintain that within the USA context, social capital has more of a positive connotation within civic society environments and movements, focusing on feelings of trust and safety, connections, and reciprocity, and paving the way for bridging and bonding social capital. These elements of social capital generally contribute to the person's feelings of happiness and belonging. Bonding capital implies a strong trust element and usually includes family members or close friends and neighbours (Putnam, 2000). Within bridging social capital, the trust levels can be thin as by implication the connections are between people of different socio-economic status. The context of providing soup for a sick person is very different to competing for the same employment position (Putnam, 2000). The research project to be described hopes to draw additionally from Putnam's (2000) ideas of bonding and bridging capital, through drawing together people who may otherwise not share ideas together with Arneil's (2006) sense of belonging and trust.

Habitus

Webb et al. (2002) introduce Bourdieu's habitus concept as:

> on the one hand, the historical and cultural production of individual practices -since contexts, laws, rules and ideologies all speak through individuals, who are never entirely aware that this is happening - and, on the other hand, the individual production of practices - since the individual always acts from self-interest. (p. 15)

Habitus is one of the most cited notions of Bourdieu's framework, but also the most controversial, with varied interpretations by researchers and meanings as explained by Bourdieu himself (Maton, 2014). Bourdieu (1977) defines habitus in practice as "history turned into nature, i.e. denied as such, which accomplishes practically the relating of these two systems of relations, in and through the production of practice" (p. 78). Bourdieu's work is often set in abstract language such and therefore the following basic definition and interpretation will be followed:

> *habitus* focuses on our ways of acting, feelings, thinking and being. It captures how we carry within us our history, how we bring this history into our present circumstances, and how we then make choices to act in certain ways and not others. This is an ongoing and active process – we are engaged in a continuous process of making history, but not under conditions entirely of our own making…Thus to understand practices we need to understand *both* the evolving fields within which actors are situated *and* the evolving habituses, which those actors bring to their social fields of practice. (Maton, 2014, pp. 51-52)

Habitus can therefore include a "collection of informal skills and knowledge which participants have constructed over time" (Jorgensen et al., 2014, p. 223), which this project hoped to build upon. Jorgensen, et al. (2014) further explain that when children participate in activities, they bring with them "a habitus that has already been shaped by their early socialisation within the family, home and immediate environment, and this shapes the way they act in and interpret their worlds" (p. 223). An individual's habitus is therefore linked to the various forms of capital and each individual's "habitus provides capital, but Bourdieu pointed out that different stocks of capital are assigned different values by powerful institutions" (Gonzales, 2014, p. 200).

As indicated earlier, various questions have been raised by researchers regarding the absence of a clear definition of habitus and how the notion can be researched. Bourdieu "thinks that the concept of habitus solves a fundamental problem in sociology – the conflict between structure and agency" (Sullivan, 2002, p. 150). Webb et al. (2002) conclude that habitus:

> can be understood as the values and dispositions gained from our cultural history that generally stay with us across contexts (they are durable and transposable). These values and dispositions allow us to respond to cultural rules and contexts in a variety of ways (because they allow for improvisations), but the responses are always largely determined – regulated - by where (and who) we have been in a culture. (p. 44)

It is the habitus of the pre-schooler within their home environments and within the classroom that this study wants to explore.

Field

Although the notion of "field" was developed later in his life, it forms a "central pillar" of Bourdieu's work (Yang 2014). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, as cited in Dumais, 2002), stated that the field is "a network, or a configuration of objective relations between positions" (p. 46). Each field is a social arena, and therefore a cultural field, within which struggles take place between dominant and subordinate groups to control resources or what is valued, intrinsically, within that space (Moore, 2014). According to Bathmaker (2015),

> what positions agents or institutions with a field, is the possession of capital and power that is relevant to the purposes of a particular field. Positions in the field then produce in agents and institutions particular ways of thinking, being and doing. (p. 66)

It is therefore "the milieu of social and objective relations" (Gonzales, 2014, p. 198) that situates the individual in the field. Webb et al. (2002) describes cultural fields as "made up not simply of institutions and rules, but of the interactions between institutions, rules and practices" (p. 22). Bourdieu argues that within these cultural fields, for example the education arena, it is difficult for children from a lower-class to understand the language and concepts that teachers use in the classroom, then to succeed within the education system, because they "simply do not understand what their teachers are trying to get across" (Sullivan, 2002, p. 145). Interactions between people are strongly influenced by class; and the degrees of contact in relation to others and with people in various formal social institutions will influence the nature of communication and understandings. Children from social classes where the types of language and concepts are more commonly used however understand the language of teachers and are thus able to process the concepts, progress, complete their schooling and access further education.

Due to the element of interactions Bourdieu regards these cultural fields as "fluid and dynamic, rather than static, entities" (Webb et al., 2002, p. 22), which links with Vygotsky's notions that learning and development is not static, these could change as children are exposed to different social milieus and cultural fields. Cultural capital and other forms of capital are therefore also not static, but according to Bourdieu the "competition for capital within fields" (Webb et al., 2002, p. 23) has underlying elements of reproduction and transformation that are linked to power and position within a specific field, which can also be transferable to another field.

Bourdieu (2018) explains that the:

> investments placed in the academic career of children had been integrated into *the system of strategies of reproduction*, which strategies are more or less compatible and more or less profitable depending on the type of capital to be transmitted, and by which each generation endeavours to transmit to the following generation the advantages it holds. (p. 61)

It is the types of social and cultural capital to be transmitted during this research project that possibly could contribute towards advantages for the following generation. The formal schooling element in SA is predominantly based on a Westernised schooling system and the rules within it are reproduced, which makes it challenging for children from previously disadvantaged communities to adapt and progress, since the rules and language within the system are reproduced generation after generation. Therefore, the dominant classes will have access to more cultural capital and therefore power and influence, than the other classes.

Symbolic violence

The interconnectedness of capital, habitus and field resulted in Bourdieu developing and coining the term symbolic violence. Bourdieu (1992d, as cited in Webb et al. (2002) describes symbolic violence where individuals, groups, and institutions “are subjected to forms of violence (treated as inferior, denied resources, limited in their social mobility and aspirations), but they do not perceive it that way; rather, their situation seems to them to be ‘the natural order of things’ “(p. 25). The power of symbolic violence is so “deeply rooted within both the individual habitus, and surrounding social fields, that they are no longer understood as reflecting the outcomes of historical patterns of contestation and privilege/domination” (Barrett, 2015, p. 6). This is where the intrinsic worth, as earlier described, is embedded in the individual habitus and their abilities questioned, rather than the role of society, which through cultural reproduction and social reproduction remains hidden (Bourdieu, 2018).

As mentioned, Bourdieu was also influenced by Marx’s economic theory. Marxian analyses of social class, point to a "false consciousness" (Engels, 1893), that is created whereby people are led to believe that every member of a particular society enjoys the same opportunities for success. Marxian theorists for example would argue that in reality there are processes at work (particularly in capitalist societies) to ensure that only the more powerful groups thrive and prosper (Wacquant, 2013). Subordinate groups remain oppressed and excluded from genuine opportunity, which Bourdieu argues represents symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

The strong influences of external, systemic elements on the child’s social, cultural, and linguistic environments and various forms of capital and habitus could possibly place children

from under-resourced communities in a disadvantaged position in fields such as formal schooling institutions. Exploring forms of capital of the pre-schoolers in this study will help to shed light on a segment of their habitus; and on how, if at all an educational partnership between parents and practitioners could influence their capital and habitus; or reshape it beneficially, in an attempt to break the cycle of underperformance of learners from disadvantaged communities. While authors have questioned Bourdieu's links between the various forms of capital and the specific role of habitus and how these are portrayed within different fields (Sullivan, 2002), his notions are relevant within the SA context with its history, diversity of race and class structures. It is possible that symbolic violence could be one contributing factor to the majority of learners in SA continuing to perform poorly at school.

Understanding Community Psychology

At the core of psychology are people's feelings, thoughts, behaviour and functioning within mostly their micro contexts. Community psychology originated to increase the ambit of psychology, extending it "to intermediate-level and macro-level contexts" (Orford, 2008, p. xi). Community psychology takes people's contextual meaning-making into consideration together with a "critical stance towards power, class and inequality" (Orford, 2008, p. xv). Sarason argued that the emphasis (1988, as cited in Reppucci, 1990) should be addressing "problems in the setting, not problems 'in' individuals" (Reppucci, 1990, p. 354).

Sarason, as a driving force in community psychology in the early 1960's in USA, motivated that psychologists should gain a greater awareness of the context of individuals. The field thus began to shift the focus away from mainstream psychology's individual focus of study and intervention to the person in the environment (Orford, 2008). Sarason (1988) admitted that it was a new approach for psychology and that many mistakes would be made. He anticipated a shift away from mainstream psychology (where intervention occurred once a problem was identified) to rather working preventatively, which was one of the founding notions of community psychology (Reppucci, 1990). Over the next few decades numerous debates, controversial ideas, and challenges about knowledge production in community psychology occurred. This new branch of psychology indeed faced many challenges, but expanded across different fields, "within and outside of psychology…" and was termed by few as a "hybrid entity" (Graham & Ismail, 2011, p. 122). This resulted in the incorporation of different thoughts, theories, practices, and processes that developed across the world, including from the Global South (Makkawi, 2017). When compared to mainstream psychology, community psychology has various barriers to overcome, some similar to those challenges faced by Vygotsky and other theorists striving to establish new approaches, during historically unsettling times a century ago.

Relevant aspects of Community Psychology

Defining "community" and the various dimensions and perspectives on the term across different disciplines was not an easy task (Obst et al., 2002). Sarason (1982, as cited in Reppucci 1990) "felt from the beginning that community psychology failed to confront what it means by community" (p. 357). Townley et al. (2018) described community psychology as "rooted in community health research and practices" (p. 3), however Sarason (1976, as cited in Reppucci, 1990) blamed this initial mental health movement as one of the reasons for failing to conceptualise community. This in a sense hindered the focus on, understanding and development of the "concept of networks for community psychology" (Reppucci, 1990, p. 357). Sarason (1976, as cited in Reppucci, 1990) argued further that "to view the community in terms of networks will provide a better picture of the interrelatedness that is the essence of community" (p. 357). Mental health promotion emphasised the availability of different services within a community, whereas the interrelatedness and functions of the variety of networks within communities should be the focus of community psychology.

Since a multitude of definitions already existed in defining community, Obst et al. (2002) conducted further research on the four dimensions proposed by McMillan and Chavis (1986) to explore what was needed to create a psychological sense of community in geographical communities. Obst et al. (2002) added a fifth dimension, "conscious identification" to the already existing four of "belonging, fulfilment of needs, influence and shared connections" (Obst et al., 2002, p. 119). Sarason (1977, as cited in Obst et al., 2002) describes the basic features of a "sense of community" as:

> The perception of similarity with others, an acknowledged interdependence with others, a willingness to maintain the interdependence by giving to or doing for others what one expects from them, the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure. (p. 120)

Orford (2008) describes a sense of community and social capital at length. Regarding social capital he argues that the value, advantage, and focus should be on the:

> capacity of the social group – whether a group of common identity or interest, a group of place or neighbourhood, or a collective of any kind – to be empowered and to empower its members, both through its own cohesion and via its links with other groups. (p. 181)

Furthermore, of importance are the three core values that guide community psychology: empowerment, liberation, and social justice. All three of these values are open to a multitude of definitions, interpretations, constructions, and actions as they are complex and multi-

layered within different contextual environments (Orford, 2008). These values support challenges to power, class, and inequalities especially in previous colonial or oppressed countries. Community psychology was not a discipline that developed equally across the globe, often developing in countries "accompanying social conflict and change" that occurred more in the Global South (Orford, 2008, xv).

Community Psychology as relevant to South Africa

The various multi-layered and diverse contexts across the world, especially in lower-income countries of the Global South, for example Latin-America and SA, "that continue to be plagued by conditions of poverty, inequality, under-development and social injustice, as well as a high prevalence of social ills such as violence and HIV/Aids" (Graham & Ismail, 2011, p. 122), provide wider settings for community psychology research. These authors suggest that "knowledge production in community psychology is therefore a useful mechanism that can … stimulate the types of social change it seeks to create" (p. 122), through interventionist research.

Since SA's democracy in 1994, there have been platforms and occasions for various forms of injustices to be heard, for example the #feesmustfall movement. Pillay (2017) states that "community psychology has firm roots in South Africa" (p. 419) and is relevant to the devastating societal ills within the country with a mixture of first and third world elements, co-existing with the legacy of *Apartheid*, current democratic struggles and violence. Pillay (2017) suggests that there is a need to "examine the extent to which research initiatives in the health and human sciences address meaningfully the issues affecting the poor, oppressed and marginalised" (p. 420).

These struggles feel at times overwhelming when working within communities where the realities of intergenerational poverty, poor school performance, violence and inequalities are visible and real. In attempting to find solutions through social change and action with participatory elements, I drew from specific overarching principles of community psychology. These principles included empowerment, sense of community and connectedness, and access to resources (Orford, 2008) within a social action intervention, the *iStoep* sessions, while following guidelines of an Educational Partnership approach. There is no "one size fits all" research or set answers to the social challenges that are deep rooted within individuals and their community settings, their historical, cultural, and socio-economic contexts which has implications for theoretical, conceptual, and methodological frameworks.

Community Psychology in Action

Despite the complexities and challenges faced by community psychology it remains an valuable vehicle to facilitate and promote social change and transformation, especially through participatory action approaches (Makkawi, 2017). During the processes of moving away from positivist research to participatory approaches Makkawi (2017) argues that students need to be "engaged with the community and begin to sharpen their own critical awareness about real issue they find relevant for the emancipation of their community" (p. 487). When implementing participatory approaches researchers and practitioners need to guard against "top-down" (Akhurst 2017, p. 2) approaches and subscribe to the principles of socially just interventions, especially when research is undertaken in under-resourced communities (Akhurst & Odendaal, 2018).

Community psychology is a sub-discipline that pays particular attention to the centrality of broader systems and the location of power, influencing people's development and behaviour. It thus draws from some of the theoretical ideas explained in the chapter thus far and provides a further framework to guide aspects of the program that formed the basis of this study. The environment and setting of overlap for the participants was the multilingual LRD Pre-school and the *iStoep* program was the intervention which created a community of interest and was one of the spaces of social action. The home and pre-school classroom were the additional two spaces where pre-schooler development took place. In creating an intervention with parents and practitioners, it was valuable to be aware of the various dimensions that create a sense of community, albeit not a geographical community, but a community where learning and development could take place.

As explained in chapter one, the title and identifying the value of voice and participation in people's first languages were intended for the *iStoep* sessions, to possibly develop a sense of community between the participants.

Reflective Summary

The notions of Vygotsky (1962; 1978) gave insight into the conscious development of the child's mind (inter- and intra-psychological) from birth and illuminated the influence of socio-cultural, physical, and historical aspects of the child's environment. Mediation, the ZPD and learning through play are essential in learning and development of higher cognitive functions such as scientific concepts and self-regulation, which are vital to enable progress at school and for lifelong learning to take place.

Bernstein's (1971) distinction between the elaborated and restricted codes further emphasised the differences in linguistic capital of children respectively from economically privileged and

economically disadvantaged backgrounds. This element was an important consideration in sharing meaning-making and improving communication in the program. How these elaborated and restricted codes could influence learning in the 11 official languages of South Africa will need intensive further research in multi-disciplinary ways.

Bourdieu's (1977) ideas about cultural and social reproduction highlighted how the various forms of capital, especially symbolic violence, habitus, and field, subtly played a role in further disadvantaging people from the working class. Within the under-resourced community where the Centre is situated, I have noted low intergenerational literacy levels and the reproduction of intergenerational poverty that Bourdieu refers to. In this study I propose modestly to strive for a possible disruption to these patterns of social and cultural reproduction. The existence of a multilingual pre-school is already explicitly attempting to disrupt the value that is placed on English, to be offering education in first languages to pre-schoolers; in the context of a secure environment offering nutrition and play-based activities.

This study's framework is situated more broadly in the ideas of community psychology and the habitus of the pre-schooler within a minimum of two fields, their home environment, and a multilingual pre-school environment. First language and play-based learning is valued in the LRD and the aim of the study was to explore the complexities of unpacking the diverse influences of habitus, language, learning and development within the various environments where learning takes place.

Within my research project I will refer to geographical areas as communities, meaning the same location where families and their pre-schoolers live, including the location of the Centre and multilingual pre-school. The second usage of "community" will relate to the community of interest, including the participants (parents and Centre staff) of the research project who shared common interests of wanting to understand how they could improve home- and school-based practices, to the benefit of the pre-schooler.

Three different concepts of social capital were described in the above chapter, as proposed by Bourdieu (Moore, 2014), Putnam (2000) and Orford (2008). Orford (2008) identifies that a sense of community and social capital are two concepts for understanding inequalities of position and place. Interactions between people are strongly influenced by class; and the degrees of contact in relation to others and with people in various formal social institutions will influence the nature of communication and understandings. In my research project I attempted to create a community of interest with dimensions of a sense of community through identity, belonging and influence, applying the principle of mutual capacity-building.

I agree with Hasan (2002) that while weaving threads of theories and concepts together, one cannot lose sight of the emphasis that “social phenomena are complex, and stories around them are long; this distance cannot be covered by the movement of one discipline” (p. 13). The complexity of human lives “is bound to remain incomplete within the bounds of one discipline because the concerns of human life are interconnected” (Hasan, 2002, p. 13). It is within this “hybrid entity” where this modest research project explored the social and cultural capital (environment) of the pre-schoolers within a multilingual pre-school setting, rather than focussing on problems “in” the pre-schooler. The selected notions of Vygotsky (1962; 1978), Bernstein (1971) and Bourdieu (1977) complement the framework of community psychology in attempting to understand and intervene positively for the pre-schoolers within two different fields of a small peri-urban town in the Eastern Cape.

These various concepts have been reviewed and interwoven in an attempt to create a rich theoretical framework that aligns with the overarching focus in the introduction of this chapter. Given the complexities of the SA context, including especially the so-called crisis in education, there is an urgency to prevent another generation facing a dismal future, which has subsequently further been compounded by the experiences and effects of COVID-19. The notions described earlier in this literature review were mostly formed during a volatile period during the first half of the 20th century in a European context, but they provide idea that resonate within the location of this research project.

Chapter 3: Early Childhood Development Perspectives – an overview

The multilingual LRD pre-school is situated within the ECD sector. This study's purpose is to explore the value of an educational partnership within a multilingual ECD South African context. The South African context is characterised by high levels of inequality which contributes to the majority of children "starting behind and staying behind" (Spaull & Kotze, 2015, p. 13) not just in their mathematical progress, but in their overall educational and even personal journeys. In the last few decades the importance and value of investing in early childhood internationally has received extensive attention through evidence-based research and published articles, which has "also shaped the manner in which ECD is being conceptualised worldwide" (Vorster et al., 2016, p. 2).

Nationally, Biersteker (2012), Atmore et al. (2012), Atmore (2013), Berry et al. (2013) and Biersteker et al. (2016) have highlighted various aspects such as: increasing services and access in order to benefit the most vulnerable children; challenges the ECD sector has been facing; and *Getting the basics right: An essential package of services and support for ECD.* Some literature aspects of the mentioned authors are discussed in Chapter one describing the background to the research problem and other relevant ideas will be mentioned further below in the SA context section.

This chapter will focus on the ECD sector internationally and nationally. After a broad outline of the areas of concern, it will focus on features and the potential benefits of three International ECD programs: *Sure Start,* a UK based early childhood programme, *Head Start,* an USA based programme and *Better Beginnings*, an Australian Library literacy intervention. These programs had similar goals: to close the educational gap of school progress and attainment between working- and middle-class children; and thus to attempt to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. While each country had its own political agenda for initiating these programs, the financing of these and their focus changed over time with changing political agendas. This chapter however cannot exhaustively trace these aspects but will focus in more detail on what is relevant to SA. Then, this chapter will also include information about the educational partnership research conducted in the Netherlands and finally it will cover national research related to parental involvement at ECD level.

Contextualising Early Childhood Development

In 2007 and 2011 two *Lancet* series on Child Development in Developing Countries "spearheaded the review of evidence linking early childhood development with adult health and wellbeing" (Black et al., 2017, p. 77). These findings drew international attention to the realisation that "219 million (39%) children younger than five years in low-income and middle-

income countries (LMICs) are at risk of not reaching their developmental potential" (Black et al., 2017, p. 77). The reviewed evidence in these two series took numerous key disciplines and diverse factors around childcare into consideration, for example, neuroscience, biological and psychosocial risks, programs, and policies. The outcome of these two reviews was however clear "that inequalities in development begin prior before conception, and that timely interventions reduce inequalities and increase productivity" (Black et al. 2017, p. 77).

In response to these first two reviews highlighting the potential loss of human capacity, a third review in 2017 focused on possible strategies to minimise these risk factors. The Lancet published three consecutive articles with an overarching title *Advancing Early Childhood Development: from science to scale*. The estimated statistics continued to be staggering and had increased to 250 million children (43%) younger than five in LMICs "at risk of not reaching their developmental potential" (Black et al., 2017, p. 77). Paper one of the series focused on five objectives, but for the purpose of this research study I concentrated on the objective "to examine access to centre-based and home-based early childhood development programmes" (Black et al., 2017, p. 78).

While focussing on the latter objective, it cannot be regarded in isolation, as a child's developmental needs to be understood within multiple domains such as health, nutrition, security and safety, responsive caregiving, and early learning. Key risk factors such as "poor levels of stimulation in the home, chronic undernutrition, iron and iodine deficiencies" (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2014, p. 11) together with a lack of "responsive parenting behaviours" (Black & Aboud, 2011, p. 490) influence the development potential of young children. Furthermore, the interactions that occur between these various domains and risk factors collectively influence the child's capacity to develop competencies to enable them to reach their developmental potential (Walker et al., 2007).

Nurturing care is defined by Britto et al. (2017) as "a stable environment that is sensitive to children's health and nutritional needs, with protection from threats, opportunities for early learning, and interactions that are responsive, emotionally supportive and developmentally stimulating" (p. 91). In a parenting intervention program in rural Uganda, "parenting interventions have been implemented to improve the compromised developmental potential among 39% of children younger than 5 years" (Singla, et al., 2015, p. 458). Community volunteers were trained to deliver a 12-session community intervention program that focused on both maternal psychological wellbeing and five child development practices (play, talk, diet, hygiene, and love and respect). Parents were encouraged to apply and practice specific identified practices in between sessions, which was relevant to either herself, their child, spouse, or peers. The outcome of the study indicated improved maternal health and child

development. This integrated program being delivered by non-professionals, with minimal resources by a local organisation in rural Uganda “has the potential to be replicated and scaled up in other low-resource, village-based settings” (Singla et al., 2015, p. 458).

In addressing the objective that dealt with home-based and centre-based activities, Black et al. (2017) refer to “Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey data collected from 2005 – 2015” by UNICEF. The home-based activities data gathered from 62 countries, which did not include South Africa, varied by country and wealth quintile amongst children aged 3-4 years. A particular focus was on access to books in homes and to gauge the degree to which adults were reading to children. The figures of having an adult read to this age group ranged from:

> 62-4% in the top quintile to 36-4% in the bottom quintile…children under the age of 5 sampled, 41-8% had home access to children’s books, with availability ranging from 56-6% in the top wealth quintile to 29-0% in bottom quintile families. (Black et al., 2017, p. 84)

The above figures paint a picture of the stark inequalities depending on economic capacity. It is therefore strongly recommended that to address these inequalities “global action” is needed “to enhance family support for early learning” (Black et al., 2017, p. 84). In a systematic review of studies undertaken “that examined the effect of interventions combining a child development component with a nutrition one…” results indicated that “stimulation consistently benefited child development” (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2014, p. 11).

Despite the inclusion of early childhood development in the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals, which subsequently raised global awareness and attention, “250 million children (43%) younger than five years in low-income and middle-income countries are at risk of not achieving their developmental potential” (Britto et al., 2017, p. 91). The *Lancet* series two focused on *Nurturing care: promoting early childhood development* involving five sectors: health, nutrition, education, child protection, and social protection. Nurturing care is further characterised by a core set of inter-related components, including:

> behaviours, attitudes, and knowledge regarding caregiving (e.g. health, hygiene care, and feeding care); stimulation (e.g., talking, singing, and playing); responsiveness (e.g., early bonding, secure attachment, trust, and sensitive communication); and safety (e.g., routines and protection from harm). (Britto et al., 2017, p. 91)

The authors go on to emphasise that the single most fundamental and influential element in child development remains the home and care settings of young children. Parenting support and interventions for children from birth to five years old is therefore crucial. Britto et al. (2017)

define parenting programs as “interventions or services aimed at improving parenting interactions, behaviours, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and practices” (p. 94). The review of different interventions indicated that the most effective parenting programs used “several behaviour-change techniques, including media such as posters and cards that illustrate enrichment practices, opportunities for parental practice of play and responsive talk with their child, guidance and support for changing practices, and problem-solving strategies”. The above authors continue by emphasising that the key to any out-of-home intervention remains program quality. Series two strongly recommends a comprehensive effective multi-sectoral intervention package for children under five, with nurturing care and protection as the pillars to develop long-term potential in young people.

In the *Lancet* series three, where a leading SA academic in the ECD field is the first author of an international team, Richter et al. (2017) address pathways that have been shown to scale up programs and argues for effective multi-sectoral intervention packages for young children. While scale up mostly rests within the political arena, NGOs play a pivotal role in partnering with relevant sectors to initially implement small scale intervention packages, especially in a country such as South Africa and other LIMCs. Richter et al. (2017) strongly recommend that deep social problems such as “poverty, inequality, and social exclusion” (p.103) are tackled early in the child’s life through appropriate age-related interventions.

A community-based cluster-randomised feasibility study (Yousafzai et al., 2014), was implemented and explored in Sindh, Pakistan. Stimulation and nutrition were delivered through health programs delivered by specifically trained Lady Health Worker (LHW) in specific aspects of the program. One group of LHWs were trained in responsive stimulation, the second group of LHWs were trained in nutrition and the third group was trained in both aspects of stimulation and nutrition. The nutrition pack was delivered monthly during visits, which included a multiple micronutrient powder. This project covered a two-year period with groups randomly selected for a specific intervention that was “integrated within existing services through home visits and group meetings” (Yousafzai et al., 2014, p. 1284). Assessments were conducted at specific intervals, which included the control group. The interpretation of the results indicates that “responsive stimulation intervention can be delivered effectively by LHWs and positively affects development outcomes. The absence of a major effect of the enhanced nutrition intervention on growth shows the need for further analysis” (Yousafzai et al., 2014, p. 1282). Ultimately, developing a comprehensive integrated intervention program is crucial especially during the First 1000 days and should include the most important elements of “health, nutrition, security and safety, responsive caregiving, and early learning” (Black et al., 2017, p. 7).

The *Head Start* (USA) and *Sure Start* (UK) programs are the two most widely known early childhood programs offering comprehensive services to children and families in disadvantaged areas. The variety of services are contextually designed to support various developmental aspects of early child development. The *Better Beginnings* program started as a literacy intervention in Western Australia and developed over the years in offering additional services, with a focus on including hard-to-reach parents. English was also not their first language, which aligned with this study.

International Programs

Head Start Program, USA

The *Head Start* Program was one of the decisions of President Johnson of the USA's campaign on "War on Poverty," initiated in 1964 and to date it continues to be "one of the last antipoverty programs still in existence" (Hines, 2017, p. 6). The aim was to ensure that children born in impoverished circumstances "begin schooling on an equal footing with their more advantaged peers" (Currie & Thomas, 1993, p. 1). The *Head Start* initiative started in 1965 "as an eight-week summer program, was started in the basements of churches and in public schools throughout the United States" (Hines, 2017, p. 2). From these beginnings the *Head Start* Program developed to offer comprehensive services over a one-to-two-year period, for disadvantaged children and families between the ages of 3-5 years as part of a public program (Garces et al., 2000). Funding was initially provided by federal government to local programs that were specifically addressing challenges of poverty and educational support to pre-schoolers born into low-income families (Hines, 2017). These comprehensive child development services include nutrition interventions, of a minimum of one hot meal per day, education, social and health services (Hines, 2017).

Subsequently, the *Head Start* Program started including one or a combination of options depending on the community needs assessment conducted "to determine which options and services best fit the strengths and needs of families in the community" (Puma et al., 2010, p. 4). These program options are as follows:

- a center-based program in which children are enrolled in classroom settings and parents participate in at least two home visits annually;
- a home-based program in which staff work directly with children and parents primarily in the home on a weekly basis and also in at least twice monthly group socialization activities;
- a family child care option in which services to children and families are provided in a family child care setting; and

- the combined program that allows for a variety of combinations of centre-based class sessions with home visits. (Puma et al., 2010, p. 3)

While the *Head Start* Program included the above options according to the outcome of the needs assessments conducted, it was not the only early childhood program in the USA. Additional poverty-based small intervention studies were developed during a similar time in the early 1960s and 1970s. One of these intervention studies is the longitudinal *High/Scope Perry Preschool* study. It "is considered to be one of the first studies that examined the effects of preschoolers' education and poverty relationship to education" (Hines, 2017, p. 5). Findings linked the preschooler's good health with an increased "ability to perform better at school…" and results "indicated that poverty-born preschoolers improved their educational performances as a result of the High/Scope Preschool Study active learning model" (Hines, 2017, p. 5).

An additional project, The *Carolina Abecedarian Early Intervention* project (ABC) offers centre-based intervention from infancy. The study involved infants and included a random control and treatment group in the 1970s, showed that as the "treatment group aged through its preschool years, their cognitive abilities increased" (Hines, 2017, p. 5) compared to the control group. Key consistent findings were that:

> from 18 months through 21 years of age the benefits include the children's higher IQ and higher reading and maths scores, an improved understanding of their role in the educational process…increase social competence, more years of education; and greater likelihood of full-time and higher-status employment. (Ramey & Ramey, 2004, pp. 486-487)

These were some of the findings that highlighted the influence of poverty on child development together with the lack of early stimulation and the influence of environmental factors (Hines, 2017).

Regarding the impact of *Head Start*, "assessments of a national sample of Head Start graduates at the end of kindergarten showed further that these children have made substantial gains in word knowledge, letter recognition, writing skills, and phonemic awareness during the course of kindergarten" (Zill et al., 2000, p. 19). A further aspect that should be taken into consideration was the "presence of spillovers of Head Start benefits from older to younger children" (Garces et al., 2000, p. 17). The assumptions were that "older siblings are more likely to teach (or be a role model) for younger siblings…" and secondly the program "requires parent participation and some of the skills that parents learn are likely to benefit younger children more than older siblings" (Garces et al., 2000, p. 17). Knowledge that parents

acquired as a parent of a 5-year-old would benefit the 1-year-old child. Currie (2001) supports and makes recommendations regarding the *Head Start* Program by suggesting the following:

> short-and medium-term benefits of Head Start is compelling enough to suggest that it would be good public policy to fund Head Start fully so that all poor children could participate, and to extend it to be a full-day, full-year program. (p. 235)

Currie (2001) further recommended that these programs should not only include children who live in poverty but extend it to additional groups of children. These to include children who are "vulnerable to educational failure for other reasons: children at risk of abuse or neglect; children of high school dropouts; and children with limited English-language proficiency" (Currie, 2001, p. 235).

The *Head Start* Program started small, as an eight-week summer program, but developed into an extensive national program that continuous to exist to date. This brief overview highlights the impact of such a national program, which links with the recommendations of Biersteker (2012) recommending an integrated ECD program for SA. This will be further explained in the SA context section later in this chapter.

Sure Start Programme UK

The increase of evidence of small-scale interventions such as the: *High/Scope Perry Preschool* project; *Abecedarian* project; and national large-scale *Head Start* project of the USA, highlighted the benefits of these interventions for children and families in disadvantaged communities (Anning et al., 2004). This coincided with the New Labour government's victory in 1997 in the UK, the appointment of Prime Minister Blair and the outcome a governmental Comprehensive Spending Review in 1998 that resulted in the party making "family policy an explicit part of its legislative programme…" (Lewis, 2011, p. 71). Given this 1998 Review and the accumulation of the above evidence-based projects, a number of social policy initiatives were submitted to the government for consideration to address one of their key objectives "to promote fairness and opportunity by improving the quality of public services…" (Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1998, p. 7) for everyone. *Sure Start* became the "flagship policy" (Lewis, 2011, p. 71) of the UK government with a commitment of funding for ten-years, which included a national evaluation project.

The aim of Sure Start was recorded as:

> To work with parents-to-be, parents and children, to promote the physical, intellectual and social development of babies and young children – particularly those who are disadvantaged – so that they can flourish at home and when they get to school, and

> thereby break the cycle of disadvantage for the current generation of young children. (Anning et al., 2004, p. 2)

The *Sure Start* Local Programmes (SSLPs) interventions were established and targeted at "20% of the most deprived areas in England" (Melhuish et al., 2010, p. 2). The SSLPs were "managed by a partnership of health, education, social services, and voluntary sectors" (Melhuish et al., 2008, p. 1641) with original services (established between 1999 and 2003) not being specified and prescribed. Services for under-fives were area-based within identified geographic areas to address local needs within a local program (Melhuish et al., 2018). Despite programs being local, they needed to cover essential core services which were mandated as: "outreach and home visits; support to families and parents; support for good-quality play learning, and childcare; primary and community health care, and support for children and parents with special needs" (Melhuish et al., 2008, p. 1641). There were however no prescribed guidelines or guidance providing the specifications of these core services (Melhuish et al., 2018).

The national evaluation of Sure Start started in 2001. Due to the local components, with each geographical area deciding on their own unique program, the evaluation of several hundred interventions was complex. The UK government had prevented randomized control groups being formed at the outset, which added further challenges to the evaluation of the effectiveness of *Sure Start*. In the evaluation of the Family and Parent support elements as conducted by Barlow et al. (2007), key findings highlighted that a wide variety of parenting support services were delivered, with some being innovative. However, there were only a few evidence-based programs. For a variety of additional reasons, the UK government changed SSLP's into Children's Centres in 2006 and transferred control to local government authorities. One of the reasons for creating Children's Centres was to enable the provision of multi-agency delivery and service integration, which was then linked to the government's "Every Child Matters" agenda (Melhuish et al., 2010, p. 4).

Within the SSCC's the following core services were specified and offered:

- In the centres in the 30% most disadvantaged areas: integrated early learning and childcare (early years provision) for a minimum of 10 hours a day, five days a week, 48 weeks a year, and support for a childminder network; or
- In centres in the 70% least disadvantaged areas, which do not elect to offer early years provision; drop-in activity sessions for children, such as stay and play sessions;

- Family Support, including support and advice on parenting, information about services available in the area and access to specialist, targeted services; and Parental Outreach;
- Child and Family Health Services, such as antenatal and postnatal support, information and guidance on breastfeeding, health and nutrition, smoking cessation support and speech and language therapy and other specialist support;
- Links with Jobcentre Plus to encourage and support parents and carers who wish to consider training and employment; and
- Quick and easy access to wider services. (Department for Education and Skills, 2007, p. 16)

Once the integrated services were specified as above, an example of the services within the parenting and family functioning category was the

> Home learning environment: made up of six items of frequency of learning opportunities for child in home – i.e. taken to library, helped to learn or play with alphabet, helped to learn or play with numbers, child read to, taught songs and rhymes, child paints and draws. (Melhuish et al., 2008, p. 1642)

Identifying the most important activities that could take place in home environments assisted in guiding parents with specific ideas that could contribute to language and cognitive development of their young child. These noted activities would also assist in program development and could enable the assessment of impacts in future studies. The National Evaluation of *Sure Start* conducted by Barlow et al. (2007) highlighted the value of providing support to families on good parenting practices as it "determined outcomes for children" (p. 1). Recognising the importance of the family environment was "also consistent with the messages coming from research that support for parenting was an essential ingredient for programmes to reduce childhood poverty (Barlow et al., 2007, p. 1).

Over the past twenty years, the *Sure Start* concept has been regarded as "one of the most important policy programmes in the early years in England" (Cattan et al., 2021, p. 2). *Sure Start* became "a 'one-stop shop' for childcare and early education, health services, parenting support, information about health and child development and employment advice" (Cattan et al., 2021, p. 5). In an evaluation, Cattan et al. (2021) was able to identify several key health findings of SSCC's. In a study conducted by Melhuish et al. in 2008, the following five beneficial effects associated with living in SSLP areas were identified:

> children growing up in these areas had better social development with more positive social behaviour and greater independence than those in non-SSLP areas. In SSLP

> areas, risk of negative parenting was less than in non-SSLP areas and parents provided a more stimulating home-learning environment. (p. 1645)

Conducting rigorous research, evaluations and identifying the specific effectiveness of a program of "what works can be a more complicated issue than simply whether something is or is not effective" (Powell et al., 2021, p. 13). Melhuish et al., (2010) agree that it is not always easy to evaluate and compare the impact of intervention studies such as *Sure Start*, despite the evaluations that began in 2001 until 2012. One of the main reasons was the UK government's decision that randomized controlled trials could not be implemented to assess the impact of the program. This resulted in using a quasi-experimental design, which had clear limitations (Melhuish et al., 2008). Despite budgetary cuts of more than 60% since 2010, the *Sure Start* programme continuous to offer a "rare opportunity to understand and evaluate how such a programme has worked in practice" (Cattan et al., 2021, p. 44).

Better Beginnings Australia

In 2005 the State Library of Western Australia launched *Better Beginnings* - an early intervention family literacy program that developed into a State-wide initiative. The purpose was "to provide positive language and literacy influences for young children through supporting parents as their children's first teachers" (Barratt-Pugh et al., 2012, p. 2). It was proposed that strong partnerships between public libraries, local government and local communities contributed to the success of *Better Beginnings*. Due to the success of the latter, an additional four programs were developed, "designed to integrate and overlap, providing a coherent and seamless service for preschool children from birth to school enrolment" (Barratt-Pugh et al., 2018, p. 5). The resultant program interventions were:

- Birth to Three: Providing an introduction to books and literacy for babies;
- Sing with Me: Integrating singing and reading aloud activities with a focus on 2-3 year olds;
- Kindergarten: Concentrating on children in the year prior to school enrolment;
- Read to me, I love it! Ensuring the specific needs of families in remote Aboriginal communities are met; and
- Books to go: Working with communities and children to create books that capture their own family and community stories. (Barratt-Pugh et al., 2018, p. 5)

Providing additional complementary programs were encouraged by various research findings, such as a study undertaken by Blok et al. (2005). The initial *Better Beginnings*

program provided a yellow library "gift" reading bag pack for families with a new baby. This gift bag included the following resources:

- a colourful board book for babies;
- a frieze with nursery rhymes printed on it;
- a brochure containing suggestions for enjoying reading experiences with a baby;
- a list of first books for babies and toddlers;
- information about local library resources;
- a library membership form; and
- a DVD that shows adults reading and singing rhymes and songs to young children and babies of various ages. (Barratt-Pugh et al., 2012, p. 9)

Parents could collect their gift bags from their local library or from their local clinic during their baby's six to eight-week health check-up. In a study conducted over four years Barratt-Pugh & Rohl (2015) reported that of "particular interest were the mothers' reports of their changing practices as their child matured over the four years…and also their child's language-and literacy-related behaviours" (p. 4). The positive outcomes and impact of this *Better Beginnings* program was "mothers' confidence in sharing books with their child, the increased interaction and communication with their child, and the recognition of the importance of sharing books and its impact on their child's early literacy development" (Barratt-Pugh & Maloney, 2015, p. 364).

Parents involved in the program's evaluation strongly voiced their "need for continued support of their children's reading and literacy development when they commenced formal schooling" (Barratt-Pugh & Maloney, 2015, p. 364). This directly influenced the development of additional *Better Beginnings* programs as noted earlier. The above programs are largely national or area-based programs that require a substantial budget, which is usually heavily co-funded by a government policy to address a national challenge. The *Better Beginnings* programs were evaluated since the initiation of the pilot in 2005 and evaluation reports can be accessed on their website, which also has resource material available for parents. One of the *Better Beginnings* program challenges were to access hard-to-reach families. These families were mostly either living in vulnerable circumstances or were families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. This led to an intervention called *Creating Books in Communities,* which allowed for the voices of partnership participants to be heard (Barratt-Pugh & Haig, 2020).

In countries such as SA, budgetary constraints limit the implementation of large-scale national plans as described above. There are a few national NGOs in SA attempting to address selected challenges such as *Nal'ibali* (DGMT, 2017) advocating for a well-established culture

of reading through reading clubs and *Nal'ibali* Supplements, stories and activities printed on newspaper in various SA languages. Within the national ECD sector, UNICEF (2016), supports the SA government, families, and communities to combat poverty and related societal challenges of education, health, and child protection. *Ilifa Labantwana* (2012*)* is "concerned with the design and testing of scalable integrated and affordable ECD models which can be taken forward to ensure that all children in South Africa have access to the services they need to develop to their full potential" (p. 2). On a smaller scale and budget, I was seeking a method or approach that could be implemented in practice with parents, which as noted in Chapter one, resulted in exploring the value of an educational partnership.

School Learning Communities and Educational Partnerships

The concept of parental involvement has a long history, the concept first appearing in the research literature in 1979 (Bakker et al., 2013). Historically, Vygotsky (1962; 1978), Bourdieu (1977) and Bernstein (1971) as noted in Chapter two, highlighted the influence of parents, caregivers, and the community on the development of a child's social, cultural, and linguistic capital. Parents being involved at their child's school has taken on various formal and informal features across the world; and over time opinions of various stakeholders within educational spaces has differed.

Seeley (1984), writing from the USA notes the importance of parents and teachers as partners in education and develops this idea further to suggest "collaborative efforts, with the various parties working together to achieve common objectives" (p. 388). He acknowledges that the "spirit of partnership" in the various school systems will not be easy to establish or offer the solution to all the challenges within school systems. He promotes an educational partnership approach with the focus on relationships to address reform, rather than a focus that emphasizes only the improvement of service delivery.

A recommendation made by Hara & Burke (1998) who implemented a structured parent involvement program in a USA inner-city school over two years, was that "it is essential that the model selected be adapted to the needs of the particular school, parents, and community" (p. 18). Furthermore, it is important that all stakeholders involved in the partnership, agree, and commit to developing a strong parental program.

Epstein (1995) advocated for school/family/community partnerships over a few decades in the USA, aimed towards children's later success. Epstein (1995) states that "when parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and begins its work" (p. 82). This thinking led to Epstein's (1995) overlapping spheres of influence model, where the child is viewed as being in the centre of

the various contexts of the partners. She distinguishes between external (family, school, community) and internal structures (interaction and practices of family, school, and community). Epstein (1995) highlights “how complex and essential interpersonal relations and patterns of influence occur between individual at home, at school, and in the community (p. 82). Epstein (1995) furthermore develops a framework of six types of involvement as follows:

> *Type 1:* Parenting: Help all families establish home environments to support children as students;
> *Type 2:* Communication: Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children’s progress;
> *Type 3:* Recruit and organize parent help and support;
> *Type 4:* Learning at home: Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning;
> *Type 5:* Decision making: Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives;
> *Type 6:* Collaborating with community: Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. (Epstein, 1995, p. 85)

From research-based approaches and “stories from the field” in the USA, Epstein & Salinas (2004, p. 13) differentiate between a professional learning community and a school learning community. They define a professional learning community to improve the effectiveness, teaching and outcomes of a school and a school learning community they describe to “includes educators, students, parents, and community partners who work together to improve the school and enhance students’ learning opportunities” (2004, p. 12). Iliás et al. (2016) clarify that the use of the terminology of a school learning community refers to the whole school, but in the study to be described, it refers to a smaller group of a partnership between parents and teachers, which could be the equivalent of an action team in the USA.

