



# PIECCE

PROJECT FOR INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE & EDUCATION

## Project for Inclusive ECCE (PIECCE): Output 2: Baseline Findings

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for every child



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### Project Partners:

*PIECCE is a collaboration led by UNISA, Saide, Centre for Social Development at Rhodes University and BRIDGE. The consulting partners on the project are TREE, Ntataise, and False Bay College. At the request of the Department of Higher Education (DHET), and with additional support from them, the consortium was extended to include a number of Higher Education Institutions, namely, Walter Sisulu University, University of Pretoria, University of Fort Hare, North West University, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, University of the Free State, University of the Witwatersrand and University of KwaZulu-Natal.*



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

Note that these abbreviations are also used in citations and the list of references.

ADHD – Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder  
B.Ed. F.P. – Bachelor of Education, Foundation Phase  
CAPS – Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement  
CHE – Council on Higher Education  
CSD – Centre for Social Development  
CoP – community of practice  
DBE – Department of Basic Education  
DHET – Department of Higher Education and Training  
DSD – Department of Social Development  
ECD – Early Childhood Development  
ECCE – Early Childhood Care and Education  
ETDP SETA – Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority  
FAL – first additional language  
FAS – Foetal Alcohol Syndrome  
Grade R – Reception Grade  
HL – home language  
HEI – Higher Education Institution  
HoD – Head of Department  
HSRC – Human Sciences Research Council  
IBEST – Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training  
ITE – Initial Teacher Education  
ITEC – Institute of Training and Education for Capacity Building  
KZN – KwaZulu-Natal Province  
NDP – National Development Plan  
NGO – non-government organization  
NPO – non-profit organization  
NQF – National Qualifications Framework  
ODL – Open Distance Learning  
PBL – Problem-based Learning  
PIECCE – Project for Inclusive Early Childhood Care and Education  
PMRP – Policy on Minimum Requirements for Programmes Leading to Qualifications in Higher Education for ECD Educators  
PoE – Portfolio of Evidence  
RPL – Record of Prior Learning  
RSA – Republic of South Africa  
SA – South Africa or South African  
Saide – South African Institute for Distance Education  
Stats SA – Statistics South Africa  
TPP – Transformative Pedagogy Project  
TREE – Training and Resources in Early Education  
TVET – Technical and Vocational Education and Training  
UNISA – University of South Africa  
WIL – Work Integrated Programme

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research report serves the purpose of informing the work of PIECCE which is specifically concerned with programme development at national level for an ECCE 0-4 year-olds Diploma/Degree. The work of PIECCE is unique in that it adopts a collaborative multi-stakeholder approach to understand how to achieve quality in ECD. In addition, it recognises the importance of addressing diversity together with understanding what quality ECCE looks like, in order to bring about transformative pedagogy. In this respect it has a link to the Transformative Pedagogy Project (TPP).

This report presents empirical data derived from three national surveys, together with collaborative literature reviews on four specific topics, that were derived from an action research approach, adopted by the collaborative research team. The four agreed-upon areas were: academic support, work-integrated learning, record of prior knowledge, and norms and standards. The data were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively by one of the core collaborating members in order to benchmark current thinking and practices in ECCE.

The findings of the study showed that across the different types of teacher training organisations there is a wide variety of qualifications in ECD on offer. These are provided by TVETS, NPOs and HEIs, with a shift from the traditional NQF ECD Level 5 from the NPO/TVET sector, to some HEIs.

All institution types acknowledged the need for academic support, with an emphasis on mentorship at multiple levels. Mentorship is given in diverse ways ranging from lecturers providing individual attention, to peer mentorship, to mentor teachers. What is suggested is that a community-of-practice (CoP) approach has the potential to provide support at a variety of levels and should be encouraged. Extending mentorship beyond the confines of a training programme has direct implications for achieving quality, as without it there is minimal accountability and support for teachers/practitioners. Although the institutional surveys indicated an integrated approach to academic support, the student survey evidenced a non-integrated approach. It is apparent that a combination of both is most effective.

The concept of reflective practice was considered an essential aspect of learning for student/practitioners and for the lecturers themselves. An analysis of a quality tool kit that focused on reflective practice showed that teachers found it to be beneficial but seemed reluctant to apply it when there was no mentor present to guide the process. This raised questions around finding smart ways to ensure reflective practice is easily achieved and therefore optimise quality implementation of ECCE programmes.

The importance of an adaptive approach to context emerged in the WIL component of this research. There was consensus that context is a key component of transformative pedagogy and that students/practitioners must be given the opportunity to work in a variety of contexts but most importantly should be equipped with the skills to be flexible and sensitive to these



contexts. There was some evidence of preparing student/practitioners to cope in a variety of contexts. These included providing specific training through dedicated modules, workshops, group discussions and a concerted effort to expose students to varied teaching environments. There were however some marked constraints in the form of access, language difficulties, transport and in some cases inadequate exposure to ‘best practice’.

A thorough examination of the policies that drive ECCE showed that a competency approach to programme development is a potential way forward. Ten competencies were isolated and considered in relation to quality and the current institutional philosophies of training in ECCE. Three gaps were identified between policy and practice, namely, insufficient support for health, safety and nutrition; a need to provide more explicit training in leadership, management and administration; and a need for a stronger link between observation, assessment and development of the child.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) appears to have minimal uptake within HEIs because there is a sense that it may impact on institutions’ reputations. There is evidence that RPL is gaining traction in the NPO sector, but it is generally not sufficiently supported by training institutions because it is time consuming and costly when working with large cohorts. Given the present trend toward acknowledging that many in the ECCE workforce have considerable experience in the field, but limited financial resources and a need for a formal qualification, the suggestion is that deeper exploration of RPL is essential as a means to resolve the problem.

The PIECCE project has three main drivers, namely Quality, Diversity and Collaboration. The research report was a collaborative effort which included an exploration of diversity in our present training together with a discussion on what is meant by quality in ECCE. The empirical data showed a collaborative commitment to addressing diversity in training, but also that this is primarily being done in a non-integrated manner with an emphasis on specific modules. Understanding of diversity will require more discussion to conceptualise its complexity and thereby build it into teacher training programmes.

Finally the issue of quality was examined through the lens of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model and Britto et al.’s three-tiered pyramid, in order to unpack the levels of quality beyond the confines of the classroom and pedagogy. There was a sense that, while ‘quality’ is a term that is easily bandied about, it is not as easily defined or achieved. The empirical data in this report suggest that providing academic support, mentorship at multiple levels, encouraging reflective practice, embracing diversity, and producing adaptive, flexible educators who are able to be leaders in their field while acquiring a suite of competencies derived from policy and practice, equals quality.

## INTRODUCTION

Readers are referred to the list of acronyms and abbreviations (above).

There are eight categories of ECCE workers identified in the National Integrated ECD Policy (DSD & UNICEF, 2015). The training resides with the health-care sector, other social service professions, and the education sector. Each has its own regulating and quality assurance bodies. Most ECCE training for pre-Grade R seems to reside with NPOs. Biersteker (2007) and later, Biersteker and Picken's (2013) reviews of NPO programmes, showed that qualifications range from skills courses to certificates to diplomas. There are overlaps between different sectors and their offerings, but this concept has not been fully exploited. There is an urgent need to harmonise the training of the ECCE workforce. The NPOs, TVETS and HEIs need to share a common vision, and common knowledge and practice standards, to guide preparation of a quality workforce which can make a difference to the lives of children and their families.

PIECCE is a collaboration led by UNISA, Saide, CSD (at Rhodes University), and BRIDGE. The consulting partners on the project are TREE, Ntataise Training and Resource Centre, and False Bay College. At the request of DHET, and with additional support from them, the consortium was extended to include a number of HEIs, namely, Walter Sisulu University, University of Pretoria, University of Fort Hare, North West University, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, University of the Free State, University of the Witwatersrand and University of KZN.

PIECCE was initiated in 2016 and charged with an overarching outcome of programme development for a 0-4-year-olds ECCE qualification in the form of either a Diploma or Degree. Within the scope of this output there are three focal points or drivers:

- Quality: Define quality to inform all aspects of the programme development process.
- Inclusivity: Infuse inclusive practices into every aspect of teaching and learning, preparing practitioners to be flexible and responsive to diversity.
- Collaboration: All project work will be done through a collaborative process with multi-sectoral partners (a first in this field) and provision of additional platforms for broader engagement.

The first two drivers translate into understanding “What is quality ECD?” and “How should diversity be addressed?” when developing teacher training programmes. Diversity is presented through empirical data generated in the PIECCE research, while quality is discussed at the end of the report, taking into consideration the findings of research presented in this report.

### How will these objectives be achieved?

ECD can have a life-changing influence on children receiving essential services before entering formal schooling. Benefits to young children unfold into positive effects on the

formal schooling system itself, which in turn influences social and economic development. However, ECD's favourable impacts can only be fully achieved through quality implementation.

At the centre of quality ECD is the practitioner. This, in turn, demands that we increase access in order to produce professionally qualified ECD educators. Practitioners and teachers hold the key to unlocking the potential of young children.

PIECCE sees professionalism embracing the following:

- foregrounding principles of inclusive education;
- emphasising the centrality and uniqueness of the learner;
- preparing a critically reflective workforce;
- fostering an understanding of contextual and situational realities.

In the interests of supporting professionalism, programme design takes into account:

- alignment and qualification pathways for practitioners and teachers;
- design for access (e.g., flexible delivery, recognition of prior learning, work integrated learning, and academic support).

PIECCE has three outputs, namely:

- Output 1: a collaborative process model for programme development.
- Output 2: a research review of fitness for purpose of a representative selection of existing ECD and related capacity-building programmes.
- Output 3: a standardised programme framework and set of support materials.

This report addresses Output 2 and pulls together empirical research that was conducted during the first quarter of 2017, in order to inform Output 3. It serves two primary purposes: (a) to benchmark the status quo in how institutions presently develop and train in-service and pre-service ECCE teachers/practitioners, and (b) to assist in understanding the attitudes and practices that should inform development of a quality birth-to-four-years ECCE Degree or Diploma.

### [Structure of this report](#)

This report is comprised of the following elements, in sequence:

1. an overview of how the study was undertaken;
2. core information pertaining to current qualifications (e.g., costs, enrolment numbers, length of courses);
3. empirical data on diversity;
4. four literature reviews on Academic Support, Work Integrated learning (WIL), Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), and Norms and Standards, respectively, interspersed with empirical data and case studies that support or negate the findings;
5. discussion of the topic of quality in ECD.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### Introduction

At a meeting held in February 2017, the research team, consisting of the core and wider consortium, discussed the research design. This was part of the consortium's commitment to make use of action research which requires collaboration and adaptation of the research process as it evolves.