A study in the Netherlands between 2005 and 2007 (Smit et al., 2007) investigated the parental involvement and participation of parents in schools who either had more or less disadvantaged children in attendance. The study emphasised the urgency of teacher training to include skills that would guide teachers to develop meaningful relationships with parents from different socio-cultural backgrounds. This recommendation was also highlighted in the PIECCE report (Harrison, 2017) described in Chapter one. In developing a dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships in the USA, Mapp & Kuttner (2013) highlight the critical element of capacity-building of both families and staff to enable an effective

partnership that will support the child's learning and development. They however caution against a "one-size-fits-all" capacity-building framework as each school context differs; and these differences need to be taken into consideration during program development.

A review study conducted by Bakker et al. (2013) examined the impact of parent involvement on children's achievements. During this review they realised that there was no one consistent conceptual understanding or definition that specifically unpacked the meaning of parental involvement. This made it challenging to compare studies and link parental involvement to academic and social achievements. They also found that the method of invitation of teachers to parents made a difference. If the teacher's invitation specified that they wanted to explore ways of helping their child, parents would respond, but if it was a general invitation, parents seemed less inclined to attend.

An additional dimension of parent engagement is added by McKenna & Millen (2013), from the USA, which focuses on parent participation. This "encapsulates both parent voice and parent presence…but also that educators are receptive to this voice, allowing for an open, multidirectional flow of communication" (p. 9). It is the development of honest, teacher parent relationships that will encourage parents to accept invitations to their child's school, within a culturally sensitive environment where the child's development remains central during discussions.

Afolabi (2014) analysed and reviewed a cross-section of relevant literature on parental involvement and inclusive education from two internationally recognised data bases, over a period of 20 years. The literature specifically included key words and empirical studies of parental involvement and children's educational achievements. From an international and African perspective, including the Sub-Saharan research perspective of special education needs and parental involvement, he states that the situation is no different from what is experienced in other parts of the world. He notes that "research has found that parents are often an untapped resource in learner's education in spite of them nurturing the children" (p. 202), caring for them and making important decisions regarding their schooling and future. Findings illuminated "a strong and meaningful relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement and that parents' beliefs, expectations and experiences are important ingredients that support better learning outcomes for children" (Afolabi, 2014, p. 196).

Reference was made earlier in this chapter to the integrated community-based parenting intervention in Uganda (Singla et al., 2015). One of the strengths of this study is that they were able to effectively integrate "child development and maternal psychological wellbeing in a parenting intervention" (p. 468).

While many of these parent involvement partnerships focused on primary or senior schools, Webster-Stratton & Bywater (2015) encourage supportive parent-teacher partnerships when children start pre-school or day care. They argue that such partnerships are valuable as they "impact on children's social and emotional development and wellbeing, academic readiness, learning and academic outcomes" (p. 202) at a young age. Capacity-building and mental health of both parents and teachers should be taken into consideration when developing educational partnerships.

A small research study that Fenech et al. (2019) conducted in Western Australia focused on the marketing trend of comparing various quality services of schools with each other, which has led to parents becoming viewed as consumers of a services, rather than partners. This was supported by "research conducted over the past two decades in Australia, Europe, and the United States shows that parents generally make child care choices as uninformed consumers" (Fenech et al., 2019, p. 706). Various endeavours have suggested different formats of solutions to either address the perceived decline of parental involvement at schools or to address the marketing agenda of school services versus consumerism.

In further unpacking the various understandings and components of educational partnerships, it is essential to determine what constitutes the elements of a school community within various contextual settings. In a USA study Dove et al., (2018) point out that school communities and partnerships also include systems that play a role in the development of children in a specific school. Partnerships are therefore not just limited to humans, but also school policies and procedures. They further draw attention to the notion of community that is built on elements of teachers and parents' capacity and connections. The "community's capacity is made up of two elements: members' feelings of shared responsibility…" and the "collective competence of the members, which is made up of their abilities to take action in enacting change" (Dove et al., 2018, p. 50). The second element of connectedness is developed as members trust each other in the partnership and "share the responsibility of educating children using their social capital within their formal and informal networks" (Dove et al., 2018, p. 50). It is this sense of belonging, feeling of connectedness and level of participation that increases the potential of developing quality relationships in partnerships that is fundamental in shaping children's educational and social outcomes.

Extensive research over decades as outlined above, have indicated that "parental involvement is associated with higher educational attainment in children" (Barnard, 2004, p. 59). The literature has furthermore highlighted the various elements that should be taken into consideration when planning and implementing possible formal or informal methods of parent, teacher, school and community involvements and partnerships.

Thuis in School Research in the Netherlands

A study conducted in the Netherlands by Overmaat & Boogaard in 2004 indicated that there was a decline of parents participating in and being involved in school activities of their children (Janssen-Vos & Weijers, 2012). This however is not an indication that parents do not care about their children as further findings of an exploratory pilot study in Dutch primary schools conducted by Leenders et al. (2018) confirmed the commitment of parents in wanting their children to progress at school. They furthermore noted that it was possibly the teachers' perceptions that under-rated the level of commitment of parents. Janssen-Vos & Weijers (2012) indicate that educational partnerships could possibly be a new innovative alternative to increase parental participation and involvement in their child's education. While research indicates the positive impact of educational partnerships, the practical knowledge of how to establish these parent teacher partnerships is often missing or not clearly specified (Iliás et al., 2016).

The *Thuis in School* research project was conducted between October 2014 and October 2018 with seven primary schools (Iliás et al., 2016). The project included various research methods but focused on establishing and supporting educational partnerships, which included "home" involvement between teachers and parents of children who attended these schools. In year one of the project, kindergarten teachers and parents of four of these primary schools formed SLC's and met five times, while these sessions were observed and supervised to assist in developing an improved educational partnership. The additional three schools and parents met in year two of the project. Furthermore, during the *Thuis in School* research project a manual was developed: *Working together on Educational Partnership: A manual for setting up a School Learning Community* (Iliás et al., 2019b). This was compiled as a facilitator's guide for use during sessions with parents and teachers. Reference to the use and implementation of aspects of this manual (hereafter referred to as the Educational Partnership manual), will be further explained in Chapter four. Additionally, the *Thuis in School* project also included a randomised controlled trial (Iliás et al., 2021).

In the Netherlands, parents have three different opportunities to participate in their child's school environment: one a legal right through the formal structure of a school board; secondly through forming a supportive partnership in the child's upbringing; and thirdly, parents can "assist the school in daily school practices as members of a parent community" (Janssen-Vos & Weijers, 2012, p.165). At the core of motivating and striving for parental involvement through a positive two-way communication between parents and teachers, is the child's development (Leenders et al., 2019). When the home and school environment differ considerably, the child has to use a lot of energy to navigate between these two settings, which hinders the child's development (Iliás et al., 2019b). Therefore, the impact on the child's development will be

supported, the closer the home and school can work together in partnership with each other (Iliás et al., 2021). The following questions asked by Iliás et al. (2019a), have also been asked by teachers and practitioners across many countries, “how do teachers develop a partnership with parents? How do you ensure that the child remains central during the conversation?” (Iliás et al., 2019a, p. 16).

The school environments of the four schools differed from each other and therefore the issues discussed during these sessions also differed. A SLC was formed in each school where parents and teachers could discuss, share, cooperate and reflect on their views and practices (Iliás et al., 2016, p. 307). The research project aims were twofold: to examine how equality and diversity were voiced (parents and teachers) during the SLC sessions, as well as being able to reflect on their practices and opinions; secondly, to explore whether participants were able to translate their reflections into insights about practical benefits (Iliás et al., 2016, p. 307). Permission and consent were received to video record the sessions and these were transcribed by students and randomly checked by the research candidate. The same facilitator facilitated the sessions at the four schools, while the researcher was present in these sessions. Iliás et al. (2016) highlighted the critical role the facilitator fulfilled in the concept and application of reflection. In all the schools she was the one who initially challenged participants to reflect by asking (critical) questions and translating insights into change in practices (Iliás et al., 2016, p. 326). Transcriptions were thematically coded according to main and sub codes that were created for concepts of diversity, equality, and reflection (Iliás et al., 2016, p. 317).

The findings indicated that the participating teachers of classes of all seven schools showed an interest in working with parents and appeared to be able to make actual changes in their daily practice through the SLC. A few examples of these changes were identified as follows:

- to improve communication with all parents, it was agreed that teachers would communicate class activities with parents and include tips for home activities
- to communicate the monthly class calendar
- a working group was established, and parents and teachers developed a new website for the school
- the format of the school rapport was revised, which resulted in the whole school adopting the new format
- to conduct home visits
- allocate time for conversations and discussions between teachers and parents at special school meetings
- displaying photographs of activities and

- organising an informal greet meeting before the year started, for example a barbeque, with the teacher, parents, and children of the class (Iliás et al., 2016).

These new insights and practices could also be transferred to other members of the school community. Future parents could benefit from these changes. The research showed that a SLC in which parents and teachers work together with a facilitator can support the improvement of an educational partnership in a school (Iliás et al., 2016. p. 333). These SLCs created opportunities for reflections on home and school-based practices, that could lead to changes of practices and changes within the educational partnership between parents and the school. These changes resulting from the educational partnership could potentially lead to policy changes within the school and could become embedded in the school structures in the long-term (Iliás et al., 2016).

The *Thuis in School* research project in the Netherlands included additional elements of research, which involved a psychometric evaluation of two self-report questionnaires. The study focused on "migration background and the measurement of home-based parental involvement in education" (Iliás et al., 2021, p. 1). This was taking the educational partnership a step further by exploring whether "the type of educational activities at home and the way parents provides their support may differ across parents with and without a migration background (Iliás et al., 2021, p. 1). The home-based parental involvement activities questionnaire included two dimensions: one of informal activities which included, play, reading and stories; and the second dimension of formal activities included supervision of homework and practicing of numbers, word, and concepts. The second questionnaire focused on the style of parental involvement with an emphasis on "three facets of parenting that can contribute to child development: home learning environment; support for autonomy and expectations for appropriate behaviours, and management and discipline" (Iliás et al., 2021, p. 15). Findings support the notion that a broader categorisation and assessment of parental involvement should be included in assessments across different ethnic groups. Furthermore the authors encourage practitioners and teachers, especially those involved in children's early years of education, to prioritise "reflective dialogue with parents that have dissimilar backgrounds to mutually explore their home-based involvement and the dominant and non-dominant cultural capital these parents can transmit to their children in the family context" (Iliás et al., 2021, p. 17). These interactions could contribute to allowing "teachers and parents to connect these children's school and family worlds whilst employing available funds of knowledge, sensitive to the cultural capital of parents with different backgrounds" (Iliás et al., 2021, p. 17).

The *Thuis in School* (Iliás et al., 2016; 2019a; 2019b) program's ideas and material were important in constructing my program, which will be referred to further in chapter four.

South African Context

Published ECD research within the South African context is varied and often focuses on the challenges that the ECD sector is facing (Atmore et al., 2012), the development of the ECD sector post-*Apartheid* (Atmore, 2013), and the quality of centre-based programs (Biersteker et al., 2016). The challenges faced within this sector in SA are extensive, especially when compared to the evidence of the value of investing in young lives as highlighted in international evidence-based research (e.g., Black et al., 2017). The benefits of investing in early childhood and developing integrated services has been emphasised earlier in this chapter (Richter et al., 2017). The nature of parental involvement during the decades of pre- and post- democracy from 1994 differs, as well as the life experiences and participation levels of parents living in rural and urban areas (Mncube, 2007).

The *Sobambisana* Initiative, introduced by *ilifa Labantwana* (2012) ran over four years focusing on parenting education through group workshops and the impact thereof on the development of their children. Two partner organisations implemented two different group workshops with parents. The Parent-Support Program (PSP) workshops were based on the Abecedarian USA program that included a form of psychosocial support to the parents. The aim was to "improve the early childhood knowledge of participating parents/caregivers…" and the goal for parents "to provide improved developmental environments for their children, thereby adding value to the early learning opportunities provided by the pre-school and also extending the benefit to their other children" (2012, p. 3). Only parents whose children were enrolled in pre-schools were invited to attend the ten, two-hour workshops with the intention that while the children were not attending the workshops with their parents, they would directly benefit from the knowledge increase. The Infant and Toddler support program was based on a playgroup setting that included parents and children between the ages of one to six, with the proviso that they were not involved in any other ECD services or programs. Sessions were weekly for two to three hours long, over a sixteen-week period. Findings highlighted challenges with attracting and sustaining attendance of participants; and the program implementers had to run these support groups as additional activities to their normal workload. The suggestion was made that in future program implementers should be adequately trained and support structures be put in place. The benefits from the Infant and Toddler group included:

- Improved cognitive and language development of children;
- Where more sessions were attended, greater improvements were noted by parents and children;
- The parents' ability to cope improved significantly;

- Parents were more responsive to their children; and
- Provided academic and language stimulation.

The approach of providing group sessions was successful as it assisted in reaching more parents simultaneously, but distance, seasonal work, and home duties and responsibilities hindered regular attendance. Incentives to participate in future should be considered in the form of food parcels, the fun element in making toys to take home or seed for food gardens (*ilifa Labantwana*, 2012).

The South African Child Gauge is published annually by the Children's Institute, University of Cape Town, to monitor progress towards realising children's rights. *Getting the basics right: An essential package of services and support for ECD* (Berry et al., 2013) and *Children and COVID-19* (Berry et al., 2021) are some of the advocacy briefs prepared by a combination of ECD professionals.

After a 2010 survey was conducted on under-fives accessing ECD centre programs, Biersteker (2012) identifies "age, spatial, race and income disparities" (p. 54) as barriers of accessing ECD programs. In advocating for closing the gap, Biersteker (2012) strongly recommends that due to the diversity of ethnic groups in SA, different approaches should be evaluated to "improve access and shift patterns of inequality…" and "mobilising communities to demand services" (p. 56). The crucial need for an essential integrated package of services and support (Berry et al., 2013) is noted in chapter one, with the authors further recommending that services should be delivered through "multiple delivery channels, including:

1. Home-based strategies (support for child and caregiver)
2. Community-based strategies (e.g. playgroups, mobile clinics)
3. Facility-based strategies (e.g. community health centres, ECD centres)" (p. 32).

In 2016, the DSD Western Cape Provincial Government of SA contracted an investigation of the quality of programs in Early Childhood Care and Education Centres the province (Biersteker et al., 2016). This was the first representative sample survey conducted in SA and included the random selection of a sample of 240, which included city and rural centres. The focus was on assessing centre management and quality programs according to specifically selected indicators that were "to provide a sense of commonly observed conditions" (Biersteker et al., 2016, p. 339). The outcome emphasized the need for the improvement of the quality of the learning environments in the Western Cape province, which Biersteker (2012) describes as a "more affluent urban province" (p. 54) and especially for children in disadvantaged communities (Biersteker et al., 2016). The study further recommends a "focus on improved provision of educational activities, scaffolding of learning, and attention to

language stimulation is required…" with an increase of "financial resources to centers coupled with interventions to improve center management and administration are routes to improving quality" (p. 342). It is no longer disputed that "access must be coupled to quality if early childhood programs are to improve child outcomes, particularly in low-income settings (Biersteker et al., 2016, p. 342).

Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 in SA, Vorster et al., (2016) emphasised that multiple factors such as poverty, violence, malnutrition, scarcity, continued discrimination and inadequate human and physical resources were threatening early childhood care, which directly impacts on educational outcomes. The authors stressed that these factors threatening "early childhood care and education in South Africa is rife…" and research indicated that approximately 7 million children live in the poorest 20.0% of South African households" (Vorster et al., 2016, p. 3). Therefore, parental involvement in SA needs to be viewed against the legacy of *Apartheid* and the inequalities it created, and the continuation of intergenerational illiteracy and poverty. This has created a situation where most South African children are deprived "of their fundamental socio-economic rights, including access to health care, education, social services and nutrition" (Ashley-Cooper et al., 2019, p. 87).

The outbreak of COVID-19 and subsequent first lock-down period in SA (18 March to 6 July 2020) "intensified existing challenges" (Berry et al., 2021, p. 2) within ECD programs and young children and families. These authors noted the impact on ECD programs as follows:

- Closure of ECD Centres;
- Suspension of the ECD subsidy for registered programmes;
- The struggle to reopen ECD programmes;
- Loss of jobs and livelihoods. (Berry et al., 2021)

The impact of COVID-19 on families being unable to provide an enabling environment for their children resulted in a heightened risk of poverty, hunger, stress, and violence. Some ECD services adapted their programs to provide "parents with material to continue learning at home" (Berry et al., 2021, p. 4). This was a strategy followed by the LRD in the form of activity packs according to a specific theme that included resources to enhance play practices at home together with tips and activities for parents.

McCain (2022) reports that the SA ECD Census 2021 found that: 1.4 million children were attending over 42 000 centres; of which about 40% do not have flush toilets; around a third do not have taps to supply running water for handwashing; and around a half of the centres do not have access to age-appropriate books. The attendance figure prior to COVID-19, was 1.9 million. Significant challenges were not only identified in the infrastructure of centres, but also

in the skill-set of practitioners, where 22% of the ECD workforce had received no formal training. While authors such as Biersteker (2012), Atmore (2012) and others identified challenges in the ECD sector and advocated for specific integrated interventions, the ECD sector a decade later seems to be in a similar situation or even worse due to the impacts of COVID-19.

Research and literature on parental involvement and teacher and practitioner partnerships within SA especially in the ECD sector seems to be limited. Consequently below in this review, I also include relevant research that has been conducted in Junior, Senior and Tertiary education.

An ethnographic study conducted in SA by Singh et al. (2004) recruited a sample of 24 parents and learners from eight different historically disadvantaged Black African secondary schools, for a period of 12 months spread over two years. Findings highlighted that many home conditions were not suitable or motivational for learners. Parents expected their children to complete home chores and those who had *spaza*[13] shops had to sell the goods in the shop when not at school. This resulted in learners being too tired to start or complete homework. Children who lived in informal settlements were affected more as the number of people occupying the same living space made it impossible to do any homework. Many of these communities had no public library or alternative spaces where learners could complete their homework. Different domestic problems and dysfunctional families added further to unsatisfactory home conditions for learners. The majority of parents "did not seem to understand their role as parents. In fact, 90%, regarded the schools as being competent enough to deal with their children" (Singh et al., 2004, p. 303). Teachers acknowledged that the domestic problems were interfering with the learners' progress, and one admitted that he no longer gave homework to learners, as they would not be assisted at home. Findings of this study clearly illuminated that it was crucial for parents to be involved in their children's education. Findings highlighted parents who gave their children attention at home, especially when they were younger, resulted in the children being able to work more independently later in their school career, compared to children who received little or no attention (Singh et al., 2004).

Lemmer (2007) conducted a small exploratory qualitative study in SA of parental involvement as part of a teacher education Certificate in Parent Involvement, which was offered at a distance education tertiary institution. She explored the feasibility of replicating Epstein's (1995) comprehensive model of parental involvement in SA. The two most widely used options

[13] Informal, unregistered shops in the township selling essential goods.

of parental involvement in the majority of SA schools are either being part of fundraising activities or the formal option of being elected to the school's SGB. As part of their assignment her students had to implement and describe one type of parent involvement they applied at their primary school. Using purposeful sampling, fourteen assignments were selected, and five major themes were clustered together when compared to Epstein's categories. A summary of highlights of some of the narratives of parent participants and findings in these five categories follows below.

Creating a family-friendly environment for home-school encounters

Selecting suitable venues that were accessible to all parents, especially hard-to-reach-parents, making transport and childcare facilities available together, offering refreshment and selecting a suitable time for most parents. Taking these elements into consideration was essential in contributing to make parents feel they were welcome. A teacher from a farm school noted that for most of the parents it was the first time they visited or attended any activity at the school. She described the parent community as follows: "most of the parents did not go to school due to staying and working on another man's farm. Some, in fact, most of them can't read and write" (Lemmer, 2007, p. 223). This teacher has asked her children to make a portrait of themselves and asked the parents to sit at the table that had their child's portrait. A scribe was also placed at each table, which all contributed to developing a family-friendly environment that was non-threatening to parents who were unable to read and write. Prior to the activity, one teacher asked parents to identify topics of concern to them, which were parenting styles, effective communication skills and sexuality education. The reality of parents having to provide basic necessities (food, shelter, clothing, and medical services), could not be ignored and in one situation the teacher organised a workshop so parents could learn to grow and sell their own vegetables. "Only when parents are assisted to cope with disadvantaged situations are learners placed in a better position to learn and families can pay attention to appropriate parenting techniques" (Lemmer, 2007, p. 224).

Home-school communication

It was noted that many schools communicated poorly with families, especially concerning multilingual families. Various methods of communication were initiated, from formally printed to handwritten letters, quarterly newsletters, and although less common, some teachers conducted informal home visits. These home visits were especially targeted at hard-to reach-parents so that they could communicate to the families in their first language, in this case isiXhosa. In other instances where the teachers felt that the broader community would benefit, posters and advertisements were placed in local languages in churches, clinics, shops, and

taxi doors. To attract multilingual families, one poster advertising a parenting skill noted that "a famous multilingual translator is there for you" (Lemmer, 2007, p. 224).

Expanding the definition of the parent and the community

It was recommended that the view of involving parents should move away from the traditional definition, in that it should include either the biological parent or legal guardian, to a broader flexible perspective that includes extended family members. This broader flexible view is supported by both Epstein (1995) and Lemmer (2007), not just pertaining to the definition of parent involvement, but also in defining the community and those who have a vested interest in the well-being of families and children's progress at school.

Innovative volunteering

As noted earlier, traditionally SA parents have mostly been involved at schools to raise funds, cater for functions, or serve on the SGB. Being part of classroom activities is not a regular function that is fulfilled. One of the students enrolled in the Certificate course, a principal of a township school, had transformed his school by allowing parent volunteers to fulfil duties such as managing the tuck shop and making tea for staff. These duties were usually completed by teachers and children, which resulted in losing valuable teaching and learning time. Parents volunteered to guard a school at night without payment to prevent vandalism, another offered to manage the tuck shop. The value of volunteers is key to expanding school activities, but for it to be successful the program must include the screening and training of volunteers in school policies and rules (Lemmer, 2007).

Getting results

A planned school approach and strategy of parental involvement showed an increase in various results: parents expressed pride in their volunteering tasks; negative feelings towards parents changed; the culture of teaching and learning improved; learning at home strengthened due to the new interest shown by parents in children's schoolwork and children sensed a more positive atmosphere (Lemmer, 2007).

Mncube (2007) explored the nature and extent of parental involvement in the democratisation of education through SGBs at four different secondary model schools in Kwa-Zulu Natal. He made use of a variety of qualitative methods to explore the "nature of parents' perceptions of their role in SGBs in South Africa by providing conceptual exploration of democratisation and social justice as they apply to school governance" (p. 129). His methods included observations, semi-structured interviews, and document sources. Despite Mncube's focus on SGBs in secondary schools, his research highlights valuable understanding of parental

experiences and perceptions within SGBs. Mncube's (2007) study findings suggest that sufficient space should be created for parents that will enable them to participate and engage confidently in school governance issues when SGBs are held. Being able to participate in this space could possibility contribute to a sense of belonging as their voice is being heard. Such a space should furthermore allow parents to use their own language especially if they are not confident in using English. This could potentially boost parents' "self-confidence, which is lacking particularly for the black African parent governors" (Mncube, 2007, p. 141). Parental participation in SGBs is additionally dependent on literacy and educational levels of parents and whether they have received training in school governance issues. Additionally, meetings should be scheduled at a time that is suitable for most parents to enable regular attendance of meetings as public transport is seldom available in the evenings.

In a follow up study Mncube (2009) further recommends that parental involvement in SGBs should increase if teachers are trained in methods of communicating and encouraging parents to get involved in school activities. Training teachers "should form part of the curriculum of pre-service educators, and existing educators should be given the necessary in-service training" (Mncube, 2009, p. 100). This training should enable teachers to confidently engage with parents about various forms of school activity involvement. Ultimately, this could lead to the voice of parents being heard and in turn they could feel a sense of belonging that would lead to engagement and participation in making decisions at SGB level.

One of the three stages of a South African study conducted by Lachman et al. (2016), included a variety of data collection methods; in-depth interviews and semi-structured focus groups with local practitioners and low-income parents. The parents were from predominantly isiXhosa-speaking communities in Cape Town and the "practitioners were community workers recruited from local non-governmental organizations that provide services to disadvantaged children and families" (Lachman et al., 2016, p. 234). Thematic analysis was used to identify the following topics for inclusion in parenting programs:

- Learning how to manage behaviour problems;
- Addressing corporal punishment and other discipline strategies;
- Building positive relationships with children;
- Keeping children safe in dangerous communities;
- Coping with stressful lives;
- Communicating about HIV/AIDS and bereavement;
- Involving fathers in caregiving.

Barriers to participation were identified as:

- Finding an appropriate meeting time;
- Lack of funds for transportation;
- Poor weather conditions;
- Parental and child illness;
- Childcare responsibilities with small children (Lachman et al., 2016).

As possible solutions to these barriers, participants made suggestions that included providing food and childcare, and reimbursing participants for public transportation expenditures. Others recommended a versatile program format that could possibly include group and individual sessions at home for sick, older, or disabled parents. Respondents disagreed with each other whether financial assistance would increase participation or not. They however generally agreed “that some form of recognition, such as certificates of completion or prizes for full attendance, would incentivize attendance” (Lachman et al., 2016, p. 2343).

Given the reality that SA families are facing, as noted in Chapter one, Ebersöhn (2017) suggests an alternative to educational interventions by integrating resilience, health, and well-being lenses that “may generate knowledge on how to cushion against poverty and adapt financially” (p. 6).

Her study draws on ethnographic and participatory case study data, from three Southern African studies. Ebersöhn (2017) advocates that:

> well-being oriented education interventions include: mobilising connectedness (school-communities where individuals do not feel isolated); developing self-esteem (school-communities where students, teachers and parents are not ashamed of who they are); and investing in happy early childhood (school-communities that build initial trust and attachment, rather than fear and distrust). (p. 8)

Ebersöhn’s (2017) research sheds light on the possibilities of using different lenses that build on connectedness, confidence, and early childhood development, through multi-sectoral responses.

A mathematics story-time program implemented at two schools in Makhanda with parents of Grade R learners, encouraged parents to engage with their children through mathematics picture storybooks and resources (Graven & Jorgensen, 2018). This story-time program “involved three one-hour sessions (spaced out weekly or monthly) in which four story books were provided along with related resources (e.g. paper finger puppets, laminated numeral and number word cards, dice, cards)” (Graven & Jorgensen, 2018, p. 346). During the sessions,

each story reading was modelled to them as well as demonstrations on how to engage the children in mathematical activities with the resources and examples of questions that could be posed to the children. The findings clearly indicated that parents and children benefitted from the workshops and the children furthermore regularly played with the resources with other members of the family and other children. The authors highlighted a possible “key enabler in this was that the resources, while handed to parents, were to be given to their children providing for a sense of ownership of them” (p. 351).

In their cross-sector partnership study of parents with disabled children and staff of a provincial and national body, Philpott & Muthukrishna (2019) question the dynamics of power in a partnership and the meaning of an equitable partnership. The authors noted that “dominant actors in partnerships are those in power and authority over others, and they govern the fate of those who are vulnerable, for example disabled children and their families” (pp. 7-8). To enable the development of voice and agency of participants, especially those in vulnerable situations, effective communication and honest feedback is crucial. They acknowledge that an unequal balance of power is one of the barriers to an effective partnership, especially with parents of disabled children. Their findings suggest that there is “a need for a rights-based, social justice agenda to underpin parent-professional relationships, to address the power dynamics and pervasive discourses that oppress the parent actors” (2019, pp. 9-10).

A study conducted in an Eastern Cape Metropolitan Municipality examines the experiences of home visitors who were “working with families of children enrolled in ECD centres” (Azzi-Lessing & Schmidt, 2019, p. 4). The value of this study for my project is in the description of what the home visitors experienced when they visited the homes of families living in poverty in an EC urban setting. The home visitors’ experiences were divided into four themes:

1. Encountering the effects of extreme family poverty;
2. Identifying high rates and multiple aspects of child maltreatment;
3. Encountering scarce resources in high-need areas;
4. Finding rewards and maintaining a desire to continue serving challenging populations.

The description of their experiences and the harsh conditions “reflect the extreme lack of resources to address the needs of vulnerable families in the Eastern Cape and other parts of the country” (Azzi-Lessing & Schmidt, 2019, p. 8), which is similar to conditions faced by the majority of families in the areas that the Centre serves.

The study of Machimana et al. (2021) focuses on higher education and community engagement-partnerships, arguing that communities often highlight the lack of assets as their main problems, but are ignorant about the invaluable local resources that could be used. In an article by Ebersöhn & Malan-Van Rooyen (2018), they refer to “strengths” (or a strength-based approach) rather than focusing on “deficits”. Partnerships and especially educational partnerships where voices of both partners are acknowledged and valued, are crucial to enhance child development (Machimana et al., 2021).

The impact of parental support and involvement on children’s development and educational progress on national and international level has been highlighted in the above studies and literature. The study of Jacobs & Daniels (2020) further argues against the risk of narrow views focusing on “deficits” rather than the various forms of capital that exist within parents, children, and community members, despite the extent of their limited income. The small single mother study highlighted that “despite severe societal adversity, these participating mothers invested in their children’s educational and emotional well-being by accumulating alternative forms of embedded community cultural wealth” (Jacobs & Daniels, 2020, p. 160). To engage in home-school partnerships and develop positive collaborative relationships with single-mother families, the authors argue that it is crucial to acknowledge the “informal and non-traditional forms of capital” (p. 172) within the diverse SA context.

Rationale for the Research Project

Parents and children from disadvantaged communities in SA continue to face a multitude of challenges. Current parents, who themselves were raised in vulnerable families, may have had little positive role modelling to influence the upbringing of their children. Even at pre-school level, parents do not easily engage with ECD practitioners, and the language used is often not understood by parents. Parents may feel vulnerable and powerless, which makes open and meaningful communication between equals as parents and practitioners, difficult or strained (Okeke, 2014). Exploring the value of an educational partnership within a multilingual context and in a culturally diverse South African context, that is characterised by high levels of inequality, seemed both timely and necessary, especially given the lack of similar research at pre-school level in SA.

Conclusion

Extensive research has provided valuable data on the benefits and value of interventions during the early years of the child’s development. The parent remains the child’s first teacher and their involvement in any intervention is paramount. Irrespective of the content of comprehensive ECD interventions in LIMC, building trusting culture sensitive relationships with parents needs to form the foundation. While it is acknowledged that developing

educational partnerships or parental engagement is not easy (Epstein, 1995; McKenna & Millen, 2013; Seeley, 1984), Strawhun et al. (2014) state that “when parents and teachers collaborate on behalf of children, they *create windows of light* for the generations that follow” (p. 3).

Chapter 4: Conceptual framework, methodology and program design

The previous chapters provide a theoretical framework and cover contextual factors influencing the ECD sector, internationally and nationally. These form the foundation for the conceptual and methodological frameworks of this chapter. Situated within the former, this chapter will outline and explain the latter frameworks, the program design and implementation and various elements of the ethical framework, the data collection, analysis, and synthesis.

Conceptual Framework and Researcher Position

"You are the sum total of the people you meet and interact with in the world. Whether it's your family, peers, or co-workers, the opportunities you have and the things that you learn all come through doors that other people open for you" (Colby, 2012, p. 1).

The nature of my qualitative research study was to explore the possible value of an educational partnership within a multilingual pre-school setting. The overarching aim of this project was to explore the learning practices at homes and in the pre-school, during six sessions within a multilingual reflective research environment, where mutual exchanges of knowledge took place between parents, practitioners, and the researcher.

Given the diversity of the three local languages and cultural contexts, I conducted my research within a broad socio-cultural framework, using a predominantly constructivist paradigm, while my data was analysed using an interpretive lens. My role as researcher was to be actively involved in the research project, while being guided by Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory that learning, and development are constructed within various social, cultural, and historical contexts. After being internalised by the individual, the material assimilated from sociocultural sources enables expression of thoughts, which in the context of the *iStoep* sessions was made possible in the first language of the participant. The multilingual context of the pre-school, as noted in Chapter one, and the advantages of communicating and engaging in the person's first language, as noted in Chapter three, resulted in the creation of a multilingual *iStoep* environment. The *Thuis in School* program had five meetings that ran for approximately two hours, whereas I decided to run six sessions due to the uncertainty of the length of time that translations would take, if no allowances were made for additional time. The creation of a welcoming and informal space would hopefully form a social space or ZPD (Hardman, 2016) where active communication and engagement could take place between all participants. Furthermore, that form of facilitation within this social space could lead to collective capacity-building between all participants, which ultimately could influence the child's development whether at home or the pre-school.

Parents, co-facilitators, and I as the facilitator, came from diverse backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds and spoke and understood at least two of the three local languages, as explained in Chapter one. Following Vygotsky's (1962) theory of ways in which we construct meaning, each participant brought their own collection of constructs, which were explored during interviews and additionally through the *iStoep* sessions. Participants' constructs were initially formed within the context in which they were raised, namely the "inter-psychological" (Hardman, 2016), which included a historical context of oppression, colonialism, patriarchy, and *Apartheid*, as well as the language or languages they were surrounded by, before being internalised "intra-psychologically".

Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory was applied at various levels: one attempting to understand the parent participants' perceptions, experiences and therefore constructs of their roles in preparing their young children for formal schooling; secondly through the intervention of the *iStoep* sessions, creating a ZPD space where learning and development could happen. These dual roles of sharing information and decision- making related to what is best for the child, were to take place in conversations between parents, facilitator, and co-facilitators within an educational partnership approach.

The roles of the novice and the mediator (the more capable other) (Hardman, 2016) were used interchangeably during the *iStoep* sessions. One of the adapted principles within the South African context of an educational partnership and this study was "mutual capacity-building" or as referred to by Mapp & Kuttner (2013) from the USA, as "dual capacity building" framework. Parents have more knowledge of their children at home and when they described their exercises or experiences, they fulfilled the role of the more capable other and the co-facilitators were learning in the ZPD space. When the co-facilitators explained classroom practices or theory they had learnt and developed over the years, they fulfilled the role of the more capable. An additional level was to share with parents the importance and value of play in a child's development (Vygotsky, 1978) and how this links to self-regulated learning (Pino-Pasternak & Whitebread, 2010).

Both constructivism and Vygotsky's theory supports "the emphasis on how the social, cultural, and historical milieu impact on a child's developmental trajectory" (Hardman 2016, p. 142). These aspects are unique to each individual and need to be taken into consideration and understood, as this directly impacts learning and development of the individual (Hardman, 2016). The purpose of the *iStoep* sessions was to explore the understanding and meaning of each other's constructs and develop new constructs through conversations and discussions, made possible through first language communication and participation through sharing of practices, information, and reflective sessions. To enable forming of new constructs, social

spaces were created where ideas were shared additionally through the mediums of photographs and videos, to enable the expression of and internalisation of thoughts. Group discussions allowed participants to externalise possible circular thoughts in a linear way, through their first language. It was within this paradigm that *iStoep* sessions were created and the intervention developed to allow all participants to either develop new constructs or add further meaning to their constructs. The process of each participant forming a particular meaning at that point in time is unique to each and this was observed during data collection, when participants answered questions either during the interviews or evaluation section. These thoughts and constructs are complex and not static, as they can change when individuals are exposed to new information and experiences. This will be further outlined and explained in the findings and conclusion chapters. The complexity of constructs is further bound in what we know or perceive as reality and knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Thus, drawing from a predominantly constructivist paradigm, ontologically I viewed my realities as multiple, intangible mental constructs, as described in Chapter one, which could change over time (Moon & Blackman, 2014). What participants viewed as realities would be interpreted accordingly during three different timeframes: one during the interviews to gather background information; secondly during the six *iStoep* sessions; and thirdly in the telephonic follow up interviews a few months later. Selecting an exploratory study was therefore purposeful, to gather snapshots of home and pre-school practices, mutual capacity-building possibilities, and the potential value of an educational partnership, without being able to make generalisations. This links with a relativist ontology that Moon & Blackman (2014) describe as "reality is constructed within the human mind, such that no one true reality exists; instead, reality is relative according to each individual who experiences it at a given time and place" (p. 1170).

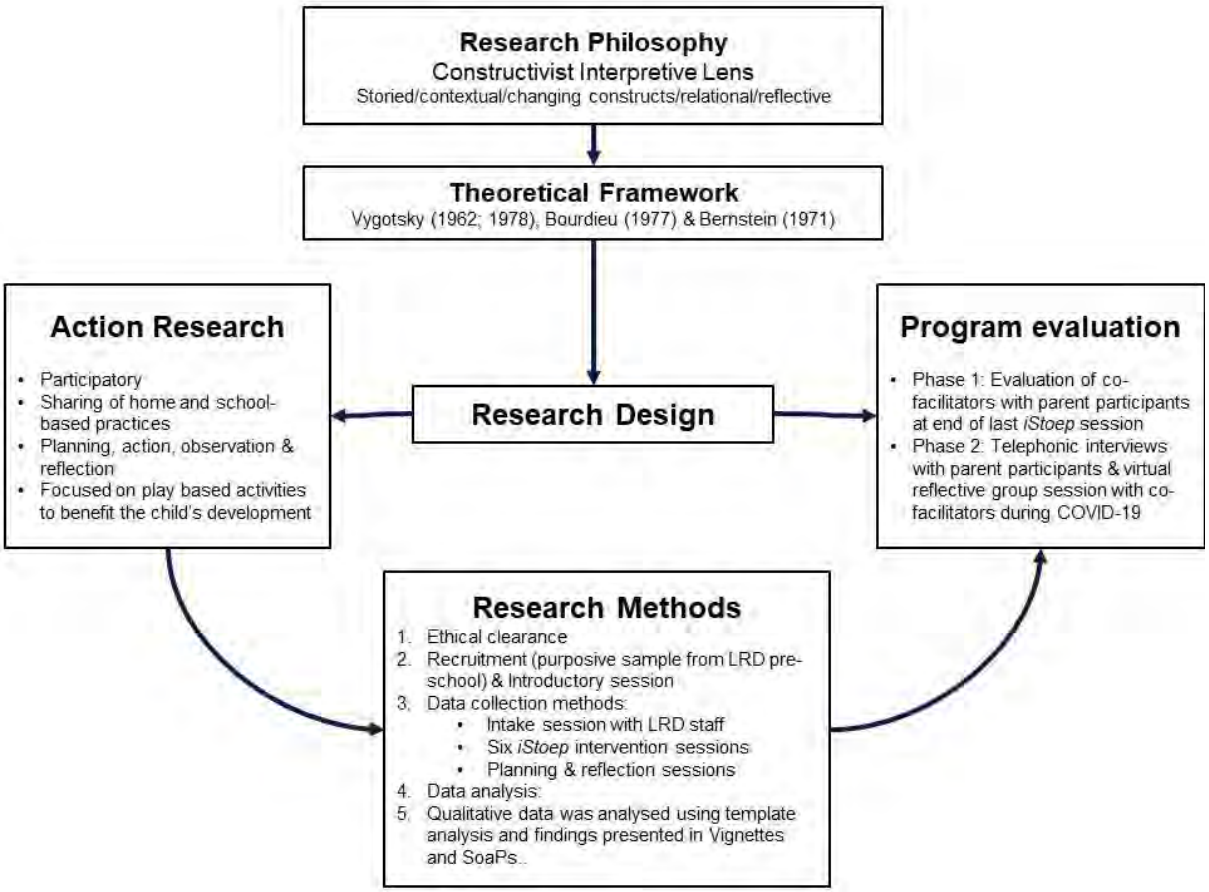
My subjectivist epistemological position assumes that in an attempt to discover knowledge it all depends on participants' perceptions and understandings of reality. Therefore, according to Moon & Blackman (2014), "people impose meaning and value on the world and interpret it in a way that makes sense to them" (p. 1172). It is anticipated that the value of subjectivist research in an exploratory study will reveal insights into home and pre-school practices and factors that could contribute to improving communication between parents, practitioners, pre-school, and the Centre. Whilst as the researcher, I was collecting the data, the *iStoep* setting and epistemological relationship between the researcher and the participants were informal, interactive, and relational.

The methodological assumption “relates to the appropriate approach to systematic inquiry” (Mertens, 2007, p. 215). This systematic inquiry includes the choices that the researcher makes regarding research design and methods of implementation, together with data analysis, interpretation, and meaning-making from the data, underpinned by their specific ontological and epistemological perspective. The methodological framework of my research, using inductive knowledge that was contextually unique within a “customized” action research methodology, allowed me to be qualitatively creative. The use of different data collection methods (interviews, action research, reflective data, and post-intervention interviews); different data analysis methods (template and thematic) together with contributions from participants from different cultural backgrounds, as well as my own unique position, resulted in applying a mix of compatible components within the constructivist and interpretive paradigms. Following principles of rigorous qualitative research, while allowing for flexibility within the research process of implementation, decisions and judgements were subjectively influenced by the researcher’s and co-facilitators’ contextual frames of reference (Yin, 2011).

My research problem was therefore explored within the assumptions and beliefs of what reality and knowledge imply within the constructivist and interpretivist paradigms, of multiple “socially constructed realities; highly interactive researcher-participant relationship that leads to discovered meaning and expression of experience” (Ponterotto, 2010, p. 582). Together, these paradigmatic aspects framed my conceptual framework to explore the home-and school-based practices of pre-schoolers in a multilingual pre-school setting, to explore new understandings and to make new meanings, albeit subjectively, that hoped to assist the pre-schooler’s development. Value was therefore placed on the importance of voice within a multilingual setting, of exposing participants and researcher to additional constructs in a social space, where learning from each other (parents, practitioners, the school, and researcher) could be facilitated in a meaningful manner that could hopefully make a difference to the child’s development in two different environments. A snapshot view of my methodological framework is provided below.

Figure 1

Research Methodology Framework



Ethical Framework

The fourth philosophical assumption that defines the paradigm and research context of this research project, is the axiological question. Axiology is concerned about ethical considerations in theory and in practice and addresses questions of what constitutes moral behaviour during the entire research project, especially in culturally complex communities (Mertens, 2007). Due to the latter, as described in Chapter one, ethical elements were considered before starting the research project as well as during and after the project. These ethical elements shaped the ethical framework of this project and included the following: informed multilingual consent; minimizing power imbalances; ensuring inclusion of the voice of participants; a participatory intervention method that included capacity-building of all participants; principles of educational partnerships; data analysis and storage of the data.

Yin (2011) strongly argues that “setting and maintaining ethical standards of conduct” (p. 38) are crucial prior to starting a research project. As a social worker one is constantly aware of

ethical considerations during interventions and counselling, which assisted me in being aware of various ethical aspects from the initial conceptual stages of my proposal. However, completing the prescribed ethical application form of the tertiary institution assisted me to think more broadly and identify possible risks that I had not anticipated, especially regarding the use of audio and video material of learning opportunities of minor children. The various relevant ethical aspects were detailed in my ethical application that was submitted to the Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee (RUESC) – Human Ethics (HE) sub-committee. This formed the foundation of my research project throughout all the stages of knowledge production (Kvale, 1996).

Yin (2011) compares research integrity to taking an oath to strive "to produce research that is truthful, including clarifying the point of view being represented" (p. 41); this also includes the research lens through which the researcher interprets and analyses the data. A further ethical issue of concern highlighted by O'Carroll (2006) is research undertaken in developing countries such as South Africa, where there has been a history of oppression and abuse of human rights. The goal of this research is ultimately a restitutive one in the sense that it hopes to contribute towards mutual knowledge exchange and finding possible solutions and practices that may lead towards addressing past inequalities. Furthermore, as a social worker I followed the ethical guidelines of my profession, together with the following guiding ethical principles which formed the backbone of my research:

- respect and dignity,
- transparency and honesty,
- accountability and responsibility
- integrity and academic professionalism (South African Council for Social Service Professions, 1986).

My ethical clearance letter, reference number 2019–0365–462, is attached in Appendix 1. The extension of my ethical approval was obtained to continue collecting data in 2020 is attached in Appendix 2. As noted earlier, the potential risks and responsibilities of my data collecting research tools, such as video material of the participants' young children was clearly identified and mitigated, which will be further described below. I was open and honest about my role of power and privilege at the Centre and fully aware of the influence of my demographic profile and how these may have impacted on the various lenses of my research. Applying a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, which included a "highly interactive researcher-participant relationship that leads to discovered meaning" (Ponterotto, 2010, p. 582) was an integral part of the *iStoep* sessions. All participants, co-facilitators, and facilitator would

hopefully discover new meaning. This is further highlighted in Chapter six where the process of the sessions is described.

Before the Research Project Started

The clarification of elements within the ethics application prior to the study

Purpose of the research

To explore the value of an educational partnership within a multilingual pre-school setting aiming for mutual capacity-building between parents, practitioners, the pre-school, and the researcher. It was hoped that the research project outcome would possibly improve early stimulation practices at home and at the pre-school which would benefit the development of the pre-schooler to prepare them for formal schooling.

Description of data collection methods and characteristics of sample

Data were to be collected from a variety of methods: data from interviews conducted with parent participants who would sign consent forms to participate; data from a joint interview with the practitioners and co-ordinator who would complete consent forms; data from the six *iStoep* sessions that would include photographs, audio, and video recordings; and data from the planning and reflection sessions with co-facilitators.

The participating parents were parents who had enrolled their children at the LRD pre-school for 2019. The LRD is the only known multilingual pre-school in Makhanda. Parents mostly come from a combination of economic and cultural backgrounds. Some parents are middle class parents who have stable backgrounds and pay school fees, while other parents receive a scholarship for their children. Predominantly parents from isiXhosa and Coloured ethnic groups enrol their children at the LRD. All parents and children at the pre-school are treated as individuals and all backgrounds respected. There is one amaXhosa practitioner and one Coloured practitioner employed at the LRD, with one having completed her Level 5 ECD qualification and the other in the process of completing the said qualification. The co-ordinator has a teaching diploma and is also from the Coloured ethnic group. The researcher is a white social worker with 30 years of national and international community development work experience and had been managing the Centre at that stage, for 10 years.

The nature of interactions, frequency, duration & procedures involved

The nature of the project being exploratory, a semi-structured interview schedule was designed that would be completed with parents who signed informed consent forms. The interviews were completed in the parents' preferred first language of either isiXhosa, Afrikaans, or English. Interviews were completed prior to the commencement of the facilitated *iStoep* sessions. The isiXhosa interviews would be conducted by a specifically recruited translator and the Afrikaans and English interviews by the researcher who is fully bilingual.

Participating parents and practitioners would identify their topics of interest or concerns re the development of pre-schoolers. These identified topics were facilitated by the researcher during six *iStoep* intervention sessions. The first language of participating parents and practitioners would guide the facilitation languages during the *iStoep* sessions. The researcher would introduce the specific session in English, whereafter discussions would be facilitated in first language small groups by the co-facilitators. During the discussion sessions in the small groups, the researcher would observe verbal participation and body language using the observation schedule. Due to the complexities of the various languages and discussions that would take place, all these sessions would be audio recorded, transcribed, and translated where necessary.

Depending on the layout of the venue there would either be one or two stationary video recorders. Due to there being multiple voices in any discussion, the purpose of the video recording was to assist the researcher and transcribers to provide accurate transcriptions, as well as accuracy using the observation schedule. Furthermore, the video recordings would only be viewed by the researcher and co-facilitators to assist in post sessions reflections and planning of the subsequent sessions. These post session reflections and planning sessions would also be audio recorded as these activities would be part of the mutual capacity-building data collection. During the planning and reflection sessions, co-facilitators would be regarded as collaborators. During the discussions with the groups, the practitioners are part of the discussion sharing within their first language, as we have one amaXhosa practitioner and one Coloured practitioner.

In preparation for the next session, parents and practitioners would be requested to video early stimulation practices that occur in the various settings. For example, if the parents would like to know different strategies of reading a book to their child, practitioners could video record themselves reading a book to the group of children whose parents gave consent and this would be viewed during the next session. It was completely voluntary for participating parents to either bring photographs, or a short video, or a drawing of the activities that their child participated in at home. Parents could also verbally share stories at the sessions. The role of the practitioners would be to share practices of the pre-school and the importance of learning through play at a young age. The children attending the pre-school are between the ages of three and a half and five and a half years old. The mutual sharing of practices in the various settings across different cultures would hopefully enable mutual capacity-building.

A convenient time for participants and six dates would be negotiated with them. The intervention session would be no longer than two hours and be held in an informal atmosphere around a cup of coffee. This is an attempt to move away from “formal” type of parenting programs of the past, where parents passively sat and listened to information that is given to them. It was anticipated that a case study approach would be applied, to guide the in-depth implementation of this research project. Parents, co-facilitators, and the researcher too participate in six intervention sessions, with the focus on early stimulation practices at home and at school that could be used to the benefit of the child’s development.

Recruitment details and nature of information to be gathered

As noted earlier, the sample would be recruited from the LRD, the only known multilingual pre-school in Makhanda. Invitation letters would be sent to all parents and practitioners to attend a Recruitment and Introductory session where details of the research project would be explained, together with the possible outcome, purpose, and value thereof. Parents who were unable to attend the Recruitment and Introduction session would receive a detailed explanatory letter and could request further clarification from the researcher, to make an informed decision whether they wanted to participate or not. Parents and practitioners willing to participate would be requested to sign consent forms, which would be explained and made available to them in their first language.

Furthermore, that there would be a minimum and maximum requirement sample and that participants who would like to be involved would be selected on a first come first serve basis, but all learning material would be distributed in a condensed written format (summary) to parents and practitioners not involved in the research. A minimum of four parents and one practitioner were required to participate in the six sessions. For facilitation to be effective, the group should not be bigger than ten participants (maximum of eight parents and two practitioners), to allow all participants to communicate and engage in the process. The semi-structured interviews would only be completed with the consented participants, as the project is not about generalisations but rather exploring and attempting to understand practices in the mentioned settings.

Information would be gathered through an in-depth implementation of an educational partnership as an intervention tool with a group of parents and practitioners of only one multilingual pre-school. The focus would be on mutual capacity-building of participants to assist jointly in preparing the pre-schoolers to start their formal school career. The intention was that all the children, parents, and practitioners at the pre-school together with the co-facilitators and researcher could potentially benefit from the project and not only those who gave informed consent to participate in the facilitated sessions.

The purposes of requesting the practitioners to video-record were the following:

- for parents to see their children participating in a multilingual environment;
- to highlight the importance of learning through play at this young age;
- to observe pre-school practices that could possibly be adapted at home.

It would be voluntary for participating parents to give verbal feedback, take photographs, or a short video, or to draw the activities in which their child participates at home and share these with the other parents and co-facilitators at the next session. It would be important to clearly re-iterate that their sharing was voluntary and that they would not be excluded from the research project, should they decide not to share any of the latter.

During the six facilitated intervention sessions agreed topics of child development would be discussed. Co-facilitators would be trained by the researcher to facilitate the

discussions in small groups in first languages. It was planned that the researcher would introduce the topic in English, whereafter discussions would be held in the different language groups, which would be facilitated by the co-facilitators. The researcher intended to use an observation template during the discussions, which would also be used for post-session reflections. Feedback by the co-facilitator to the bigger groups would be given in English to enable knowledge sharing with short translations for clarification or where necessary.

Audio recordings of sessions would be transcribed to collect in-depth data and stationary video recording of the sessions was for the purpose of accurate transcriptions. Furthermore, it would only be viewed by the researcher, participating practitioners, co-ordinator, and translator to assist in post-session reflections and planning purposes. The post-session reflections and planning for the next session would become a collaborative reflective activity, to clarify aspects.

The practitioner/s would video-record the participating children in the relevant agreed activity topic of the *iStoep* session in the classroom, to show participating parents during the next session. This would give parents a glimpse of practices within the multilingual classroom and during the session discussions would be held to explore how these practices could possibly be adapted for the home environment. The researcher would observe the participating parents during the discussion sessions of the intervention, focusing on their levels of participation and body language. The aim of these observations was to develop a deeper understanding of the parent participant through their levels of sharing and participation. It was planned that the co-facilitators would complete their observation form after each session. This would be used during the post-session reflection to discuss how to include all participants or how to deal with a participant that controls the discussions.

Gaining of permissions, consent, and assent

Permission was requested from: Mr Matinise, DSD District Office, Makhanda, as the gatekeeper of minor children in ECD centres in the Sarah Baartman district; and from the ICDP Trust Trustees, who were the gatekeepers of the staff (including the researcher) and programs offered at the Lebone Centre, which includes the LRD pre-school. After the completed consent and assent forms were received, appointments were made with the participants to conduct semi-structured interviews.

It would be clearly stated that participation is not compulsory, but purely voluntary and no repercussions would follow non-participation. Potential participants would be guaranteed that not giving consent would not exclude their children from any learning or activity or put their post in jeopardy. As noted earlier, audio, photographs, and video activities will clearly be explained and their right to not give consent. The consent forms would be given to participants at the Recruitment and Introductory session where they would be given a choice to either complete at the end of the session or think about it further and return it to the pre-school within three days. The English version of the informed consent form is attached in Appendix 3. Should potential participants not return the form, it would be accepted that they have not given their consent. Participants furthermore would be given the choice to start the research project and withdraw at any stage without any questions asked.

My position of being the researcher of the project and the manager would be acknowledged and addressed with the participants. Although the practitioners would be participants, they also hold a position of power which would also be addressed and acknowledged if they willingly agree to participate in the study. The lines of reporting of any misconduct and uneasiness were to be explained. Parent and practitioner participants would be given the relevant Trustee members' contact details, as well as Mr Matinise's at the DSD, should they at any stage want to report concerns about the researcher or any of the co-facilitators.

Means of providing privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of data

Interview schedules would not be labelled with names but presented with numbers. Audio transcripts would identify participants only by an initial. As mentioned earlier, the shared knowledge and learning that might take place during the intervention sessions with parents and co-facilitators would be distributed to all the parents and practitioners. Sensitive and personal information however was to be kept confidential within the group and not to be disclosed to others. All participants and co-facilitators were to be given pseudonyms within the written research project.

Data management, storage, and use

All audio and video recordings as well as transcriptions would be saved electronically with password protection. Any printed information would be stored in a locked cupboard on the premises of the Centre that only I have access to. Classroom activity video recorded data would be downloaded on the researcher's laptop and thereafter deleted from the recording device. After each *iStoep* session, the audio and video recordings would be removed from the *iStoep* venue. The audio recording would be given to the transcribers and then to the translator, who would be requested to sign confidentiality forms. The video material and recordings would be downloaded on the researcher's laptop with a password protection and then it would be deleted off the video recorder. Electronic data on any device would be password protected only known to the researcher. All data would be destroyed after five years.

Risks and benefits of the research

The potential risks that were identified: the exposure of visual and audio data of minor children and families from disadvantaged communities and participants not honouring confidential and sensitive data that should not be divulged to others outside the group; the position of the researcher as centre manager and the power this holds; and feelings of awkwardness or embarrassment regarding limited resources at the pre-school and homes. With identifying these risks, remedial measures were identified and put in place in the event of such a risk occurring.

The goal and potential benefit of this research was ultimately a restitutive one in the sense that it hoped to contribute towards mutual knowledge exchange and finding possible solutions and practices that may lead to addressing past inequalities.

Conflicts of interest

Throughout my ethical framework, my position of power and privilege was addressed. No funding or any other reward was received for this research project or the outcome thereof.

During the Research (Risks and Responsibilities)

As noted in Chapter one, initially I planned to implement Engeström's (2001) Expansive Learning Cycle, but due to practical contextual challenges and the multilingual aspect I decided to change it to a more customised collaborative action research methodology (McNiff, 2002). After ethical clearance was received, the recruitment and consent process followed with the six *iStoep* intervention sessions beginning in the second half of the year. One practitioner opted to not participate in the research project. In total, eight parents signed

consent forms, one practitioner and the co-ordinator. Most of the parents were Afrikaans- and English-speaking, with one isiXhosa parent, thus an additional translator was needed.

As identified, there were various high-risk elements present in my research project, such as audio and video recording of activities of minor children and their parents. To enable sharing of early stimulation practices with each other with the possible outcome of learning from each other, this needed continuous careful consideration during the implementation phase, to ensure that all ethical positions and procedures were followed. The practitioner verbalised that it was practically difficult to video only the children whose parents signed consent forms, as children would naturally move in an out of play areas. I therefore first viewed any video material of the pre-schoolers in the classroom before the session, to ensure that only consented children's faces were visible. In instances where this happened, I used a photographic paint brush tool to erase any identifying features. Children were also at times distracted in their play if the practitioner started videoing their game, but they soon forgot about the video activity and continued with their play.

Since video recording may be found intrusive by participants (Asan & Montague, 2014), they were assured that the video recordings were to assist the researcher with accurate transcriptions, due to there being multiple voices in any discussion. Group discussions were audio recorded and because one video recorder was stationary, it was less intrusive. Additionally, the parents were informed that the video recordings will only be viewed by the researcher herself, along with the participating practitioner and co-ordinator, to assist in post-session reflections and planning of the subsequent sessions. Due to work constraints and co-facilitators' personal time, it was impractical to view these recordings between sessions. The video recordings were eventually only viewed by the researcher during the data transcription and analysis stages.

The difference between what constituted learning and sharing with others and confidential information was addressed during the second *iStoep* session, with the identification of house rules that all agreed to. During session four, one of the participant's mothers arrived at the Centre to give her daughter a message. The participant invited her mother to join the group session. While this is a natural hospitable action to invite people to join a group, my concern was that it was a research project and participants had signed consent forms to participate. This was an ethical element I had not anticipated and was uncertain how to handle this, as it was already dark outside, and I did not want any harm to come to her while she had to walk back home alone. I asked all the participants whether they were comfortable with her staying, (she was also a Community Health Worker of the local clinic) and also said that they had a

right to say “no,” in which case I would ask her to leave and I would quickly take her home. All present agreed that they were comfortable with her staying.

No external transcribers of the data were used, as I transcribed the audio and video footage myself, which further limited risks. The translator and co-facilitator transcribed and translated the one interview with the amaXhosa participant.

Pseudonyms

Given that I changed the methodology to collaborative action research, it would have been suitable for parent participants to select their own pseudonym. I unfortunately omitted to ask them to select a pseudonym. I have however attempted to select a pseudonym that represented their ethnic origin. The co-facilitators I refer to according to their roles and responsibilities, but for the sake of anonymity, I used initials and these are clarified on page 108.

The Structure of the Research Methodology

As noted earlier, the decision was made to apply Action Research (AR) as the more suitable methodology for this exploratory study, due to the flexible nature of the process (McNiff, 2002), in a multilingual intervention setting while addressing multi-faceted problems. The basic principles of AR after identifying a problem are: “imagining a possible solution, trying it out, evaluating it (did it work?), and changing practice in the light of the evaluation” (McNiff, 2002, p. 7). The cyclic and iterative processes of AR allowed for learning to take place *during* the six *iStoep* sessions, *in between* the sessions and *afterwards* (see Chapter seven). McNiff (2002) highlights the importance of the notion of learning that should take place within the cyclic AR process. In defining AR further, Cohen et al. (2002) note AR as “a small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such an intervention” (p. 297). The *iStoep* sessions were a small intervention with six sessions to hopefully promote positive change and improve home and pre-school practices, to possibly benefit the pre-schooler’s development. The elements of intervention, improvement of practices, participation and social change are essential principles of community psychology, in which this study is situated.

The aspect of participation was crucial to this study and as Ebersöhn and Malan-Van Rooyen (2018) advocate:

> research aimed at generating evidence to address challenges emerging from such inequality (postcolonial South African society) requires methodologies that can on the one hand elicit insights, while respecting power imbalances and revering often

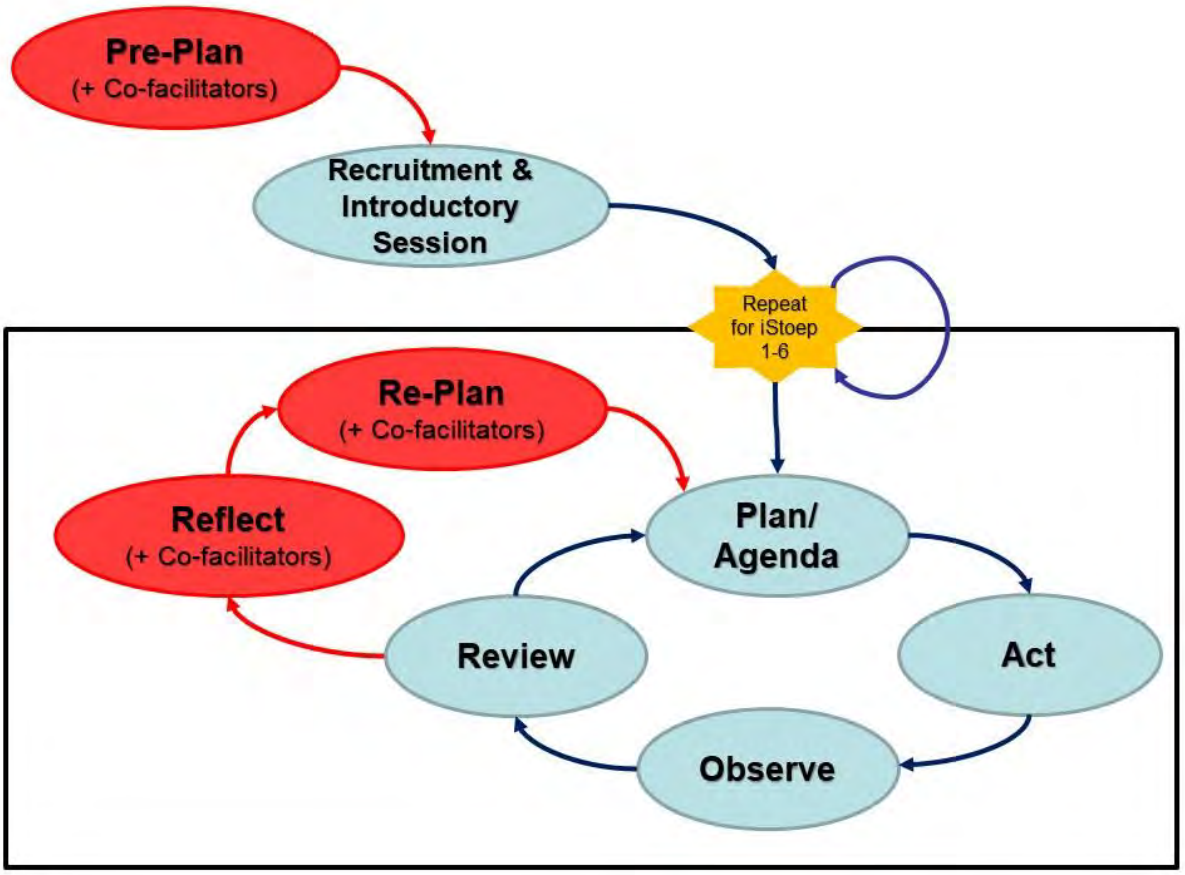
> marginalised existing sociocultural strengths on the other. The use of participatory methodologies to generate data for development aims in marginalized populations is known. (p. 1)

While this study did not apply a fully-fledged Participatory Action Research (PAR) method, it promoted different levels of participation by the various participants. Parent participants, the practitioner and co-ordinator identified the topics of the *iStoep* sessions, the time, length of sessions and dates that were suitable to them. Co-facilitators actively participated and guided the planning and reflection sessions, changes, and trials of the action. Participants were actively involved in giving feedback, their opinions, thoughts, and ideas during the various sessions.

Cycle one included the recruitment of participants during a Recruitment and Introductory session to allow for informed consent to take place, as research language is not an everyday language in disadvantaged communities. Cycles one to six included the cyclical process of planning, action, observation, and review within the *iStoep* sessions and additional planning and reflection sessions between the co-facilitators as depicted in Figure two below.

Figure 2

Action Research Cycle (Adapted from Akhurst & Lawson, 2013)



This cycle was repeated for each *iStoep* session. Each session is described in chapter six, summarised in one page as a SoaP (Akhurst & Lawson, 2013) to provide a snapshot of the session, with an extensive reflection thereafter and noting the links from one session to the next.

Program Design and Implementation

The exploratory nature of this project guided the program design, which included an element of flexibility. However, the ideas of the Educational Partnership manual (Iliás et al., 2019b) provided a structure that could be adapted and changed within the *iStoep* environment. The program design was guided by the participatory component of participants, the multilingual aspect, and contextual factors. This section initially had a dual purpose: firstly, to serve as a record of the actual practical implementation of the intervention; and secondly to make changes to the intervention with a new group of parents before implementing Phase two during 2020. With the outbreak of COVID-19 the latter was not possible and contingency plans were made to include follow up telephonic interviews (where practically possible), with the 2019 participants.

Program Planning

I wanted to start the *iStoep* sessions with the parents and practitioners early in the year of 2019 to enable both groups to continue using the practices of sharing what was happening at home and the pre-school. It was anticipated that both would share more easily with each other and therefore it would directly benefit the development of the child over a longer period. Due to the ethical clearance that was needed before I could start, the research project only started in the second half of the year.

Educational Partnerships are not a well-known concept in South Africa, and especially being applied in one of the few multilingual pre-schools in the country. Initially not knowing in which first language parents were going to complete consent forms and agree to participate in the project, I anticipated and prepared for different scenarios of predominant first language speakers. I would be able to facilitate the *iStoep* sessions if the majority were Afrikaans and English-speaking. If the majority were isiXhosa-speaking, the translator would have to facilitate the session, which would have resulted in training the translator on the various elements of an educational partnership and facilitation thereof. The contextual environments of the Netherlands and SA are different, thus the Educational Partnership manual (Iliás et al., 2019b) and elements of an educational partnership were adapted to guide participants' participation during the *iStoep* sessions, which will be further described in Chapter six.

Recruitment and Introductory session

An invitation letter was sent out to all LRD parents (x 28), the two on-site practitioners and the co-ordinator inviting them to an Introductory session. This was held on the 6 June 2019 and sixteen parents attended the Recruitment and Introductory session, along with the Afrikaans and English-speaking practitioner, the co-ordinator and amaXhosa translator. The research was explained using everyday English and Afrikaans language where possible, and translations were done in isiXhosa for clarification purposes. Due to the sensitivity of video material and potential inclusion of footage of minor children, these were further explained step by step to parents to allow parents with lower literacy levels to understand the content.

Explaining a research project to parents who are not familiar with the terminology was challenging, but I read and explained every point in a non-academic manner to all present. At this session there were parents from all three languages present. The consent forms were translated prior to this session into all three local languages. All those present were given the choice to think about it and those who wanted to join the research project could either complete the consent form at the end of the session or return the form within the next three days with their child. Opportunities were given for questions and answers in their first language that

further contributed to the element of informed consent. A thank you letter was sent out to the parents who attended the Introduction session. Once the signed consent forms were received, an additional thank you letter was sent to these parents indicating the starting date of the *iStoep* sessions. Closer to the starting date a friendly reminder was sent home as the starting date was after a short holiday.

An explanatory letter and consent forms were also sent out the next day to all parents who were not present at the Introductory session. Parents who wanted to participate could complete the consent forms and return these or they could phone me if they wanted to clarify any information. An intake session was held with the practitioner and the co-ordinator who signed informed consent forms, which formed part of the recruitment cycle.

Participants

Eight parents signed up; three pairs were couples. In my experience, generally only mothers are willing to be involved, so it was refreshing and reassuring to have three men attending. The co-ordinator and Afrikaans and English-speaking practitioner completed the consent form to participate. Seven of the eight participants were Afrikaans-speaking and could understand a mix of Afrikaans and English. Some understood basic isiXhosa and one participant was amaXhosa. The amaXhosa participant understood Afrikaans well, as her partner was Afrikaans and they mostly spoke Afrikaans at home, although she spoke isiXhosa to their child, but he would reply in Afrikaans to her. She found it difficult to express herself in Afrikaans and preferred speaking in isiXhosa. It was agreed that the translator would then translate the isiXhosa into English for all to understand. If there was something in Afrikaans and English that the amaXhosa participant did not understand she would indicate it and ask the translator to translate.

Being able to communicate, understand and participate easily and confidently in the person's first language was an important aspect of my research, especially within an educational partnership environment. The emphasis of first language use and the emotional comfort it brings, adds to the value of voice and agency (Machimana et al., 2021).

Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Using interviews as opposed to questionnaires to collect data, allows the researcher to engage with the participant in a two-way communication process, rather than in a "question-and-answer" method (Cohen et al., 2002). According to Robson (2011), it is advisable to select a semi-structured interview schedule in flexible designs, and particularly when it is a small research project, and the researcher conducts the interviews. The aim therefore of selecting a semi-structured interview schedule for this research was an attempt to explore what cultural and linguistic capital pre-schoolers brought to the pre-school. These are encapsulated in the following four broad themes:

1. Different multilingual languages that pre-schoolers are exposed to at home and in the community;
2. School experiences of the adults;
3. What children played with at home;
4. Parents' perspectives on how to assist in preparing children for their school journey.

In constructing the semi-structured interview schedule, the above four themes were used, to construct the open-ended questions to encourage participants to elaborate their views, perceptions, and experiences (Langdridge, 2004).

I conducted a pilot interview with one of the participants and made changes thereafter. Some of the questions were either too similar, or some questions were not clearly worded, which led to confusion, and it was too long. The final semi-structured interview schedule is attached in Appendix 4. This data collection tool was aimed at gathering information and participants were giving up their own personal time and those who were employed agreed to see me either after hours or during their lunch break. I therefore did not want the interview to last longer than 30 to 35 minutes. The interview schedule was adapted and then translated into the three mentioned languages.

Four interviews were completed before the *iStoep* sessions started and four interviews were completed early on, before session three started. Due to the reality of workload commitments at an NGO, it was impossible to conduct all the interviews before session one started. I interviewed and audio recorded the seven Afrikaans and English participants and the translator interviewed and audio recorded the amaXhosa participant. The amaXhosa participant had built a relationship with the translator during the first two *iStoep* sessions and therefore it was not necessary for me to be present during the interview. The translator transcribed and translated the interview into English.

Six iStoep Intervention Sessions

Prior to registering as a PhD candidate, I explored the suitability of implementing an educational partnership as a small pilot project with parents in 2018. As explained in chapter one I was looking for a parenting approach that was suitable and could be adapted within a SA environment with the main elements of being participatory and learning from each other. This small *Kuier Saam* pilot in 2018 aided me in my research intervention design, helping to adapt to be more suitable for parents within a SA context.

A date was set for the first *iStoep* session for the 2019 participants, exploring the importance of communication between the parent, practitioners, and school. This session was also used for participants to identify future topics in which they were interested, suitable times and length of the sessions. The following topics were identified:

Session 2: How my child learns through play;

Session 3: How to support my child through pretend reading;

Session 4: How to support my child through pretend writing;

Session 5: Setting a routine and boundaries;

Session 6: Summary, evaluation, and closure.

It was agreed to hold the *iStoep* sessions mostly two weeks apart to keep the momentum going, except between sessions four and five there was a one-week break, since a school holiday was approaching followed by the end of the year activities. Session six was thus held three weeks after session five. Administratively the two-week period in between the sessions was challenging, given the full-time workload of co-facilitators and especially for the practitioner who had to attempt to take videos of classroom practices of only the children whose parents gave consent. Sometimes the pre-schoolers were sick, which hindered the making of video footage together with other daily work and personal commitments.

The length of the first session was just over an hour long as per request of some of the parents who had after hours commitments. However, all agreed that this was too short and thereafter the sessions varied between one hour fifty minutes and two hours. Attendance at the sessions was fairly good despite being wintertime, when generally attendance rates for after-hours commitments are lower. Three participants did not miss one session; three participants and the translator missed one session; two participants missed two sessions due to illness and work commitments; and one couple attended only three sessions. This couple however had started an adult training course with classes in the morning and group assignments in the

afternoon, which made it difficult for them to then attend these sessions. The *iStoep* sessions were held afterhours from 17:00 to 19:00 at the Centre and transport was offered to the Centre and all participants were taken home by car, as it was dark by the time the sessions ended.

Table 1:

Attendance Register of Parent Participants

	Parent Participants						
	***iStoep* Sessions**						
Session	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**Total**
Shanel	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Greg	1		1	1	1	1	5
Anne	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Des	1	1	1	1		1	5
Cloe	1	1			1	1	4
Marlon	1	1			1	1	4
Fred	1		1			1	3
Nosipho	1		1			1	3
Zola					1		1

After each *iStoep* session, I designed a one-page “Highlights of the session” that included a combination of diagrams and minimal words, especially for the parents with low literacy levels. These Highlights were at times translated into all three languages, depending on time constraints and these would be sent home for the participants before the next session. Examples in English are attached in Appendices 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. Various forms of communication (verbal and written) within educational partnership practices are relevant tools that can be used, to strengthen the relationships between school and home (Iliás et al., 2019a). A reminder letter for the next session would also be sent out a few days before the time to the parent participants, explaining again the agreed activity that they undertook to practice with their child at home, to enable feedback during the next session.

The content of each *iStoep* session was summarized in a technique adapted by Akhurst & Lawson (2013) that is called a “SoaP” (Summary on a Page), including steps of planning and action, observing, and evaluating and reflection. The acronym of SOAP originated in the medical field to present a quick overview of the patient, by referring to the patient’s subjective data, objective data, assessment, and plan of patient care (Dolan & Broadbent, 2016). The form of SoaP (Akhurst & Lawson, 2013) used within this research project was adapted from

the business field and summarises the key elements of the content of each *iStoep* session as follows:

- Planning (that occurred with co-facilitators before the actual session)
- Action (what actually happened in the session)
- Observations (made during the session by the co-facilitators and the researcher which were discussed during the reflection session the next morning. Additional observations were made by the researcher while watching the video recordings during the data analysis process)
- Review or evaluation (this was a combination of what was retrospectively discussed at the time during the reflection sessions with the co-facilitators and my own reflections while watching the video recordings).

After each SoaP in chapter six, an elaborate reflection follows that includes explanations, notions highlighted in researcher identity memos and elements of the AR cycle and process.

In my ethics application as described earlier, the intention was that all the parents and children could benefit from the project and not only the participants. In session four one parent attended for the first time and I asked her opinion about her understanding of the one-page Highlights that I was sending out after sessions. She replied that she did not understand them, but having attended an *iStoep* session, she could understand what I was trying to accomplish. She suggested more of a one-page summary, including a specific home activity for parents and children. She thought that non- attending parents might find a summary page easier to follow and they could then possibly practice the activity with their children, rather than the one-page Highlights that had been circulated. It was thus decided to have two separate sets: the one-page Highlights for participants attending the *iStoep* sessions and the changed format to a one-page summary version as suggested for non-participating parents. The subsequent one-page summaries of each session therefore included the essence of the topic and ideas for an activity that parents could do at home with their children. These summaries were translated into all three languages and sent home with the pre-schoolers. English examples are attached in Appendices 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14.

Reflecting on the relevant use of terminology for the *iStoep* interventions, I selected “sessions” as it was the least constrictive within this exploratory study. The *iStoep* sessions had elements of workshops, focus groups and meetings, but fulfilled none of the full criteria. The terminology of “sessions” also allowed for moving away from narrow and perhaps negative connotations to the terminologies of meetings and workshops, especially for participants with low literacy levels.

iStoep Planning Sessions

Depending on work and study commitments and availability of co-facilitators at the same time, the planning sessions included a combination of meetings either between myself and the translator and then additionally again myself with the practitioner and co-ordinator or all of us together. The planning sessions were always held a day or two before the next *iStoep* session. The process of the planning sessions remained the same. After each reflection session I transcribed before the next planning session. I would then highlight changes or recommendations from these transcriptions at the planning session. Joint decisions were made as to how to address these to enable improved implementation at the next *iStoep* session.

The participants had identified the topics they were interested in discussing during the *iStoep* sessions. However, during these planning sessions the co-facilitators discussed which topics flowed logically after each other, the most important content to share and identified the best discussion tools for each intervention session. Decisions were also made regarding the resources needed for the next session, as well as what type of refreshments were going to be served.

iStoep Reflection Sessions

Initially it was planned to have the reflective sessions directly after the intervention session, but parent participants opted for the 17:00 session, which mostly finished around 19:00 and then parents were transported home. It therefore made it impractical to have the reflection session afterwards. To enable clear feedback on the input of participants, it was agreed that reflective sessions would be held at 8:00 the next morning, before the days' work commitments started. This prevented observations and interpretations being impacted by the following day's events.

The initials of the co-facilitators in the attendance table below are as follows: AM is the researcher, LS is the practitioner, SM the co-ordinator and AX is the translator.

Table 2:

Attendance Register of Co-facilitators

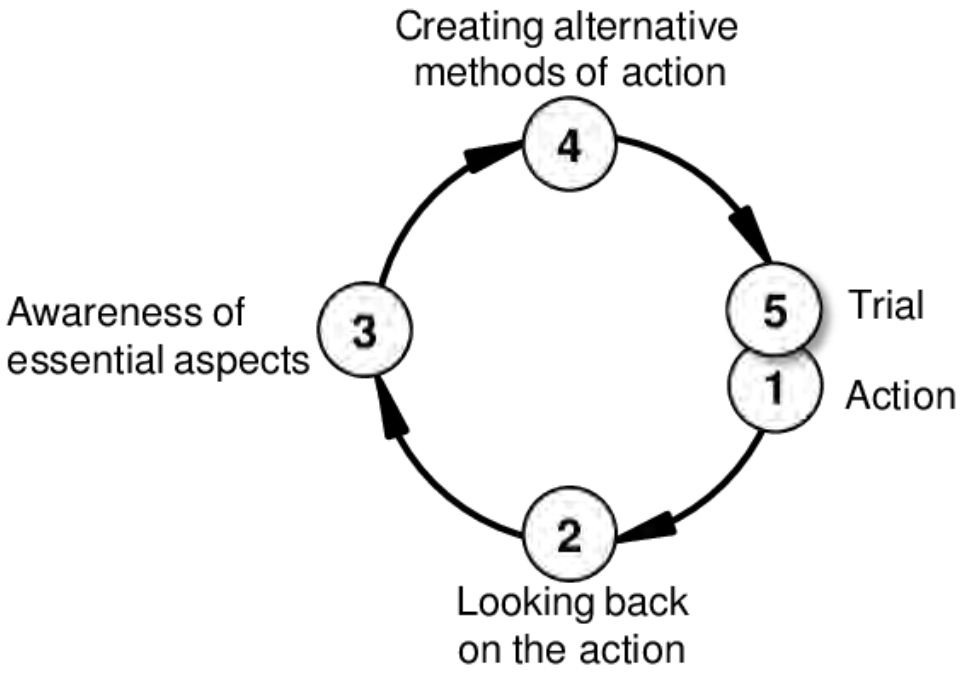
	Sessions																				
	Planning								***iStoep***							**Reflection**						
	R&I	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**Total**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**Total**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**Total**
AM	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
LS	1	1	1	1	1		1	6	1	1	1	1		1	5	1	1	1	1		1	5
SM	1	1	1	1		1	1	6	1	1			1	1	4	1	1		1	1	1	5
AX	1	1	1		1	1	1	6	1	1		1	1	1	5	1	1		1	1	1	5

Note: R&I - Recruitment and Introductory Session

During the reflection sessions, Korthagen's (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005), reflective model; action, looking back on action, awareness of essential aspects, creating alternative methods of action and trial (ALACT) was used.

Figure 3

The ALACT model of a structured process of reflection (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005, p. 49)



Looking back on the action, we focused on elements of what worked well; what did not work well and what changes we wanted to implement for the next intervention session (this is further identified in each SoaP in chapter six). Additionally, we reflected on the relevance of the content of information discussed; participation levels of parent participants; the structure of

the session; relevance of the discussion tools; sharing of relevant information during small group discussions and my facilitation skills. My communication style tends to jump around quickly from one aspect to another and this can cause confusion, as people can find it difficult to follow me and process the information. Planning the structure of the session, which the Educational Partnership manual (Iliás et al., 2019b) refers to as the "Agenda" helped me to be more focused while facilitating the session.

The benefits of these reflection sessions contributed to making improvements before the next intervention session, thus the new action was trialled and reviewed, which is explained in chapter six. These reflection sessions also highlighted how differently we perceived the session from our own personal and cultural perspectives, which therefore provided multi-perspective rich, diverse data. In the reflection session of session five (19 September) for example, I refer to my own perspective of the session, but the perspectives of the co-facilitators shed a totally different light on the session, which is described in SoaP five of chapter six. This reality emphasized how qualitative data is interpreted through multiple lenses, in this instance, the researcher and co-facilitators. Yin (2011) highlights the contributions of multiple interpretations of the same event, which leads to trustworthiness of data as it prevents the researcher from unintentionally imposing her views and perspectives.

Challenges during the data collection in 2019

Planning a research project and each stage of the process is crucial (Yin, 2011). I however experienced various challenges during the *iStoep* intervention sessions, for example I was fully aware of my technical limitations with technology and therefore practiced using the audio and video recorder prior to the sessions. Despite these plans I continued experiencing technological challenges and others that are noted in the individual SoaPs. The "dispiriting shock" when things do not go as planned (Robson, 2011, p. 406) is real, but also learning to accept "real world research" and being flexible to adapt. Bigger memory cards were purchased to lengthen the recording time and when the co-ordinator became ill just before a session, I facilitated her part. All the additional administrative tasks, translations (Afrikaans and English) and technical aspects of the research project relied on me, but the reflection sessions were invaluable in adapting and changing challenges from session to session.

Lessons learnt during the data collection phase

The nature of an exploratory qualitative study indicates flexibility and the possibilities of new vistas opening (Yang, 2014), but it was the "real world research" (Robson, 2011) challenges of unpredictability as noted above, that I underestimated. Realising there are certain life aspects that cannot be controlled in field work, one needed to change plans sometimes

instantaneously and noting these down in reflective notes as recommended by Maxwell (2008) in research memos. While a proposal is the blueprint of a research study, rather than "forcing" the proposal research method to be suitable, changes may need to be made that will be more appropriate to the fieldwork and data collection methods. Qualitative research includes humans who have lives that are unpredictable, and one must be able to adapt to these realities; whether technological, human, or environmental, but that does not exclude the need for rigour, planning and reflection to learn, improve and adapt.

Follow up telephonic interviews during COVID-19

Telephonic interviews are not ideal, as one of the disadvantages is the lack of visual signals and the ability to respond accordingly during such an interview (Robson, 2011). A further disadvantage was the background noise in the participants' home environments that at times hindered the quality and flow of the interviews. However, having developed a prior relationship with the participants during the *iStoep* sessions, enabled telephonic follow up during the first lockdown period in SA, and this facilitated the gathering of valuable data, eight months after the intervention.

The value of the flexibility, but yet some form of guidance through open ended questions that a semi-structured interview allows for (Cohen et al., 2002; Langdridge, 2004) was followed again within these telephonic interviews.

The open-ended questions focused on broad themes of:

- Activities and knowledge that have remained or changed in the home environment;
- The most valuable aspect of the *iStoep* sessions;
- Activities used with the pre-schooler during the lockdown period;
- Motivational elements to encourage other parents to attend similar sessions.

Data Collection Procedures

The body of qualitative data was collected from several methods at various points in time over a period of one year, which included the following:

- The Recruitment and Introductory session
- Face-to-face semi-structured interviews with parent participants
- Intake session (after the Recruitment and Introductory session) with the co-ordinator and practitioner as representatives of the pre-school and Centre
- The six *iStoep* intervention sessions
- The planning and reflection sessions with the co-facilitators
- Researcher Identity Memos

- Follow up telephonic semi-structured interviews post the intervention during Wave 1 of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020
- A virtual reflective session with co-facilitators during the latter period.
- Input from a critical friend

In adhering to Yin's (2011) steps to build trustworthiness into a qualitative study, the following recommended three objectives were met:

Firstly, research needs to be conducted in a publicly accessible manner and the procedures should be transparent to enable replication of the project. Secondly, irrespective of the type of study, that the researcher follows a systematic "methodic-ness" (Yin, 2011, p. 19) that allows for flexibility and discovery but minimizes "careless work" (p. 20) and ensures rigour within the whole project, especially when working with data. Thirdly, that the project "be based on an explicit set of evidence…" and that "conclusions should be drawn in reference to those data" (p. 20) collected and be fairly analysed.

My program design and implementation together with my vignettes and SoaP chapters clearly describes the planning, methods, reflections, challenges, and lessons learnt from this research project. Together with the appendices, the write-up of this project is transparent, hopefully to allow other people to understand the procedures and implement a similar project. This links closely with the rigour with which the project was conducted, but also the unpredictable realities that occur during fieldwork. Gutiérrez & Penuel (2014) add an additional element to rigour in that they argue the "relevance of practice as a criterion for rigor" (p. 19). While their focus is on education programs, the emphasis is on learning through practices and documenting "not only what happens, but also how students and teachers change and adapt interventions in interactions with each other in relation to their dynamic local contexts" (p. 19). The documentation and transcriptions of planning and reflection sessions clearly identified how the researcher and co-facilitators made changes in practice together with changes that parent participants suggested.

To ensure data were analysed "fairly", various templates were used during the process, which will be further described below. Furthermore, the actual language of participants was woven into the vignettes in chapter five and in the SoaPs, chapter six. The words and voices of the participants were valued as their constructions of realities at that time and as self-reports of their home practice activities (Yin, 2011). Using a qualitative platform for my project that included inductive thinking and reasoning, I drew conclusions from the various data collection methods and analyses together with using my various lenses as described in the introduction chapter.

Transcribing language

The audio recorded data of the face-to-face interviews, the six *iStoep* sessions, the planning and reflection sessions and the follow up telephonic interviews and virtual group discussion during COVID-19 were not fully transcribed verbatim. To clarify, the pauses or mms were not transcribed or introductory informal information but otherwise words of the participants were transcribed. The video recorded data was viewed only by the researcher to confirm accuracy and clarification of the various activities during the different sessions and for example to clarify which participant selected which photograph.

Data Analysis Strategy

Implementing Yin's (2011) 5-phased cycles

Yin's (2011) theoretical and practical guidelines of rigour were invaluable during the planning and execution of the data collection and 5-phased data analysis cycle:

Phase 1: Compiling
Phase 2: Disassembling
Phase 3: Reassembling (and Arraying)
Phase 4: Interpreting
Phase 5: Concluding (p. 177).

Yin (2011) clearly notes that these phases do not necessarily follow a linear process but rather a "back and forth between two phases" (p. 177) for fair and stronger analyses. The analysis of the data of this project followed an iterative process especially between phases two and three. Phase one of Yin's (2011) 5-phased cycle started with identifying and compiling all my data into a formal database.