“Action research aims at solving specific problems within a programme, organization, or community. Action research explicitly and purposefully becomes part of the change process by engaging the people in the program or organization in studying their own problems in order to solve those problem.”

Patton (2015, p. 221)

In this case, the specific problem resides in the history of education in SA which currently manifests a crisis, exemplified by poor throughput of learners. Government aims to resolve this through policy and programme development, starting with the birth-to-4 age group. Formal schooling begins at age six, turning seven, but many children are ill-prepared owing to a lack of access to quality ECD programmes (Van Niekerk et al., 2017). Van Niekerk et al. went on to state that this has the knock-on effect of costly remediation, with learners likely to leave the schooling system before completing Grade 12.

Stats SA (2015) showed that government efforts to improve access to schooling are having an impact as the percentage of individuals with no schooling declined from 10.6% in 2002 to 5.3% in 2014. These statistics are based on a household survey conducted in 2015 which additionally showed that 33% of SA children below the age of four were going to some sort of day care and 45.8% stayed home with parents or guardians. This suggests that there is a need to provide quality, affordable care for the 0-4 age group.

Recognising that TVETs, NPOs and HEIs have a history of working in isolation when addressing teacher training, DHET provided the opportunity for them to collaborate in order to draw from one another's strengths. The intention was to professionalize birth-to-4-years ECCE and to examine the potential for delivery of a quality ECD teacher-training programme (DHET, 2017).

Action research was chosen because it allows for the uniqueness of each institution, and their respective problems, to be understood, while still drawing from their particular competencies to the benefit of the overarching goal of programme development.

### Strategy

The core and wider consortiums were divided into task teams addressing four areas, namely Academic Support, Work Integrated learning (WIL), Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), and Norms and Standards. These were arrived at in a collaborative manner and through a series of discussions. The teams worked collectively and collaboratively to assist in designing

questions for three surveys and to each produce an assigned literature review. The literature reviews are embedded in this report.

Surveys were chosen as the primary tool for gathering data as they are a convenient way of accessing a large number of participants at national level. Although Babbie and Mouton (2010) warned that surveys can be problematic if participants are not sufficiently literate, this was not the case in this project as the participants were drawn from HEIs, TVETs and NPOs, all of whom need, by the nature of their work, to be literate. When conducting Survey 3, a lecturer was present to assist the student subjects, in the event of problems arising in conceptual understanding.

The three surveys were drawn up using the task team's input. The surveys were conducted online over the course of April and May 2017. Survey 3, which was geared toward student input, was an unusual approach in that it was a cross-over between a survey and a focus group interview. A decision was taken to do the survey online owing to time constraints. Transcribing multiple (398) responses was not an option and accurately documenting what each student contributed could have been problematic given the sample size. Consequently, the lecturers/programme heads were asked to oversee the online survey and to allow for discussion on the questions as they were being answered by students. The lead researcher made a point of attending a sample of these sessions to see if they were being implemented correctly.

Survey 1 dealt primarily with basic information, such as where programmes were being offered, numbers of students, fees for courses and staffing. Survey 2 looked more closely at aspects such as actual implementation of programmes, examining curricula, the thinking behind programmes, what types of academic support were provided, how WIL was offered, if RPL was part of programmes, and what role diversity played.

The research method attached to this project was multifaceted in that it was a mixed method (qualitative and quantitative) and allowed for triangulation of data between empirical data, document analysis and literature reviews.

#### Qualitative data

Babbie and Mouton (2010) described qualitative research as a generic approach in social research in which the departure point is that of the insider examining social action. This approach allows for emphasis of the respondents' experiences, it takes into account people's interpretation of events, it is manageable, and it focuses on processes rather than outcomes (Babbie & Mouton, 2010).

In this research, embedded in each of the surveys, were questions that required participants to describe aspects of their responses. This data was organized thematically within the four chosen themes of Academic Support, WIL, RPL, and Norms and Standards. The frequency of each thematic response was judged, providing a level of emphasis, quantification, as well as theme.

### Quantitative data

Quantitative methods were important components of data collection and analysis. Each survey had a number of quantitative questions which assisted in demonstrating the percentage of students, programme co-ordinators, HoDs and institutions as a whole, that held a particular view point or strategy. This allowed for an understanding of prevalence of features and how this might impact on the ultimate goal of programme development.

### Case studies

Flyvbjerg (2011) suggested that, when using a case study approach, the researcher is essentially making a choice about what will be intensively studied or examined. In this project, the choice of case studies was largely a result of what empirical data surfaced and the need to understand quality and diversity in ECD training. For this reason, one of the first case studies that is examined addresses reflective practice which emerged strongly across all three surveys, as well as understanding quality ECD which the BRIDGE Toolkit (2016) emphasized. When constructing their literature reviews, the task teams shared some case studies which are included in the relevant chapters of this report. In this way, the action research approach was addressed.

### Sample size and participants

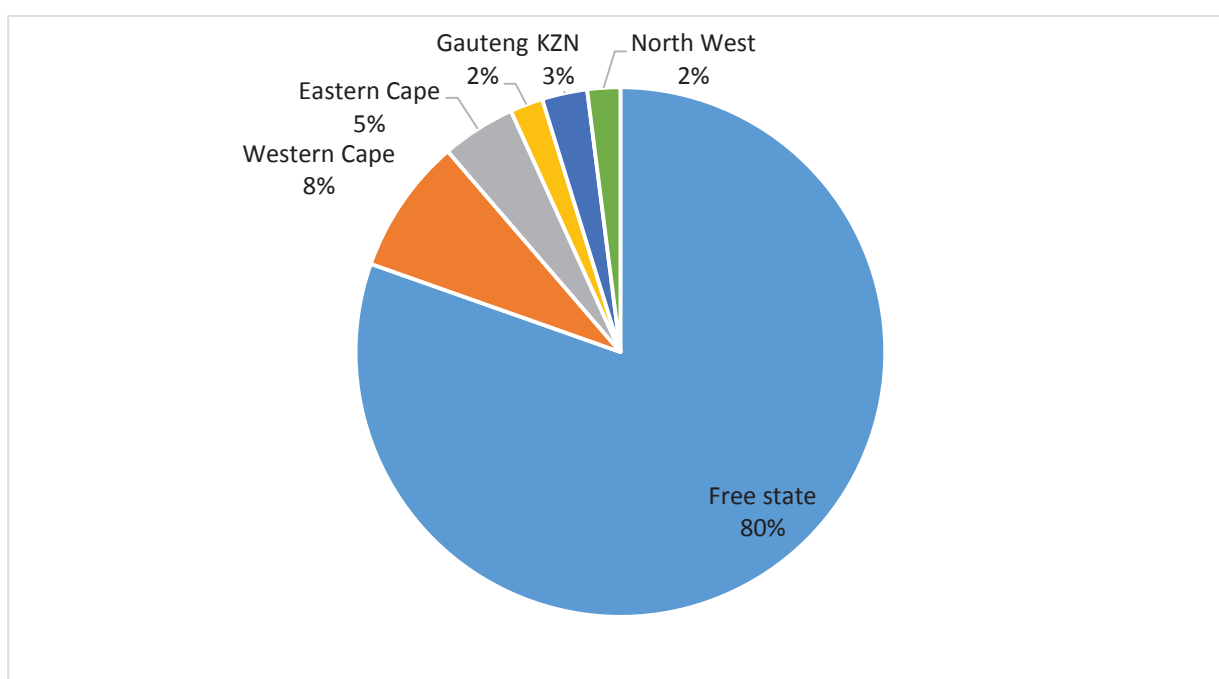
A total of 18 institutions participated across the three surveys. The institutions comprised 10 universities; three TVETs and five NPOs. Survey 3, which was filled in by students, was taken from 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> year students, including NQF ECD Levels 4 and 5 students who complete 1- or 2-year courses. The total number of students sampled was 398. Responses from lecturers indicated that the age of their students fell mainly in the 18-25 age group and 26-35 age groups. The student and institution sample sizes were sufficiently large to draw some conclusions linked to the PIECCE project outcomes, but could not provide generalisations which would necessarily apply in all parts of the country; this would have required larger sample sizes which was beyond the scope of this project.

PIECCE: Output 2: Baseline Findings

**Table 1:** Institutions that responded to Surveys 1, 2 and 3, per province. \*Note that one of the NPOs was represented in two provinces and was therefore counted twice. Note too that there were no respondent institutions in three provinces. A further five institutions (four HEIs and one NPO) participated in the task teams, but not the Surveys.

Provinces	HEIs	NPOs	TVETs	Totals
Free State	1	2	0	3
Eastern Cape	1	2	0	3
Western Cape	0	0	3	3
Gauteng	2	1	0	3
North West	1	0	0	1
KwaZulu-Natal	1	0	0	1
Northern Cape	0	0	0	0
Mpumalanga	0	0	0	0
Limpopo	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5*</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>

The largest number of institutional responses were drawn from Free State, Eastern Cape, Western Cape and Gauteng (Table 1). Respondent institutions also came from KZN and North West, while Northern Cape, Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces were not represented at all. Note that the numbers of respondents were not in proportion to the number of possible respondents per province. Proportionally, HEIs responded relatively well, while NPOs and TVETs much less so. Nevertheless, the degree of cross-institutional collaboration in this research was significant, especially given that it was a novel multi-stakeholder approach. This will stand the PIECCE project in good stead for Output 3 which will focus on programme design.



**Figure 1:** Student responses per province. (Number of student responses = 398)

It is evident that the student responses were drawn primarily from Free State and to a much lesser degree from the other provinces (Fig. 2). This means that the data are skewed and potentially biased. This was the result of a greater effort made at the relevant institution in the Free State to get students to respond together with large differences in the numbers of enrolled students at the various institutions. The impact of this skewed sample on the findings is believed to be minor because a crosscheck of responses from different institutions, relative to those from Free State, suggested a high degree of consistency of opinion. The only area where a misleading bias is likely to have occurred is in regard to the language of instruction. This is likely to have found more favour in Free State than elsewhere, because of the composition of the student body at the relevant institution, as well as its language policy, which meant that most students were studying in their home language; this is not necessarily the case at many other institutions.

As this project was committed to an active research approach, the number of participants changed from the initial survey group, to include some individual responses to specific questions that surfaced in the analysis of empirical data. These additional responses from lecturers and facilitators were used to clarify anomalies that arose from the survey data.