Below is an excerpt of the database and a complete list is attached in Appendix 15.

No	DATA ITEM
PARENT PARTICIPANTS	
1	Recruitment & Introductory session
2	Semi-structured interviews
3	*iStoep* sessions 1-6: Audio Video & Transcriptions

Phase two started with re-checking the accuracy of my data and transcriptions and thereafter disassembling the database into three broad sections of data: of interview data; *iStoep* sessions data; and follow up interviews. The data were analysed using template analysis, as most of the data collection methods had some structure to the method, but also allowed for flexibility (King, 2012).

Phase three involved reassembling the data by looking at possible patterns, going back to phase two and making decisions, which were noted in a specific column that included explanatory reasons for my choices and assigning additional patterns or thoughts made during the analytical process. The data of the parent participant interviews were analysed using a template analysis (King, 2012) as the questions of the interviews were grouped under four headings, which formed the initial “a priori” themes of the template. These were:

1. Understanding the different multilingual languages their child/pre-schooler was exposed to.
2. Understanding what their child plays with at home.
3. Understanding how parents think they could help prepare their child for their school journey.
4. Understanding the school experiences of the adult.

Phase four included interpreting the data through a constructivist interpretive lens, while making use of a variety of concepts: thick descriptions, peer reviews, clarifying my researcher bias and member checking as relevant to this exploratory study.

Creswell (2013) identified a list of eight validation strategies that could be applied to indicate an accurate account of a qualitative study throughout the whole project and not part thereof. Yin (2011) argues the same point that trustworthiness should be applied throughout the study

and not only in sections such as the data analysis phase. Creswell (2013) recommends applying a minimum of two of his eight validation strategies. I applied four of his strategies but to clarify, the member checking was done during the *iStoep* sessions in the form of paraphrasing and not formal checking in presenting their vignette to them, as realities are interpreted at that given point in time, hence the use of paraphrasing. The use of thick descriptions originated from "Gilbert Ryle, a British metaphysical philosopher" (Ponterotto, 2006, p. 538) as used in the format of vignettes (Hughes & Huby, 2004) and SoaPs (Akhurst & Lawson, 2013) in chapters five and six. The essence of these thick descriptions involved as accurately as possible describing and interpreting the interactions, ideas, thoughts, and emotions of the participants during the research project, but specifically during the intervention period (Ponterotto, 2006).

The use of vignettes has a long history in the social sciences as a data collection research tool (Collett & Childs, 2011). It is used in both quantitative and qualitative research projects (Wilks, 2004), but I used vignettes to present the template data of the parent participants, using mostly their words at that specific time. "A priori" themes were developed based on emerging data, which were used as headings of paragraphs in a vignette of each parent participant. Diagrams were used to complement the narrative, as Hughes & Huby (2004) noted that vignettes can take on different forms. The format of the SoaPs and the AR cycles allowed for the analysis of the data per *iStoep* session.

Phase five focuses on concluding remarks about the value of an educational partnership within a multilingual pre-school setting, together with recommendations and identifying the limitations and strengths of the project in chapters seven, eight and nine. The structure of the SoaPs combined with the AR cycles allowed the data to be woven together and to be presented as the intervention in chapter six. The evaluation of the intervention in chapter seven was divided into the three broad sections of data as noted earlier.

While applying a constructivist lens throughout I was conscious of the hope noted by Geertz (1973) that: "we are not actors, we do not have direct access, but only that small part of it which our informants can lead us into understanding" (p. 318).

Data interpretation and dissemination

The interpreted data can be used to inform further educational partnership interventions to improve home-based and pre-school or school-based practices including improved communication. At the last *iStoep* session each participant was given a ring bound manual of all the one-page Highlights of all the *iStoep* topics together with additional blank pages to continue making personal notes should they wish too. The final version of the completed thesis

will be provided in electronic format to the Centre and a report of the findings will be submitted to the ICDP Trustees as well as the *De Activiteit* and *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*. Further dissemination of the research intervention and findings could potentially occur through presentations at conferences and possible publications.

Evaluation of the iStoep intervention program

The *iStoep* program was evaluated at the end of the sixth intervention session and additionally eight months later. These evaluations are described in detail in Phase one and Phase two of Chapter seven, focused on the evaluation and findings of the intervention by all the participants during various stages of the research project. Various elements of evaluation through reflective notes have also been interwoven in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 5: Vignettes

In this chapter, vignettes have been constructed, in order to both introduce the participants and their contexts, as well as to present a synthesis of their interview responses, in narrative form. Whilst this is a less usual use of vignettes than in other qualitative research, these follow Hughes (1998): “Stories about individuals, situations and structures which can make reference to important points in the study of perceptions, beliefs and attitudes” (p. 381). The vignettes are short summaries of the data gathered during interviews held with the parent participants. Due to time constraints and the desire to launch the program, four interviews (Shanel, Anne, Des, and Cloe) were conducted before the *iStoep* sessions started and four interviews (Greg, Marlon, Nosipho and Fred) were held before the third session. While I conducted the interviews separately, for the purpose of understanding and ease, I grouped the three couples together, in order to form a more comprehensive family unit and avoid unnecessary repetition; therefore there are only five vignettes in the chapter.

Some of the parent participants have been known to the Centre for a few years, which assisted with additional background information such as their educational and literacy levels. It was however not known who would sign up for this research project and complete consent forms. The details of the Recruitment and introductory session were explained in Chapter three. The interview questions were designed to explore the parents’ views on the cultural and social capital of the pre-schoolers. I wanted to understand what they perceived that their children were bringing to the pre-school that could be built upon in the *iStoep* sessions; to start building bridges of understanding and communication between the parents and the Centre staff.

At the end of each vignette a diagram provides a summary of the information collected about the relevant pre-schooler’s social and cultural capital. It is clear from these diagrams that a few adaptions were made by me as interviewer during the interviews with some of the participants. The reasons for this were: where I felt that participants could possibly feel uncomfortable or embarrassed with some questions, I used my judgement and did not ask the question. The interview schedule questions were a guideline to explore social and cultural capital and not intended to cause possible embarrassment or harm or to make generalised statements. When I compiled the raw data into sections, I saw that I missed asking a question of some participants; in some cases, I had also slightly changed the question to allow for simpler understanding. These judgement calls were made during the actual interview.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. As mentioned previously in Chapter one, Afrikaans and English words are often used interchangeably in the same sentence, but with a predominance of Afrikaans words. Being bilingual in Afrikaans and

English, I then translated the seven transcriptions into English. The advantage of being bilingual allowed me to take nuances into account and therefore I used the closest relevant English word, rather than doing just a mechanical translation. Only one interview was conducted by the amaXhosa co-facilitator, who also acted as the isiXhosa - English translator. The interview schedule was translated from English to isiXhosa by the translator and then cross-checked by the amaXhosa practitioner at the Centre. The facilitator recorded, transcribed, and translated the interview data from isiXhosa to English. Being a co-facilitator in these sessions helped her understand the context of the participants' answers.

In order that participants' voices may be "heard", the vignettes mostly consist of the answers the participants gave during the interview and further verbatim words were used as indicated in italics. Often these were South African slang (informal) words that are commonly used and understood in a South African context. The meaning of these words was translated into English and placed in brackets to enable non-South African readers to understand. To ensure accuracy, I went back in some instances to the transcriptions and translations to double check that my nuanced translation was consistent over time and correct against the pseudonyms I had allocated to the participants that represented their ethnic origin.

The interview schedule was designed with specific subheadings, which aimed to explore the social and cultural capital of parent participants and their children who attended the multilingual LRD reschool. As discussed in chapter two, the elements of Bourdieu's cultural capital (Moore, 2014) present in the interview schedule were language, access to resources and play objects, as well as parents' institutionalised capital and social capital in the form of their perceptions and experiences of their roles and responsibilities in preparing their children for schooling. To enable comparisons and synthesis, these social and cultural capital elements have been grouped together under subheadings in the vignettes.

The interwoven data in the vignettes were the participants' responses, comments, real life experiences and perceptions at the time of the interviews and need to be read within the contextual and situational elements described in Chapter one. Although they all lived in the same local Municipality Ward in Makhanda; from communities surrounding the pre-school, some lived close to each other while others lived kilometres apart from each other. Mostly parents recognized each other by sight, while greeting each other in passing when they dropped off their children or collected them. Collectively being parents of children who attended the pre-school in that year, living in the same local Municipality Ward, parental literacy levels, verbal skills levels and therefore length of responses differed.

As a small exploratory study, this gave me as the researcher some insight, albeit subjectively constructed and interpreted, into the various cultural and social capital elements in the lives of

the participants and their pre-schoolers within a multilingual setting. In each vignette to follow, where a couple is involved, their two names, along with that of their relevant child will be given in the heading; where only two names appear in a heading, it refers to a parent who attended alone along with the child's name.

Vignette 1: Shanel, Greg, and Carmen

Cultural Capital: Background and Languages

Shanel and Greg have one child, Carmen, who was enrolled for a second year at the multilingual pre-school. Both Shanel and Greg grew up in an Afrikaans-speaking home. Shanel was exposed to English as a second language and Greg to both English and isiXhosa. Shanel can remember feeling frustrated not understanding isiXhosa to play with potential friends, but the latter would switch to a mix of English so that she understood.

Shanel spoke Afrikaans to Carmen and Greg used both Afrikaans and English. Carmen mostly spoke Afrikaans and sometimes English at home or a mix of the two languages, which is common in the Eastern Cape, but sang and prayed in isiXhosa. The prayers at the pre-school are said in all three languages. Carmen's grandmother spoke English to her and her great grandmother and her aunt (her mother's sister) Afrikaans. Carmen and Greg loved the isiXhosa house music *igqom*[14], which they often listened to while they sang and danced to the music.

Carmen's friends who lived in the same street spoke different languages and depending on the language that that specific friend spoke, Carmen responded to them as follows: if they spoke either Afrikaans, English or isiXhosa, Carmen replied in the same language, but when she did not know the isiXhosa word/s she answered and elaborated in Afrikaans. Carmen followed the same pattern with an elderly amaXhosa "granny" that lived down the road.

Shanel does not understand or speak isiXhosa and she explained that she selected this specific pre-school since we catered for all three languages. Other pre-schools in the area mostly used English as the language of instruction. She felt that even if Carmen just spoke a little of each language it would help her in the community, to be part of other cultures and children's lives with whom she would have liked to be friends. This made it easier for her to make friends in the community and as parents it would enable them to enrol her in a school of their choice, which was not language dependent or prescriptive. They felt that English gave a person a wider choice of subjects and therefore career opportunities.

[14] Ghom music was developed during 2010 in townships and promoted by Durban taxi drivers. This South African house music has a repetitive heavy bass beat, and the word is from Zulu origin meaning hit or noise. The isiXhosa spelling is igqom.

Cultural capital: Resources at home

Reading resources in their home included a monthly *Jet* (clothing store) magazine that had a variety of educational activities for children, the Lebone Centre books they received during literacy celebrations or quarterly, and books from the Community Library, the latter being both in Afrikaans. Carmen watched television and played cellular phone games in English, especially the educational programs that focused on numeracy. She mostly replied in English, but when the word was too difficult to pronounce in English, she would answer in Afrikaans.

Carmen enjoyed playing more inside than outside and then especially with her teddy bears and dolls; and would play 'house-house' using blankets to make tents. She enjoyed helping her father and playing with "*plankies"* (little pieces of timber) making puzzles of recycled paper, drawing and colouring in, but they noted that she just "*shines"* when she showed her parents the "*dance moves,"* she had learnt from a new song from a video she had watched.

Cultural capital: Parental education and school experiences

Shanel explained that she was unable to take pure mathematics as a subject at the senior school she attended. They did not offer it in Afrikaans, but rather only mathematical literacy. Pure mathematics was only offered to the learners who were in the English stream class, and she felt this limited her career opportunities: as she was unable to complete application forms to join the Defence Force because she needed pure Mathematics and Life Science. Shanel passed Grade 12 with a school leavers certificate and is permanently employed at a supermarket.

She described a 'good teacher' as someone who was strict, especially if you did not behave, but fair. Greg passed Grade 10 and he enjoyed working with his hands. Greg mentioned that "*it was exciting to also learn isiXhosa at school and not just English and Afrikaans*". According to Shanel, Greg is good with languages. His favourite teacher was his woodwork teacher who never "*broke them down,"* but always inspired them to try and do better. He informally learnt the trade of carpentry, but more the making of roof trusses and ceilings; and he was self-employed as a carpenter but also performed small maintenance and renovation work.

Social Capital: Perceptions and experiences of parents' roles and responsibilities.

It was important to Shanel, that although Carmen was young, she should learn to be independent. She therefore left her alone when she played, but Carmen would show her mother what she had done, and she praised her and encouraged her all the time. Shanel stated that you can read to a child from babyhood with pictures, but Greg thought that one

should start when children start pre-school around the age of five to six years, before they started formal schooling.

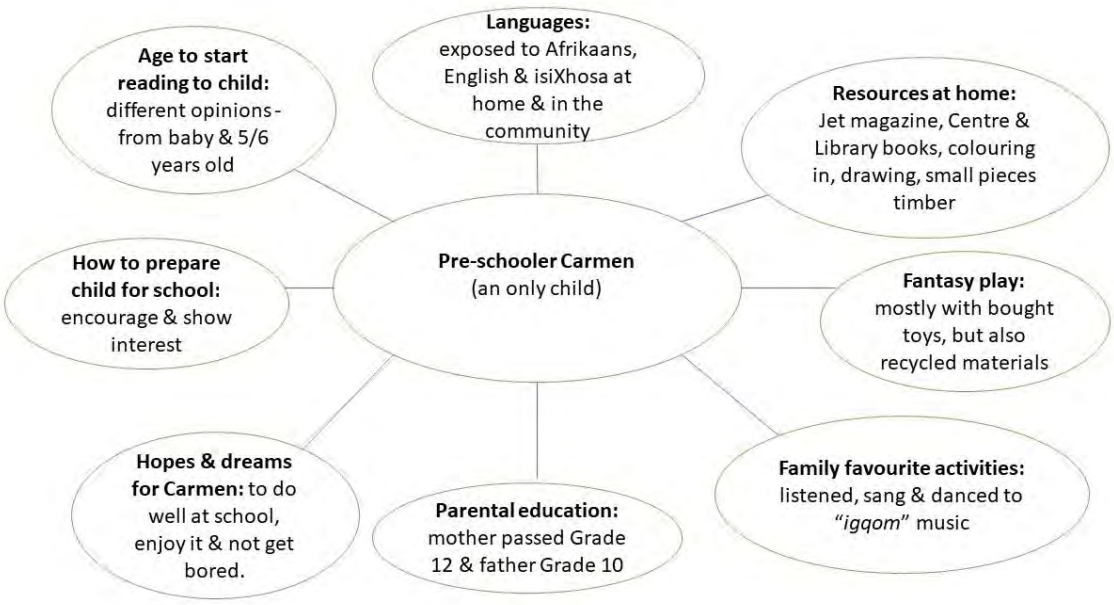
When I asked Shanel why she thought children were performing poorly at school, she answered "*Yoh, there is a lot of stuff,"* but she identified parents and friends as the main contributing factors. Parents firstly needed to be an example to their children and the community. If they were unable to be an example, how could they expect their child to learn at school when they learned nothing at home. If parents were unable to set that example, neighbours could step in and help. Greg agreed that parents were to blame. He said that if parents spent time with their children, then it would go better at school, but if parents showed no interest, then the child would not perform at school. As the saying goes "*everything starts at home*". He felt that parents are not always aware of how much a child learns or can learn at home, e.g., to walk and talk. Secondly, friends often had a negative influence on children.

I asked their views on how parents should prepare their young children for formal schooling. Shanel answered that she did not know, but she did not want to scare Carmen, but rather encouraged her that she was going to make new friends and learn and experience new things at school and that she was going to enjoy the new school.

Shanel hoped that Carmen would do well at school and that she would enjoy her schoolwork and not get bored, because children quickly got bored at school. Greg hoped that Carmen would join the Defence Force because that was Shanel's dream. Both parents agreed that there should be a partnership between the teacher and parents; parents needed to help the child with their homework, even if they experienced challenges in understanding it, they could access "*easy tips"* to help their child in the relevant language.

Figure 4

Social and Cultural Capital: Carmen



Vignette 2: Anne and Kurt

Cultural capital: Background and Languages

Anne grew up in the Western Cape and her oldest two children, aged 14 and 16 are living with her mother. She met her current husband in the Western Cape, but they moved to Makhanda as he was originally from the latter and where the majority of his extended amaXhosa family lived. They have two boys Darrin and Kurt, and a girl named Cindy. Their oldest son, Darrin previously attended the LRD pre-school, and their second oldest son Kurt was attending at the time of the study. Anne and her family were known to the Centre since the time when Darrin attended the LRD; and when the Centre ran a Mom's & Tots program in the community, Anne attended with Cindy when she was a toddler.

Anne grew up in an Afrikaans-speaking home environment and the community was also predominantly Afrikaans, with some English speakers. Anne's husband was amaXhosa but spoke Afrikaans and therefore they spoke Afrikaans at home, however when his friends and family visited, they spoke isiXhosa. Having grown up in the Western Cape Anne was not exposed to isiXhosa. She has learnt a word here and there, but the older two boys understood conversational isiXhosa and often translated more detail of the conversations so that she could participate. The boys answered in isiXhosa when spoken to in isiXhosa, but often reverted to

a mix of Afrikaans and isiXhosa. The community residents where they lived mostly spoke a mix of Afrikaans and isiXhosa, but no English.

Anne explained that it was a good thing and important to her that the children were exposed to the three local languages. No matter whether they met a group of people at school or at work one day they will not feel "*stupid"* as she did, which is not a nice feeling, not understanding isiXhosa. She felt that the schools should also be multilingual like the pre-school and learners should be able to converse in and understand all three languages.

When the boys and their friends play, they mix Afrikaans and isiXhosa, and they understand each other. She heard Cindy doing the same. She will say "*iza baba, iza"* (come here baby, come here) and then tell her mother this is her new "*tjommie"* (friend).

When the children played electronic games on the cellular phone, they played an English word game. The children spoke Afrikaans to each other while playing the game and then they would call her to explain the new word if it was difficult. They were unable to pronounce the word in English, so she pronounced it in English for them - then they repeated it in English. Thereafter she gave them the explanation of the word in Afrikaans.

When Anne visited with her friends and they wanted to say something not to be repeated by her children, they spoke in English, until one day Darrin said that he understood what they were saying. Anne relayed another story of when they realised that Kurt also understood some English. The pair seemed excited that their children had started understanding English.

Cultural capital: Resources at home

The children preferred playing outside and even when it rained, they called it a "*modderdag"* (a mud day – playing in the mud) and then changed their clothes regularly, preferring to play outside. Anne sensed that the children used their imagination when they played outside. They used any objects they found outside: sticks, stones, empty milk bottles or packets; she had also found her jug, knives, forks, and spoons outside, as they either played that they went shopping at supermarkets, or that they were a make-believe family. On the quiet she laughed at them as they argued who should play the father figure and go to work, the other had to cook and clean. The children also had a few toys; Darrin loved playing with marbles, Kurt with Ninja turtles, "*army men and dinky karretjies/cars*;" and Cindy enjoyed playing with her doll that she would constantly "*abba"* (South African word for carrying a child on your back).

Anne's children enjoyed the books they received from the Centre as well as the books she had at home, which she used for storytelling with the community children, as a multilingual storyteller. Her children also enjoyed reading books, especially when their father watched

sport on television. Darrin would say to Kurt he would read a story to him properly, because Kurt was not in formal school, and he was pretend reading. Then the children would argue over the books, but she knew that Cindy liked *Refilwe* (a colourful illustrated South African story book about a girl with dreadlocks and based on the classic fairy tale of Rapunzel). While Cindy was happy with her beloved book, it gave the boys the opportunity to then select the books they wanted. They also enjoyed the *Nal'ibali* Supplements supplied by LRD. According to Anne, Darrin "*was a boffin*" (expert) in folding the little paper books and he liked to show his younger brother Kurt how it should be done.

The family's favourite activities included her husband and children, who loved to listen to the isiXhosa *igqom* music. They knew the words and sang the songs and would dance along with it. She enjoyed listening more to the old-fashioned style "*love songs*", predominantly in English. Sometimes over weekends their friends and children played cricket in the street. Cindy was too young to play along and then Anne and she would play with a tennis ball.

Cultural capital: Parental education and school experiences

Anne's father was a fisherman; often away from home and as a heavy drinker became abusive towards her mother when under the influence of alcohol. She and her brother were moved to live with her aunt for a while, who spoke English. The aunt organised a bursary for Anne to attend a Catholic primary school, in the Western Cape. This was an English-speaking school run by nuns who were extremely strict. She and her friends at that time spoke English.

She remembered that her father took an active interest in their schooling during the periods he was home from sea. He would read to them and take them to the library or take books out for them from the library so that he could read to them. When they got home from school, they first had to complete their homework before they could play and if they were behind in schoolwork, they had to catch it up.

Her circumstances at home changed further and she no longer could attend the school in the suburb and had to attend the local school in Mitchells Plain (in a lower socio-economic area). Anne had enjoyed her primary school years and the educational outings. Once she moved to Mitchells Plain, she missed these outings and realised that the work they covered there, she had long completed previously. At the end of her Grade 8 prize-giving, she received a lot of certificates and awards, which she still remembers as how proud her aunt was.

Unfortunately, in Senior School Anne got involved with friends who did not have a good influence on her during her Grade 9 year and her schoolwork deteriorated. One of her schoolteachers who left an impression on her was strict and he took no nonsense from the

local children who had *other ways* – they swore in the classroom if they wanted, but the teacher took no nonsense. He however was also fun. Towards the end of her Grade 9 year, she was caught smoking with her friends. This class teacher motivated for Anne not to be expelled due to her achievements in the past, but the school said they needed to be consistent, and she was expelled from school during her Grade 9 year. She regretted not finishing her school career. More recently, Anne was selected as a Multilingual Storyteller at the Centre, where she received a stipend.

Social Capital: Perceptions and experiences of parents' roles and responsibilities.

According to Anne, parents needed to read to their children from birth. She was sorry that she was ignorant of the importance of reading to your child from birth, because she did not do this with her oldest two children who still lived in Cape Town. She only became aware of this information when she moved to Makhanda. Anne felt it was the circumstances that they lived in that contributed to the children performing poorly at school. She reported that when the children get home after school, they are not asked by caregivers if they have homework, they often were immediately sent to perform various chores (errands) such as to fetch water at the communal tap or looking for the donkeys (because they are not fenced in and roam freely). She explained how one child had to go and look for the donkeys and only returned home with them after seven o'clock some evenings. He was then so tired from walking and looking for them that he did not go to school the next day. They felt that another reason was that parents had low literacy levels and could not read and understand the homework and therefore were unable to explain it to their children.

Anne regarded the parent as the child's first teacher because until they attend creche or pre-school, they are learning things at home. For example, "*Cindy go and fetch the broom for mommy*". *How will she know what a broom is if I did not teach her? She will then ask,* "*where is it*?" *and I will answer*, "*look behind the door*" – this is how learning took place.

She said that you can prepare your child for school having used specific language to assist them with learning their basic colours, such as, "*gee vir Ma die rooi blokkie"* (give Mom the red block). She also named her body parts, such as her nose, ears and eyes and asked Cindy to show her and in this way, Cindy learned the names of her body parts. Anne said she enjoyed this type of play with her, especially when they were alone in the morning.

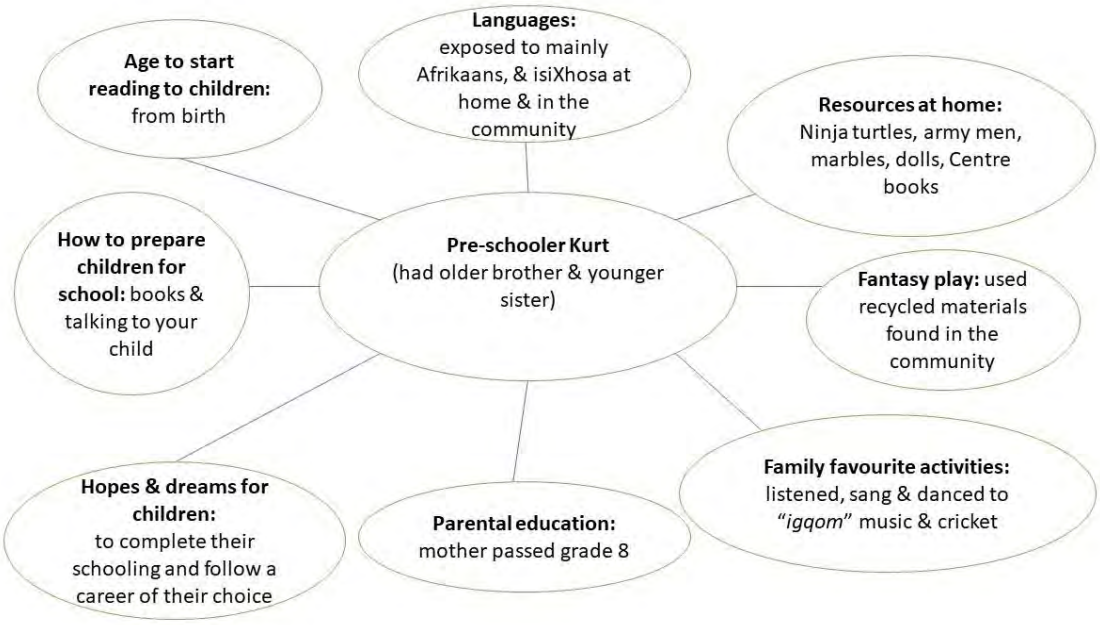
Once children start formal schooling Anne felt that parents needed to continue taking responsibility to assist their children to learn, it was not solely the responsibility of the school. When Darrin comes home in the afternoon after school and he does his homework, he sometimes pronounced the words incorrectly and then she must support him. The school

continues to give them homework, which the parents need to assist the child with. Anne wanted her children to complete their school career, to enable them to become whatever they wanted to whether a policeman or woman, or any career they wanted to follow, but they had to start with completing their schooling.

Anne felt that she only knew "*basics*" of child development and still had to learn a lot. Comparing what she knew when she lived in Cape Town when she had her older two children to now, since she has been in Makhanda she had learnt about the importance of reading books to your children and how that increased their vocabulary. However, she still needed to learn a lot more through the *iStoep* sessions.

Figure 5

Social and Cultural Capital: Kurt



Vignette 3: Des and Jack

Cultural Capital: Background and Languages

Des is married and has two boys. The oldest son attended the pre-school a few years ago and was subsequently attending an English-speaking school. At home they spoke a mixture of Afrikaans and English, but the use of Afrikaans words was dominant as extended family members mostly spoke Afrikaans. When asked whether Jack spoke isiXhosa, Des answered that he knew a little isiXhosa, but there was no one in their immediate community that he could play with that was amaXhosa. She explained that "*die boytjie wat my ma grootgemaak het hy bly by ons in die holidays wanneer hy van varsity kom, maar hy like nie sommer isiXhosa praat*

nie, alhoewel hy amaXhosa is"[15]. This sentence is an example of English and Afrikaans being mixed in one sentence.

Jack watched television in English and played educational games on his tablet in English. Des had not heard him sing any of the pre-school songs or prayers in isiXhosa, he sang the songs in English, because she thought it was easier for him. His friends were Afrikaans-speaking and when they played outside, they spoke Afrikaans. Des felt it was a good idea that the pre-schoolers were exposed to three languages as it provided them with a foundation if they wanted to pursue a specific language further.

Cultural capital: Parental education and school experiences

Des completed her schooling since she passed Grade 12. Her accounting teacher stood out for her as he always had a lot of patience and if you did not understand something you could ask him questions. He always went the "*extra mile for his students*". She was employed full time at a local clothing factory as a "*finisher*" to check the quality of the sewing.

Cultural capital: Resources at home

Jack enjoyed playing outside more than inside. He and his friends liked using the blocks that she bought him and objects lying around outside such as "*plankies"* (small pieces of timber) and constructed houses or weapons.

Her husband worked in the neighbouring town (45 minutes away) and mostly worked over the December holidays; therefore, they did not have family favourite times that she could think of. The past holiday she had bought Jack a colouring in book and has started helping him to write his name. Reading material in their home consisted out of books from the local community library and the Centre books. After supper they washed and got ready for bed when it was story time, which was usually around 19:00.

Social Capital: Perceptions and experiences of parents' roles and responsibilities.

In response to the statement of whether the parent is the child's first teacher, Des answered that parents must make time to spend with their children, even if it was an hour, because that was how children learned. Parents must contribute and lay the "*foundation*," children cannot just start school knowing nothing, even if it is just a few basic colours and counting to three.

Des agreed that parents and teachers should share the responsibility of supporting the child's learning and development. Her oldest son attended extra classes in the afternoon for science

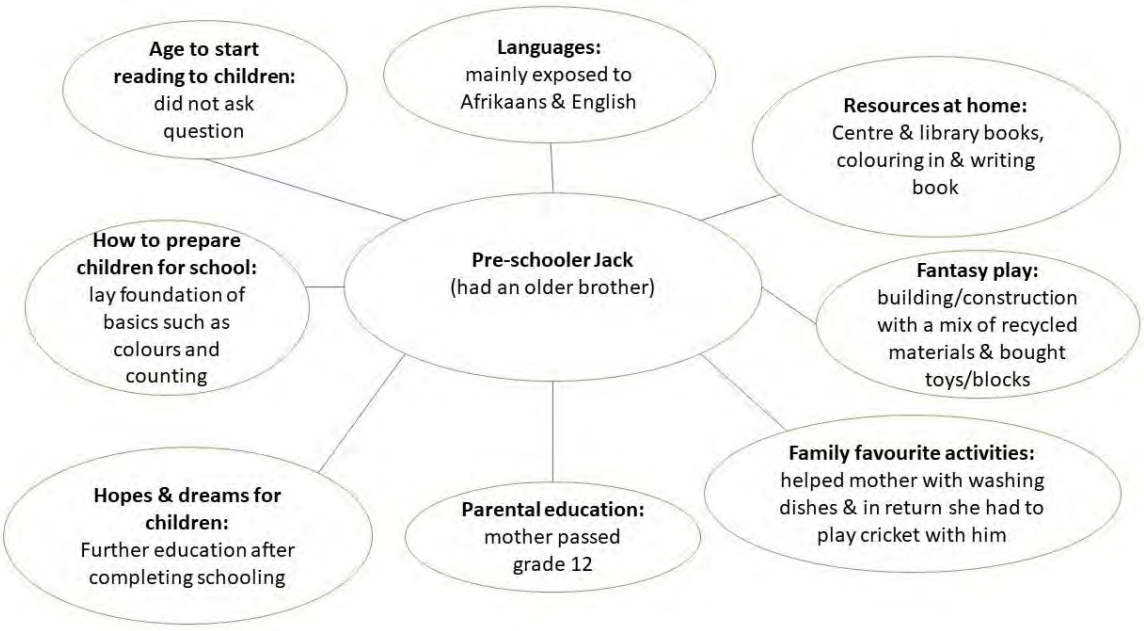
[15] Her mother raised an amaXhosa youngster, who was going to university, but when he came home for holidays, he did not enjoy speaking isiXhosa.

and mathematics. Usually when he was busy with his homework at home, then Jack also wanted to participate in some homework activity.

Generally, she thought children did poorly at school as parents expected the teacher to be solely responsible for the child's learning. She felt that parents also had a role to play, for example, she took books out from the local Community library and would read them to Jack. While reading she would explain new words to him, so that when he heard the word at school, he would recognise and understand the meaning of the word. She and her husband discussed taking out a financial education plan so that they would have the financial means to allow their children to study further after they completed their school career.

Figure 6

Social and Cultural Capital: Jack



Vignette 4: Cloe, Marlon, and Cole

Cultural capital: Background and Languages

Both Cloe and Marlon grew up in Afrikaans-speaking homes and they had four boys. Cole was the youngest of the four and all of them had attended the pre-school at the Centre. The family had been known to the Centre staff for at least ten years, during which time various forms of assistance was provided to the family. Centre staff often acted as a mediator between

the primary school teachers and the parents where misunderstandings occurred. To strengthen learning and development the children attended the Afterschool and Enrichment project at the Centre during weekday afternoons. Marlon understood and spoke basic isiXhosa, "*maar nie die hoë woorde nie*" (but not the difficult words) that he learnt from his co-workers, as well as when their second oldest son was hospitalized in a predominantly isiXhosa-speaking provincial hospital. At home they only spoke Afrikaans.

Cole loved to sing the songs he learnt in the pre-school, but only in Afrikaans and often the older brothers remembered the words and joined him in singing the songs. The older boys spoke Afrikaans with their friends with a mixture of South African slang words within the local context. The second youngest son attempted to speak a little English now and then. I observed joy from Marlon when he described how they as parents enjoyed listening to their son's attempts to speak English, which they realised that he was learning at the pre-school.

Cultural capital: Resources at home

The children loved playing outside and never played inside during the day. The oldest three sons enjoyed playing cricket and touch rugby with friends, while Cole liked playing with the neighbour's little girl with his "*karretjies"* (dinky cars) or the wooden guitar his father had made him. Cole enjoyed drawing and the second youngest enjoyed helping at home.

The oldest sons and his friends enjoyed listening to "*igqom"* music. His friend often copied "*movies"* (films) on a flash stick for him and they enjoyed sharing their music with each other. The oldest son enjoyed working with his hands and made "*draad karretjies*" (cars made out of wire), "*while his siblings helped him in the* jaart" (back garden.

Family favourite activities included watching television "*soapies"* (soap opera television series) together in English and Afrikaans, especially over weekends; and sometimes films that were downloaded on flash drives with actors speaking Afrikaans.

Cloe explained that when Marlon came home after work, she would first make him tea and then he helped the children with their homework and sometimes read a story to them all. The only story or reading books they had were from the Centre. According to Marlon the only other books they had were "*boeke wat ek van die straat of gekry het wat wit mense uitgegooi het, maar hulle is in Engels, maar ek blaai maar ook so deur die boeke en kyk die prentjies*" (he picked up books that people had thrown away, but they were in English, however he sometimes paged through them and looked at the pictures). When Marlon helped the second youngest with his homework then Cole often interfered saying he also wanted to do homework with his father.

Cultural capital: Parental education & school experience

Cloe did not enjoy school and reported that she had limited literacy skills. Marlon mentioned that they had a good principal, because there were some male teachers who were very abusive, physically, and emotionally. The one teacher hit him once so badly that his ears rang, which was so painful that he started crying. The principal looked out for the learners, and they went to his office whenever these abusive discipline measures took place. According to Marlon it was mostly the male teachers that "*boelied*" (bullied) the boys. He left school during his Grade 8 year. Cloe was mostly unemployed at times doing occasional domestic jobs and Marlon was employed as a casual labourer for a builder.

Social Capital: Perceptions and experiences of parents' roles and responsibilities.

Cloe said she left her children to play on their own because they enjoyed that the most. Marlon thought that children performed poorly at school, because parents no longer had time to give their children attention. Life was so busy, and things happened very quickly so there was little time to give children the attention they needed.

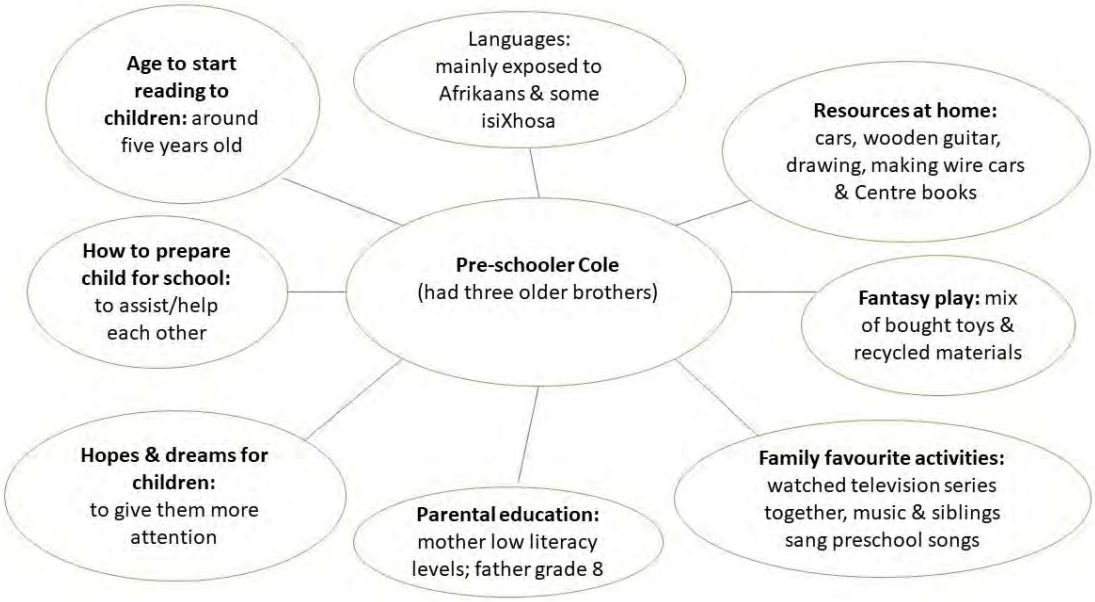
Marlon felt that it was not just the parents who did not give their children attention, but he included the teachers. He mentioned that sometimes teachers and parents did not get along with each other and then the parents tended to stay away from the school, which was not beneficial for the child. The children also had their *own way* of learning. A family member's daughter lived nearby, and they enjoyed playing "*skool-skool*" (school) then she helped a bit with the boys' homework.

I asked Marlon the question as to what his ideas were of how parents could prepare children for school? He answered to help/assist each other. Marlon interpreted my question regarding preparing the child for school, as being able to give the child some money to buy a packet of *Niknaks* (a small packet of crisps), which mostly cost R1.00. He tried his best to give them a few cents to spend during break time, but this was not always possible which he explained to the children.

According to his opinion you should start reading to your child when they were around five years old. Hopes for their children he regarded as *"soos ek dit sien, ek moet hulle meer aandag gee, veral die kleintjies" (*I see it that I must give them more attention, especially the young ones).

Figure 7

Social and Cultural Capital: Cole



Vignette 5: Fred, Nosipho and Devan

Cultural capital: Background and Languages

Fred grew up in an Afrikaans-speaking home but was exposed to all three local languages. His mother was good at speaking and understanding isiXhosa because she grew up in an amaXhosa community. Fred understood basic isiXhosa, but he experienced problems pronouncing it and was not always able to follow long conversations; he also understood English.

Nosipho grew up in an amaXhosa home and understood and could converse in basic Afrikaans. Devan and his parents lived with his maternal grandmother and therefore a mix of Afrikaans and isiXhosa languages were spoken and understood. Devan mostly spoke Afrikaans and understood isiXhosa and would sometimes translate from isiXhosa into Afrikaans for his father, but seldom spoke it. Some of Devan's friends spoke isiXhosa to him when they played, which he understood, but he answered them in Afrikaans and apparently, he did the same when Nosipho spoke to him in isiXhosa. The songs he learnt at the pre-school he sang in Afrikaans and now and then in English at home; and he prayed in Afrikaans. According to Nosipho, Devan tried to pretend read in English, so she thought that he wanted to understand English and therefore was attempting it. They only have a basic cellular

telephone and Devan enjoyed playing a bubble game on it and a puzzle pieces game, but it did not have language instructions.

Nosipho said *"I as a parent find that learning at their school makes me feel good"* (translated from isiXhosa to English). Devan often could not wait to tell her what he had learnt at school when they walked home. One of the most memorable things he ever told her was that he had drawn his finger (I suspect traced his hand on paper) and as soon as they got home, he traced it on the wall.

Cultural capital: Resources at home

Devan preferred playing outside with his friends, but at times played inside as well. When he got home, he unpacked his bag and then played outside. Fred proudly mentioned that Devan enjoyed making things with his hands and would call him and say "*kom kyk Dadda wat maak ek hier. Ek het 'n hondehok gemaak*" (come and look Dadda what I made; I made a dog box) with small pieces of timbe. Devan enjoyed playing with cars, dolls, stones, counting and loved to wear his shoes according to Nosipho.

According to Fred, family favourites were listening to music, watching television in Afrikaans and English and drawing. Nosipho said Devan enjoyed helping with the laundry and she gave him the socks to wash. They did not have time to tell stories and only had the story books that the Centre sent home, which Devan enjoyed listening to.

Cultural capital: Parental education and school experiences

Fred completed Grade 7 at school and Nosipho dropped out of school in Grade 3, but she remembered that she loved isiXhosa books. She felt that a good teacher was someone who was respectful to his or her learners and in turn the learners would respect the teacher.

Both Fred and Nosipho were involved in *a learnership* program to further their schooling, this was apparently a South African Governmental Initiative (possibly ABET/Adult Basic Education and Training). Nosipho was involved in the Community Work Programme (CWP), a government job initiative for unemployed people that provided part-time employment for a certain number of days per month. She was involved in a school cleaning project. Fred enjoyed gardening.

Social Capital: Perceptions and experiences of parents' roles and responsibilities.

Nosipho felt it was the responsibility of the parents to encourage their child to become familiar with all three local languages as it was a privileged for them to attend a multilingual pre-school where learning took place. She thought that one should start reading stories to your child at

the age of five years, when they were able to listen. Fred agreed that reading should be at a similar age of between four and five.

He felt that the parents were mostly to blame for the poor school performance of children. It all started with the child and parents were supposed to support their child in whatever they faced. The school's responsibility was to teach children how to do projects. Nosipho thought it should be a partnership. It was important that parents taught their child to be respectful and to listen to parents when they spoke. If the child had learnt these rules at home, it would be easier for the child to listen at school when the teacher spoke.

Fred felt he was always there if Devan needed him when he played, he would call his father. Nosipho sometimes played with him on the couch or hide and seek and football. Nosipho felt that the best way she could prepare Devan was by caring for him, loving him and providing for his needs at school. Training started at home so that the teacher did not struggle with the child in the classroom. Fred said children should know what is right and wrong and it was the parents' responsibility to show them. When one looked at the world and what was happening, children had to be prepared and not get a fright when they witnessed reality.

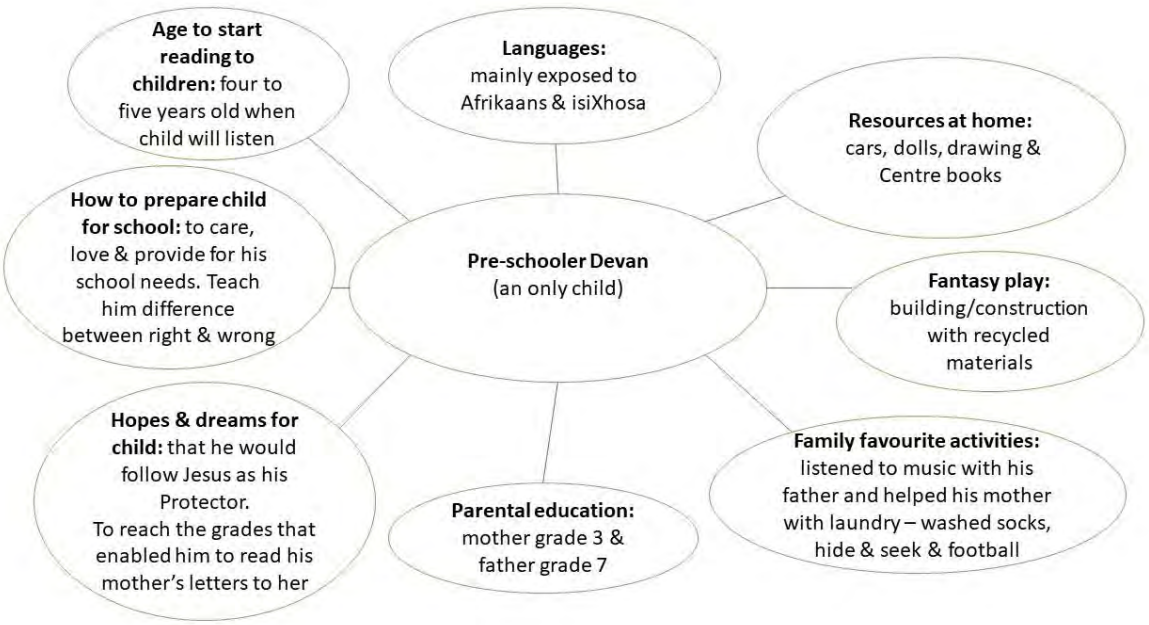
Once Devan started school, Nosipho felt her responsibilities as a parent were to support him with everything he received at school (assuming she meant homework) even though she found it difficult to read Afrikaans. The teacher's responsibility was to teach Devan important elements that included writing.