#### Data analysis

The three surveys were conducted online using Google Docs. The data went to a central database hosted by Early Inspiration (an NPO) and were lodged on a shared Google Drive. The raw data for each survey were sent to the Lead Researcher as an Excel spreadsheet and as a PDF overview document. The Lead Researcher analysed these presentations of the data qualitatively, quantitatively, thematically, and in relation to the task-team literature reviews. The findings are presented below.



## FINDINGS

This section presents the findings drawn from the empirical data, document analysis and four task-team literature reviews on Academic Support, WIL, RPL and Norms and Standards.

### Courses offered

A review of courses on offer assists in understanding the gaps in terms of need and how best to proceed with the 0-4 Degree/Diploma. For the purposes of this report, institutional data on NQF ECD Level 4, Level 5, Diploma in Grade R and B.Ed. F.P., are presented.

**Table 2:** Do you offer an NQF Level 4 Qualification in ECD?

Type of Institution	Yes	No	Totals
NPOs	3	1	4
TVETs	2	1	3
HEIs	1	5	6
<b>Totals</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>

It should be noted that NQF ECD Level 4 is offered by TVETs and NPOs, with only one HEI as an exception (Table 1). This qualification is often an entry-level qualification for ECD practitioners as it can be done in place of a matric. There is, therefore, a great need to offer this qualification as it opens the way for further qualifications in ECD/ECCE. With regard to the NPO and TVET sector, in most instances when offering a qualification, it is according to an in-service model that has a period spent in the classroom and a shorter period (“contact session”) spent at the training institution.

**Table 3:** Do you offer an NQF Level 5 Qualification in ECD?

Name of institution	Yes	No	Totals
NPOs	0	4	4
TVETs	2	1	3
HEIs	3	3	6
<b>Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13</b>

NQF ECD Level 5 is offered by two TVETs, no NPOs and three HEIs (Table 2). NQF ECD Level 5 is an important qualification for a practitioner to acquire as it is used as an entrance level into a B.Ed. F.P and, like NQF ECD Level 4, it recognises the practitioner’s prior experience. It builds on the knowledge gained in NQF Level 4 and is therefore meant to equip the practitioner for a more advanced level of study. It is interesting to note that HEIs are beginning to offer this type of qualification.

**Table 4:** Do you offer a Diploma in Grade R?

Name of institution	Yes	No	Totals
NPOs	0	4	4
TVETs	0	3	3
HEIs	1	5	6
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>

The Diploma in Grade R is a specialised qualification as it deals particularly with training students/practitioners for the unique year of Grade R. Grade R is the year that precedes Grade 1 and its purpose is to instil foundational knowledge that will facilitate learning from Grade 1 to Matric. It should be noted that, in the sample taken for this report, only one HEI offered a Diploma in Grade R and that in 2015, DBE indicated that there were only four HEIs offering this qualification, despite there being a need for 78% of Grade R in-service teachers to receive training. The Diploma in Grade R, a NQF Level 6 qualification, was developed to meet specific needs in SA's education system, post 1994, and was part of the government's drive to make Grade R available to as many children as possible.

According to Taylor (2014), by 2011 80% of children had access to Grade R, but it had limited impact on later educational development. Taylor attributed this to the need to improve the quality of programmes on offer, especially in impoverished communities. "Quality is key: a quality curriculum; a quality teacher; a quality response to developmental needs."(Taylor, 2014, p. 2). He suggested that this could be achieved by advocating professionalism in ECD, and practical in-service teacher support, particularly around assessment strategies and establishing foundational literacy. The Diploma in Grade R does articulate with B.Ed. F.P.

**Table 5:** Do you offer a Bachelor of Education (Foundation Phase)?

Type of institution	Yes	No	Totals
NPOs	0	4	4
TVETs	0	3	3
HEIs	6	0	6
<b>Totals</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>

It is not surprising that NPOs did not offer a B.Ed. with the exception of the Centre for Social Development (CSD) which falls under the Education Faculty at Rhodes University and offered an in-service B.Ed. F.P. (Table 4). All of the sampled HEIs offered a B.Ed., which is what could be expected. A TVET, however, may only offer a Degree in collaboration with an HEI, and the same will apply to the 0-4 Diploma or Degree, under development.

### Cost of a courses, length of programmes and numbers of students registered in 2017

In the current climate of “Fees must fall!”, it is important to know what teacher training costs. When examining how to deliver a quality programme, the costs attached to maximizing a positive outcome must be evaluated against present costs and the likelihood of students being able to afford a tertiary education. As this project spans HEIs, TVETs and NPOs, it is useful to see how the different types of institutions costs compare.

The present economic climate places undue pressure on students to obtain employment as quickly as possible. This is further exacerbated by the fact that many in-service students/practitioners in ECD support families and teach in contexts where they receive a minimal wage. This means that they may train only if they receive a bursary or pay off their course over an extended period of time.

As ECD students/practitioners may come from academically challenged environments and usually train in FAL (First Additional Language), they need considerable academic support. This means that, when developing a new programme, there has to be a balance between cost and length of programme, ensuring that costs are kept low, but also that there is sufficient time to give appropriate academic support.

The size of a cohort is evidence of the popularity of a particular programme offering, and popularity is in turn affected by need, access and cost. Below are statistics on numbers of students registered, costs per course, and duration of courses, for NQF ECD Levels 4 and 5; Diploma in Grade R and B.Ed. F.P.(in-service and full-time) (Figs 3-14).

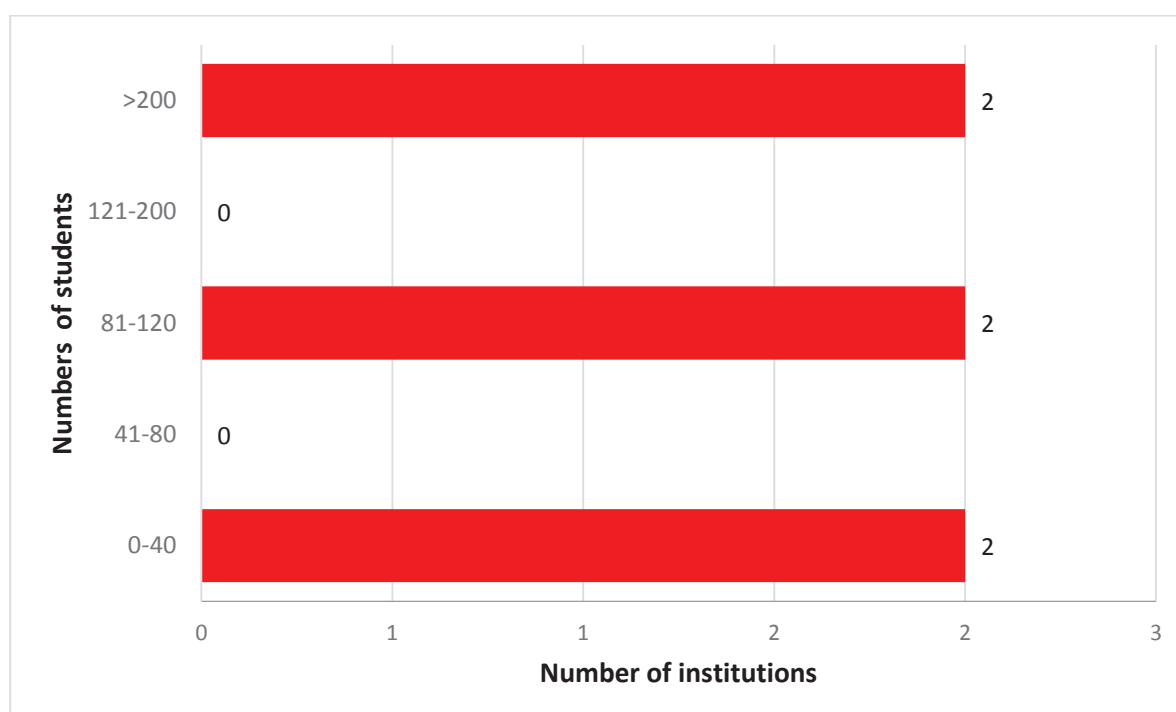


Figure 2: Number of students registered for NQF ECD Level 4.

The highest numbers of students enrolled across the sample (>200) were at one TVET and one NPO (Fig. 2). The second and third highest (121-200 and 81-120) enrolment figures were at TVETs. The low (0-40) enrolment figure was largely in the NPO sector where it is the norm to obtain bursaries for students. It is often problematic to get bursaries for large cohorts and there can be limitations on capacity as NPOs are mostly considerably smaller organizations than HEIs or TVETs. These figures evidenced the trend of government funding being given to TVETs rather than NPOs. In some instances, TVETs do not have sufficient specialized staff or expertise, resulting in staff being responsible for more than one qualification; this is not sustainable and can lead to questionable quality. The latter information was gleaned from an ‘indaba’ held at CSD in 2015, where the NPO sector met with TVETs to discuss ways to support one another.

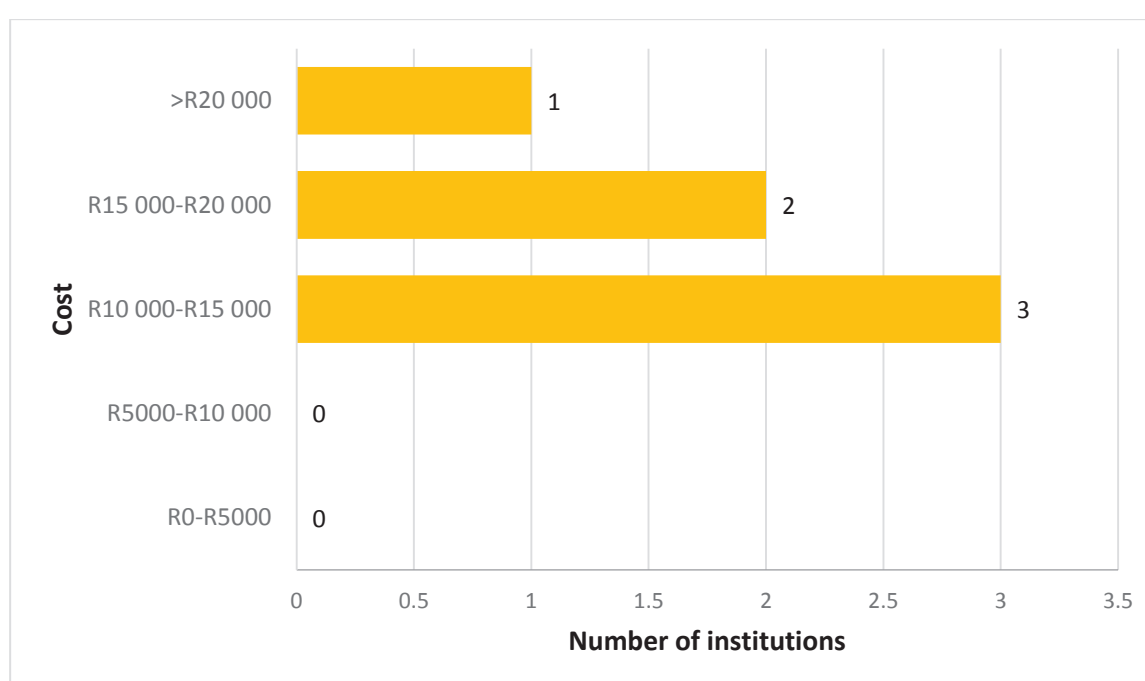


Figure 2: Cost per student for NQF ECD Level 4.

It is useful to note that the cost of R10 000-R20 000 was spread across all types of training institution (Fig. 3). The highest cost of R15 000-R20 000 was from an NPO. As this NPO works in rural areas, it is possible that the increase in cost is a result of the need to visit students on-site; this can be challenging and time-consuming. A long duration of the course adds to cost and, in the latter case, the course runs over two years whereas other training institutions do it in 12 months. Lastly, NPOs are self-funded, which means that they have to cover all the costs of staff, increasing the cost of implementation.

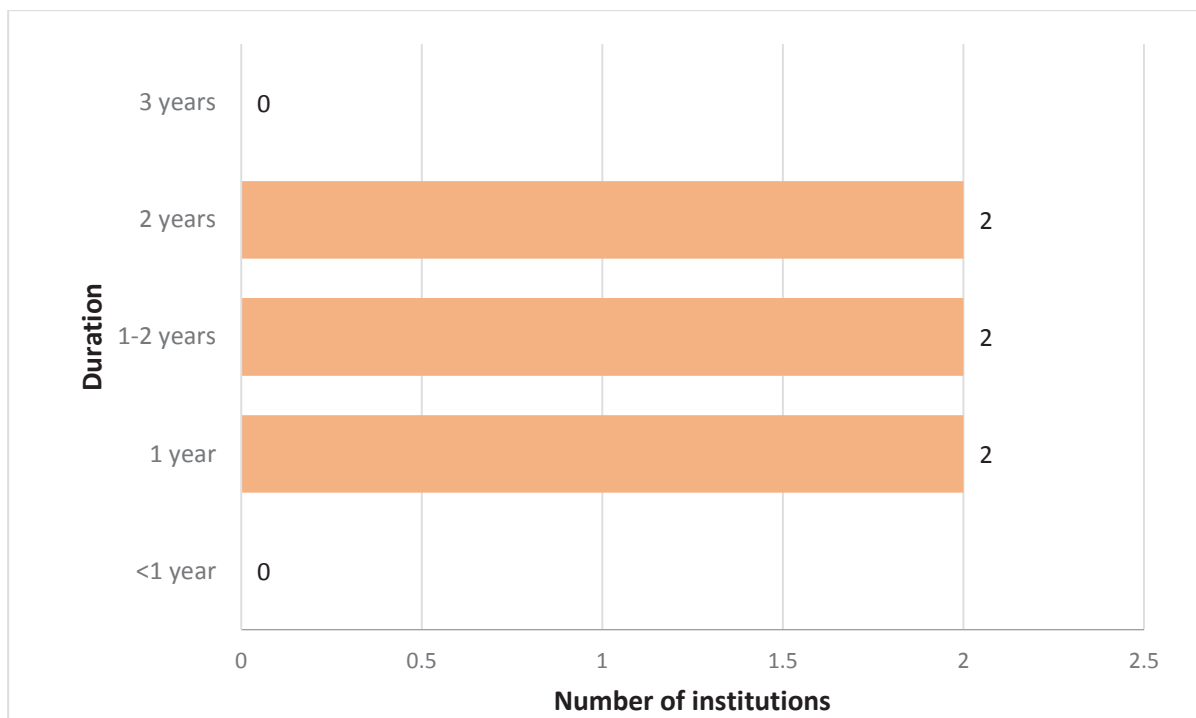


Figure 4: Duration of training programme for NQF ECD Level 4.

Two NPOs have adapted their NQF ECD Level 4 training to run over one year. The rationale behind this was two-fold namely to keep costs down for the student and to allow the student to enter the job market more rapidly. Most of the training institutions take 12-18 months or two years, but none take three years (Fig. 4). This result could be expected for this type of qualification, but a reduction to one year can be seen as preferable.

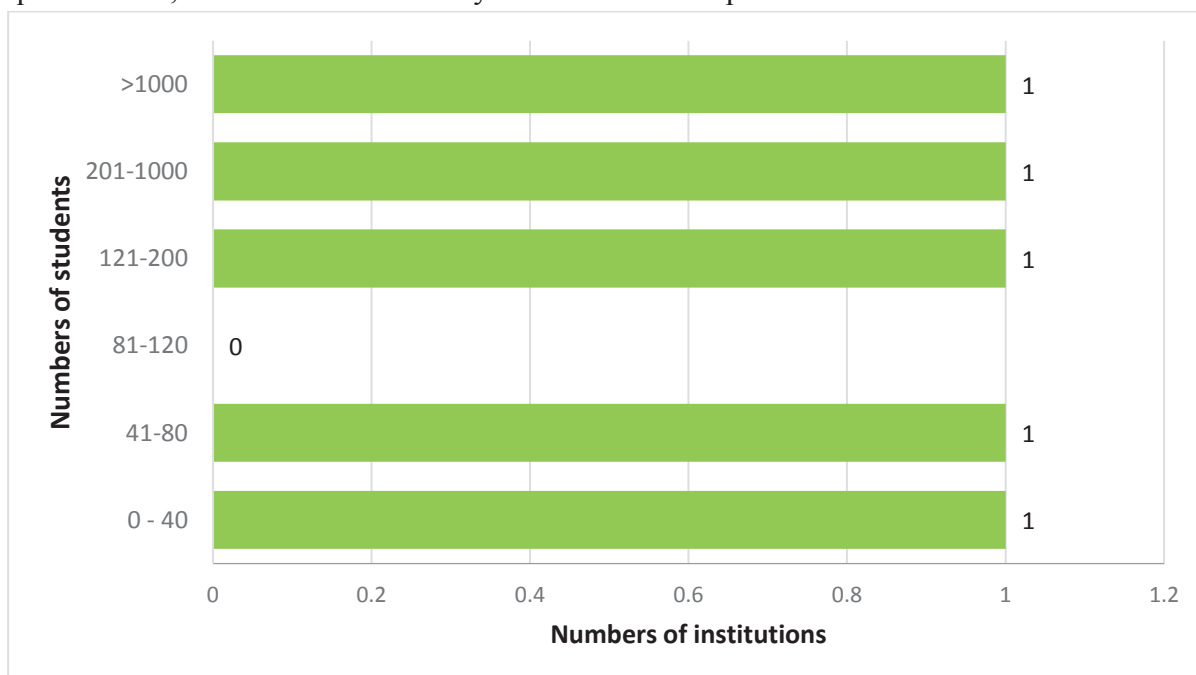


Figure 5: Number of students registered for NQF ECD Level 5.

Note that only five of the 13 respondent institutions offered NQF Level 5 (Fig. 5). The smallest cohorts of (40-80) are with the TVETs and one HEI (which is CSD at Rhodes

University) and that the largest cohort is a distance-learning HEI. The largest cohorts of (>200) reside with a TVET, and an HEI (>1000) that offers a distance learning approach at both national and international level. An interesting aspect of this research is to see that HEIs are now offering a Level 5 qualification as this used to be the job of NPOs and TVETs only.

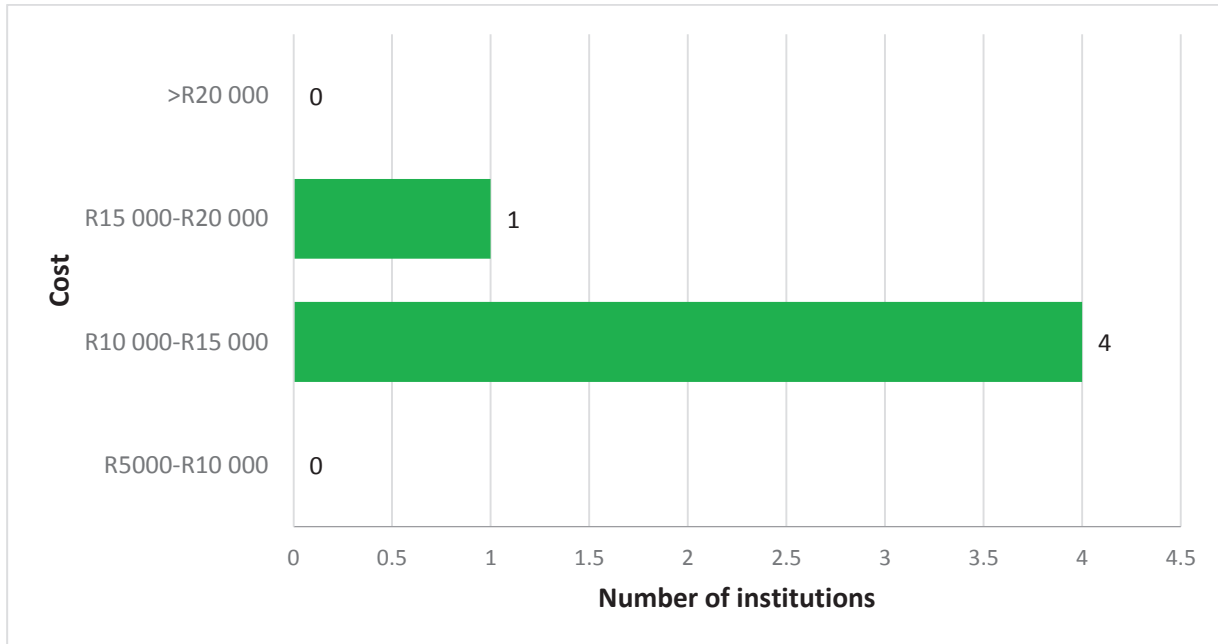
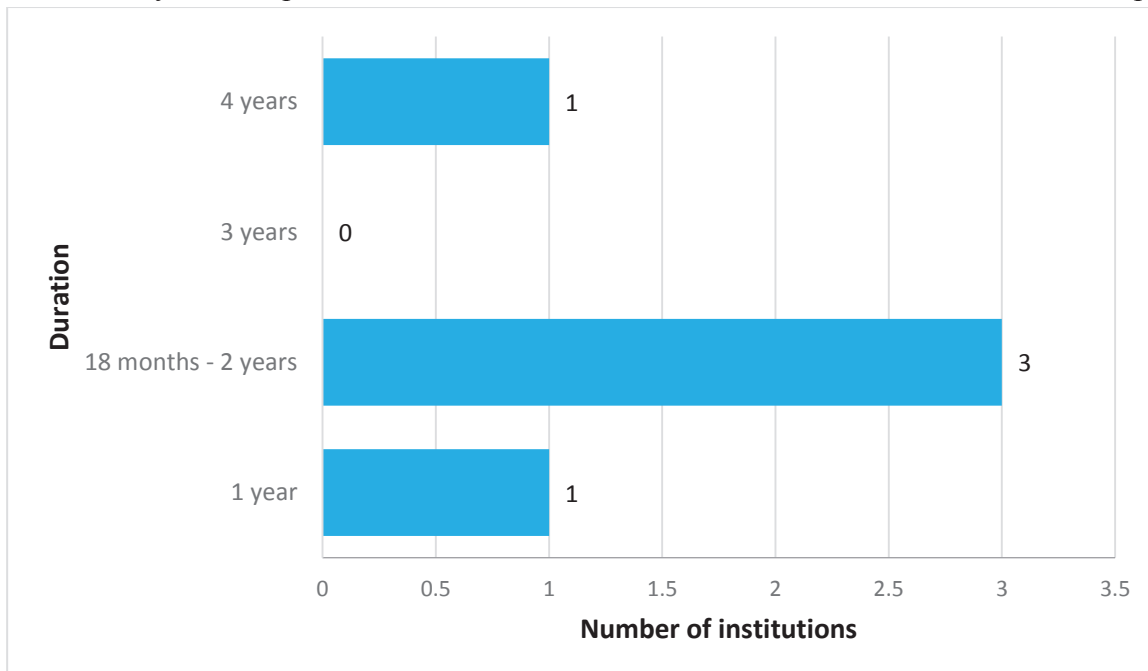