The way Fred viewed the world and everything that was happening in it, his biggest hope for Devan was "*ek wil hom reeds op daai voetbank hou"* (he wanted him to be biblically grounded, as a foot bench), because there would be stumbling blocks in life when that foot bench is removed. He prayed that Jesus carried Devan until he stood on his own feet, following the road with Jesus. "*That brings you far in life. There are so many drugs and things, and I cannot be at the school every day to see what was happening. Devan must find his own Protector. I cannot go and blame another child*" (translated).

Nosipho's hopes for Devan were that he would continue with his studies so that he reached the grades she did not reach, so that he could help her read her letters, which she was unable to read.

Figure 8

Social and Cultural Capital: Devan



Concluding Reflection

These introductory vignettes provided a snapshot and sense of the parent participants and their pre-schoolers. Using the vignette technique as a method has allowed their perceptions, opinions and attitudes regarding their roles and responsibilities as parents at the time of the interview, to be told with their real-life responses (Hughes, 1998).

Only two of the eight parents completed their school careers (Shanel and Des), and they were the only two who were fulltime employed and had enrolled their children at the local community library. Shanel and Des had smartphones, so they were able to take video clips of the activities they performed with their children at home and Des referred to Jack using a tablet. Greg had completed half of his senior school career and was good in languages and Anne had started her senior school career and was exposed to a good education when she attended the Roman Catholic primary school. Anne had been trained as a multilingual storyteller and was receiving a stipend from the Centre. Four of the participants had limited literacy skills and either performed casual or informal part-time work or were unemployed. Two of the parents had started attending an internship, which if completed would make them more employable.

Most children played with a combination of bought toys, albeit a few, and also used recycled material they picked up in the community and surrounding area where they lived. Fantasy play was evident at different themes, but mostly centred around what pre-schoolers observed in and around the home as activities that adults performed; building/making something,

shopping, and cooking. Reading material in homes predominantly consisted of the story books that the Centre sent home, that is four to five books a year sent home during literacy celebrations. A library system at the pre-school allowed for story books to go home every second week and to be returned for another book. The family favourite activity seemed to centre around music, especially the *igqom* music and secondly, a number reported that they enjoyed playing cricket in the street.

The pre-schoolers were exposed to a minimum of two local languages, if not three within their immediate home or surrounding community. They were then further exposed to the three local languages within the pre-school and parents gave various reasons and benefits for having enrolled their children specifically in a multilingual pre-school.

Four parents indicated that starting to read to your child should happen between the ages of four to six years old. Anne acknowledged that she had learnt the importance of reading to children from birth at the Centre and applied it currently, but wished she had previous access to the information, when she had her oldest two children. Shanel felt one should read to children from birth and I omitted to ask the question from the other two participants.

Answers to the question of how to prepare children for school varied and were mostly: laying a foundation with basic colours and counting, to be respectful and listen, to encourage, care and provide in their school needs. The main reason for children performing poorly at school were identified by all as the parents, but the reasons differed. A few mentioned that parents were not giving their children attention or showed interest in them and their schoolwork. The negative influences of teachers, friends, as well as the method that children applied to their schoolwork were additional reasons identified for poor school performance. All parents had higher aspirations for their children than themselves, mentioning completing their school career and some identifying following a career of their choice and possibly studying further.

The data from these interviews delivered insight into parents' perceptions of the social and cultural capital these specific pre-schoolers brought with them to the multilingual pre-school and shed light on parents' ideas about their roles and responsibilities in preparing their children for formal schooling.

Chapter 6: *iStoep* Intervention Sessions

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize, describe and explore the evolution of the activities over the sessions – explaining rationales for decisions, changes and "what happened" session by session. The Summaries on a Page (SoaPs) to follow present an account of the six evolving action research cycles from one meeting to the next. The text outlines aspects of the evolving discussions as well as reflections on the process. The illustrative evaluative participant comments have been extracted from the audio recordings of each session.

When I started with the *iStoep* sessions I had not decided yet on a specific format or theory of reflection that I was going to implement during the reflection sessions. At the first reflection session I asked the following three broad questions, which I continued using throughout:

1. What worked well?
2. What did not work well?
3. Any changes that are recommended for the next session?

These questions formed the foundation of following Korthagen's (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005) ALACT model, which provided a structured process of reflection, as noted in Chapter four.

SoaP 1: Getting to Know Each Other

Planning with co-facilitators

- Administrative tasks: Drew up an attendance register; booked the video recording device and organised catering.
- Elements to encourage communication: Established a safe, friendly environment: provided name tags with preferred names inscribed and organised room as a family dining room table.
- Selected activities that focused on parent-child interactions and communications as stimuli e.g., photographs of parents and children enjoying leisure activities together.
- Used the similar format & same questions from the Educational Partnership manual to probe photographs but translated them into the languages present in the group.
- Discussed different possible scenarios of logistics around running the sessions in three languages.

Action

- Welcomed and introduced all.
- Clarified value of mother tongue; participants to communicate in their language of preference: Afrikaans, English, isiXhosa (translator present)
- Contextualised purpose: a multi-directional learning process i.e., everyone will be learning from each other; parents as more knowledgeable about their children than practitioner and school; together could contribute significantly to child's development; an open-door policy welcome.
- Small group discussion of engagements with photographs depicting possible parent child activities at home. Questions below guided discussions.
- I added an impromptu question and asked what activity they enjoyed doing with their child.
- Discussed best method to share learning that took place in *iStoep* sessions with parents not in attendance.
- Discussed methods of communication between parents and practitioners.
- Closure: Initial identification of topics for next five sessions; home exercise - parents to capture in any medium what their child played with most at home. This sharing was voluntary (WhatsApp video clips, photographs, stories, or drawings) and take-home resources were provided.

Observation

- Contextualised purpose in first step essential to secure participants.
- Self-selected photographs and sharing of home activities are valuable stimuli for active participation and sharing and getting to know each other better.
- The translator's presence assisted the amaXhosa parents' participation.
- Verbalised enjoyment of participation.

Review

- Length of sessions were flexible that allowed for participants' personal life demands.
- Strong consensus on enjoyment of parents' enthusiasm and willingness to share their stories and what was important to them.
- Agreed beneficial for couples to remain together in small group discussions.
- A letter of appreciation for attendance and participation was sent to parents.
- Reflection sessions focused on three broad reflective questions.

Reflections on content and process, SoaP 1

During the first planning session I mostly took the lead in proposing the content of what the first *iStoep* session was going to include, but final decisions were made jointly with the co-facilitators. The purpose of including the co-facilitators in the planning and reflection sessions was that it firstly served to expose them to reflection techniques that they could apply in their own project practices and secondly to guide the practitioner and co-ordinator so that they could run these *iStoep* sessions independently in the future. The Educational Partnership manual (Iliás et al., 2019b) as explained in Chapters three and four, was used as a guideline for implementation of the *iStoep* sessions, with the understanding that it needed to be adapted to be relevant to the Centre and community contexts. Elements of intention in the first session were: the value and use of mother tongue during discussions; getting to know each other; and learning from each other as each participant's contributions were valued.

To promote getting to know each other, sixteen photographs were placed on the table, of parents and children performing different activities together. These photographs were included with the Educational Partnership manual (Iliás et al., 2019b), but represented a European context (see below). It was agreed that in future we would seek permission from our local parents to take photographs that were relevant to the community context and include these with the sixteen photographs. This would not only give parents a wider choice, but also be context specific that they can relate to.

Figure 9

iStoep parents selected the latter eight photographs

(Iliás et al., 2019b)

The *iStoep* parents were asked to select a photograph based on an activity that either their child already enjoyed partaking in at home, or an activity that they thought their child would enjoy doing with them. Participants were then divided into three small groups with a co-facilitator in each group which they selected to join, but the translator was specifically grouped

with the amaXhosa parent and her partner. The questions below were photocopied and given to each group to discuss in their language/s of choice.

Activity Questions:

1. What do you see?
2. Why did you choose this picture?
3. What can children learn from this activity?
4. How can this activity be introduced at home and at school?

After the small group discussions and in giving feedback to the bigger group regarding the above activity, parents identified the following activities and skills that they valued:

- Independence of the child. The shared examples were to dress themselves without help of a parent, to feed themselves and clean up after themselves, which would make the teacher's life at school easier.
- Listening skills/obeying rules at home and at school to make the transition from home to school easier for the child.
- Social skills that included: sharing, taking turns to play, making friends, children learning from each other and children becoming aware of importance of helping others in the community.
- Life skills included: gardening, learning to read, creative skills including making music and own puzzles from recycled material.

One parent mentioned that his own reading skills were limited, but it seemed that his child enjoyed reading and it would bring him joy if he developed into a good reader so that he could help him (the father) now and then. One group mentioned that they combined the answers to questions one, two and three into one answer.

I asked participants how they experienced the photograph activity? One parent mentioned he heard and learnt things he did not know before and another that one should teach children to be compassionate towards others. The practitioner and co-ordinator acknowledged that having listened to what the parents shared about their pre-schooler, they saw some of the children in totally a different light as to what they enjoyed participating in at home. For example, the practitioner had never seen Cole playing with the music instruments in the classroom, but his parents mentioned that he loved playing with his handmade guitar his father made him out of wood.

Parent participants suggested sharing the learning that took place at the *iStoep* sessions with other parents not in attendance, by way of summarising the sessions or to include one or two of the *iStoep* activities in the pre-school's quarterly newsletter. These activities or summaries to include fun elements, which could potentially motivate parents to attend the sessions should they be repeated in the same year.

In most of the township ECD centres in South Africa an A5 black hardcover book is used as a communication method to send messages to and from the pre-school. The same method is used within the LRD, but an added element of communication was suggested by the parents: that the black book be divided in half to improve sharing and learning between parents and practitioners. The first half of the book would remain for formal communication between parents and practitioners, but the second half could be used for sharing stories and drawings for example of what children like to play with at home and at the pre-school. In this way the parents and practitioners can continue to learn more about the child and strengthen the development of the child.

The practitioners suggested as additional methods of communication to maybe have quarterly informal but structured conversation with parents based on the approach of an Educational Partnership as per the current *iStoep* sessions. The co-ordinator mentioned that the application form had already been adapted to include more information regarding the child's likes and dislikes, which was a recommendation made during the previous year The translator added that important for parents and practitioners to share with each other when they observed that a child was getting bored with an activity so that it could be changed. Furthermore, parents to write or inform the practitioner when there are traumatic incidences happening in the community for example boycotts[16] and burning of car tyres in the street. The co-ordinator re-iterated that she could see the value of building in these additional communication methods to get to know the child and parent better.

[16] It Is a South African word indicating an expression of protest, which often goes together with burning of tyres in the street as a means of disruption.

The participants identified the following topics of interest that they wanted to learn more about during the next five *iStoep* sessions:

Topics identified by parents
1. How to play with my child to enable learning 2. How do you give attention to your child? 3. How to learn from each other to keep the communication open between child, home & school 4. Real toys/equipment vs fake 5. Bedtime routine. How to get my child to sleep on their own and go to bed early (identified in session 2).

Topics identified by the practitioner and co-ordinator
1. Open, honest communication between parents, practitioners, and school to benefit the development of the child. 2. Parents must feel they can approach practitioners about any aspect regarding their child.

For mutual learning to take place during these *iStoep* sessions, it was explained that the practitioner and co-ordinator would share classroom stories by way of verbal feedback, short video clips or photographs of their pre-schooler participating in in-and outdoor activities. Parents were encouraged to share similarly from home as this would allow for practitioners to continue learning more about the pre-schooler, but these were voluntary. No parent would be excluded from the *iStoep* sessions if they did not want to share or felt reluctant to share.

While there are various perspectives on whether to provide resources for homes or not, the LRD advocates the use of recycled materials that parents have access to in their community, but given the level of unemployment, it was agreed that access to educational resources was an implied human right, and the Centre provided the essential resources where possible.

The verbalized enjoyment of participation "*die geselskap is te lekker nou*" (the conversation is now just too enjoyable) and the co-facilitators' strong consensus during the reflection session agreed that elements of laughter, fun and engagement among the parent participants, together with a willingness to share their stories, was encouraging. Co-facilitators and I were unsure as to how the parent participants would engage within the educational partnership

approach, as mentioned, in the past parent engagement focused on parenting programs, which was mostly a one-sided communication of providing information. This style and approach used different methods and tools to facilitate communication in a more relaxed atmosphere of sitting around a table together. The hope was to create a two-way communication, but uncertainty existed whether this was actually going to be effective or not.

In response to the three broad reflective questions developed for the facilitators, the following aspects emerged: parents felt understood, showed confidence in sharing, the atmosphere was free and talkative, participants were debating but they showed understanding and valued people's opinions, the parents' enthusiasm, and willingness to share their stories.

Usually within our context it is mostly mothers or female caregivers that attend functions at the pre-school. It was encouraging to note that three fathers attended. The reasons for keeping couples together and not splitting them was that together they support each other and are confident together, but if they were split it might not have enhanced their communication, due to being in different small groups.

What did not work well was that this *iStoep* session was only an hour long, which seemed too short, and it was felt that parents still wanted to share and engage for longer. However, we acknowledged that participants had other commitments and would not always be able to attend every session and to be flexible when they had other commitments afterwards. One of the couples had a Bible study at their home that they could not change and therefore we agreed to a one-hour session. Secondly, the refreshments in the form of a bowl of soup and bread were not suitable to eat while participating in discussions. It was a bitterly cold evening, which led to the decision to serve warm soup, but it was decided that serving finger refreshments in future would be more practical to eat while discussions took place.

Challenges were experienced with the video recording device. From the perspective of being both facilitator and researcher, I found it very challenging to manage the video recording, audio recording and running the first session. Although I had prepared well and thought I had everything ready, the technical challenges were a distraction and increased my anxiety. These issues would need to be resolved before the next session.

SoaP 2: Supporting My Child To Learn Through Play

Planning

- Issues of equality, diversity and paraphrasing remained high on facilitation agenda.
- Discussions to be *facilitated* rather than answers being provided.
- Consensus reached on next topic, nature of session and activities were flexible.
- Introduce the model of an educational partnership and of parenting dimensions & behaviours related to children's self-regulated learnings (Pino-Pasternak & Whitebread, 2010) in user friendly language.
- Purchased bigger memory card to allow for at least 2-hour video recording.

Action

- Summarised previous session – emphasised value of input from parents and learning from each other.
- Reached consensus on group rules as point of departure.
- Participants brainstormed ideas of how in future, parents and practitioners could get to know each other better at the beginning of a school year.
- Variety of photographs placed on the table from *Children from around the world with their most prized possessions*. Participants selected a photograph and discussed it in small groups; gave feedback to bigger group.
- Explained model of educational partnership in more details.
- Showed participants photographs of their children participating in indoor and outdoor activities at the pre-schools.
- Introduced the self-regulated learning model (as explained in Chapter three).
- Closure: Parents identified one aspect from session worth sharing with others and added a bedtime routine to the topics for discussion.
- Home exercise and preparation for next session: observe child's favourite games or look for opportunities to support their child while playing.

Observation

- Parents enjoyed suggesting ideas of how to get to know each other better at the beginning of a year.
- Photographs of children from other, unfamiliar contexts a valuable stimulus.
- A highlight for parents was seeing photographs of their children at the pre-school.
- Started to observe elements and characteristics of an educational partnership.

Review

- Consensus that activity question *prompts* for photographs of children confused parents but *photographs* a successful discussion tool. Review questions and language used.
- Ethical concerns about material differences in homes captured on videos raised by coordinator. Researcher reassured parents that focus is on children and activities, not homes.
- Insightful to hear participants views of elements they were finding valuable and prepared to share with others outside the group.
- Important note: Constant, unexpected video recordings problems proved distracting and disruptive, but apologies were extended to the parents.

Reflections on content and process, SoaP 2

During the second planning session it was agreed that the principles of equality and diversity needed to be strengthened by applying facilitation techniques rather than the provision of answers, which I tended to do during the first *iStoep* session. Changes or improvements identified in the reflection session of the previous *iStoep* session were repeated to ensure effective implementation took place. It was jointly agreed that the session needed to start with participants identifying their own group rules. The difference between confidential information and sharing of learning within the sessions needed to be clarified. The principle of valuing suggestions by co-facilitators were also applied in the planning and reflection sessions. Decisions on the inclusion of activities and topics of discussion were therefore jointly made.

At the beginning of session two, while summarising the previous session, I often used the skill of paraphrasing, referring to the examples that participants used as an indication that I had listened and valued their contributions. To continue developing relationships between the various participants, I explained the purpose of group rules. As it was a smaller group in attendance, all agreed to discuss it within the bigger group.

***iStoep* GROUP RULES**
• There is no wrong or right answer. • Important that we participate (give our opinion) in discussions so that we can learn from each other. • We need to be sensitive to each other when suggesting something more helpful. • Be non-judgemental (do not gossip) towards other children, people, and each other. • Respect each other – give the person a chance to finish speaking and not to interrupt them. • Every person's comment/suggestion is valuable. • What we learn from each other can be shared with other parents and community members. • Sensitive and confidential information stays in the group and is not shared with others outside the group.

To continue the discussion of improving communication between the school and parents, participants were asked to discuss how parents and practitioners could get to know each better at the beginning of the year. The element of fun was present again in this brainstorming activity and it was clear they enjoyed sharing their ideas and possibilities. I was surprised at their ideas as they mostly identified ways that we as Centre staff had never thought of before.

Suggestions of ways (spontaneous or organised) in which parents and practitioners can get to know each other better within a multilingual pre-school setting.
• Dress up Concert; parents must wear school uniform and sing the songs and rhymes that their children are learning at the pre-school. • Road trip to share learning that took place with parents who find it difficult to attend; either because they live far from the pre-school and do not have the means to get there or due to possible disabilities. • One-on-one appointments with teachers during the year to enable all parents to get a chance to discuss their child's progress with the teacher. • LRD Bioscope session – watching video clips of how their children are learning in the classroom through play. • Fundraising event on a Saturday at the pre-school for parents and children together like the Child Protection March. • Games evening on Saturday, where parents and children can participate for example karaoke. Practitioners can teach the pre-schoolers some of the words of the songs. • Participants Anne and Cloe, who live within walking distance of the pre-school can be mentors and visit other parents to tell them what they have learnt or purposefully share with them when they drop off their children in the morning or when they collect them later. • A fun event together for example potjie kos morning or afternoon where practitioners and parents can chat and get to know each other in a relaxed environment – hand flyers out of event. • Family fun day of literacy and numeracy.

In introducing this session's topic of how to support my child to learn through play, thirteen photographs of children and their prized possessions, which came with the Educational

Partnership manual (Iliás et al., 2019b), were placed on the table and participants were asked to select a photograph that “spoke” to them.

Figure 10

iStoep parents selected the latter seven

(Iliás et al., 2019b)

The participants selected the latter group of seven photographs (possibly because they were ethnically diverse and felt to be more representative of the parents). They were divided into two smaller groups while using the activity questions below to guide their discussions.

Activity: Questions to discuss of photographs of children from around the world with their most prized possessions.
What did this child choose to play with? Why did you choose this photograph? What do we think of the child's choice? What do you think a child can do with these toys? What could a child possibly learn/develop from this? What possibilities are there at school and at home where children can play/do more and learn from in these play situations?

In giving feedback to the bigger group, participants contributed those children could learn different colours and basic numbers by counting toys. The photograph of Stella in Italy reminded the participant of her own daughter who enjoys playing with dolls. The dresses and dolls were colourful, and the child could learn by playing with the dolls and make-believe games with the dresses. All these activities could be performed at home and at school.

The photograph of Chiwa in Malawi led to an emotional reaction for the participant as he felt saddened by the child and felt she needed more attention (this was the same participant that requested the topic of "how to give my child attention"), friends to play with and clothes to wear. He felt that she needed to go to school to learn more and maybe the toy dragon was her "protector".

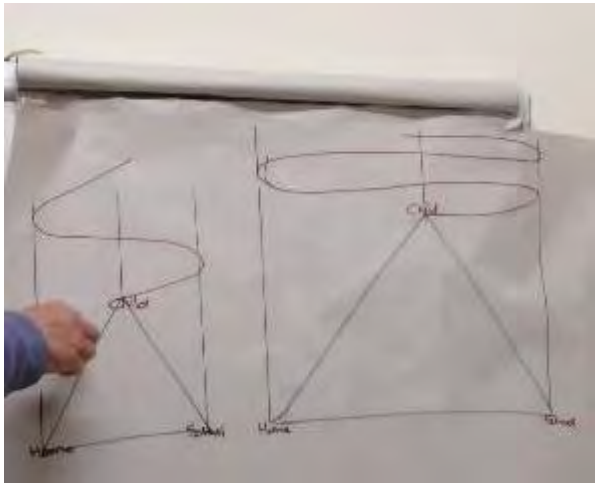
The photograph of Pavel of the Ukraine was linked by a parent participant as a possible career choice: maybe wanting to join the Defence Force or the South African Police. The parent mentioned that learning regarding these types of careers could just happen at home and not at school as children were not allowed to play with toy guns at school. The practitioner however clarified that the pre-school included themes on possible careers and "people who help us" so children could think of their future and what possible career they would like to dream about. The pre-school therefore purchased the appropriate fantasy play uniforms and equipment such as toy weapons or doctors' instruments that accompanied the various careers. Additionally, the practitioners emphasised the proactive and positive role of the police officer to the pre-schoolers, as parents sometimes threatened their children with the police if they

were naughty. This caused children to be fearful of the police, rather than seeing them in a protective role.

I used the same photograph to illustrate how each one interprets something from their own perspective. I explained how our interpretations and perspectives can often lead to misunderstandings between parents and practitioners or parents amongst themselves, as we sometimes “judge” from our perspective. The importance of clear communication was highlighted and furthermore linked to the value of an Educational Partnership focusing on the benefits of having similar rules at home and pre-school to assist the pre-schooler to navigate and adjust to the pre-school environment. I emphasised the importance of parents continuing to communicate with their child’s teacher when they start formal schooling. I drew the model of an educational partnership as illustrated below on flip chart paper to visually show parents the benefits of the closer the school and homework together the better for the child. The model on the left indicates a close relationship between the parent and teacher, which is beneficial for child development. Whereas the right-hand side model, the wider or further removed parents and teachers are, which is represented by the base of the triangle, the more strain is placed on the child to navigate between these two different worlds. We agreed that in future I would refer to this model in a shortened manner as *the triangle* model.

Figure 11

Educational Partnership Model



(Iliás et al., 2019b, p. 5)

The practitioner took photographs of the parent participants children participating in a favourite in and outdoor activity. These were developed for the parents as a “mini bioscope” attempt as a glimpse of what their pre-schoolers participated in. The parents enjoyed seeing photographs

of their children at pre-school and some were fascinated by what they saw. One parent could not believe seeing her daughter dressed up in a “dress” as she never wore dresses at home.

The practitioner took a photograph of Cole playing the drums in the pre-school. After the first *iStoep* session where Cole’s parents shared that he loved playing with his homemade guitar, the practitioner realised that she had not seen him playing in the music corner. She therefore intentionally invited Cole and other pre-schoolers to join her in the music corner. She explained how she supported and challenged Cole to join her in playing drums first just with one drumstick and later handed the second one over to him. This was a prime example of mutual capacity building which benefitted Cole’s development. It was noted that parent participants mostly selected photograph stimuli of people of mixed race.

I used Cole’s example to introduce the three circle elements (challenge, contingency/support, and autonomy) of the self-regulated learning model in user friendly language and how it could be applied in practices at home. I used additional examples of activities that parents had shared to further explain the purpose in applying the different roles indicated in the circles. The wording of these three circles were clarified and translated into all three languages to ensure that co-facilitators were prepared for user friendly language during the small group discussions.

Parents found the following aspects of session two the most valuable and would share these with colleagues or friends:

- Visually seeing photographs of the activities their children enjoyed participating in at pre-school
- How learning happened through play
- Had never heard of the three self-regulated circles and how it can be applied
- The importance of the use of communication strategies to support, encourage and motivate their children while playing.

It was agreed during the planning session that I would ask parents towards the end of the session whether they had any stories they wanted to share within the group of their exercise with their child at home, as they were still getting to know each other and could potentially feel uncomfortable in sharing their story earlier. Two parents shared that they had taken short video clips of their children playing at home. It was agreed that it was best to download the videos onto a Centre flash stick and show it to the participants through the data projector during one of the next sessions. Take home resources included the photographs of their children where they participated in in and outdoor activities and a photocopied handout of the self-regulated learning model.

I started the reflection session with the same three questions identified in the first session. I highlighted the importance of professional and personal growth and that the reflection questions could be applied to one's own practices within the various projects offered at the Centre. What worked well was observing the parents' enjoyment in seeing the photographs of their children participating in activities at the pre-school. It was therefore agreed that the practitioner would attempt to take short video clips of the children (whose parents gave consent) when they participated in a themed activity, with the intention of showing it at the next session. It is important to note that when planning these *iStoep* sessions to have a minimum of two weeks between sessions as the practitioners need time to take photographs of in and outdoor activities that pre-schoolers participated in and then these need to be printed before the next session.

It was agreed that the activity questions were not working in the way we had hoped; the focus being on what the child could learn at home from participating in that specific activity in the photograph. In some sense the questions felt repetitive or there was not a clear distinction of what information was asked. The practitioner explained that within their community, they spoke "*kombuis*" (kitchen) Afrikaans, which is more colloquial and casual. It was agreed that the photographs were a valuable stimulus, but the wording of the questions needed to change, but we were unsure as to 'how'. We acknowledged that we were learning from each other – hearing stories from home and pre-school proved to be invaluable but I questioned whether parents were equally learning new information that they would be able to apply in their practices at home. The practitioner thought than when parents practically saw an idea and how the skills were applied, it made it easier for them to understand and implement. She felt that parents understood an idea better when they visually saw it. In my researcher memo after the *iStoep* session – I wrote: "*How to approach this in a SA context*"?

The practitioner and co-ordinator found that giving feedback to the bigger group after the small group discussions was meaningful and they learnt more from the different perspectives of parents in all the groups and parents could also learn from each other. The practitioner felt that the more the parents participated and shared about their children, the more she learnt. She used this new information to adjust classroom practices that allowed for development and learning to be facilitated. Despite making changes to the video technology to ensure uninterrupted video during the two-hour session, it continued being a disruptive challenge. The lesson learnt was it is important to understand the basics of the devices that will be used in a research project and to have additional backup systems: for example, I had two audio recorders, which proved invaluable.

SoaP 3: How to Support My Child through Pretend Reading

Planning

- Format of session started with recap of main points from previous two sessions.
- Used collective local knowledge and experience to design session content with relevant activities and discussion tools. Going forward, Educational Partnership manual to be used as a guide.
- Used relevant handout with short video clips that depicted “reading with adults” and “pretend reading” for facilitated discussion.
- Discussed relevant take home resources.
- The translator was unable to attend session three. Translation dilemma was discussed with solutions.
- Co-facilitators were encouraged to increase their participation during sessions.

Action

- The co-ordinator suddenly became ill and was unable to present her contribution at the session - plans were adapted quickly.
- Highlighted parents’ contributions during summary of session one and two.
- Revisited self-regulated model and parents’ shared experiences of how they used this model during a play activity with their child at home. Explained additional roles and activities linked to this model.
- A variety of discussion tools were utilized such as a handout, a video and photographs that depicted the benefits of shared reading activities.
- The practitioner provided additional practical tips in “pretend reading” activities at home and raised the importance of modelling the behaviour of reading.

Observation

- Parent’s “support” stories showed excitement and creativity in their children’s development.
- Participants seemed to enjoy the engagement around the video and group discussions with the support of the handout.
- Participants not as enthusiastic about the additional roles that can be applied within the self-regulated learning model. Unsure whether a lack of interest, a difficult concept, or tiredness/length of session.

Review

- Encouraged to see more parents attending this session than the previous one.
- I felt the absences of the two co-facilitators and their input.
- Reassured to hear activity stories from participants - they mostly used the “support” circle within the self-regulated learning model.
- Used the handout as discussion tool together with relevant video, assisted in a clearer direction for discussions. To use different types of discussion tools in future such as videos, photographs, and relevant guiding handouts.
- The practitioner made suggestions of improving my facilitation skills.
- Flexibility and adaptability key in real world research to deal with unforeseeable challenges such as circumstances preventing parent and co-facilitators attending technical challenges and high workloads.

Reflections on content and process, SoaP 3

After giving the change of facilitation tools considerable thought it was agreed at the planning session to use a *Wordworks*[17] handout (How children benefit from sharing books with an older person) and an accompanying video, which showed how a volunteer was reading a book with a child, to facilitate discussion and learning at the third session. The practitioner and co-ordinator agreed on the additional information they were going to include to further support the handout and video. Each participant would receive the handout in their language of preference to use while watching the video and small group discussions would be held afterwards. It was also decided to give each participant a story book for their child that would enable them to practice a reading activity with their child at home.

The translator had excused herself from this session due to personal reasons and then the co-ordinator became ill during the afternoon of the session and was not able to attend. The practitioner and I had to quickly adapt the plans and we agreed that I would present the information. Cloe excused Marlon from the session as he was participating in seasonal work on a farm and would only get back to town later.

I gave special thanks to the participants for attending and acknowledged that life was busy and unforeseen circumstances are part of real life but appreciated their commitment. While summarizing the previous two sessions I used a 3D printed brain and explained how children could find it challenging to adapt to the pre-school when the two environments of home and school were different. It took additional brain power for the child to navigate between these sets of rules, which could contribute in making it difficult for them to concentrate and listen at school. Therefore, the benefits of good communication between practitioner and parent.

I also touched on the meaning of “child development” and asked what participants understood by this terminology. Shanel answered to make you a better person and Fred replied to help you understand. I further linked child development with cognitive development, which again was one of those concepts that was not easy to translate, but I used practical examples to illustrate how a child developed their cognitive skills. I added the use of the three self-regulated circles that participants could apply to enable further learning and development.

I moved the sharing of home activities to earlier in this session and the parents easily shared their stories. They mostly used the supportive circle with their children in the following activities at home:

- Practiced writing his name

[17] Wordworks is a South African based literacy Non-Profit Organisation that focuses on developing relevant literacy resources and programmes.

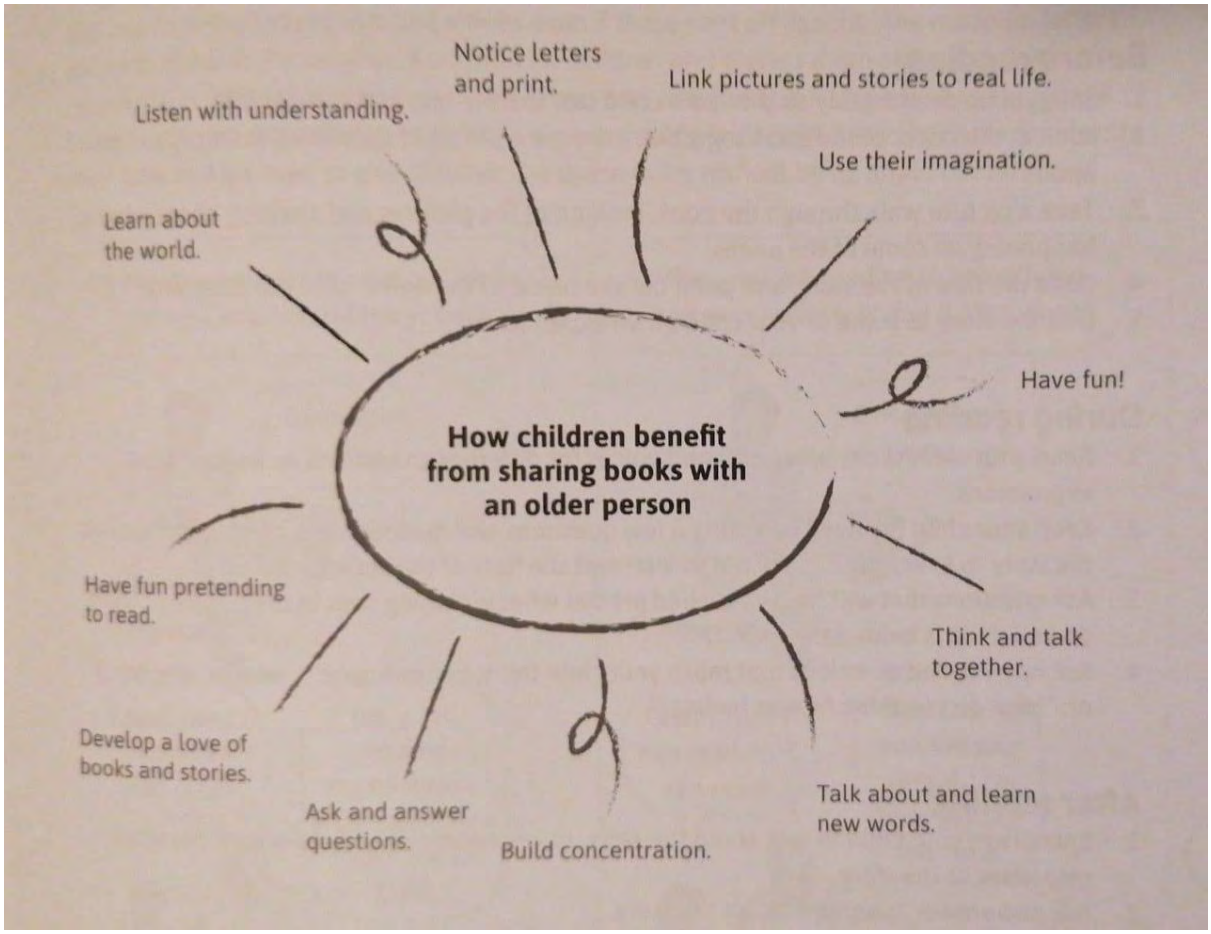
- Guided them to count past 19 and 29 – the child got stuck after a ‘9’. The practitioner gave additional practical tips in remembering twenty and thirty.
- Drew and coloured in. I used this example to explain the value of this for fine motor skills development as the fore runner of being able to grip a pencil to write.
- Drew himself but with such a long neck. His parents supported him and compared their own neck to that of their child so he could see his neck was shorter. He enjoyed drawing his hand on the wall. The practitioner explained that one of the school readiness tests was to assess whether the child could draw him or herself. Encouraged parents to support their children in seeing and drawing first two eyes and ears, a mouth and nose and then the neck and body.
- Learned to ride a bicycle with supportive wheels and removed one wheel at a time.
- Applied the supportive circle element with other children who attended the multilingual stories in the community.

Greg shared how Carmen used to draw these “funny” shaped dolls when she started the pre-school but was now drawing them correctly with a path and a house. When he asked her where the path was going, she answered that the girl was going to town. Parents further asked the practitioner about a new song the children were singing about brushing their teeth. She explained that it was part of dental hygiene theme, and each child received an age-appropriate toothbrush and toothpaste. Nosipho shared that now she understood why Devan was looking for his “*tubie”* and could not go to school before he brushed his teeth.

I introduced the new topic of the importance of reading with and to your children. I used the *Wordworks* handout below to briefly discuss each benefit with a practical example to assist the parents with low literacy levels to hear what the benefits were if they were unable to read them. The handout assisted in highlighting the benefits of children reading books with an older person and the role they as a parent or an older sibling could fulfil in this activity.

Figure 12

Handout: How children benefit from sharing books with an older person (Wordworks, 2018, p.27)



A *Wordworks* video that complements the handout was purposefully selected as it clearly and practically illustrated how a volunteer read with a young child. After watching the video, the participants were divided into two groups and were asked to identify the benefits they observed in the video with those identified in the handout. Using this particular handout with the video was useful as participants eagerly gave feedback of the benefits they identified in the video from the handout. Some parents expanded further on the reasons why they selected a particular benefit linking it to what they observed in the video.

The second activity included photographs of reading activities. This time we included a mixture of the Educational Partnership manual (Iliás et al., 2019b) photographs, and photographs that the practitioner took of their children reading a story book in the pre-school. This discussion was linked again to the above benefits but also the three self-regulated circles and the extension of roles that parents could implement.

Figure 13

Parent participant viewing photographs of reading activities of parents and children

When we were wrapping up, Greg mentioned that they enjoyed receiving the *Grocott's Mail* (local and oldest newspaper in South Africa) every Friday (an initiative the Centre partnered with *Grocott's Mail* to enable local reading resources for homes of Centre beneficiaries). The practitioner shared that they encouraged the children to ask their parents to read something out of the newspaper to them over the weekend. Greg mentioned that Carmen is just interested in seeing whether there are any photographs of people she might know. Fred mentioned that he and Devan discussed a Rhino photograph in one of the editions. The practitioner enjoyed hearing how they used the *Grocott's Mail* with their children, and it was agreed that it was a good initiative to continue with. Take home resources included a story book that they could read to and with their child, a photocopy of the group rules and a small chocolate to celebrate the half-way mark of the *iStoep* sessions.

I transcribed the actual *iStoep* session data after I completed all the sessions, and I realised I missed a valuable learning opportunity. I should have had a visual up front from session one indicating the five main areas of child development and linked the shared stories to not just the three circles, triangle, but also to these five developmental areas. This would have framed learning more specifically rather than referring to the broad development and benefits thereof for the child in general.

The reflection session started again with the same three reflective questions. Reflecting on how the reflection sessions should have transpired I would suggest that co-facilitators should

jointly have agreed on the method to follow, and turns should have been taken to facilitate the reflection session. This might have brought a rich perspective on styles of facilitation and implementation.

Parent participants shared more stories from home having mostly applied a supportive role in a variety of activities. The adapted method was successful, and all agreed that removing the questions and replacing it with a handout and a video, where participants could clearly see how the child responded to the way the book was read to him, would be repeated in the next session. Parents seemed to understand better what was expected from them in this session's activities.

In my researcher memo I wrote: "*I definitely thought I spoke hopelessly too much*". To improve my facilitation skills, the practitioner suggested that I give participants longer time to answer, rather than supplying the answer to them. I shared that I did not want the parents to feel anxious when they could not quickly provide the answer and then I would answer my own questions. The practitioner further suggested that I give parents an opportunity to add any additional contributions at the end of the session, for those who might have remembered something they would like to add. I reminded the practitioner to share the stories of the parents with her colleague, the amaXhosa practitioner, to enhance learning and development of pre-schoolers in the classroom.

SoaP 4: Supporting My Child to Learn through Pretend Writing

Planning

- Shared with the co-ordinator the positive outcome of the change in the use of facilitation tools.
- Going forward, the logic flow of each session had to be discussed and agreed by the co-facilitators and myself as well as the take home resources relevant to the topic.
- In hindsight after the previous reflection session, I remembered that I observed that when feedback was given to the bigger group, that some participants seemed to communicate less than others.
- Reminded co-facilitators again on the importance of using similar reflection techniques to interrogate their own practices.

Action

- Welcomed Zola[18] and briefly summarized previous three sessions.
- One of the participant's mother arrived to give her daughter a message.
- Parent participants shared their stories of reading activities with their children, and I showed a short video of the practitioners reading a story to the pre-schoolers.
- The group brainstormed ideas on "how to give my child attention".
- Introduced the new topic, "Emergent Writing" with a handout.
- Shared *Wordworks* video and parent participating in writing activity.
- Zola's presence provided an opportunity to question the benefit of the agreed communication to parents not in attendance.
- Closure: Agreed parents would share stories of drawing and writing activities at home at next session. I gave participants the opportunity to add any additional information.

Observation

- More English was spoken in this session. Prior sessions consisted more of a mix of Afrikaans and English with additional isiXhosa where needed.
- Observed one parent participant pasted all her handouts she received in her book.
- Increased number of sharing stories at home and the pre-school.

Review

- Small group discussions were beneficial.
- Participants spoke in their second language to accommodate each other.
- The changed facilitation tools continued to be effective, but sound of pre-school video and of parent was poor.
- Felt encouraged by parent who offered to take notes during small group discussion.
- The mutual sharing of stories proved encouraging and helpful in exploring the value of an Educational Partnership.
- Found Zola's suggestion valuable to adapt summary handouts to parents.
- Agreed that my facilitation skills improved as I spoke less, offered less answers and gave participants time to respond.

[18] A parent participant who attended for the first time. She had completed a consent form to participate in the sessions, but due to personal circumstances this was the only session she attended.

Reflections on content and process, SoaP 4

As mentioned before, the Educational Partnership manual (Iliás et al., 2019b) was used as a guideline to follow the agenda items for each session; within this every session addressed another aspect of communication that potentially could be improved between the pre-school and the parents. Examples were "how to get to know each other better," to discuss and question the relevance of the content of the Application/Enrolment form. Were the most important questions asked in the form or what should be changed to give the practitioner a better understanding of the child before they started the pre-school. Another matter to question was the content of the Orientation session that was held with parents before the pre-schooler started at the LRD. It was agreed that adding an item on improved communication was valuable and relevant, but it somehow did not make logical sense to include it with the topic of interest. In future when these *iStoep* sessions are repeated, one should maybe use one specific session to address the most important communication matters, rather than including it in every session.

Cloe and Marlon sent their apologies as their youngest child was sick and Fred and Nosipho attended the internship classes. During the session Shanel's mother arrived to give her a message and then Shanel invited her to join the group. I welcomed her and then felt unsure as to how to address the situation, as it was a formal research project and not just a function held at the Centre where people were welcome to attend. I then asked everyone's permission whether they felt comfortable with her attending, and they could say "no". The participants agreed that she could stay as they knew her as one of the community health workers from the local medical clinic.

To adhere to the ethical conditions of the research project, I had to blank out the faces of the children in the video taken by the practitioner. While the parents enjoyed watching the video, the true excitement and engagement of the children's faces could not be seen, but the parents were able to see the various skills the practitioners used to make the story reading activity exciting.

Shanel explained how Carmen role-played what she learnt at school. When she got home, she would take for example the above book and read to her dolls and mimic the teacher's voice. Greg added that she pretended to be reading to the baby (doll) and pointed to her back showing her father that he must be quiet because the baby is sleeping. Greg usually asked Carmen about her school day and asked her to expand if she gave short answers. She sometimes sang a new song they learnt that day or she would ask Greg to read her the story of the book she brought home. He would start reading it and then she took over and "read"

the rest of the story to him. Shanel shared that one needed to give your child attention when they wanted it, as that made them feel important and it developed their self-confidence.