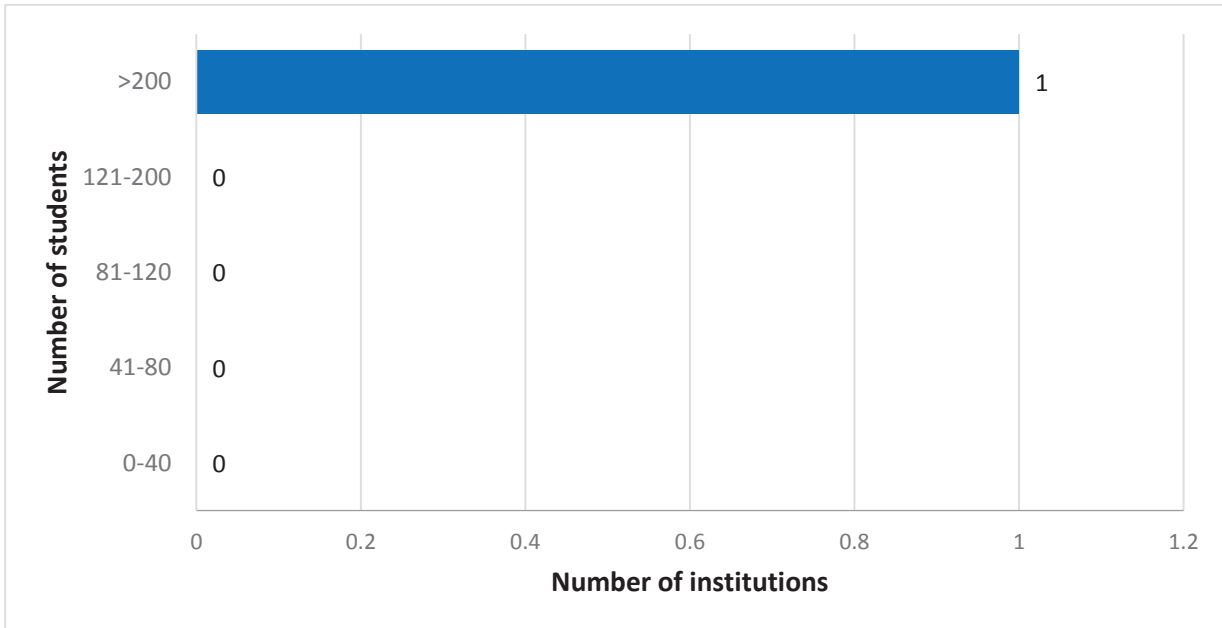
Figure 6: Cost of training NQF ECD Level 5.

NQF Level 5 is generally a longer course than NQF Level 4 and can range from 18 months to four years. This means that it is likely to be costly. HEIs and TVETs require students to fund their own courses. Both the R10 000-R15 000 and the R15 000–R20 000 costs are seen across all of the training institutions (Fig. 6). There is often an assumption that HEIs are considerably more expensive than TVETs or NPOs. The above stats debunk that assumption.



**Figure 7:** Duration of training for NQF ECD Level 5.

The duration of training ranges from one to four years (Fig. 7). Both the shortest (1 year) and the longest term (four years) are offered by HEIs. The shortest is offered by a distance learning university. The NPOs and TVETs run the NQF ECD Level 5 programme from 18 months to two years, with training completed at 18 months and the remaining six months used for administration of qualifications. The reason for the latter is linked to issues around SETA accreditation which is frequently delayed.



**Figure 8:** Number of students registered for Diploma in Grade R.

It should be noted that generally HEIs do not offer Diplomas and that this is usually done through TVETs, however, in the sample, there was only one participant, an HEI, that offered the Diploma in Grade R (Fig. 8).

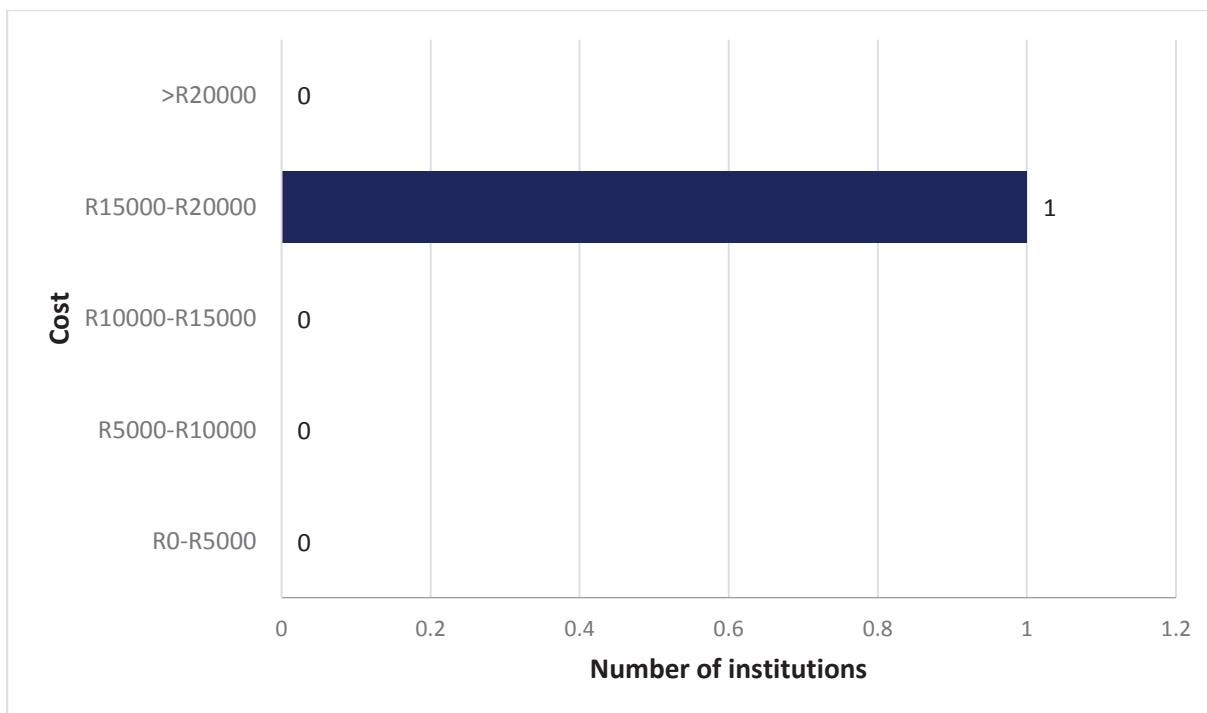


Figure 9: Cost per student for Diploma in Grade R.

The cost of the Diploma in Grade R is within the cost of both the NQF Levels 4 and 5 qualifications namely R15 000–R20 000 per annum, but is a longer course being implemented over three years (Fig. 9).

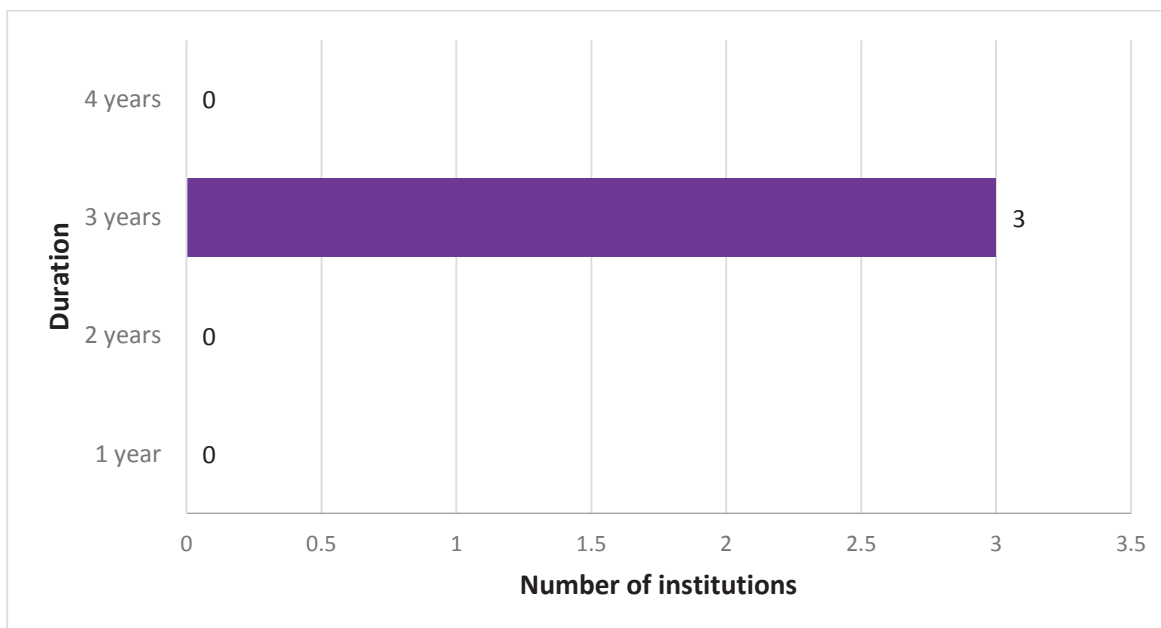


Figure 10: Duration of training for the Diploma in Grade R.