Parents described the following additional homework exercise stories from home:

- Jack “read” a story to Des in English but used Afrikaans words where he could not remember the English word. For example, he read “*he played in the “modder*”(mud) and then she would support him in translating it into the correct English word.
- Zola’s daughter also “read” the “SHHHHH!” book to her, which she enjoyed listening to. She added that her daughter liked to count in Afrikaans, so now Zola had to learn to count in Afrikaans as well.
- Anne explained how she used the supportive circle to encourage Kurt to “write” his name and draw himself. She excitedly shared Kurt’s attempts in drawing himself in the photograph below.

Figure 14

Visual example of Kurt drawing himself during an activity at home

After the parents gave feedback of their homework activities with their children, we moved to the following section of how one could give your child attention. Within the bigger group we discussed what it means in practice to give your child attention.

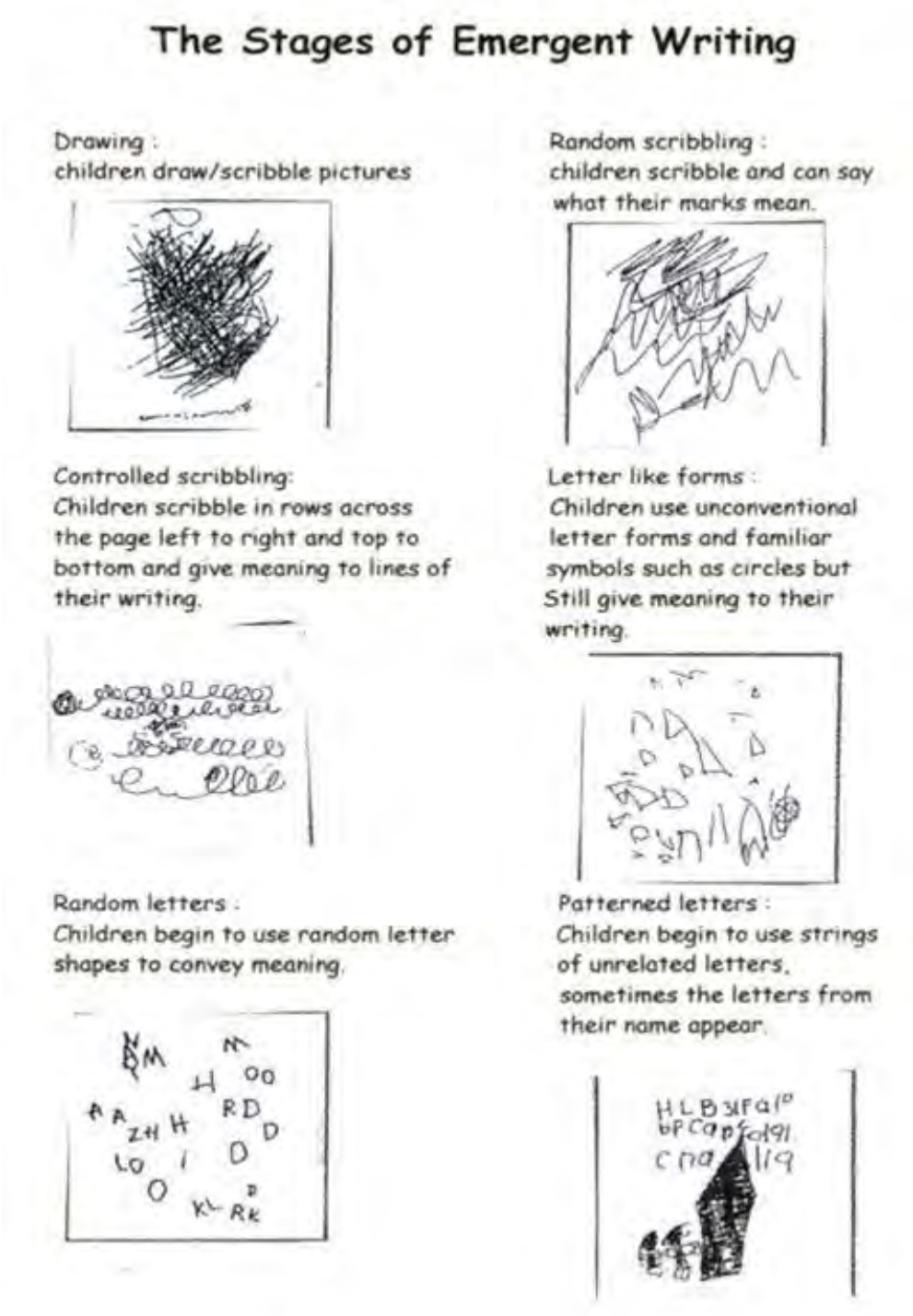
Parents and co-facilitators identified the list below:

Giving my child attention
BENEFITS • Builds my child's confidence. • It shows that as a parent I value what they are saying because it is important • Attention shows them you care, it shows comfort and love. • It shows parents are 'with me', which enriches their lives and increases vocabulary **IDEAS** • No cellular telephone or use of technology (TV) when spending time with your child • Participating in physical exercise together for example skipping together • Allow them to participate in daily routines with you as parent • Be in the space with your child Keep eye contact with your child while talking to them • Ask for their opinion/ what are they thinking/ what are they feeling • Tone of voice needs to be encouraging • Ask them about their day at school. What did they like/ what did they not like? • What would they like to talk about/conversations about their surrounding community/what are they seeing, smelling, and hearing?

I introduced the new topic of emergent writing and used the handout below to show the parents examples of how children's writing developed through the various stages.

Figure 15

The stages of emergent writing (Kavanaugh, n.d.)

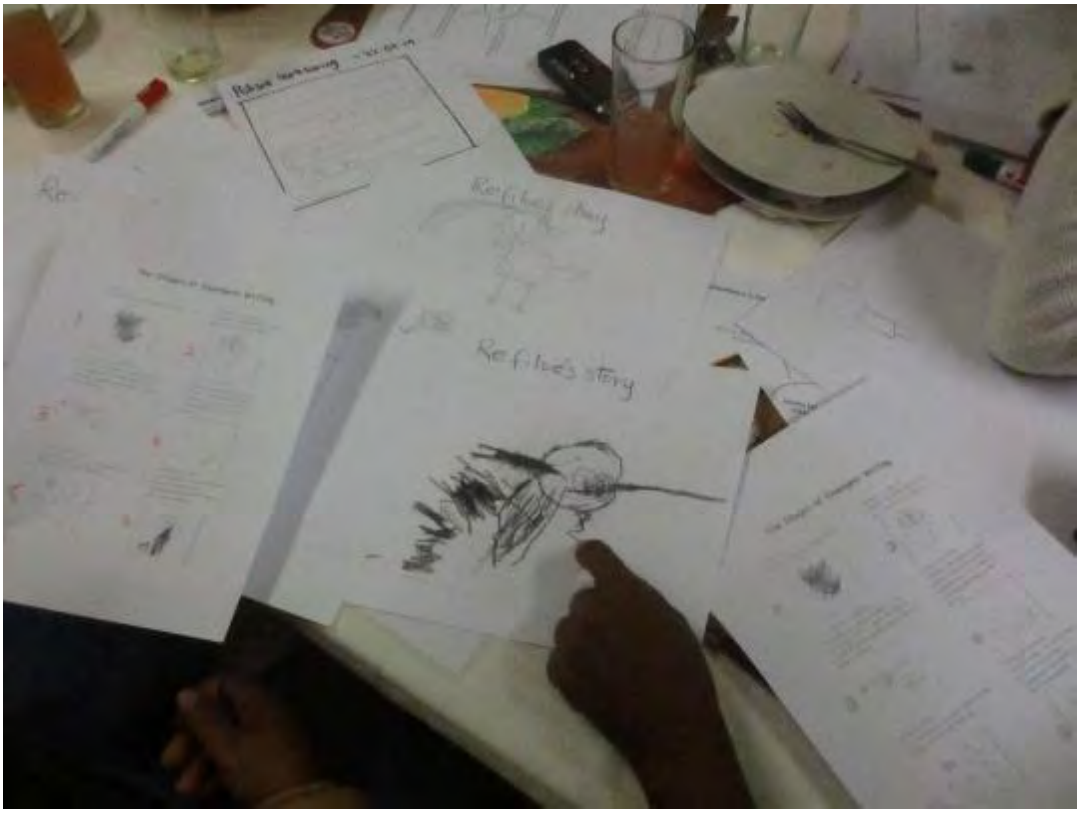


I made copies of various stages of the pre-schoolers' drawing and cut the names out and divided participants into the two groups so that they could discuss and identify the various

stages of the drawings in front of them. Again, they needed to read each stage and used practical examples for further explanation and clarification.

Figure 16

Parent participants identifying the various stages of emergent writing



Discussing the various stages of emergent writing was a lively discussion that included laughter and bantering, which I used to highlight that one could disagree from one another, which is normal, but the importance was how one dealt with the disagreement. The same applies when teachers and parents differ from one another, they can discuss it and clarify possible misunderstandings.

Returning to the emergent writing exercise, Des, as part of her homework feedback, had taken a short video of Jack and his father practicing writing his name. The practitioner had taken a video of an emergent writing activity within the classroom. The activity included people being robbed and then went to the police station to report it and the police officer taking their statement. This video gave the parents a glimpse of how learning re pretend writing was taking place in the classroom. I then showed them the *Wordworks* video of emergent writing, which showed them skills they could apply as parents at home in challenging and supporting their

children to write. I related the story of Anne and Kurt that picked up a bird's nest on the way to school, which transpired into the practitioner writing down Kurt's story when he got to school and how his story and book was displayed in the classroom library. The practitioner encouraged all parents to seek similar opportunities and commented how they could sound the beginning letter of various household objects when talking to their children, which would assist in their reading strategies as it prepared them to "sound". She furthermore mentioned that the same way it was important for parents to model reading at home, the same applied to writing.

Take home resources consisted of photographs of their children "reading" in the pre-school. Additionally, they received a laminated handout version of a self-regulated model (Pino-Pasternak & Whitebread, 2010), which is attached in Appendix 16. The latter was given to parents to enable them to display it on a wall or cupboard as a reminder of how they can assist their children to learn through play. A photocopied handout of the stages of emergent writing was also provided.

During the reflection session the translator mentioned that participation and discussions in the smaller groups seemed to work well. Participation occurred in a non-judgmental manner and participants spoke in their second language that allowed communication and understanding to take place. If they used a word in their mother tongue, they would explain it in more detail in their second language to allow the other person to follow their meaning. Anne offered to take down notes of their decisions, which according to the translator showed initiative and that she felt safe in the *iStoep* environment, as often participants are not confident to write down notes. The practitioner purposefully attempted to engage more with Des during the small group discussions to allow her to share her stories.

The translator felt that watching the videos together with the handouts that were given to the participants gave them different options to select from; it allowed for easier participation and discussions as she found that sometimes people experienced problems relating to the question and therefore answering it but having a variety of options allowed them the freedom to debate, discuss and come up with possible answers while feeling safe in the space. It was encouraging that participants shared stories, videos, and drawings of home practices.

It was agreed that I had implemented the recommended facilitation skills and the translator agreed with the practitioner that showing the videos helped with taking the pressure off me. The videos provided the information, while also visually showing parents the skills and therefore there was no need for me to talk and explain such a lot. Having the support of the co-facilitators and their input was valuable within these *iStoep* discussions as it provided a variety of perspectives, not just in the *iStoep* sessions, but also in the planning and reflection

sessions. Their diversity and equality (in terms of being able to critique my style and add comments and suggestions) were appreciated.

Zola's attendance for the first time and her honest input helped to make more informative decisions regarding the method of feedback to the parents, going forward. She suggested including a small photograph of the activity and then to give some background information or tips on how to do the activity. The photograph of the activity would personally make her interested to read more and attempt the activity with her child. The videos of the classroom activity and parent writing activity with his son will be shown again in the next session as the sound quality was poor.

SoaP 5: Supporting a Child to Develop Confidence through Setting Age-Appropriate Boundaries

Planning

- Provide recap of previous session and re-watch videos with better sound. Request feedback of home activity exercises by parents.
- Introduce the session topic: family values, reward chart exercise and the goal setting ladder exercise, which the translator explained.
- Identify and discuss different feelings with children.
- The Communication channels handout to be shared with all LRD parents.

Action

- Recap included summary of session four.
- Showed the videos on writing activities with better sound quality.
- Parents shared stories of home activities.
- Introduced the new topic of setting age-appropriate goals and boundaries.
- Participants practiced completing the reward chart and asked questions.
- Explained how parents can set their own goals using a ladder illustration.
- Showed the marshmallow video test, which connected with the reward chart; questions and discussion followed.
- Closure: Repeated the opportunity for participants to additional information. Home activity to set one goal with their child and give feedback next session.

Observation

- Discussing values is not always easy and participants seemed more reserved discussing the issue of family values.
- Parents seemed to enjoy sharing their ideas of the reward chart objectives they were going to implement at home.
- The translator clarified the ladder goal setting example that parents could use as I misunderstood it when she explained it during the planning session.
- More input from co-facilitators in responding to parents' questions was evident during this session compared to previous sessions.
- The enjoyment of watching the marshmallow video was clearly visible with participants commenting during the video and afterwards.

Review

- Discussions focused on a variety of aspects such as different levels of engagement and whether this could possibly be linked to different levels of processing the content of the topics.
- The co-facilitator voiced her disappointment that there was not sufficient time to explain the different emotions, but to include next session.
- Need to find a balance as the content planned in the planning session was too much for one session.
- The translator mentioned that after she had clarified the ladder exercise, one of the participants acknowledged that she had learnt something new.

Reflections on content and process, SoaP 5

The practitioner had to attend a work-related training session out of town and the translator and co-ordinator were unable to attend the planning session together, so I met with each one individually. It was agreed that after the translator explained the goal setting ladder example to me, I would introduce it and she would provide additional information and the co-ordinator was going to explain the reward chart and how to use it to set boundaries and a routine for children.

Having diverted the activities from the Educational Partnership manual (Iliás et al., 2019b) was more time consuming than originally anticipated. It took time to find a handout and video that linked with the topic the parents had selected and then to establish a structured, logical sequence of activities. It was helpful to have co-facilitators that assisted with these discussions and choices during the planning sessions, reminding me that mutual capacity-building was essential.

Unfortunately, Des was absent as she was sick and Fred and Nosipho were absent. They had mentioned that it was difficult for them to continue attending the *iStoep* sessions as it was now clashing with their internship and at the time of signing up for the sessions, they were not aware that the internship was going to start. I explained that I understood, and that the internship was not always available and that gave them the opportunity of better employment in the future, but they were welcome to attend where possible.

The recap in this session was longer than previous sessions as Cloe and Marlon were present and for their benefit, I felt it was important to focus on the handout of giving your child attention. The videos of the previous session were replayed with a speaker that increased the volume. Before I showed them the videos it was encouraging to hear Shanel saying they must specifically note how the volunteer supported the child in the *Wordworks* video.

After watching the videos, the parents shared their stories:

- Shanel and Greg showed a short video where Carmen was “writing” her name and numbers with play dough. Shanel asked “wat skryf jy?” (what are you writing?) and she answered “ek het my naam geskryf” (I wrote my name).
- Anne described how Kurt drew a man in the mud with drops of rain, but he was complaining because his two-year-old sister drew on the opposite page, and he said that he could not write properly because she was in his way. Anne asked him what he was writing, and he answered “dit reën” (it is raining).

- Shanel and Greg shared another video with Carmen singing, having memorised quite a lot of words.
- The third video showed where she was colouring in while singing along.
- Greg also described how she was teaching her friend who was in the local school, a song that she had learnt in the pre-school, encouraging the friend to memorize the words and sing along.

I introduced the new topic of setting age-appropriate boundaries and asked the couples to work in pairs together as we were going to first discuss family values as these formed the cornerstone of boundaries. I grouped Anne with the co-ordinator and the translator. I saw it as an opportunity for each couple to discuss what was important to them, which is quite personal. The participants looked at me vaguely and I expanded to give them a better understanding of what I meant. Discussions seemed quite reserved between couples and was not met with the usual enthusiasm. Their input was the following:

- Honour your father and your mother.
- Being honest as a family and teaching it to your children.
- "*Moenie mekaar vermaak / koggel nie*". The co-ordinator asked for clarification as even in Afrikaans we were not exactly sure of the meaning in the context as a family value. He explained that when they have visitors, the boys would act out and tease each other, but it is not an entertaining teasing, but rather errs on nastiness and then it becomes out of control, which in a sense was disrespectful.
- The translator contributed saying her children are not allowed to eat sweets before they have a meal, but only afterwards. Shanel mentioned that is something they are experiencing challenges with Carmen. She wanted to eat her treats before supper.

It was agreed in the discussion that the benefits of setting boundaries for children contributed to give them security and self-confidence. This was then linked with the reward chart, which the co-ordinator explained. Each couple received a coloured laminated reward chart (see below) and a black and white photocopied example for practice during the session. Together with the reward chart, parents also received stars that they could use as a reward when the weekly goals were achieved.

Figure 17

My weekly reward chart (Toby Tower, n.d.)

It was agreed that each child should have their own reward chart for those families who had more than one child. I agreed that we would laminate additional copies that would be handed out at the last session. The translator suggested that children could tick their own box if they achieved their goal each day, but only with the parent present. In that way children further took responsibility and monitored their progress. She also suggested to always give children an option, if you removed something you should replace it with another option. The co-ordinator reminded parents that goals had to be age appropriate, realistic, and specific.

The participants enjoyed setting the goals on the black and white photocopied reward charts. As discussions were lively with laughter and they easily shared their opinions. The following examples were identified:

- Shanel and Greg felt that the safety of their daughter was important and therefore their strict rules about play times and being home.
- Anne felt that her family needed to get up early and be ready so that they could all leave the house at 07:00 to get to school on time. The importance of children learning to read time and ideas were shared with each other as this leads to independence. She also added that they must change out of their school uniform before going to play outside, to decrease her washing load.

- Marlon noted that by the time the boys got home their uniform was already dirty and their shoes do not last long as they walk and kick the stones along their way home, and this should change.

I then introduced the goal ladder exercise, but my description showed that I had clearly misunderstood it, where after the translator clarified it for the parents. This was for the parent to use to set goals for themselves and not for the child, as I initially understood. While the participants watched the “Marshmallow experiment” (FloodSanDiego, 2019) video they made comments and laughed and sympathised with the children who were clearly trying hard to not eat the marshmallow. While the purpose of the video was based around delayed gratification, which I linked to the perseverance of keeping to the reward chart, I asked parent participants what they thought the video was teaching us. They replied:

- Patience
- Most of the children listened
- The smaller children did not listen
- It is tempting to give in

The co-ordinator added that they received a bigger reward if they were prepared to wait. The translator felt that the older group children who had a better concept of time, were able to restrain themselves compared to the younger children. Take home resources included the coloured laminated reward chart, sticker stars and the goal setting ladder handout that they were going to practice at home.

During the reflection session the participation of the various parent participants came up for discussion again. The translator had observed that Cloe although less talkative during feedback sessions, was telling her husband what he had to write during the family values discussion. She highlighted those individuals’ understood information at different levels, but this did not mean that we needed to do things differently. The value is in what the people understood, and some needed more time to process and make sense of it. By comparing their level of understanding she felt that it would be implying that “someone is lacking”.

The translator further observed that when there were fewer participants at the sessions, participants seemed to participate more and gave their opinions freely and therefore one did not realise how quickly the 2-hour session went by. In my researcher memo, I wrote: “*I felt it didn’t go as well”.* I had a forgotten to switch the video recorder on at the start of the session and only remembered later, but thankfully had the audio recorders. We had also planned too much information to cover in the one session and the values discussion (which was more abstract) did not go as well as I anticipated. However, during the reflection the next morning,

the translator mentioned why she thought the session went well. The input of the co-facilitators ensured that it was not just a one-person perspective, which further contributed to rich, diverse discussions and reflections.

SoaP 6: Conclusion and Evaluation

Planning

- Start with the participants' home stories re the reward chart and goal setting exercises.
- Practitioner to share positive reinforcement discipline techniques used in the classroom.
- To include topics that were not covered during Session five: feelings displayed on the emotional fan and the influence of the stability of home circumstances.
- To introduce the outstanding topics: Real vs Fake toys and developing a bedtime routine.
- Discussed format/method of evaluation and identified relevant questions.
- Wrap up: certification of attendance, take-home resources, and farewell tea.

Action

- Quick recap of previous session allowed absent participants to catch up.
- Parents shared their experiences of the reward chart exercise.
- I introduced a basic bedtime routine and discussion followed around the challenges that were experienced within contextual home circumstances.
- Value of children identifying their emotions was discussed.
- Practitioner described discipline methods applied in classroom.
- Described the value of stable home circumstances on the child's development.
- Addressed real toys vs fake toys. Showed them a video of a Forest Kindergarten in a Scandinavian country and discussed it.
- Each co-facilitator had a small group of participants, and the evaluation questions were discussed to allow all parent participants to contribute.
- Take home resources included: A printed booklet of the session highlights and an educational resource pack for each family.to enable continuation of activities at home.
- Closure: certification of attendance and photograph taking; thanking participants for their time, contributions, sharing and learning and reminder of Centre's open-door policy.

Observation

- I and the co-facilitators who knew Marlon found it noteworthy that he was writing down notes on a serviette during the beginning part of the session. When he shared their reward chart exercise, he mentioned that he wrote down what he wanted to say to not forget some parts.
- I found it encouraging that during sessions five and six the co-facilitators and parents shared more frequently and asked questions, compared to the earlier sessions.
- Participants participated during the evaluation session, there was lots of laughter during the verbal feedback.

Review

- In the examples parents presented, it was clear that keeping their children safe was a very real social issue.
- Mutually agreed that there was a positive feeling present during the *iStoep* sessions.

Reflections on content and process, SoaP 6

As it was the last planning session, we reviewed the topics that participants selected to ensure nothing was left out that still needed to be addressed. To accommodate the different literacy levels of our participants we decided that a written evaluation or questionnaire would not be suitable. Due to the success of the small group discussions, it was agreed that each co-facilitator would discuss the questions below with the parent participants and take brief notes of their answers.

Evaluation questions
1. What did you think or feel about the *iStoep* talk sessions when they started? 2. Which topic did you learn the most from? 3. What about that topic stood out for you and that you feel you will share with other parents? 4. What are you doing now with your child that you did not do before? 5. How do you feel now that the 6 *iStoep* talk session have come to an end? 6. What should we do differently next year?

Shanel started giving feedback acknowledging that the implementation of the reward chart was “not easy at all”. Anne agreed explaining that her oldest son said he was not interested in getting stars, but she observed that Kurt, the younger son, came home earlier as he wanted a star. Shanel explained that the reward chart however did help with the battle around a “treat” after supper and not before. During the holiday break they introduced it and now they eat together as a family and then share the treat together at the table after supper. “*This has made a big difference in not arguing about the treat before supper anymore*” (translated). Furthermore, now when they call Carmen she listens. The main challenge remains that she does not want to go to bed alone, which means her mother must also go to bed early otherwise Carmen is tired the next day.

Des clarified that the challenge in their community is that people mostly only have one room, with beds, television, and everything else in this one room and then a separate kitchen where possible. The parents wanted to continue watching television, but then that keeps the children awake and it is difficult for the parents to go to bed that early. Shanel and Greg agreed and although they had a separate bedroom for Carmen, she is anxious to go to bed alone. Every now and then Shanel allows her to fall asleep on her lap on the couch in front of the television, so that they can continue watching.

Fred mentioned that Devan enjoyed a hot drink of tea before going to bed and that seemed to help because they do not have challenges with him falling asleep. I thanked Fred for his contribution and used this as an example of how they can continue sharing ideas with each other after the *iStoep* sessions. I acknowledged that the contextual circumstances in the community made it more challenging for parents but gave them some practical steps to follow as a bedtime routine and encouraged them to not give up and to take small steps at a time. I reminded them to be consistent with the reward chart and stars.

Marlon shared that he and Cloe likewise experienced challenges with their four boys during the week-long school holiday. While the youngest two challenged each other to see who would fall asleep first, the oldest two would then wake them because they battled to fall asleep. The parents would reprimand them by shouting at them and then the second oldest would start crying and wake the youngest two. Then the youngest one wanted all the stars for himself and did not want to share. According to the parents it was an uphill battle.

I acknowledged that the reward chart was not a quick fix in solving problems, but it was a positive method to use to try and regulate behaviour. The practitioner shared how they used the same method, but just with a huge reward chart with all the children's names on it and they encouraged the children to work towards achieving their stars. If pre-schoolers continued to misbehave, they were asked to sit in the "naughty corner" – one minute felt like it equalled one year. The practitioner asked parents to maybe identify a space in their home that could be used as a "naughty corner". I then linked this to emotions and the value of children being able to identify and express their feelings, rather than acting out their behaviour. For example, rather than crying they could identify they were sad, or instead of hitting the sibling, they could identify their anger. Parents were encouraged to use the fun fan of emotions with their children.

Figure 18

Emotion's Fan (SparkleBox, 2007)

I briefly explained how unstable home circumstances affect the child's development and "hold" them back due to fear and uncertainty compared to caring and stable home circumstances, which allows the child's brain to develop more calmly. Around South African Social Grant (SASSA) pay out days and towards the end of the month, circumstances become unstable in the communities and townships, due to alcohol and drug abuse which results into various forms of violence. I stressed that while housing is in close proximity of each other and it is difficult to ignore what is happening in their immediate surroundings, they should attempt to keep their homes stable.

The Forest Kindergarten video showed how they taught young children to use a knife correctly to whittle a stick. Children played outdoors in the snow and cold and climbed trees and learnt about the outdoors and forests. The participants voiced their amazement at what these pre-school children were able to do. Shanel stated that "*their mindset is not the same as ours – knives are not for such young children*". In South Africa, a knife is one of the most common weapons used to cause people harm. We discussed how the teacher showed them how to use a knife responsibly and reminded them of the self-regulated learning circles and how one could support your child while they were learning to master the skill, but it needed to be age appropriate.

Fred mentioned that children were cleverer than we thought. Marlon said that if children mastered those skills, they would be able to build anything. He saw that the children were

also learning from each other by observing and did not hurt each other in the process. Anne felt that an adult had to be present, and Shanel contributed further by saying that it clearly built their self-confidence.

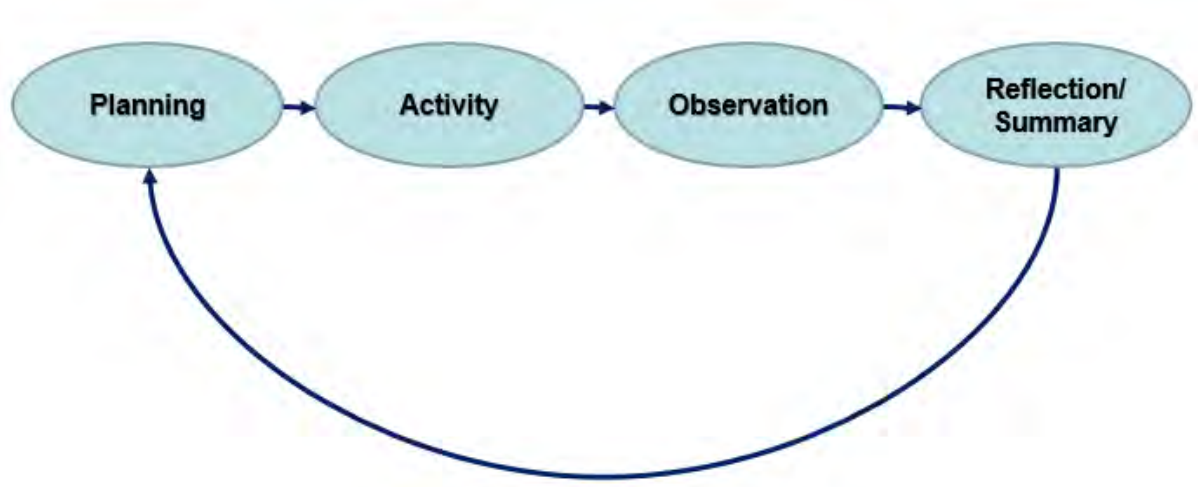
The discussion of the content of the last reflection session will be incorporated into the next findings chapter.

Reflective Summary

Implementing the *iStoep* sessions with the sequence of the action research in the figure below, provided the framework that held all the sessions together and offered the stability and confidence of going from one session to the next. While content changes were made, these did not affect the stability of these cycles, thus providing a framework to enable each SoaP to represent the process.

Figure 19

The Action Research Cycle (Adapted from HELM, n.d.)



This Educational Partnership method (the *iStoep* sessions) was an intervention program that was implemented as an innovative approach to involve parents and practitioners, to encourage them to equally communicate and learn from each other in ways that could potentially benefit the child. While topics changed from session to session, the process evolved for co-facilitators, for me and the parent participants. It developed from me guiding the process towards a joint effort, as participation, confidence and input from parents and co-facilitators increased.

The process of understanding the framework of an educational partnership and adapting it to a SA multilingual pre-school context took time but having the co-facilitator's perspectives and input guided decision-making. The resultant changes that were made to the facilitation tools

from the Educational Partnership manual (Iliás et al., 2019b) and activity discussions seemed to be beneficial. It was clear that the advice of showing a video where parents could see how the skills were applied together with a handout to give them options to choose from, was helpful for discussions and implementation. In future this method will be implemented from the beginning.

The agenda for future *iStoep* sessions would consist of the following steps:

1. Recap of previous sessions using the skill of paraphrasing of the parent's input to link to specific topics discussed;
2. Participants to share their stories of activities with children from home and pre-school;
3. Introduce the new topic using small group discussions with the adapted facilitation tools of handouts and videos and giving feedback to the bigger group;
4. Explanation or feedback re the homework exercise;
5. Closure.

Additional real-life factors, that were unknown at the time of starting the research, played a role in the delivery and implementation of my research project and for each researcher these might be different. Apart from technological challenges, participants have personal lives that change rapidly and then occurrences in the community where the research is delivered all played a role. The time of preference to attend the sessions was between 17:00 and 19:00 when participants had finished working, but we started during the winter months as I needed to first obtain my ethical clearance before I could start. While the Centre is situated in a reasonably safe area, my researcher identity memo on 1 September 2019 read "*the drug dealers are now out of prison again* (they live two houses up from the Centre), *which does not make the area very safe at night. I definitely did not feel safe locking up!*". While we were usually a group of co-facilitators together when we locked up, this specific evening was just me and the practitioner, which made us feel quite vulnerable.

An unintended and encouraging outcome was the "fun" element that emerged during reflection sessions. Lives are busy and complex, and I realised that all needed some time to unwind and laugh and these sessions seemed to provide this opportunity for participants. A further outcome was the richness in the different perspectives of the co-facilitators and how these guided not only the planning and reflection sessions but the whole process. The value of different insights and perspectives contributed to being able to provide structured, but flexible and relevant *iStoep* sessions.

When facilitating the *iStoep* sessions, I found that my being a social worker worked to my advantage as I applied my counselling skills regularly, but I found myself lacking the educational knowledge that I needed as a teacher. However, having the team of co-facilitators provided the opportunity for input from their educational knowledge and created an environment with rich opportunities for sharing and learning.

Chapter 7: Evaluations and Findings

Chapter five introduced the parent participants in a vignette format of data that was collected during interviews. Chapter six focused on the content of the *iStoep* sessions together with the process. This chapter includes two sets of evaluative data collected during the data collection phase: Phase one includes the evaluation the co-facilitators conducted with the parent participants at the end of the last *iStoep* session; and evaluative input from the team of co-facilitators. Phase two focuses on the content of interviews conducted telephonically during the SA COVID-19 lockdown period of 2020 with the parent participants and a virtual reflective group session with the co-facilitators during the same period. Within this chapter all the verbatim comments have been translated from the participants' first language to English.

Evaluation Phase 1

The format and type of evaluation questions were discussed and agreed with the co-facilitators during the last planning session prior to *iStoep* session six. It was agreed that each co-facilitator would ask the pre-identified questions in a small group discussion rather than it being facilitated within the big group. This would provide opportunities for participants to voice their opinions and participate in discussions. Each co-facilitator to write down brief notes for feedback at the last reflection session.

Pre-Intervention Thoughts and Feelings

The two parents who mentioned they had some idea of what to expect were the two participants who attended the *Kuier Saam* sessions the previous year but voiced their excitement to attend the *iStoep* sessions. The remaining six parents were unsure what to expect, while one was curious; one wanted to learn new things while three voiced they were worried. One was concerned as she thought she would be told what her child was doing wrong at school while the other was nervous about the group participants and their characters and how they would re-act to his input and contributions during the sessions. The third one was concerned and unsure about the researcher's expectation of them as it could have included a lot of extra work. These concerns and feelings of uncertainty of parents were highlighted by Mncube (2007).

An additional aspect that was raised was the signing of the consent forms. As mentioned, the consent forms were explained in all three and user-friendly language at the Recruitment and Introduction session but signing the form to give consent to participate was described as "binding" by the translator. She agreed that it was well explained to the parents but thought that parents "*are not exposed to those situations*". The practitioner wondered whether the signing of the consent forms might have been a barrier for parents to attend. This supports

the findings of Mncube (2007) that due to a lack of training and experience in school issues, parents generally lack the understanding and confidence to participate. This is also linked to the educational levels of parents.

Most Meaningful Topics

Nosipho mentioned that she had learnt that listening to her child was especially important and not shouting at him, but rather to listen and communicate at the level that he understands. Des added that the self-regulated learning circles and roles that parents can apply were most meaningful to her. She further realised from the examples that were used during the sessions that parents do not need to buy expensive toys to enable learning to take place, but recycled goods and conversations were just as useful for learning.

Anne highlighted the triangle as meaningful to her as she realised the value of the relationship between parent, school, and child. She furthermore felt that the routine chart helped her with her children, and she was going to continue using it. The real vs fake topic changed Shanel's perspectives on being overprotective. She explained that she would for example shout at Carmen and say, "*don't climb on that gate, you are going to get hurt*" but having seen the video she realised there is a different method a parent can use; to communicate with your child and explain the safety issues and allow them to try. She reflected that the video had changed her view and she was going to share this with other parents. Marlon mentioned that he learnt the most from practical ways that you could play with your child. He remarked that he was sharing this information with his cousin who has a toddler on how to give her child attention. They were however struggling to implement the reward chart successfully.

Fred viewed this question differently. He explained that he was a shy person, but the *iStoep* environment allowed him to participate as he got to know the group members who made him feel comfortable and were supportive of the comments he made. He never felt his views or contributions were judged or laughed at. Members laughed when something was humorous, but not when he experienced challenges in formulating sentences correctly. He repeated the importance for him in not being judged when he contributed. Fred's explanation resonates with creating a family-friendly non-judgemental environment for home-school meetings and workshops as highlighted by Lemmer (2007), especially to attract hard-to-reach parents.

The bedtime routine was also highlighted as a meaningful topic especially around practical tips within the context of most people having one room or at most two rooms that served as kitchen, lounge, and bedroom. It was acknowledged that it was not easy for children to go to bed early when there was only one room and then the noise of neighbours due to the proximity also made it difficult to settle children in an early bedtime routine.

It was interesting to note that each parent had selected a different topic that they had learnt the most from. Mapp & Kuttner, (2013) warn against developing “one-size-fits-all” capacity-building frameworks and the responses of the participants are indicative of the unique individual and contextual elements of parent-teacher partnerships. However, guidelines for the process and principles of an educational partnership are more general, in that they can be applied without having to re-invent the wheel.

Changes in Home-based Practices or Behaviour

Nosipho and Fred recognised that their behaviour was not always conducive to Devan’s development. They had started the process of making changes and not “*follow the steps of their past*”. In their attempts to improve their communication with Devan, they felt that he was being honest during conversations and reported that he was not fighting at school anymore but would inform the practitioner if someone wanted to fight with him. Marlon also mentioned that he recognised the harm that shouting and physical discipline measures had on his children and rather attempted to improve his manner of communication with his children.

Shanel mentioned that the implementation of a reward chart method, was something she had not used before, and she expressed joy that it was successful in changing Carmen’s behaviour such as having her treat after supper and not before. Des and Anne were in the same evaluation group and said that they felt confident now in approaching the practitioners at the pre-school if they had any concerns regarding their children. Anne valued open honest discussions regarding the development of her children. They actively changed to asking open ended questions to their children about their day at the pre-school and minimized asking closed ended questions.

Prior to the sessions, Des would discourage Jack to be around her in the kitchen while she was preparing supper, but after realising the value of learning that could take place in the kitchen, she asked him to help her count out for example the number of potatoes or carrots that she needed.

This highlights the increase of parental involvement as supported by Janssen-Vos & Weijers (2012). Nosipho remarked that Devan enjoyed praying before they started their meal and if they did not want to, he said, “*I’m going to tell my teacher*”. She felt proud that Devan was saying “*thank you*” when he received something, which was not always the case. These changes of behaviour and home-based practices confirms the commitment of parents as emphasized by Leenders et al. (2018).

Evaluative Thoughts and Feelings about the iStoep Intervention

These evaluative thoughts and feelings were gathered at the end of the last *iStoep* session by the co-facilitators. Each co-facilitator had the same set of questions that was agreed at the last planning session. A variety of information was covered by each pair, and they seemed to highlight something different.

Nosipho and Fred mentioned that one of the aspects they enjoyed about the *iStoep* sessions was that if they missed a session, they received that particular session's *Highlights* handout. As noted earlier these were sent out before the next *iStoep* session for parents to read at home. Due to different literacy levels of participants I would summarize the previous session at the beginning of each new sessions that further helped participants who missed the session to quickly catch up, so they did not feel "left out".

Nosipho and Fred explained that they found the information that was provided at the sessions especially useful and that they "*feel ready to practice what they learnt*". They realised it was not going to be a one-day fix, but that it would take time. They stated that the six sessions were not enough, and they wished there were more sessions. They never felt bored, every time they came, they learnt something new, which helped developing their skills on how to parent. Nosipho added that while she understood Afrikaans, she was unable to speak Afrikaans fluently. She "*loved that she was being accommodated as the only isiXhosa-speaking parent*". She could converse in her mother tongue and after it was translated other parents could understand her contributions. While she was unable to perform scholastically and despite being "*uneducated*", it made her feel that she was being treated special to have her own translator. Having had her own translator made her feel welcome, and comfortable in the *iStoep* session spaces. This supports the findings of Bloch (2006) of the emotional connection to the language of the associated culture and furthermore it acknowledges the value of voice and presence of parents as supported by Mc Kenna & Millen (2013).

Des felt that she wanted the session to continue. She specifically enjoyed the "*surprise*" element in how the topic was addressed and that motivated her to return every session. The excitement she felt in attending led to her telling her mother that she felt she was "*going back to school*" and her son wanted to come with her to see what she was doing at school. Des acknowledged that she was a shy person but was able to communicate and participate in the *iStoep* sessions. She also discussed the information she learnt at the sessions with her friends and those at work and her extended family. One of the factory workers where Des worked, told the practitioner that after each *iStoep* session Des would share what she learnt with them the next day and also jovially updated them on the type of refreshments that were served. A

few of the participants mentioned discussing what they learnt with others, which are indicators of “spillovers” as highlighted by Garces et al. (2000, p. 17).

Anne said she got “*used to attending the sessions and enjoyed it tremendously*”. She took some refreshments home for her family (sharing her portion) as the children were looking forward to these rewards that she brought home after each session. She reported that Kurt would excitedly ask her regularly what “*homework*” she needed to do so that he could help her with it. Anne said she wanted to attend more sessions and would “*like more parents to attend*”. Anne and Des both enjoyed forming new friendships and agreed that they “*never would have met under any other circumstances, but now that they have done this, they see each other and talk to each other and share things with each other*”. They also remarked that towards the end of each session when they realised it is time to finish up, they usually felt that they wanted to learn more and that it should continue for longer. They both appreciated and valued “*the bond*” that developed between staff and parents during these sessions.

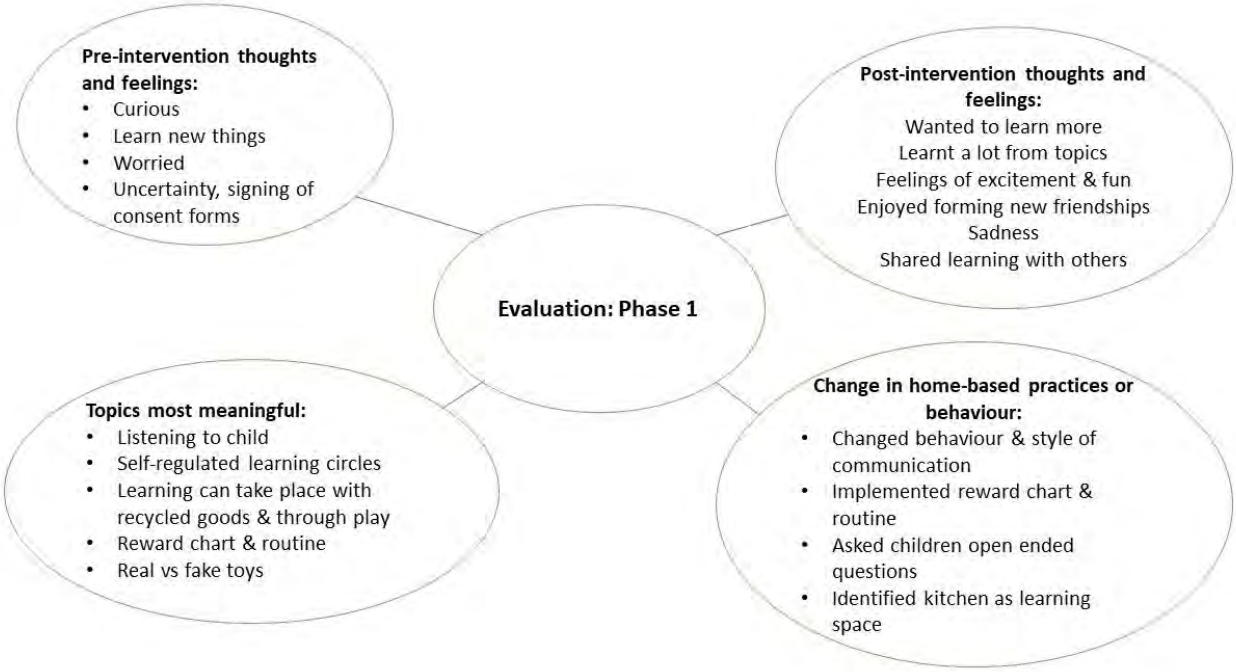
Marlon felt “*very sad*” that the sessions had come to an end. The practitioner said she got the impression that he felt this was “*the end and going to be cut off*” for the rest of the year. The translator added that she gathered he enjoyed the space. The practitioner was going to purposefully attempt and include him in conversations of support for the rest of the year. The co-ordinator respected Marlon’s honesty in the group as he acknowledged that he argued and scolded Cloe in front of the children, which he wanted to refrain from doing.

Greg said he learnt a lot and especially from the practitioner who worked directly with Carmen, and he was sad that her time at the pre-school was coming to an end before she started formal schooling. Shanel said she wished the group were bigger so that more parents could have learnt from the topics. The narrative responses of the latter three paragraphs are indicative of the value of Putnam’s (2000) bonding capital.

Below please find a summary of the main points that emerged from the parent participants in the Phase one evaluation, before moving on to other forms of evaluation.