It is not unusual for a Diploma to be three years long and shorter than a Degree (Fig. 10). The model presented by the participating institution was full-time study and could be done online at distance.



PIECCE: Output 2: Baseline Findings

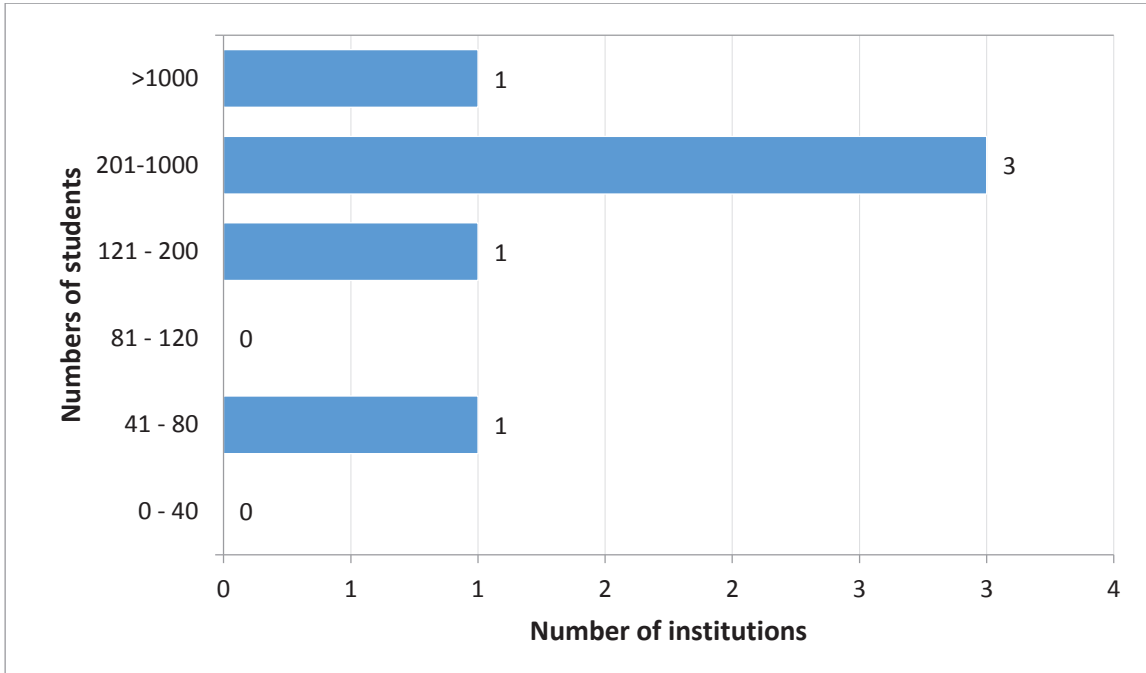


Figure 11: Number of students registered for B.Ed. F.P.

The spread of student numbers showed a range from a relatively small cohort of (40-80) to a relatively large one of over a 1000 students (Fig. 11). The small cohort is an in-service model whilst the larger cohorts are all full-time with the largest being a distance-learning model.

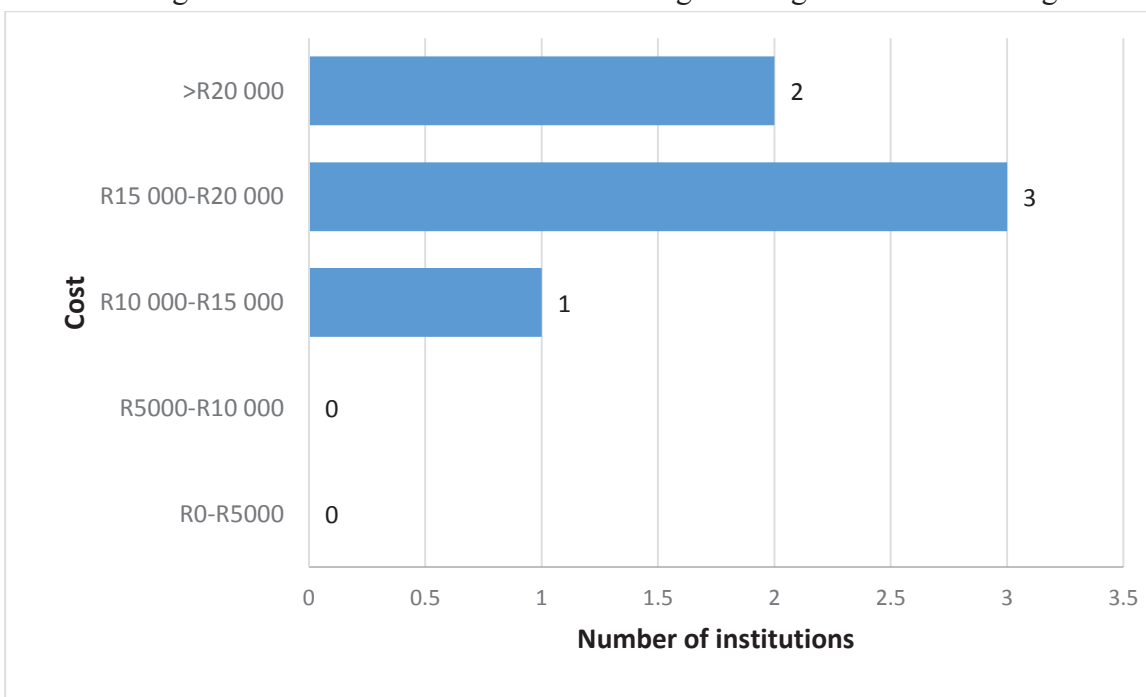
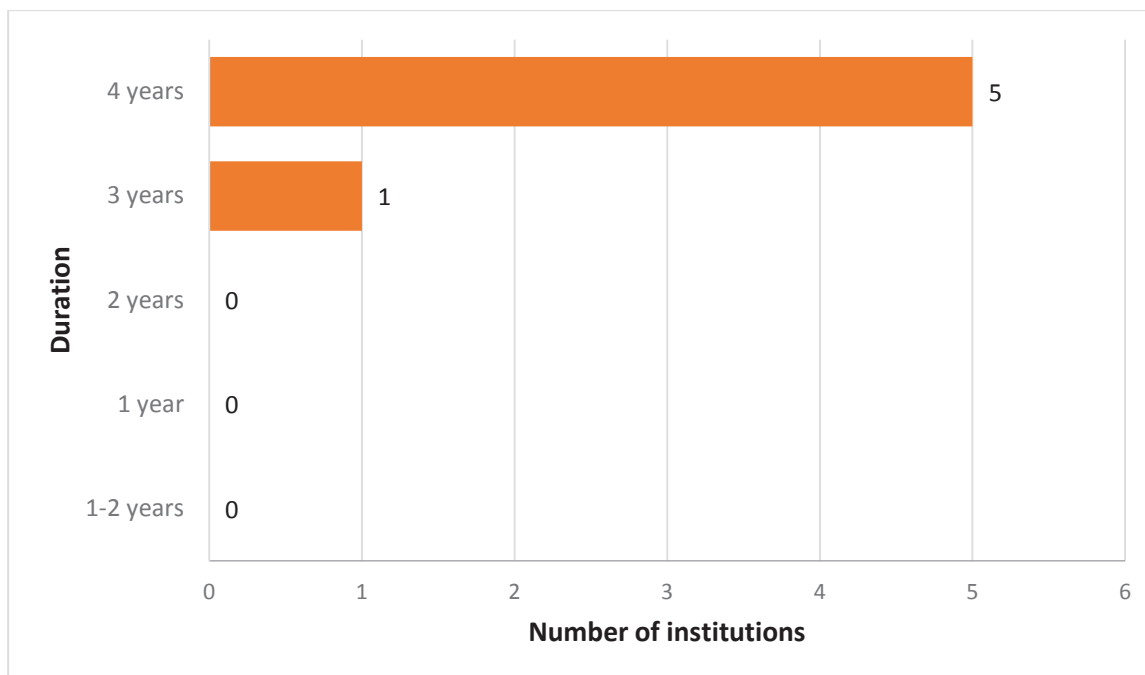


Figure 12: Cost per student for B.Ed. F.P.

The lowest cost of between R10 000-R15 000 was for the in-service model which only had four contact sessions per annum (Fig. 12). The more expensive costs were for the full-time model of >R15 000. It is interesting to note that, while there was some difference in cost between the NQF qualifications, the margin was not as high as could be expected.

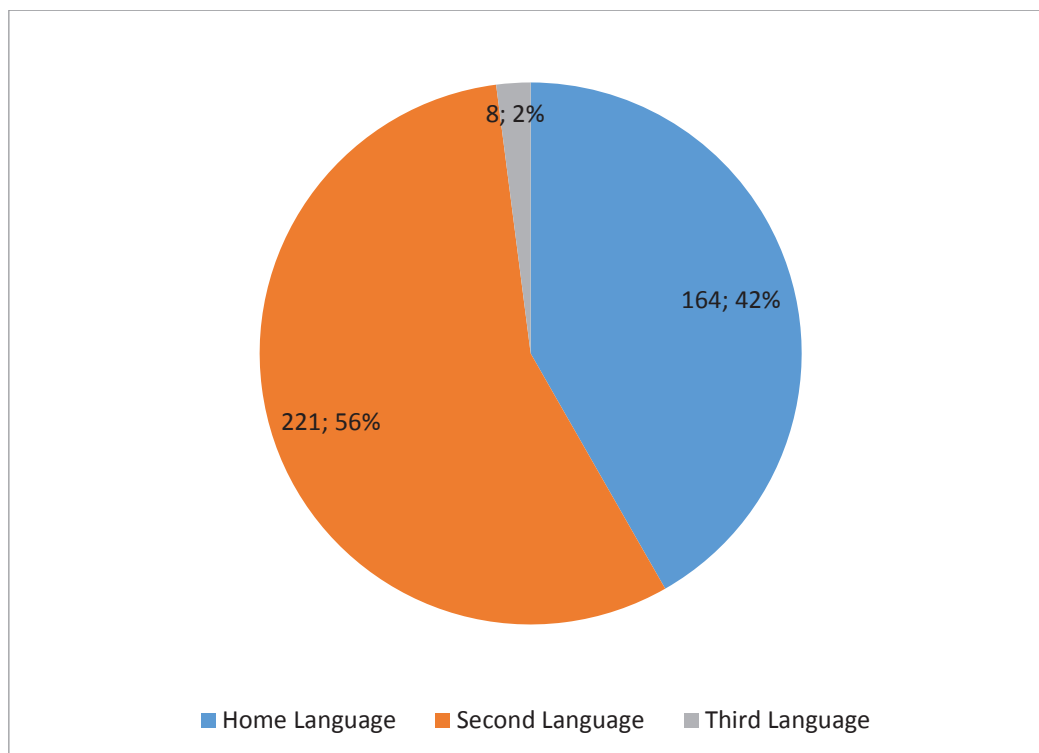


**Figure 13:** Length of training for B.Ed. F.P.

It is useful to note the difference of a year in length of training between the in-service and full-time model of implementation (Fig. 13). The reason for this was that in the in-service model, a year of credit was given to experience and entry to qualification at NQF Level 5. Only one of the participants in this research project was currently offering the in-service model.

#### Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT)

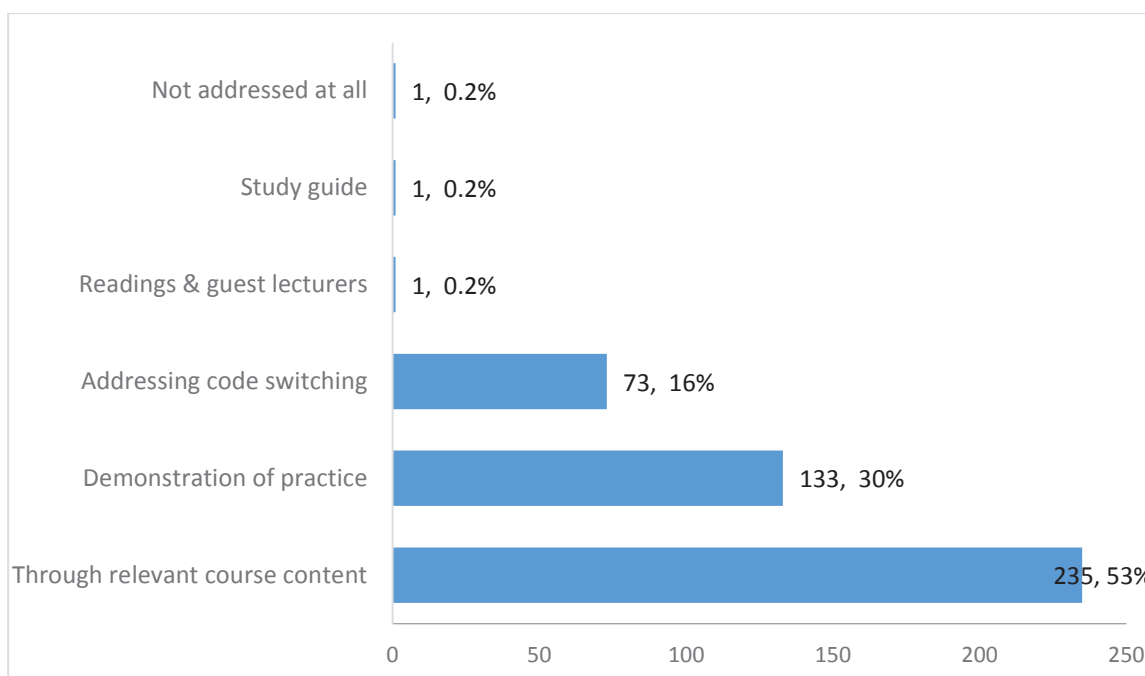
It is often assumed that students/practitioners are not learning in HL (Home Language) but in FAL (First Additional Language). While 56% were learning in FAL, 42% are learning in HL (Fig. 14). This is not a true representation of the whole of SA, but rather a result of the students that responded to the survey, many of whom came from one particular institution in the Free State where they were mostly learning in HL.



**Figure 14:** Language of learning. (Number of respondent students = 393)

In addition, many students/practitioners were not teaching in HL, but rather in FAL, even though children are meant to be learning in their mother tongue from birth to Grade 3. There is frequently pressure brought to bear by parents on schools to make English the medium of instruction as it is seen to be the language that will ‘open doors’ for children as they progress through their academic careers. Some of the HEIs participating in this project have been examining their policy around LoLT under the current pressure for universities to be transformative and responsive to the call from students to ‘decolonise’ their curricula and practice.

The bar graph below shows that according to the student survey, the majority of training institutions are specifically addressing the issue of the multilingual classroom when training their student/practitioners. This was supported by Survey 2 in which the training institutions indicated that 67% assisted their students/practitioners with preparing to teach in a multilingual classroom and 33% said they did not do so. Some approaches have been through demonstration of practice and through exploring code switching, which is common practice in FAL classrooms. It should be noted that very few students/practitioners indicated that the topic was not addressed at all and that there was minimal usage of guest lecturers or readings on the topic.



**Figure 15:** In what ways has your training institution addressed the issue of multilingual classrooms? (Number of student responses = 444)

Survey 2 showed that English is the main LoLT used for training (95%) with Afrikaans second (26%), isiXhosa third (16%) and isiZulu fourth (5%). (The percentages refer to courses offered and some courses were offered in more than one language, therefore the percentages add up to more than 100%.) This suggested that the majority of training institutions were implementing in English, with African languages continuing to be the less popular choice. The reason that is frequently given for the latter is that African languages have not sufficiently evolved to include ‘scientific terminologies’ and that there are inadequate HL resources available to students who are studying further. In the NPO sector, however, there has been a recent drive to translate training materials into isiXhosa and study guides into HL.

### Understanding diversity

The National Development Plan 2030 (RSA, p. 300) stated:

“The education system will play a greater role in building an inclusive society, providing equal opportunities and helping all South Africans to realise their full potential, in particular those previously disadvantaged by apartheid policies, namely black people, women and people with disabilities.”

Early intervention together with understanding the importance of the first 1000 days, demonstrate that with the appropriate training, teachers are able to provide support to parents and children that are vulnerable because of issues such as developmental lags; the challenges of the multilingual classroom and the legacy of apartheid. It is therefore easy to see why one of the drivers of the PIECCE project is to gain an understanding of how to address diversity when training our teachers in the 0-4 age group.

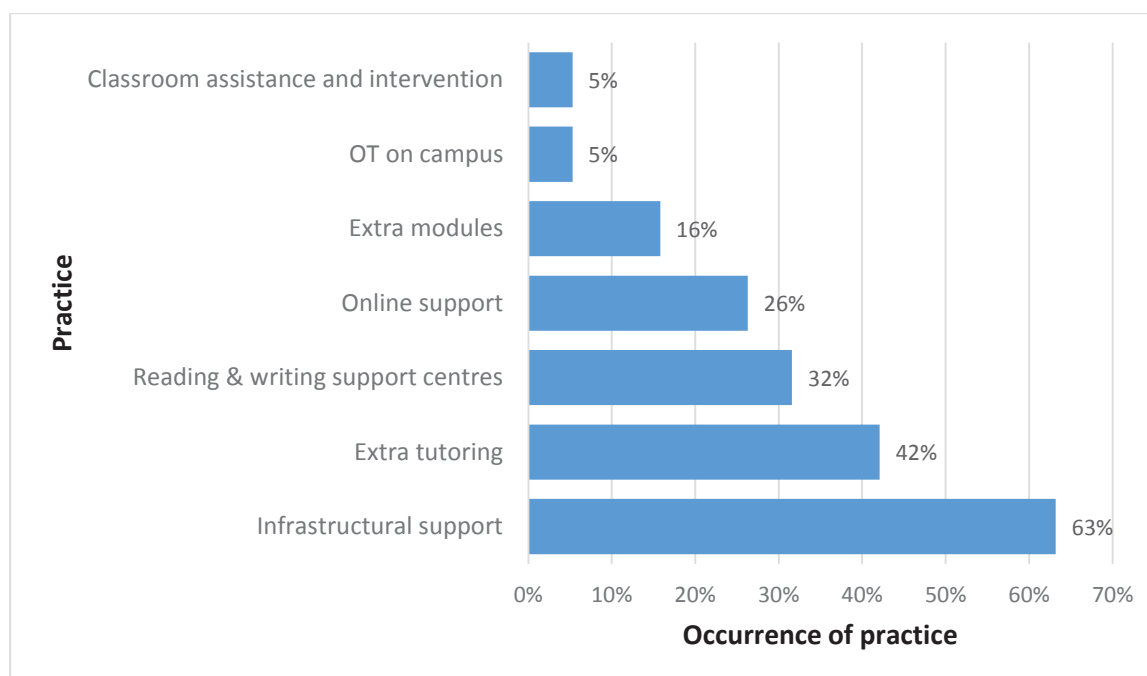
Student responses to Survey 3 indicated that the number of modules (across all courses) devoted to special needs, varied from one to six, but five and six modules were rare responses and possibly not accurate. One module on special needs was the most common response from students, suggesting that special needs do not receive adequate attention in ECD qualifications. (Unfortunately, accurate quantitative information on course content on special needs was not collected, therefore a definitive statement on numbers of modules, per course, per institution cannot be made.)

Surveys 1 and 2 revealed that there was a tendency to approach diversity in a separate rather than an integrated manner and, in some instances, devoting only one module, for example, 'Inclusive Education Studies', to the topic and this being a compulsory module covering all aspects of diversity. This suggested that there was a belief that it is a topic that can be addressed 'once-off' and that students will have acquired all the necessary tools. Other institutions adopted an approach of breaking up the issues of special needs and diversity into separate modules for example, HIV and Aids; developmental lags, and the challenges of multilingual classrooms. There was a minority that indicated that they provided opportunities to allow students to observe and interact with learners with special needs; however, this appeared to be limited. What did not seem to be addressed, was specific training in how to support teachers who are working with learners who have ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and FAS (Foetal Alcohol Syndrome). Given that these are found to be increasingly evident in foundation phase classrooms, perhaps these are topics that need specific attention.

In terms of number of notional hours spent equipping students with the skills to address special needs and diversity, these varied from 10-160 hours and were mostly dealt with in either the first year of training or the fourth year. This raises the question of whether or not the thinking lies in preparing the student as early as possible, or preparing them just before they graduate, and why either is considered desirable.