Figure 20

Phase 1 Evaluation: Parent evaluations at the end of the iStoep sessions



Evaluative Comments from the Team of Co-facilitators

In addition to the evaluation of the parent participants as illuminated above, the co-facilitators added their own evaluative voices. The co-ordinator added: "*I personally also learnt a lot and found it very informative*". The translator explained that she had not worked with children during the past ten years of her career and by attending these sessions "*I have learnt a lot, it was not just a matter of attending, but learning*". The practitioner commented "*I also learnt a lot and also as a mother, because I have children and the learning always goes on. The opportunity helped me a lot – we need to work hand in hand with the parents because they will assist me to learn more about their child, so it makes my job much easier – how to develop this child from this point on*". This supports the findings of Iliás et al. (2016; 2019a) of how improved communication between parents and practitioners can lead to changes in classroom practices that benefit children's development.

Evaluation Phase 2

As noted in Chapter four, the initial plan was to repeat the *iStoep* sessions with a new set of pre-school parents during the earlier months of 2020 to enable parents and practitioners to benefit from an improved relationship for a longer period. Due to the outbreak of the pandemic COVID-19, these plans had to be changed and it was agreed with my supervisor that I would conduct follow up cellular phone interviews, with parents who were contactable; and conduct a virtual reflective group session with the co-facilitators during the lockdown period. The purpose was to explore whether knowledge that parents obtained during the *iStoep* sessions were applied with their children after an eight-month period and during lockdown when no schooling was permitted.

iStoep Activities and Knowledge that Remained

Shanel mentioned that the "how" to support Carmen was the most important aspect for her: "*If you think of what we know because we attended the sessions and especially now during Corona, when the children aren't going to school*".

Greg stated that he learned "*how to negotiate with your child at home and at school*".

Des felt that she learnt a lot, but especially that it was not necessary to buy expensive toys for learning to take place, which during lockdown came in handy, because she used milk bottle tops as counters for Jack.

Anne mentioned that she remembered the *iStoep* session exercises they had to practice with their children at home "*like how to learn with your child and play*" and the sleep routine. She made changes to her young daughter's sleep routine and no longer allowed her to sleep late in the afternoon, which worked well as she went to bed early, which allowed Anne to watch her *soapie* in the evening.

The above responses support the recommendations of Webster-Stratton and Bywater (2015) of the value of parent-teacher partnerships at pre-school level. They emphasise the importance of parental involvement at pre-school level and the impact thereof on the child's long-term development, as noted by Barnard (2004).

Anything that Changed in the Home Environment as a Result of the Program

Shanel said that they were doing things differently during the pandemic as they were helping Carmen more with her schoolwork. Greg mentioned that when the lockdown period moved to level four and the children started getting activity packs to complete at home, he guided Carmen. She wanted to complete the activity book in one week, but he explained to her that according to the school instructions the activity book needed to be completed over a four-week

period and therefore she needed to have some play time every day as well. They allowed Carmen to only play with her one friend in their yard, not in the street and they would sanitize their hands and they had to wear masks when they played together.

After having heard how important it is to make time for your child and the influence it had on a child's development, Des changed her routine at home. She used to always walk in from work, wash her hands and immediately start cooking, but she decided that she had to spend time with her children and therefore made time in her routine to allow for a special time with each. She spends specific time with Jack at 19:00 when they would do something together, "*this time is invested in my child's life*".

Anne became more observant of her children's behaviour and noticed there was a lot of competition between the two older boys, with constant bumping and hitting each other. Her husband always reprimanded the oldest son as he felt he should know better, but Anne made him aware that there are usually two sides to a story and therefore he should rather ask for an explanation from the children. Anne further described that after each *iStoep* session she explained to her husband what she had learnt at the session and showed him the resources she brought home. She then asked him if he could help with the homework of their boys as she felt they also listened better to him. He agreed and started helping the oldest son and she assisted Kurt. These emergent outcomes links with Janssen-Vos and Weijers' (2012) findings that fostering a parent-teacher partnership leads to joint responsibility for the child's development.

The Most Valuable Aspect of the iStoep Sessions

"*Yoh, there was a lot of things*", but the most important aspect was the communication with the school now that Carmen had started her formal schooling. Through communicating with Carmen's teacher, Shanel realised that the method the school was using to teach children was different to the methods they were using at home. Shanel and Greg are therefore trying to use the method of the school at home when they assist her with her homework. Shanel regularly "*checked in*" with the school to clarify that they are doing it correctly ensuring that the school and the parents are working together. Greg felt that "*checking in*" with the school made a difference, because Carmen saw that they were interested in her schoolwork and worked with the teacher, using the same method that will benefit her progress. This supports the findings of Lemmer (2007), Leenders et al. (2019) and Iliás et al. (2021) regarding improved communication and relationships between school and home having a direct impact on the child's academic progress.

Des said hearing about a bedtime routine and the importance of going to bed early "*otherwise they battle to concentrate the next morning*" was most valuable for her. She admitted that during the lockdown period it was difficult to get the children to go to bed early and that it was an ongoing battle with Jack. Anne responded saying that she had heard how unstable home circumstances negatively influenced a child's development, but she observed how her behaviour sometimes over weekends negatively influenced the children, as they remembered it and made references to it in the weeks that followed. The negative impact of home circumstances on academic progress of children was highlighted in the studies of Singh et al. (2004) and Black et al. (2017).

Activities used with Pre-schooler during Lockdown Period

Shanel explained that during the first three weeks of the lockdown period, she did not know how to handle the situation or what to do. She was anxious and unsure whether she would have a work to return to, whether she would get paid and she was worried because her child was supposed to be in school and she was not. She was honest in admitting that she had completely forgotten about the *iStoep* sessions due to so many uncertainties around the pandemic, but when the lockdown was extended, she remembered the *iStoep* sessions and what she had learnt and immediately felt she did not have to wait for the school to re-open she could work something out. She felt "*so stupid*" afterwards for not thinking of the sessions earlier, but immediately started using them.

Des continued using the resources they received from the pre-school and *iStoep* sessions and Jack was "*reading / remembering*" more English words than the previous year. She thought that Jack "*was reading it really nice*". They fetched his activity book from school, and he had nearly completed it and continued practicing writing his name, which he had mastered. Anne and her children played snakes and ladders and a card game, which were resources they received at the last *iStoep* session, during the lockdown period. They also received books and pencils from the Centre during lockdown, which were delivered with food packs. Kurt's drawing improved and he liked to add hair and clothing his figures. He asked Anne to draw first and then he copied her.

Motivational Elements to Encourage other Parents to attend Similar Sessions

Shanel said she would tell parents that it "*will help them to know how to support their child and it will help them to understand and then they will have more patience with their child – it will open their eyes and also towards the school*". She elaborated that as parents they have certain ways of doing homework with Carmen, which they think is correct and the only way to do it. They have however realised that there is another and different way of not just doing homework

but also in supporting the growing up to assist the child and "*this is what we learnt – other parents are not aware of these different methods that exist*" … "*It is these manners of doing things that changed my life and that's why they must participate*".

In addition, Greg explained that during the *iStoep* sessions, when the parents heard from the practitioner's perspective how it is done at the pre-school, it will "*help the parents to think for themselves that the teacher's way is different to what I do at home – there is another way of helping my child develop*". Greg felt it was important to assist your child and be present for them, since your child then realised that their parents wanted to support them. Shanel ended saying that "*you also meet other people and parents, and you can then maybe phone and arrange for a play date*".

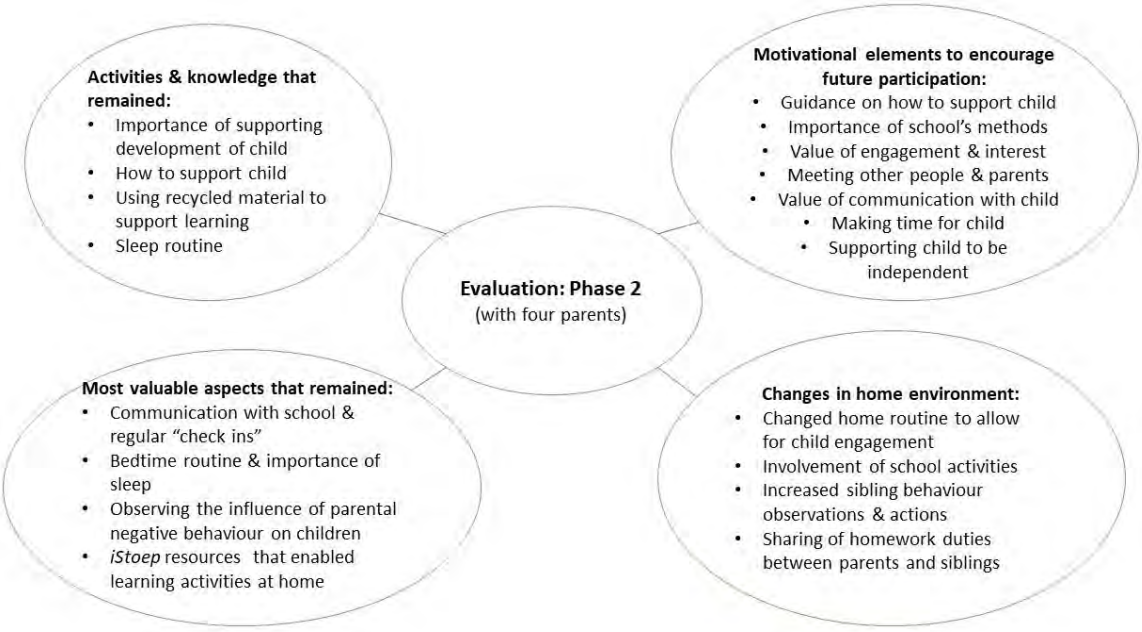
Des said she would tell parents that they needed to attend to understand "*how to communicate with your children*" and the "*importance of making time for your child*" as that was very meaningful to her and felt that other parents would also benefit from the sessions. Anne would mention that it was not a waste of time, and you learn how to communicate with your child even when you are tired. She gave an example that when she arrived home, she started with cooking supper and if her daughter was "*cranky*" she made it a type of game time, rather than scolding her. She asked her to bring her a few potatoes or carrots and then if it was too much, she asked her to take it back where it belonged. Her daughter was keen to help, and it turned into a positive experience where learning took place. She repeated that the sessions helped a lot in "how" to spend time with your children and "how" to interact with them – "*you really learn – those mistakes you made becomes less*". She observed a difference in her children and felt the children saw a difference in them as parents. She explained that the children used to use foul language and then she implemented the reward chart and steadily she noticed a decline of swear words at home. She encouraged her children to develop skills of independence and asked that they must take note of their environment for example, when the house or front area needed to be cleaned, they should clean it and not always wait for her to point it out. Similarly, if the dog needed to be fed, they should feed the dog and not wait for her to constantly remind them. Anne proudly commented how her oldest son had used his initiative and cooked a one pot meal with potatoes and carrots for him and his siblings a few days after she had the conversation with them.

One of the emergent outcomes in this study is a restitutive element, which is indicated by the responses above. The enablement of voice and agency together with effective communication supports the findings of Philpott and Muthukrishna (2019). This further aligns with the advice of Ebersöhn and Malan-Van Rooyen (2018), to focus on what is possible rather than on "deficits".

Below please find a summary of the main points that emerged from the parent participants in the Phase two evaluation, before moving into other forms of evaluation.

Figure 21

Phase 2 Evaluation: Parent evaluations during COVID-19



Virtual Reflective Group Session with Co-Facilitators

What Stayed with the Co-facilitators 8 months after the iStoep Sessions ended?

The co-ordinator stated that the highlight for her was the answers of the parent participants during the evaluation session at the end of *iStoep* session six. The parents in her group clearly enjoyed attending the sessions. While they knew the topic of the next session, they enjoyed the surprise element of not knowing what they would learn that was new during the session. Des's enthusiasm to attend the sessions contributed to her son wanting to join her. The friendship element and eagerness to attend more sessions and wanting the sessions to continue for longer was clearly illuminated. Achieving the outcome of the study in being part of developing a closer relationship between parents, practitioners and Centre staff was a further highlight to her.

The practitioner reflected that at the beginning of the sessions, participants were a bit shy and seemed unsure when they voiced their opinions, but as time continued, they were more open in sharing. While she understood the theory of the educational partnership model, being part

of the actual process to see that mutual capacity-building was possible was "*mind blowing*" for her. The fact that Cloe related the story of how Cole was interested and enjoyed music at home, assisted her in making him more comfortable in the classroom, which allowed her to guide him into the next stage of play.

The practitioner further added that it was encouraging to her that despite Marlon not achieving high grades at school, it brought him so much pleasure to be able to read the stories to his children and he was trying his best according to his abilities. She felt that the *iStoep* sessions helped parents and especially couples think deeper on issues of "how" they can help their children. Having both parents attend was beneficial, as it guided their thinking that one parent at least had to assist the children with their schoolwork, having realised how important schoolwork was. She "*loved seeing*" the genuineness of the couples to want to help their children more.

A highlight for the translator was that the parents were committed to attend the sessions, despite having other responsibilities. They attended the sessions, and she believed that if they did not find the information that was being presented helpful, they would not have continued attending. She further observed that the parents realised the type of relationship that was needed between them as parents, practitioners, and Centre staff, to enhance the development of their children. She acknowledged that clearly home-based practices occurred, as parents described what they were doing at home with their children. The *iStoep* sessions however guided and exposed parents to additional activities or to do the same activities in a different way with their children. She felt that the videos were helpful to the parents.

The practitioner agreed that the videos demonstrated practically how to implement an activity and despite the diversity of parents, they all learnt something from it. She further highlighted that the reflection sessions (the next morning after each *iStoep* session) stood out for her, showing that changes and improvements were possible and could be discussed and implemented by the next session. Both the co-ordinator and the translator agreed that when sessions are held in future, that both parents should be encouraged to attend the sessions, as the value therein would be to discuss jointly practical ways of assisting their children.

Mutual Capacity-building between Parents and Centre Staff

The co-ordinator answered that she felt that mutual capacity-building "*definitely*" happened between parents, practitioners, and Centre staff and that she saw parents in a different light. While she assumed that there were possible challenges of alcohol abuse and possibly physical abuse in some homes, but despite these challenges she observed that parents were trying their best even with limited resources in their homes. Some parents were "*striving*" to

give their child the best possible education and they were also "*present*" in their child's life and offered more of a stable environment than others could.

The practitioner also agreed that mutual capacity-building took place and what she enjoyed further was the open communication that existed between the parents who participated and the practitioner. The practitioner lives in the same community than most of the parents, and she often bumped into them in the community and then engaged in conversations and offered advice when asked. "*This is lovely that we can still continue having these relationships*". The *iStoep* sessions provided opportunities to build meaningful relationships and feelings of connectedness that went beyond the sessions. This supports the findings of Dove et al. (2018) of the importance of personalising the school community and connectedness though "quality relationships that are the core to influencing children's educational and social outcomes" (p. 55).

Regarding mutual capacity-building between the facilitator and the co-facilitators, the practitioner mentioned that the use of the three reflective questions prompted her to use it herself in her classroom practice to adapt and change things "*here and there*". "*Those reflections really helped me to grow as well*". The co-ordinator acknowledged that she used a different method of reflection, more of a process of thinking it through, but not making notes and writing down what she wanted to change. This encouraged her again to implement reflection "*to actually do that as a full circle and go back to it*", which will serve as a reminder and identify lessons learnt from it.

The translator felt that the sessions "*brought the background of the parents*" to the pre-school staff, which guided them when working with the pre-schoolers. This enabled them "*to accommodate each kid according to their background*" as sometimes when children do not achieve when compared to others, the practitioner would be better equipped to assess what contributing factors could be playing a role. These emergent themes are also highlighted in Iliás et al. (2019a).

In terms of the method, of implementing the educational partnership approach through the *iStoep* sessions, she felt it was working and useful for those who were working directly with the parents and children and therefore "*did not see the point of changing or introducing new methods*". She suggested continuing the *iStoep* sessions and if at a later stage improvement were necessary, to then make slight changes, but to keep the existing method and approach the same.

The practitioner felt that the parents made many suggestions during the *iStoep* sessions, especially giving ideas of how various communication methods between the Centre and

parents could improve. While the pandemic derailed the implementation of many of their suggestions, the suggestions were consolidated and implemented even in a re-imagined manner for the duration of the pandemic. The home-based practices that the parents described were invaluable for the practitioner as it gave her ideas and the confidence of how to integrate new aspects in the classroom.

Both the practitioner and the co-ordinator acknowledged that they also re-assessed their own home situations. They would say to their children they were busy and tired at the end of the day but changed their behaviour to be present in the moment while actively listening to their children. Changes were therefore not just made in the classroom at the Centre but also in their personal lives at their homes.

Reflective Summary

Phase one outlined all the participants' (parents and co-facilitators) evaluative views of the *iStoep* intervention sessions and Phase two reported on the content of four telephonically contactable parent participants and a virtual group session with all the co-facilitators. Narratives were provided in each phase, together with a summary figure of the parent participants' views. The evaluation phases provided an additional depth of understanding about this small exploratory project within a multilingual setting, which provided some insights into home- and classroom-based practices. Phase two reported shifts in home-based practices after a period of eight months and highlighted the importance of resources and knowledge obtained during the *iStoep* sessions, which could be implemented during the SA COVID-19 lockdown period.

Chapter 8 Discussion and Conclusion

The central objective of this study was exploratory, in order to contribute to the literature by offering additional insights: on parents' perception's about pre-schoolers' social and cultural capital that they bring to school; on the use of educational partnerships in a SA context and more specifically a multilingual EC pre-school setting; and on ways in which an intervention such as the *iStoep* sessions might contribute to mutual capacity-building between various role players, for the benefit of the child's development. This was underpinned by theoretical ideas from Vygotsky (1962; 1978), Bernstein (1971) and Bourdieu (1977).

Theoretical Underpinning of the Study

The multi-layered historical and current complexities of a diverse SA made it challenging to choose one specific theory, which resulted in a combination of notions of three theorists interwoven into one theoretical framework, as described in Chapter two. The mutual aspects taken from each theorist about language, historical culture and capital were the threads that guided and informed my program.

The various elements of the capital of the participants and their children were described in the Vignettes chapter. This links with Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (1962; 1978) and the role of the inter-psychological and intra-psychological functioning on language and subsequent every day and scientific concepts. While an individual's sociocultural world is an integral part of their being, meaning making and development of new constructs is possible when exposed to new information. Guba & Lincoln (1994) noted that development is not static as individuals can change when exposed to new information and experiences. The exchange of new information and experiences within the *iStoep* sessions was interwoven into home and school-based practices to benefit the child in an ever-changing SA context. Vygotsky's (1962; 1978) notions provided the foundation of this theoretical framework in guiding my thinking about the possibilities of changing attitudes, behaviour, and practices by creating spaces through the sessions with the added element of mediation.

Bernstein's (1971) restricted and elaborated codes were further helpful in considering the historical influence of language. This should not be seen as exclusionary, but rather to explore additional pathways and lenses as bridging capital, as suggested by Ebersöhn (2017) and Putnam (2000). Additionally, this involves making the most of connecting and bridging home and school-based capital through sociocultural strengths as proposed by Ebersöhn and Malan-Van Rooyen (2018). Developing an understanding of the different concepts from the three theorists also created a "springboard from which to open up new vistas" (Yang, 2014, p. 1522) within this exploratory study and possible future multidisciplinary research projects and

practices. Bourdieu's (1977) social reproduction theory and the interconnectedness of capital, field and habitus deepened my understanding of the role of symbolic violence within various systems. This allowed me to realise that the everyday concepts of parents and children did not necessarily connect with the scientific and scholarly terminology used in pre-schools and schools.

The theoretical underpinning described above, furthermore directed the overarching research aim and research questions. As noted in Chapter one, the overarching aim of the project was to explore the learning practices at homes and in the pre-school, during six sessions within a multilingual reflective research environment, where mutual exchanges of knowledge took place between parents, practitioners, and the researcher.

Research Questions

This overarching aim was explored through three research questions, with the findings related to each question being briefly summarized below:

Research Question 1: What are parents' perceptions and experiences of their roles and responsibilities in preparing their children for formal schooling?

The purpose of exploring parents' perceptions and the pre-schoolers' social and cultural capital in chapter five was to prevent blanket assumptions to be made about participants, but more importantly to develop an understanding of the environments of the pre-schoolers attending the LRD. The vignettes described in chapter five provided a snapshot of data that related to: language, resources at home, family favourite activities, parental education, hopes and dreams for their child, and how to prepare their child for school. Each of these themes will be discussed below, with reference both to the evidence provided in the findings and the theoretical framework described in chapter two.

Language

While the sample was small and no generalisations can be made from this study, these data revealed that all the children were exposed to more than one language, if not in their homes, then directly in their surroundings. Multilingualism provides the children with linguistic capital and benefits across their lifespan that has recently been highlighted by Kroll and Dussias (2017); and this appears to be an asset of these children. While this linguistic capital of the children might not translate into reading fluency at a young age, the benefits and value thereof should be viewed from a strength's perspective (Ebersöhn & Malan-Van Rooyen, 2018), rather than from a deficit perspective, where young children are exposed to feelings of failure.

Resources at Home

The study of Graven and Jorgensen (2018) highlighted the importance of resources in homes, to enable mathematical activities and games to take place. The majority of the parents in this study acknowledged that the reading resources in their homes were limited and thus accessed mainly from the Centre. It was interesting to note that in the interviews during COVID-19, the *iStoep* resources were additionally used further as the basis of learning activities. One parent commented that she recycled some of the material to stimulate learning. The challenges of minimal resources in homes are further highlighted by Armstrong (2019), as these impact on the development of underlying language proficiency from early childhood, especially in disadvantaged homes. Language proficiency may be under-developed because people have limited access "to a wider range of social and economic resources" (2019, p. 180).

While books are expensive to purchase in SA, the above points highlight the alternatives such as the use of recycled materials, telling stories, and registering at the local Community library for books, as inexpensive ways of providing resources in homes. Furthermore, one of the findings that Singh et al. (2004) reported were the advantages of just giving children attention. A key factor therefore is to encourage and provide non-judgemental capacity-building zones for parents, to jointly partner and provide developmentally age-appropriate environments for children in various settings, not just in homes, pre-schools, or schools, but in clinics, libraries, shops, and taxis; or any other additional spaces that children access within their communities.

In a recent long-term ethnographic study undertaken in an Eastern Cape disadvantaged community, Armstrong and Boughey (2020) highlighted the limited reading materials in homes and lack of engagement of adults with children around reading and educational activities. They strongly recommend that "without support and encouragement, it is unlikely that parents and caregivers such as those in this study will understand the importance of engaging with their children" (p. 210). This links with the findings of my small research project and comments of the parent participants during the *iStoep* sessions and the evaluations in Chapter seven. The authors further advocate that when early childhood development initiatives are planned, support and encouragement of parents should be considered (Armstrong & Boughey, 2020).

The possible creation of mini-mobile libraries, where book swopping can take place could also be created within homes of people willing to encourage reading. An extension of the *Intsomi* Ambassadors process and project (Gush, 2018), which advocates the value of reading books to children and where parent ambassadors are utilised to communicate with other parents in the community, is a possible project that could be extended further to focus on language and literacy development in similar communities. Encouraging literacy practices from an early age between parents and young children within disadvantaged communities is crucial for child

development. This however has to be addressed sensitively, as tertiary students commented "with a black child – we get home, we throw our books away" (O'Shea et al., 2019, p. 5). Some students further explained that the "difference between white families and black families is that the former sit down and they do homework as a family…" while "black children go and play outside" (O'Shea et al., 2019, p. 5). The researchers highlighted this data of linking ethnic group to family practices, especially to reading as an emerging theme of the data. Creating spaces where these cultural and identity sensitive practices can be unpacked and discussed is essential in finding ways to move forward in child development in SA.

Favourite Family Activities

Given the frequency that music was identified as a favourite family activity inspired thoughts about classroom activities that could include a variety of music activities. In addition, perhaps available parents could be asked to offer their time to stimulate such fun music activities. Lemmer (2007) highlighted the importance of creating a family-friendly environment in the ECD space; and this could be one of those activities to encourage otherwise hard-to-reach parents to assist with music activities. Pre-schools could also arrange for fun "street cricket" mornings, as a means to get to know each other in an informal way; and to hopefully attract fathers to join in family school activities.

Parental Education

Parental educational levels varied from limited literacy levels to some having completed Grade 12. Prior education was reflected in those who were in full-time employment, as opposed to others being unemployed or doing occasional jobs. Linking this factor back to the earlier point about home resources, research has indicated that to prevent the transmission of lowered intergenerational literacy levels, the presence and access to a minimum of 20 reading books in a home may counteract such low parental educational levels (Evans et al., 2010).

Hopes and Dreams for their Child

The information provided and willingness of the sample of parents who completed the consent forms and attended the *iStoep* sessions support the statements made by Leenders at al., (2018) that parents want to improve and provide better outcomes for their children. The study of Jacobs & Daniels (2020) furthermore highlighted that despite societal challenges, mothers accessed "embedded community cultural wealth" (p.160), to support their children's educational endeavours. In relation to the cultural translation of the inter-psychological to intra-psychological functioning referred to by Vygotsky (1962; 1978), the parents all voiced their hopes and dreams for their respective children. They were willing and prepared to make changes to their home systems, communication and functioning as described in chapter

seven, despite the possible limitation (for a number) of the parents' own literacy and prior educational levels. The *iStoep* sessions thus provided a space for parents to develop additional understandings, perspectives, and experiences on "how" to support their child.

How to Prepare their Child for School

The findings highlighted the absence of basic information regarding the value of early stimulation: such as the age when one can start reading to the child; and comments asking why they had no prior information about this. Participating parents were mostly unaware of what they could do to prepare their child for formal schooling, illustrating the gaps in knowledge between the privileged minority who have well-developed awareness and this group of parents. This gap in knowledge also includes linguistic differences, which Bernstein (1971) points out "is most marked where the gap between the socio-economic levels is very great" (p. 61). Parents' perceptions of the appropriate age to start reading stories to a child furthermore revealed the absence of important information to enable early stimulation and language development of infants, as highlighted by literature (e.g., Britto et al., 2017).

Thus, the situations and circumstances of families living in disadvantaged communities cannot be compared to the minority who enjoy first-world family environments. The above responses as described in the vignettes, and their links to the various capital notions of Bourdieu (1977) and language codes of Bernstein (1971) reveals a glimpse of capital of a few families. Focus should rather be drawn to the individual and collective community strengths, emphasising the role of Vygotsky's (1978) mediation where change of thoughts, attitudes, and behaviour is possible. Using Vygotsky's (1962; 1978) socio-cultural theory is vital to provide a foundation for a program, especially his concepts of creating zones at home and in pre-school settings where an application of mediation from a more capable other is essential, to make a difference in the child, parent, and practitioner's development.

Relevance of National Legislative and Policy Documents

The relevant National documents referred to in Chapter one include various components of parental involvement, ranging from formal participation by being elected to the SGBs or related to assessment of their children, but limited guidelines are provided as to "how" parents can be involved in their children's development at school or pre-schools. These are similar questions posed by Iliás et al. (2016). Some suggestions are made by Epstein's (1995) framework of six types of involvement of parents, within a USA context (in Chapter three). Within this research project elements within Epstein's (1995) parenting, communication and learning at home types were included. Afolabi (2014) noted that "research has found that parents are often an untapped resource in learner's education" (p. 202). This was a theme that emanated from the

iStoep sessions and the evaluations where there is evidence that mutual capacity-building took place. Parents should therefore no longer be placed on the side-line and the variety of levels and roles they could potentially fulfil should be clearly integrated in SA policies and frameworks. Parents as an "untapped resource" in SA should therefore not only have a formal SGB role and an assessment role to fulfil but a variety of roles at pre-school and school levels.

Research Question 2: How might an educational partnership approach be utilized within the ECD space within a multilingual SA context?

The descriptive reflective notes on the content and process of each SoaP in Chapter six, provide a number of themes that illustrate the potential value of an educational partnership within an ECD multilingual pre-school setting. The findings presented in chapters six and seven illustrate the potential benefit of an educational partnership approach that can be successfully utilized within a multilingual ECD SA space. While some resources were provided to the parent participants in the *iStoep* sessions, the program was not materially resource-intensive, thus having wide applicability in various contexts. It was however human resource intensive, as will be outlined further.

The Educational Partnership itself

Multilingual Aspects

Recent literature has emphasized the value of multilingualism not just during the child's lifespan, but also in social and economic terms (Kroll & Dussias, 2017); though Bloch (2006) does refer to the importance of the emotional connection with a first language. The *iStoep* sessions allowed for all three local languages to be spoken, heard, and understood. While this can be resource-intensive if there is a need for different translators, the underlying message lies in recognising the value of all languages and to enable participation through voice. For example, Nosipho reported on a few occasions how she valued having her own personal translator. The most meaningful multilingual aspect, therefore, was the strong valuing of voice and presence; to facilitate being able to participate, be heard and understood, using the person's first language. Being able to emotionally connect with both first language and cultural aspects seemed to enhance participation for a number of participants. This aspect of the value of voice, contributing to fuller participation, was one of the emergent findings of this study, as also reported by the *Better Beginnings: Creating books in communities* (Barratt-Pugh & Haig, 2020) program.

Focus on the Development of the Child

We made it clear from the outset that it was not a “parenting program” but a partnership between parents and practitioners to find ways to assist in the development of children at home and at the pre-school. Purposefully selecting a terminology, such as the choice of *iStoep* as its name, further contributed to creating an informal atmosphere with the expectation of conversations rather than participants being told how to parent. The focus was therefore not on the deficit of not knowing how to parent, but as adults finding ways together that are practical for application in both settings. Parent participants clearly stated during the *iStoep* sessions that they were unaware of what happened at the pre-school and were interested to learn more about their children in this setting. In turn the practitioner was interested in knowing what activities parents and children were involved in at home. The mutual interest and motivation to make changes in these two settings for the benefit of the child, strives to diminish the power differential in an educational partnership. This supports the findings of Philpott and Muthukrishna (2019) that an unequal balance of power creates a barrier to effective partnerships and hinders the development of voice and sense of agency that can come from participation, especially amongst people from disadvantaged communities. It furthermore also links strongly with the findings of Machimana et al. (2020) that partnerships and especially educational partnerships where voices of both partners are acknowledged and valued are crucial to enhance child development.

Finding various paths of working together in creative culture sensitive zones can be created for the pre-schoolers by adults, as suggested by Janssen-Vos and Van der Meer (2017) through play and mediation. The same can be created within educational partnerships for parents and practitioners where the element of fun and learning are interwoven.

Home-school Communication

The verbal multilingual aspect described above, is also relevant to written communication between parents and pre-schools. Wherever possible, most written communication at the LRD and within this research project was translated into all three languages. The importance of not only communicating in English is highlighted in the findings of Lemmer (2007), especially in multilingual contexts.

In SoaPs one and two, parents were requested to comment on ways that the pre-school and Centre could improve communication between parents and practitioners. The ideas were noted in these two SoaPs, and some were immediately changed, such as communicating the themes of the pre-school in the black book that each child takes home, as well as on the outside notice board. While two-way communication seems a simple way to communicate, the

actual value of it was more fully recognised within this educational partnership, resulting in daily practice changes in both environments of home and school. This aspect has also been noted in Iliás et al. (2016). The “spillover” of the *iStoep* sessions continued after the pre-schoolers had left LRD, with the practitioner mentioning that some of the parents asked her advice when they saw her.

Principles of an Educational Partnership

While the study in the Netherlands (Iliás et al., 2016) aimed to reflect how elements of equality, diversity and reflection were applied within an educational partnership, the present study was more exploratory, being focused on the broader application of an educational partnership within a SA multilingual pre-school setting. This was informed by a constructivist perspective that wished to be open-ended, in relation to what emerged organically. This resulted in identifying the following basic principles as the partnership evolved:

- Recognising and embedding the value of first languages of participants;
- Focus on the development of the child;
- Identifying mutual learning topics;
- Minimizing opportunities, either directly or indirectly, to display a position of power;
- Identifying the overall goal of the educational partnership;
- Appreciation of cultural and linguistic differences;
- Appreciation of different perspectives and ideas;
- Accountability towards children through a commitment to change or adapt practices in both settings;
- Creating an environment that provided a friendly space;
- Having fun together and laughter.

Within this study, the definition of Iliás et al. (2016) was followed of an educational partnership being a small group of parents and practitioners, of the LRD pre-school. This format of an educational partnership could be replicated within individual classes of a school, which could potentially have a ripple effect to lead to policy changes within the school. It could also become embedded in the school structures longer-term (Dove et al., 2019; Iliás et al., 2016).

The Role of the Facilitator

The role of the facilitator is crucial in developing the educational partnership and the atmosphere (friendly, engaging and application of principles) was created from the onset and during each session. The word “facilitation” is critical and needs to be applied, so that it is not “teaching”. While I received some information and training from Levineke van der Meer, and

my background as a social worker assisted me in not falling into the trap of “teaching”, I made numerous reflective notes of having felt that “I spoke too much” and that my facilitation skills needed to be improved. While I mostly used paraphrasing to indicate my appreciation of participants’ ideas and perspectives, the facilitation role could perhaps be fulfilled by a professional or willing and able parent, trained in applying the contents of the Educational Partnership manual (Iliás et al., 2019b) and in basic skills of facilitation. The facilitator plays a crucial role in enabling an equal partnership.

Where possible, a recommendation would be to develop a team of co-facilitators, to divide the administration and logistical duties and preventing all the responsibilities falling on one person. While this was not appropriate for the present study and might not always be practical, parent participants could also fulfil some of the roles: for example, setting up of the room and getting refreshments ready, therefore fulfilling volunteering roles (Epstein, 1995) and these could later be extended further into the pre-school.

Research Question 3: In what ways does the implementation of a transformative interventionist approach contribute to mutual capacity-building between practitioners, parents, and the Centre?

The findings regarding the implementation of the *iStoep* sessions have been interwoven in chapters six and seven, with particular reference to mutual capacity-building in chapter seven. Following a transformative approach of minimizing power differentials, with the focus on the development of the child, appeared to contribute to the reported mutual learning that took place, resulting in changing home and pre-school-based practices. This was achieved through identifying what was happening in these two settings and by creating zones of opportunities where mediation (Vygotsky, 1978) could take place.

Mapp and Kuttner (2013) highlighted the critical role of capacity-building in both families and staff members, to enable an effective partnership that will support the child’s learning and development. This research project advocates for mutual capacity-building through conversations, which allow for individual and collective development and changes of perspectives (for example using smaller groups for mutual sharing), rather than being in a formal learning environment. In addition, it is important to formulate the purpose of partnerships up front (between various stakeholders in an educational partnership), since mutual capacity-building, starts creating opportunities of bridging capital (Putnam, 2000).

As anticipated, the exploratory study revealed insights into home-based and pre-school practices together with factors that contribute to improving communication between parents, practitioners, pre-school, and the Centre. These insights will be described below.

Reported Shifts in Home-based Practices and Parental Perspectives

The evaluative reflections that resulted from phase one highlighted: changes in behaviour and style of communication; the implementing of relevant behaviour and routine charts for children; asking more open-ended questions; and identifying additional spaces as learning spaces. After an eight-month period, which included the first COVID-19 wave in SA, the following shifts were identified by parents in the second evaluation: changed home routine to allow for quality child engagement; being involved in the child's school activities, for example homework; increased sibling behaviour observations and actions; and parents sharing between themselves the homework duties of children. Having access to resources as provided by the Centre provided opportunities for learning at home, with the additional awareness of using recycled and community resources.

The added dimension of maternal well-being and possible follow up home visits as recommended by Singla et al. (2015), could be a beneficial addition in future. It was interesting to note how parents in first world countries might take early stimulation activities for granted, but participating parents reflected on how helpful these sessions were and how much they had learnt and changed in their behaviour or practices at home, as described above. Capacity-building was also multi-directional, between parents, practitioner, and co-facilitators, and also between parents themselves, especially providing contextually relevant advice. For example, living in home circumstances where children find it challenging to go to bed early, parents found ways to calm them down to enable them to fall asleep. Also, our sharing of classroom practices like setting boundaries and giving practical advice, assisted in parents voicing their commitment to change their behaviour from expressing anger and even striking the child.

Reported Shifts in Classroom Practices

Improved multilingual written communication was addressed, together with informing parents when the themes within the classroom were changing together with the topic of the new theme. The sharing of favourite child activities at home resulted directly in changes in play-based practices in the classroom. While music instruments were present in the classroom, the practitioners had not intentionally engaged with these with the children. For example, once Cloe had mentioned how Cole enjoyed playing with his home-made guitar, the practitioner purposefully invited and encouraged him to participate in the music corner. From the shared and engaged communication of parents during the *iStoep* sessions, further examples of home-based practices emerged that could be adapted for classroom practices, for the benefit of the child.

Reported Shifts in Centre Practices

The information that parents shared during the *iStoep* sessions and the interviews guided the reformatting of the enrolment/application form. The role and importance of cultural activities that pre-schoolers can relate to and the practitioner's role of engaging with these activities had a direct impact on the selection and roll-out of activities packs for the pre-schoolers during the COVID-19 lockdown period. Methods of communication were adapted to enable an open-door policy, which the Centre assumed it had, but there was room for improvements in being flexible and offering different times for future meetings, to accommodate working and non-working parents.

Reported Shifts in Co-facilitators

Realising that parents had hopes and dreams for their children and wanted to work with the pre-school to improve home-based practices, developed insight into the perspectives as highlighted by literature, that parents are interested in their children's progress at school and aspire for them, irrespective of their educational levels. Other than building lasting relationships with the parent participants and experiencing the value of an educational partnership first hand, the co-facilitators reflected that they had also personally benefitted from the sessions and made changes in their own home environments.

As highlighted by Vygotsky (1978) thoughts and constructs are complex and not static, as they can change when individuals are exposed to new information and experiences. Implementing an educational partnership approach within a SA context provided opportunities for thoughts and constructs to be changed, which resulted in mutual capacity-building. The benefits of an educational partnership between parents and various settings of schools could possibly

provide the space for further development of cultural capital to benefit the development of the child.

The reciprocity of the partnership has been highlighted above but upon further reflection it is questioned whether the parents recognised the value and power of their contributions to the mutual capacity building concept, within this educational partnership.

Barriers and Possible Solutions to Participation

In this study, similar barriers to participation were experienced as identified by the *Sobambisana* Initiative (ilifa Labantwana, 2012) and Lachman et al. (2016): finding an appropriate meeting time; lack of funds for transportation; poor weather conditions affecting attendance; parental and child illness; and childcare responsibilities with small children (Lachman et al., 2016). There are solutions to most of these barriers, other than illness, and some of these were relevant to this project. For example, introducing the *iStoep* environment as a space where participants can share their challenges, makes it easier for mutual solutions to be found (as in bridging capital, Putnam, 2000). I would add that in other contexts, the absence of written and verbal communication in participants' first language, could be an additional barrier to attendance. Personal visits to parents to invite them to the sessions, as suggested by Lemmer (2007), could further encourage parents to attend. Research terminology and the act of signing consent forms could also be a further possible barrier. Understanding the content of consent forms and the provision of various language options are crucial to encourage the involvement of people living in disadvantaged communities.

Program Evaluation

As noted previously the *iStoep* program followed ideas and concepts from the Educational Partnership manual (Iliás et al., 2019b), which provided a base to draw from for this research and intervention project. Adaptions were made to this manual as noted in the SoaPs in Chapter six, to be more compatible with the SA and EC context.

Structure of the iStoep Program

While a detailed description of the content and process of each of the *iStoep* sessions were provided in the SoaPs chapter in the format of reflective notes, the following additional elements of the structure of the program will be discussed under headings related to each element.

Program Interactions

Creating a friendly, informal, non-judgemental environment to get to know each other is crucial to allow for conversations and engagement to take place. Setting mutual capacity-building as the aim to allow for each individual child to learn and develop at home and at the pre-school further sets the scene for interactions and participation to take place. Despite using user-friendly wording in the recruitment and introductory session, parents found the concepts difficult to understand and the signing of the consent forms was highlighted as a possible barrier to participation, as described earlier in this chapter.

The time of the sessions were mutually agreed to be 17:00. Conscious of the time being at the end of the day, light finger refreshments and non-alcoholic beverages were ready for participants as they arrived. Refreshments were left on the table and warm drinks could also be made during the sessions. The chairs were loosely placed around the table, which was decorated with colourful tablecloths, all contributing to creating a warm, friendly setting for conversations. The comment of Shanel at the end of session one reflected the enjoyment of the conversations, with further agreement from the co-facilitators during the reflection session. As facilitator, I found the particular feedback of enjoyment and fun present in the *iStoep* sessions where mutual capacity-building was taking place through mediation (Vygotsky, 1978), both encouraging and hopeful as these sessions afforded opportunities for change. The evaluations in Chapter seven further highlighted one of the emergent outcomes being the presence and value of a sense of belonging and connectedness reported by participants. The *iStoep* sessions could potentially be regarded as a vehicle to increase both bridging and bonding capital (Putnam, 2000).

The six SoaPs described the interactions and sharing of information that took place, not just during the sessions, but also afterwards. The value placed on interactions resulted in the development of what seem to be lasting relationships. The interactions during the planning and reflection sessions with the co-facilitators provided different perspectives, which in turn resulted in providing rich data for this project. It was further reassuring that all participants participated and voiced their views, while there were some participants more vocal than others, no person dominated the discussions, ably continued by the co-facilitators within the small group discussions.

The Variety of Facilitation Tools

The mix of different stimuli tools, of photographs, drawings, short video clips and relevant handouts to facilitate group discussions were useful to prompt discussion and change of perspectives and behaviour as highlighted in Chapter seven. It also contributed to moving

away from the general view of “parenting programs” where parents are expected to sit and listen. The mix of facilitation tools allowed for active participation and engagement. Ebersöhn and Malan-Van Rooyen (2018) also advocate for identifying and using a variety of multiliteracy participatory methods that are familiar to people from disadvantaged communities, to further enhance participation.

Content of the iStoep Program

It was interesting to note that where photographs were stimuli, the majority of the participants selected mostly those that were more representative of the ethnic diversity of the SA population, that is those photographs that they could better identify with. It is therefore recommended in the design of a SA manual that photographs should be representative of the ethnic groups who will be involved.

Then, the participatory aspect of parents suggesting and selecting topics for the *iStoep* sessions is crucial, as it highlights topics they are interested in or where they might be experiencing challenges with their children, such as setting a bedtime routine. The topics selected by the parents enabled the researcher and co-facilitators to highlight the crucial role and value of learning through play, reading and writing and communication with the school to benefit the development of the child. A further recommendation as suggested by Lachman et al. (2016), would be that to cover a wider variety of topics and the number of sessions could be increased according to the needs jointly identified.

Future Roll-out of the iStoep Program

As explained, due to various research-related elements, the *iStoep* sessions were offered in the latter half of the year, potentially impacting on its effectiveness for the participating parents in relation to the pre-school itself. It had been hoped that a further trial could be implemented early in 2020, however the pandemic impacted upon this. The value of the educational partnership within a SA context as described above, would be more beneficial to the development of children if in future iterations, these were held at the beginning of the year. The benefits thereof would be the continued engaging relationship between parents and practitioners and could allow for additional follow ups throughout the year. Using a handout together with a video was helpful in facilitating discussions.

While resources were provided to the parent participants in the *iStoep* sessions, it is not a materially resource-intensive program. It was however human resource intensive, as the administration and logistics (due to the evidence-gathering research needs) were challenging and onerous for one person, to fit it all into a full work schedule. The advantages however far out-weighed the latter, as literature and data collected clearly indicated the value of voice and

participation in the participants' first language and the seeming impact on home-and school-based practices. The Educational Partnership manual (Iliás et al., 2019b) provided an essential resource, that assisted in implementing an educational partnership approach, but this needs to be refined further for broader SA contexts, both multilingual and more monolingual, as all participants reported the value of their experiences attending the *iStoep* sessions.

Hara and Burke (1998) who implemented a structured parent involvement program as described in Chapter three, recommended that "it is essential that the model selected be adapted to the needs of the particular school, parents, and community" (p. 18). Furthermore, it is important that all stakeholders involved in the partnership, agree, and commit to developing a strong parental program.

This highlights the need to develop a possible "road map" of "how" it was done, including suggested changes in a SA manual of *Working together on Educational Partnership*. The manual could possibly link with and complement the E*ssential package of services and support for ECD*, recommended by Berry et al. (2013), within a multisectoral approach as emphasised by Richter et al. (2017).

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The research project was proposed and implemented within the field of community psychology that supports building relationship and collaborative work within the research process (Visser, 2012), rather than doing research "on" people. Participants' social contexts were considered, their voices were heard in their first language, which was valued. The research included participatory elements, such as the selection of topics, meeting times and the duration thereof. This research focussed on collaborative work, aiming for mutual capacity-building to improve early stimulation practices at home and at the pre-school, which potentially would benefit the development of the child and prepare them better for the demands of formal schooling. This project therefore linked with the types of social justice interventions recommended by Akhurst and Odendaal (2018). The sense of belonging and connectedness (Obst et al., 2002) was an additional strength-building outcome of this study.

A further strength was the partnership with the *De Activiteit*, which provided the basic Educational Partnership manual (Iliás et al., 2019b) and guidance on building the educational partnership aspect. Although modest in size, this research project provided additional insights into literature not just for the ECD sector, but also about the utility of educational partnerships in general, that could be applied both in pre-schools and formal schools, to improve communication between parents, practitioners, and teachers. There appear to be limited

interventions in the ECD field in SA, especially within a multilingual setting. At the present juncture, where the national oversight changed from the DSD to the DBE in April 2022, this project potentially offers ways to improve and better integrate partnerships, underlining the importance of ECD for children's later school outcomes. Linking the value of educational partnerships furthermore with relevant national policies and frameworks could strengthen the relationships and partnerships between home and school by the building and bridging of cultural capital aspects.

Regarding limitations, this was a modest research project with one group of participants (although a further iteration was planned but could not be conducted), in a well-resourced ECD site, when compared to much other ECD provision, which are often in the realm of mainly child-care for financial reasons. As regularly noted during the study, although no generalisations can be made, this study provides additional insights and perspectives within a constructivist paradigm.

There were limitations related to being an inexperienced researcher, for example that the initial interview schedule was too long, whereafter it was adapted as explained in Chapter four. This highlighted the adaptation I needed to make as a practitioner moving to a much less familiar role as a researcher.

The essence of mutual capacity building as highlighted by parents focussed more on the skills that they learnt as parents. However, what they contributed as partners within the partnership could have been more explicitly strengthened in the study.

Additionally, as the researcher and PhD candidate, I was responsible for the whole project, the conceptualisation, running and facilitating the *iStoep* sessions, including the planning and reflections and analysing and interpreting the data. A further challenge was the lack of financial support; therefore, the project could not be "rolled out" beyond my workplace (in contrast to the *Thuis in School* project, which was a funded research project that could be further trialled due to available personnel).

Future interventionist research like this would benefit from a team approach, to share responsibilities and roles. The findings of a research project such as this one, illustrate that the research has been "filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.31) as highlighted in chapter one. This provides one account of the phenomenon and therefore having a multidisciplinary team involved in this project could potentially provide additional rich data, from various perspectives. Despite working across the three disciplines of community psychology, social work and education, this story remains incomplete due to the small group of participants, the complexities, and multi-

layered challenges within the resource-stretched and diverse educational needs of the SA context.

Suggestions for Future Research

The following suggestions are considered ways in which similar research could be conducted:

- To offer a longer program of relevant topics as identified by practitioners and parents of children who attend a number of under-resourced ECD pre-schools. This would allow for comparisons to take place;
- To offer the program earlier in the year, to enable follow up with the same group of parents, with possible "top ups" later in the year, especially for parents of children entering formal school;
- To continue to explore and identify home-based practices that could be enhanced, to enable practitioners and teachers to build bridges with parents and children, enabling them to better adapt to the school environment;
- In future studies, to explicitly highlight the parents' contributions to the mutual capacity-building aspect that they bring to the partnership and not just on their parental skills.
- To apply Engeström's (2001) expansive learning cycle in a pre-school setting, as originally intended. Knott-Craig (2017) applied Engeström's (2001) expansive learning with learner participants within a senior school setting in Makhanda to enable them to "create new knowledge and new practices within their activity system" (p. 113). The exploratory nature of this study, whilst it was small, has provided additional insights that can now be applied within a pre-school setting.

Researcher's Personal Note

I end with a paragraph from Harrison's (2020) book *Harnessing the thunder* where he argues that he "is convinced that SA can fly; that we would soar if we just seized the opportunities for lift-off" (cover page).

> The next few years will be tough. There will be new storms and thunderous rumblings of discontent. But if we listen carefully, we will discern them as millions of voices asking to be heard, looking for opportunity, seeking to be part of our common future. And no matter how dire the present, we always stand on the cusp of new opportunity for ourselves and for our nation. We should not feel threatened by the rumblings, but find ways to channel them into a more inclusive and innovative society. The problems may loom large, but they can be overcome if we are willing to think simply and radically. And at its most radical, a caring and creative spirit is all that is required to harness the thunder. (p. 123)

Developing quality relationships in educational partnerships between teachers, practitioners and parents could be one of the simple but radical answers to address some of our educational challenges. Let it provide opportunities for beautiful voices to be heard, to change the future of our children.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethical Clearance Letter

RHODES UNIVERSITY
Where leaders learn

Human Ethics subcommittee
Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee
PO Box 94, Grahamstown, 6140, South Africa
t: +27 (0) 46 603 8055
f: +27 (0) 46 603 8822
e: ethics-committee@ru.ac.za

www.ru.ac.za/research/research/ethics
NHREC Registration no. REC-241114-045

16 July 2019

Anneliese Maritz

Review Reference: 2019-0365-462

Email: g98p8633@campus.ru.ac.za

Dear Anneliese Maritz

Re: Educational partnership within a multilingual preschool.

Principal Investigator: Prof Jacqueline Akhurst

Collaborators: Mrs Anneliese Maritz ,

This letter confirms that the above research proposal has been reviewed and **APPROVED** by the Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee (RUESC) – Human Ethics (HE) sub-committee.

Approval has been granted for 1 year. An annual progress report will be required in order to renew approval for an additional period. You will receive an email notifying when the annual report is due.

Please ensure that the ethical standards committee is notified should any substantive change(s) be made, for whatever reason, during the research process. This includes changes in investigators. Please also ensure that a brief report is submitted to the ethics committee on completion of the research. The purpose of this report is to indicate whether the research was conducted successfully, if any aspects could not be completed, or if any problems arose that the ethical standards committee should be aware of. If a thesis or dissertation arising from this research is submitted to the library's electronic theses and dissertations (ETD) repository, please notify the committee of the date of submission and/or any reference or cataloguing number allocated.

Sincerely

Prof Joanna Dames

Chair: Human Ethics sub-committee, RUESC- HE

Appendix 2: Extension of Ethical approval

Anneliese Maritz

From: noreply@ru.ac.za
Sent: 10 February 2020 08:02
To: g98P8633@campus.ru.ac.za
Cc: J.Akhurst@ru.ac.za; ethics-committee@ru.ac.za
Subject: Mrs Anneliese Maritz: Ethics Recertification- PG Report Approved. Ethics Recertification Approved

Dear Mrs Anneliese Maritz

RUESC Chair hereby grants extension to Mrs Anneliese Maritz (98P8633) under the supervision of Prof Jacqueline Akhurst to continue the research project titled Exploring the value of an educational partnership within a multilingual preschool setting which has been granted ethical clearance approval under the tracking number 2019-0365-462, for 1 Jan 2021 - 31 December 2021. This extension implies that there have been no significant changes to the conditions/term of the original application.

Kind Regards

Chair: RUESC

Appendix 3: Informed Consent Form

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT DECLARATION

(Participant)

Project Title: Exploring the value of an educational partnership within a multilingual pre-school setting.

Anneliese Maritz from the Department of Psychology from the Department of Rhodes University has requested my permission to participate in the above-mentioned research project.

The nature and the purpose of the research project and of this informed consent declaration have been explained to me in a language that I understand.

I am aware that:

1. The purpose of the research project is for mutual exchange of knowledge to take place between parents, practitioners, and the researcher within a multilingual preschool setting.

2. The Rhodes University has given provisional ethical clearance to this research project and the letter dated 27 May 2019 is attached.

3. By participating in this research project, I will be contributing towards improved early stimulation practices at home and preschool that will hopefully benefit the development of children prior to starting formal schooling.

4. I will participate in the project by:
    - The researcher asking me questions (semi-structured interview schedule) that will form part of the research data
    - Sharing photos, or a short video, or draw or verbally share, the activities that my child participates in at home and share this with the parents and research collaborators in this project during the intervention sessions to enable mutual capacity-building. I do understand that this is voluntary and am under no obligation to provide any of these activities.
    - The researcher and research assistant will observe my participation (verbal and body language) during the intervention session.

- During the sessions photos will be taken and it will be audio and video recorded.

1. My participation is entirely voluntary and should I at any stage wish to withdraw from participating further, I may do so without any negative consequences.

2. I will not be compensated for participating in the research, but my out-of-pocket expenses will be reimbursed.

3. There may be risks associated with my participation in the project. I am aware that

   a. the following risks are associated with my participation:
      - that the confidentiality clause is not upheld
      - the position of the researcher as Centre manager and the power this holds
      - the position of the practitioner and the power she holds
      - feelings of awkwardness/embarrassment regarding resources at the preschool and homes

   b. the following steps have been taken to prevent the risks:

- Confidentiality is part of the Lebone Centre's Disciplinary code, which if found guilty as a first offence would mean the staff member will be dismissed.

  The temporary research assistant will be from the Psychology Department, Rhodes University, who have their own confidentiality policies that will be signed.

- The sensitivity around confidentiality especially regarding children will be shared with participating parents.
- The researcher will fully explain her position as researcher and Centre Manager and that of the practitioner and will give each participant the name and contact details of the ICDP Trustee Chair and Vice Chair as well as an additional Trustee member who uses the same language that they can contact and report the researcher.
- Facilitators will be trained to be extremely sensitive regarding family resources at home and no parent will be expected to answer. It will be a discussion where the parents can decide whether they willing to share or not.

  Should any risk be breached the researcher will ensure explanatory sessions and arrange debriefing sessions.

   c. there is a 20% chance of the risk materialising

4. The researcher intends publishing the research results in the form of presentations at conferences and written articles for example journals. However, confidentiality and anonymity of records will be maintained and that my name and identity will not be revealed to anyone who has not been involved in the conduct of the research.

5. I will receive feedback in the form of a summary of mutual knowledge sharing examples at the end of the facilitated sessions, regarding the results obtained during the study. A copy of the thesis will be given to the Lebone Centre that I can access, and it will be used to inform future practices.

5. Any further questions that I might have concerning the research, or my participation will be answered by the researcher, Anneliese Maritz or the ECD Co-ordinator, Cherise

Sickle or the Vice Chair, San Knoetze or Mr Matinise at the Department of Social Development.

6. By signing this informed consent declaration, I am not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

7. A copy of this informed consent declaration will be given to me, and the original will be kept on record.

8. Request to take pictures, video and voice recording for this study

I, …… have read the above information / confirm that the above information has been explained to me in a language that I understand, and I am aware of this document's contents. I have asked all questions that I wished to ask, and these have been answered to my satisfaction. I fully understand what is expected of me during the research.

I have not been pressurised in any way and I voluntarily agree to participate in the above-mentioned project.

…… …… ……

Participants signature **Witness** **Date**

Please tick relevant box:

Preference of time to attend on Wednesdays: 9:30 – 11:30 *OR* 14:00 – 16:00

I want to participate in attending the sessions, but don't want any photos, audio or video taken of my child.

Name of child and parent _____

I don't want to participate and don't want any photos, audio or video taken of my child

Name of child and parent _____

Rhodes University, Research Office, Ethics

Ethics Coordinator: ethics-commitee@ru.ac.za

t: +27 (0) 46 603 7727 f: +27 (0) 86 616 7707

Room 220, Main Admin Building, Drostdy Road, Grahamstown, 6139

Appendix 4: Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Participant number: ____

Physical area where you live? _____

I am interested in understanding the different multilingual languages your child/pre-schooler is exposed to.

Firstly, in the home environment. The pre-schooler - hearing different languages and speaking different languages

What different languages are spoken (identify all) in your home. Who speaks what language of these identified?

If grandparents or important people in your child's life live nearby, what languages do they speak to your child?

In what predominant language/s does the pre-schooler watch TV/listen to the radio?

What language/s does your child speak to the various people at home? (if mixed, please specify).

What predominant language/s does your child listen to play cell phone games/videos on electronic devices?

In what language does your child respond to these 'electronic devices?

I added this impromptu question: Books that are taken out from the library, which language are they in?

Hearing and speaking and immediate surrounding?

If there are people living in the yard or neighbours, what language do they speak?

When your child plays with friends' what language is mostly spoken?

Have you noticed a change in her language use since s/he started the Little Red Dragon Preschool, pls explain.

Did or does your child say anything about the different languages heard at the Little Red Dragon?

What are your thoughts about children hearing all these different languages? Please explain answer.

What responsibility/ies do you think parents have towards preparing their children to deal with the different languages at school?

I am interested in understanding the school experiences of the adult

Were you exposed to hearing different languages while growing up at home?

If yes, what languages spoken by whom?

Were you exposed to hearing different languages at your school?

Please describe your own school experiences (for example what did you like most, what didn't you like, what would you have wanted differently,)

How would you describe a 'good teacher?'

What grade/standard did you pass at school?

If employed, where are you currently working?

What do you think are the reasons for children generally doing poorly at school in SA?

What do you think about the statement? 'A parent is the child's first teacher?'

What do you think a parent should teach a child before starting school?

I am interested in understanding what your child plays with at home. This could help us to have familiar things to play with in our preschool and also different things.

Where does your child mostly play*? Tick relevant answer*

- inside
- outside/yard
- garden
- street
- park

What does your child mostly play with at home, for example? Tick relevant answer.

- Type of objects and materials: sticks, rocks, empty tins, balls, leaves, wire, wood, pieces of rags
- Household objects (spoons, bowls, cups)
- Things that make music sounds (stones in a tin or using a stick
- Listening to music, singing and dancing
- Things for colouring in, drawing and writing

I am interested in understanding what activities you as a family like doing over weekends/holidays

Which of the following activities are family favourites?

- Telling stories
- Singing songs/listening to music/dancing
- Looking at picture books/reading stories
- Other, please explain _____

Do you play with your child when they play or just observe or continue with your house chores? Please explain __

Do you spend time with your child naming things, counting and drawing?

What type of reading resources do you have at home? (tick relevant answer)

- Newspaper/pieces
- Magazines

- Picture books
- Story books
- School books
- Other

In the past week or two, which of these activities are family favourites that your child participates in?

I am interested in understanding how you think you can help prepare your child for their school journey.

What do you think is most important for children to learn at home before they start school?

At what age do you think you should start reading stories to your child?

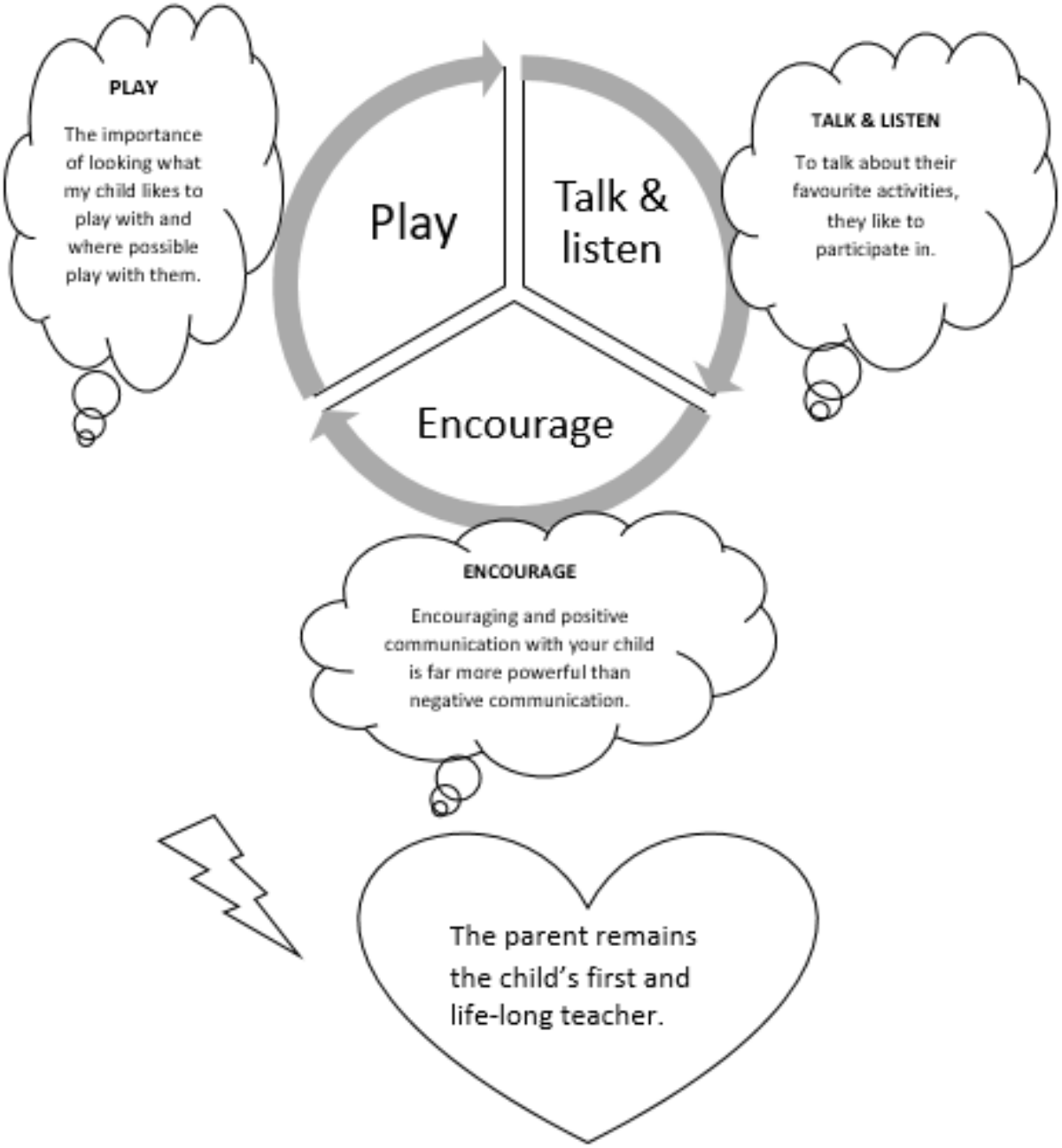
What hopes do you have for your child when they starts school?

Appendix 5: HIGHLIGHTS of Session 1 held on 24 July 2019

HIGHLIGHTS of Session 1 held on 24 July 2019

Learning that took place during the 1st *iStoep talk* session.

The importance of communication between the parent, school and child that develops learning at school and at home!

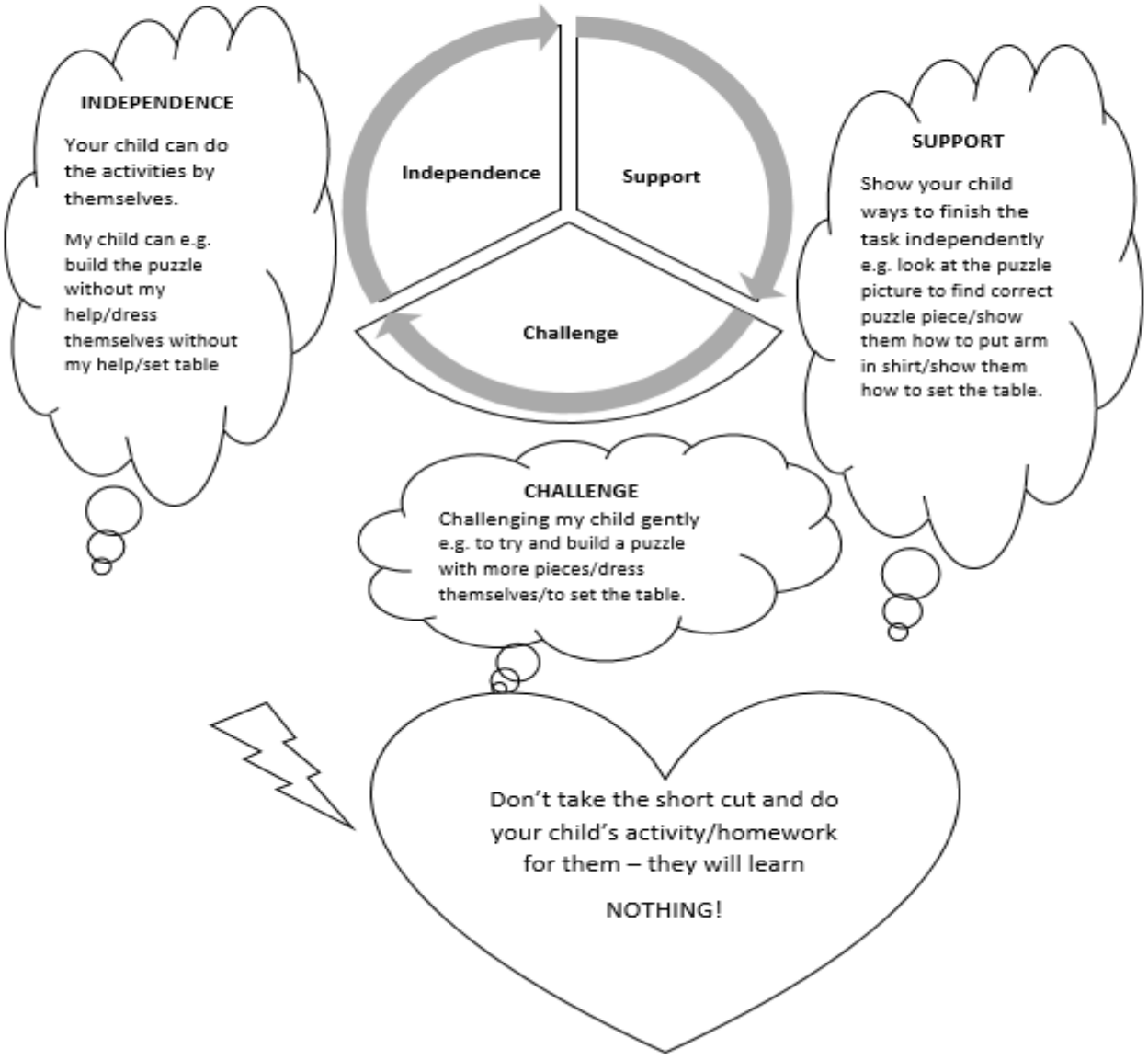


Appendix 6: HIGHLIGHTS of Session 2 held on 13 August 2019

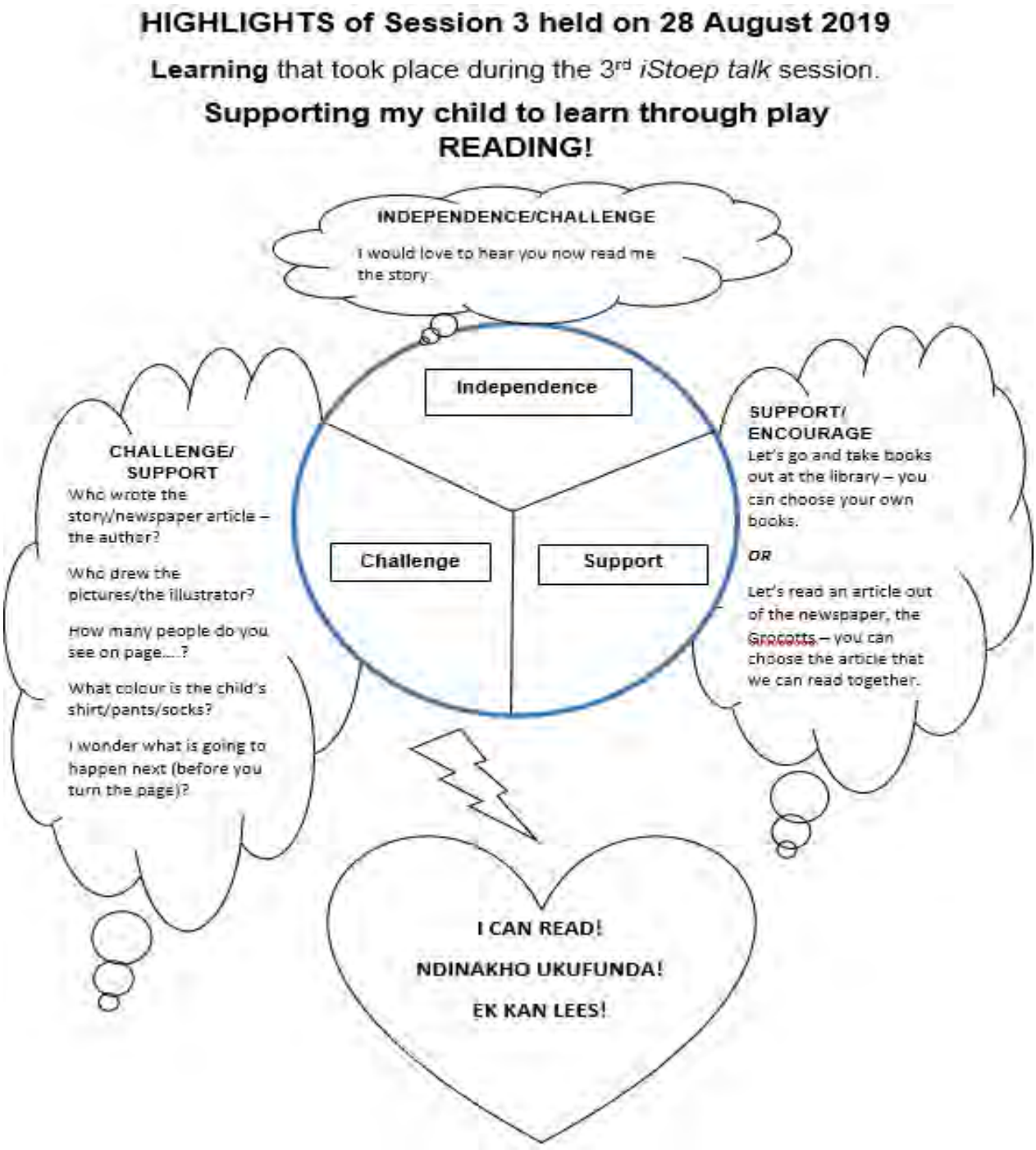
HIGHLIGHTS of Session 2 held on 13 August 2019

Learning that took place during the 2nd *iStoep talk* session.

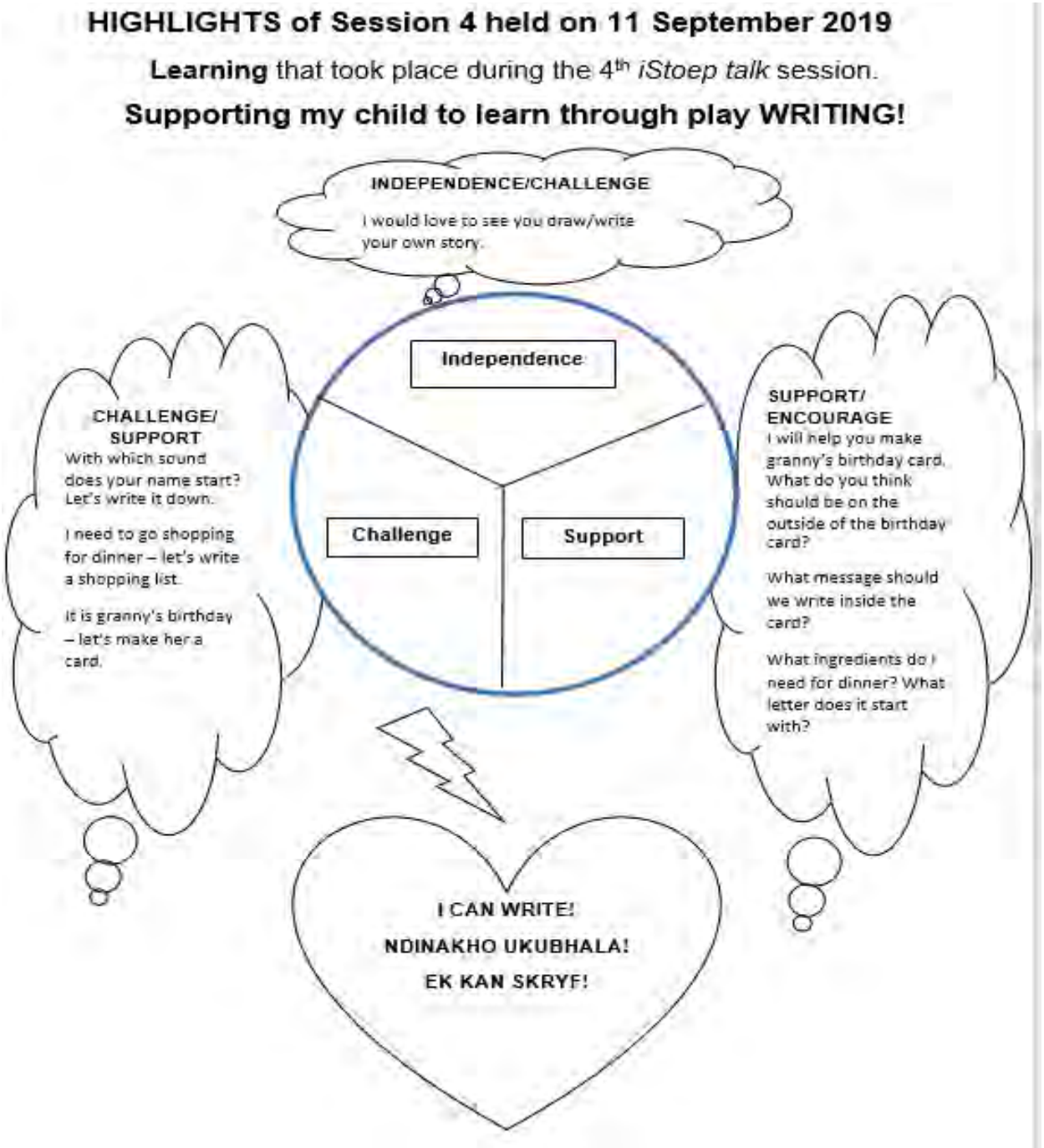
Supporting my child to learn through play!



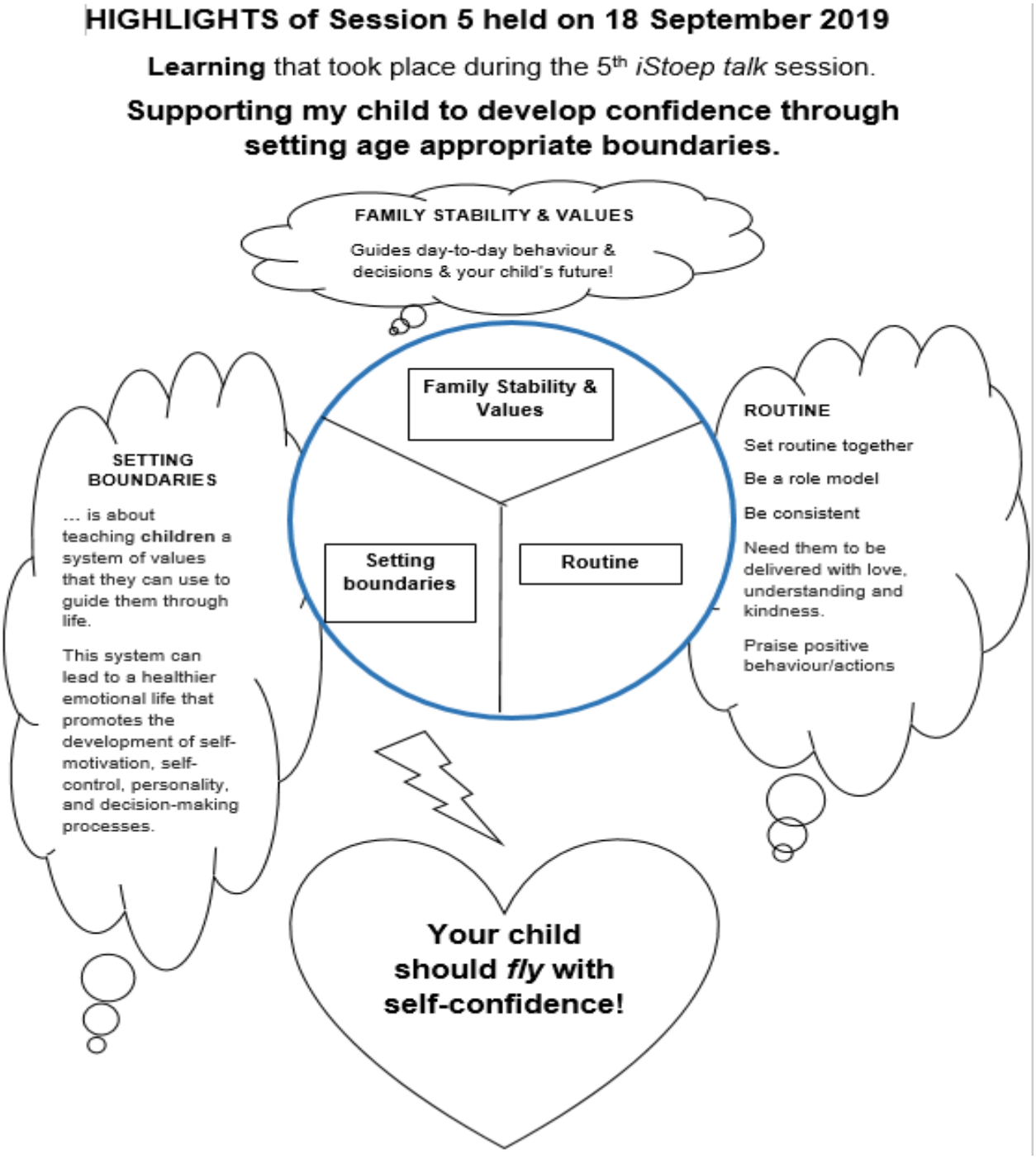
Appendix 7: HIGHLIGHTS of Session 3 held on 28 August 2019



Appendix 8: HIGHLIGHTS of Session 4 held on 11 September 2019



Appendix 9: HIGHLIGHTS of Session 5 held on 18 September 2019

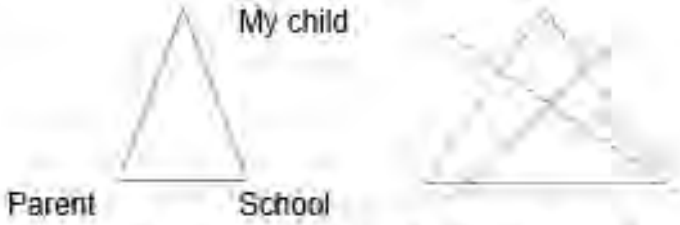


Appendix 10: Summary of *iStoep* session 1

iStoep Talk Session Topic 1: The importance of communication between the parent, teacher, and school

The closer the relationship between the parents, teachers and school, the more the child's brain has the space & capacity to learn new things at home and at school.

The importance of the triangle of communication.



When the triangle is narrow (as illustrated above), it means that the parent and teacher/school communicate regularly about the child's development. The child sees these positive conversations taking place and the brain relaxes realising that the parent and teacher respects each other and listens to each other's ideas and plans.

Sadly, the wider the triangle, which means that the parent and teacher don't have a good relationship and that rules at home and the school are very different - the brain is then constantly worried & finds it extremely difficult to concentrate, learn & develop.

What can we do to make the triangle narrow?

- Parents and teachers to have positive conversations about your child and how they can work together e.g. encouraging healthy eating and setting a bedtime routine so your child can go to bed early. This helps them to focus on their schoolwork the next day and not be tired.
- Parents and teachers to shares stories with each other about the child's favourite activities at home and school.
  Sometimes these differ e.g. a child loves building a puzzle at school but not at home. So why is that? Parents and teachers can talk to each other to discover what the reason might be?
- Parents and teachers to share what they each value as important for the development of the child.

ACTIVITIES TO TRY AT HOME

- Take turns to listen to each other and ask open ended questions e.g. what did you enjoy most at school today? Who are your friends at school? Ask questions that will therefore lead to conversations
- Prevent asking closed ended questions e.g. Was your friend at school today – the answer is going to be 'yes' or 'no' and does not allow for a conversation or discussion to take place.

Love and stability in the house are the biggest gift you can give your child!

Appendix 11: Summary of *iStoep* session 2

iStoep Talk Session 2
Topic: The importance of LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

The importance of children 'Learning through Play' is a phrase often heard.

WHY is it important for my child? The following skills are developed when children have enough time to play:

- To solve problems and learning cause and effect
- Learning how to play with others through compromise, conflict resolution and sharing
- Development of fine and gross motor skills
- Nurturing their creativity and imagination
- Discovering their independence and positive self-esteem

The role adults can fulfil when their children are playing is to gently challenge them to for example build a puzzle with slightly more pieces. Support your child while you set the challenge to enable them to next time do the bigger piece puzzle alone.

These are important three circles that a parent and child constantly move between while their child is learning to become more independent and ready for school. It is very important that you do not set the challenge to high or too low and that it is fun and enjoyable. Don't pick a time when your child is tired to challenge them to build a bigger piece puzzle and the activity must be age appropriate, for example you wouldn't ask your one-year-old to set the table.

ACTIVITIES TO TRY AT HOME

- Observe what your child is trying to do independently. A lot of children at this age want to dress themselves. Show them how to put on a jumper, assist them once or twice and then ask if they want to try and do it themselves. Do this when you have enough time in the morning, not when you are running late because then you will be impatient, and your child will think they cannot do it. Encourage, support, challenge and motivate!
- When the preschool sends activities home, please support your child in the activity, sit with your child and show interest in what they are doing, BUT do not take short cut and do it for your child – they then learn NOTHING!

Play and laugh with your child. Enjoy the time you spend together as it becomes a lifelong journey together.

Appendix 12: Summary of *iStoep* session 3

iStoep Talk Session Topic:
The importance of LEARNING THROUGH PRETEND READING

Children love imitating their parents and they will tell you that they can read – this is pretend reading, but it is the first steps to reading and, in their world, they are READING! As the parent you support, encourage, and praise your child when they take a book to READ!

WHY is it important for my child to pretend read? The following skills are developed when children have time to pretend read:

- It develops a love for stories and books
- They 'see' printed words
- It builds concentration
- It exposes them to other worlds
- They listen with attention
- It develops their imagination

ACTIVITIES TO TRY AT HOME

- Create family reading times. A time when you can also relax with the *Grocott's* or book. This should be a special relaxed time, even if just 5 min, BUT with NO technology. This should be a special time that your child looks forward to where patience, calm and love surrounds the reading of books. The preschool is sending books and newspapers home that can assist the parent. Use these resources with your child.

Things to highlight when reading to your child:

- Who wrote the story – the author of the book or newspaper article?
- Who drew the pictures – the illustrator
- How many e.g. people/children/ animals do you see on page 2
- What colour jumper is the baby wearing?
- I wonder what is going to happen next. Create that expectation and excitement before you turn the page over, which allows your child to use their imagination.

'Honour your father and your mother'...be the example for your child, because children imitate/copy good and bad habits of their parents!

Appendix 13: Summary of *iStoep* session 4

iStoep Talk Session Topic:
LET'S HAVE A GO AT DRAWING AND OR WRITING!

Nobody starts writing words and sentences – it all starts with drawing, which develops into writing. Drawing pictures starts with 'scribble marks' and after a while you will start seeing that the drawing means something – an object or letters/words.

WHY is it important for my child to draw?

- Children learn that what is in their heads can become a picture or story.
- They develop important learning skills.
- It gives your child an opportunity to be creative and use their imagination.
- The small muscles in your child's hand develops, which helps them to hold a pencil at school to enable them to write.

ACTIVITIES TO TRY AT HOME

- Create family **writing** times. The preschool has provided drawing and writing materials – *so have a go at drawing and writing!*

Things to highlight when drawing & writing with your child:

- NEVER criticize the drawing or writing – ALWAYS encourage!
- A question to ask for example is: 'tell me about your drawing?' This allows your child to explain what they 'see' in their drawing.
- If they say it is a dog – you could gently ask 'how many legs does a dog have?' or 'does the dog have a long or short tail? Ask questions related to your child's drawing to help them 'see' the object they drawing.
- Draw/write with your child as this encourages them to also try.
- Again make it a fun, special time.
- Write your very own family story – your child can draw the pictures and you can write the words & sentences and share your book with family members.
- Make your own Christmas cards together as gifts.

With thanks to Wordworks for the use of their materials

Draw, paint and write together! There is a hidden artist in all of us.....it just needs practice and patience!

Appendix 14: Summary of *iStoep* session 5

iStoep Talk Session Topic:
How stress changes a child's brain

The picture below shows how stress can change your child's brain – a stable loving home is the most precious gift you can give your child.

Tips to create a caring home environment:

- Listen first to your child; don't interrupt them; then talk
- Talk about feelings and express your own emotions
- Don't be judgmental, tease your child or compare them with other children; rather support and encourage them e.g., 'good try' or 'I like the way you are thinking'.
- Make sure your child has your undivided attention, with no cellphone interruptions.
- Having a daily routine, which you can set up together with your child, is important if you are wanting to support your child's learning.
- Harsh/severe discipline measures causes stress.
- A 6-year-old needs between 10- and 11-hours sleep, otherwise they are too tired to learn at school the next day.
- Set a consistent bedtime routine to help your child.

This is the last session handout. I sincerely hope that these handouts helped in guiding the activities with your child and that it was fun and enjoyable.

A stable loving home is the most precious gift you can give your child!

With thanks to Wordworks for the use of their materials

Appendix 15: Research Project Database

(Phase 1 of Yin's (2011) 5-phased cycles)

No	DATA ITEM
PARENT PARTICIPANTS	
1	Recruitment & Introductory session
2	Semi-structured interviews conducted before session 3 started
3	*iStoep* Talk sessions 1-6: Audio Video & Transcriptions
4	Evaluation of sessions – part of session 6
5	Follow up telephonic interviews during 2020 with 4 parents during COVID-19
CO-FACILITATOR PARTICIPANTS	
6	Intake Interview session
7	Planning sessions 1-6 Audio & Transcriptions
8	*iStoep* Talk sessions 1-6 Audio Video & Transcriptions
9	Reflection sessions 1-6 Audio & Transcriptions
10	Virtual Reflective session Audio & video recording of Virtual session & Transcription
RESEARCHER	
11	Researcher Identity Memos
12	Quick reflections after *iStoep* sessions (written)
13	Researcher reflections written while reading and sorting data
14	Discussions with Dutch researchers involved in Netherland Research project: Marina Iliás (PhD candidate) Levineke van der Meer (emails, zoom sessions & face to face, EECERA conference presentation based on *Kuier Saam* sessions
15	Netherlands SLA Manual (Iliás et al., 2019b)

Appendix 16: Self-regulation handout

Building blocks for a successful lifelong learning journey: self-regulated learning