It should be noted that in the NPO sector the institutional response showed a more integrated approach to diversity and special needs with these aspects being addressed continuously over the year or 18-month courses. This may be because the courses are shorter than a four year Degree and therefore there is a sense that there is less time for the student to absorb the necessary skills. It may also be that most NPO training is in-service and therefore the practitioners were coming into the training with some assumed experience and knowledge. When providing support for students who themselves have disabilities or learning challenges, Survey 2 evidenced the following:

## PIECCE: Output 2: Baseline Findings



**Figure 16:** Institutional support in place for students with disabilities/learning challenges. (Number of institutions surveyed = 13)

It appeared that there was an emphasis on providing infrastructural support and extra tutoring (Fig. 16). It is interesting to note that classroom assistance and intervention for the student was limited, however. This was perhaps linked to costs attached to assigning a student with a personal facilitator.

The array of modules and approaches suggest that diversity is a complex area and that like quality, it needs further discussion in order to isolate strategies that will genuinely serve to develop the student/practitioner understanding of the topic. In so doing it is hoped that the student/practitioner will enter classrooms with a sensitivity coupled with the tools to address issues of diversity in an appropriate and mindful manner.

## ACADEMIC SUPPORT

### Background

ITEC reported in a learning brief on the DGMT website, that there are low enrolment levels in the ITEC Level 4 ECD training course. The explanation given was that: “in the Eastern Cape more than 50% of the women aged 25-50 (the typical age of ECD practitioners) have completed no more than Grade 10 and are therefore not eligible for the Level 4 qualification.” ITEC also stated that the practitioners who do have the equivalent of at least Grade 11 (Standard 9 or Level 3) in communication and mathematical literacy, usually struggle with the reading and writing required to learn effectively at Level 4. This is reflective of the national ECD picture in varying degrees.

Spaull (2013, p. 7) reported that:

“Irrespective of which subject or grade one chooses to test, most South African children are performing significantly below the curriculum, often failing to acquire functional numeracy and literacy skills. Apart from the 25% of schools that are mostly functional, South African schools as they currently stand do not, and arguably cannot, impart to pupils the foundational knowledge and skills they should be acquiring at school.”

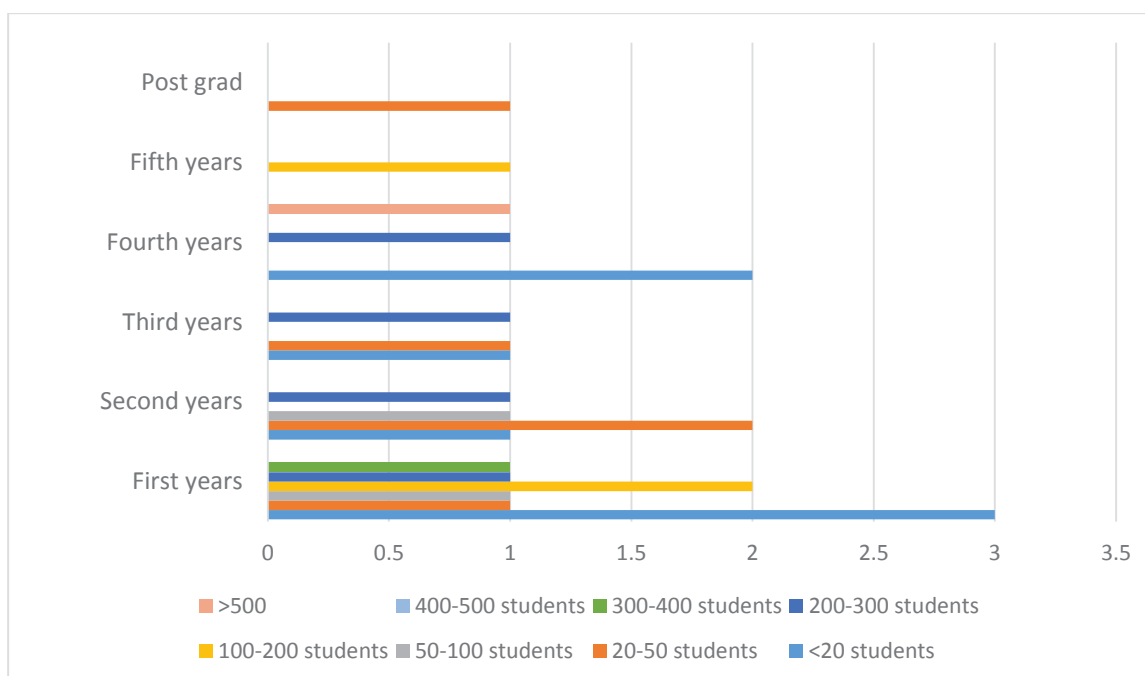
It can thus be suggested that even Grade 12 graduates or ECD practitioners wanting to further their education, be it from a Level 4 legacy/occupational qualification or from Level 5 certificate/diploma, may lack certain foundational skills, conceptual knowledge, language development, critical thinking skills and life skills necessary to support their further study toward Level 6 and 7 qualifications.<sup>1</sup>

It is from this disadvantage or unpreparedness that ‘academic support’ arose. Torr (cited in Boughey, 2010) noted that academic support was “developed to assist students without the necessary background to be able to benefit immediately from lectures and tutorials”.

Empirical data from Survey 1 showed that 80% of the sampled training institutions offered academic support. This was evident across all types of institution. The 20% that said they did not offer academic support had interpreted the question to mean that academic support was a separate entity and that they did offer support, but in an integrated manner. 54% stated that the majority of academic support was given in the first year of study.

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<sup>1</sup> “Higher education is suffering an ‘articulation gap’, defined as a mismatch or discontinuity between the learning requirements of higher education programs and the actual knowledge and competencies of first-time entering students. In other words, there is a mismatch between the statutory minimum requirements for admission to higher education and the level of academic preparedness that is needed for succeeding in conventional higher education programs.” (Fisher & Scott, 2011)



**Figure 17:** Estimates of how many students receive on-campus academic support. (Number of institutions surveyed = 13)

Academic support was spread across all years of study and the institutional survey indicated that this was irrespective of institutional type (Fig. 17). The smaller cohorts were to be found in the NPO sector and the larger cohorts in HEIs. There is, however, evidence that the post-graduate student receives minimal academic support, which is no doubt based on the assumption that, after a number of years of study, they no longer require it. First- and second-year students appear to get the most support, with a tapering off by third and fourth year.

The glossary of education states that the term ‘academic support’ may refer to a wide variety of instructional methods, educational services, or school resources provided to students in an effort to help them accelerate their learning progress, catch up with their peers, meet learning standards, or generally succeed. In practice, academic support encompasses a broad array of educational strategies, including tutoring sessions, supplemental courses, summer learning experiences, after-school programmes, teacher advisors, and volunteer mentors, as well as alternative ways of grouping, counselling, and instructing students.

Arising from the review, it is suggested that academic support is largely given as a separate or isolated programme and that this makes it difficult for students to marry what they learn in academic support with their course as a whole. Therefore, it is suggested that an integrated response that allows for strong mentorship would be more effective and would build students’ confidence.

In Survey 1, 56% of the different training institutions indicated that they have an integrated approach to academic support, however, the student Survey 3 showed the opposite with a heavy emphasis on use of tutorials, advice from lecturers, extra language modules, study guides, discussion groups and readings. In Survey 2, institutional heads noted that workbooks



are a popular means of providing academic support, but the student survey found little mention of this. In the spirit of active research, individual lecturers were approached to respond as to how they made use of workbooks. As one of the institutions is a distance-learning model of implementation, they noted that they do not have workbooks, but rather a form of study guide which has an ‘activity based’ emphasis. Another institution responded that they also do not have workbooks but rather module guides with specific directions for an activity linked to a particular text. Two NPOs related that they make use of workbooks specific to academic literacy and numeracy. The workbooks have a series of activities that the student must complete over a period of a week whilst receiving training on the aforementioned modules. This is in keeping with the student survey which did make mention of the use of study guides.

Developmental education “understands academic life as a form of social practice to which some had more access than others because of previous social and cultural experiences, and acknowledges that access to academic practice is only developed over time, through engagement with learning in the disciplines and through support, which was embedded in those disciplines” (Boughey, 2010).

An effective transition to university (or the next level) is “the degree to which previous education and previous experiences have equipped the student for the expectations and demands they will encounter” (Conley, 2008, p. 24). In thinking about how ECD practitioners transition from Level 4 and 5 to Level 6, or Level 6 to Level 7, we turn to the literature on developmental education programmes and provide the following summary:

- Developmental education is implemented through a number of strategies such as remedial classes (Brock, 2010; Bettinger & Long, 2008), supplemental classes (Barlow, Villarejo & Merna, 2004; Blanc, DeBuhr & Martin, 1983), extended curriculum (Boughey, 2010), tutoring one-on-one in groups, using both peers (Topping, 1996) and specialists (Arikan, 2006), technological IC (Jaffer, Ng’ambi & Czerniewicz, 2017) and learning centres (Cruickshank, Newell & Cole, 2003).
- Developmental education takes place while children are still at school or bridging courses before university, or as part of a university programme. The programme can be of short duration, from orientations to foundational support (first two years), or of longer duration. Penn-Edwards and Donnison (2011) explained that transition is an ongoing process of continual learning. “It’s getting used to how to learn it, rather than what we’re learning, because that’s more a continual thing...how to help yourself.” They posit that students need different programmes at different times. The empirical data showed that academic support was given across institutional type from first year to post-grad, but with most emphasis on first- and second-year students (Fig. 19). In addition, 44% said that their academic support programmes were compulsory.
- The focus or content of these developmental programmes was on the following:
  - Maths, English reading and writing (Brock, 2010). The empirical data showed that this was done largely in the NPO sector through their programme of “Fundamentals” which is designed to bridge the gap between school and

tertiary education. This is particularly important for ECD practitioners who have not obtained a matric.

- Information literacy (Salisbury & Karasmanis, 2011; Johnston & Webber, 2003; Jacobs, 2007; Owusa-Ansah, 2004). The empirical data showed that some institutions do have specific training sessions for computer literacy, but this was done on a small scale.
- Socio-emotional, such as community or strong peer networks (Barlow, Villerejo & Merna, 2004) and persistence, GRIT, resilience and ability to ask for help (Casazza & Silverman, 2017), study skills (Blanc, DeBuhr & Martin, 1983) or learning to learn (Arikan, H). The empirical evidence showed that students are exposed to discussion groups, tutorial programmes and that lecturers have established WhatsApp groups to support students through the processing of assignments.
- Subject-specific skills (core academic skills, styles of scientific writing and thinking, etc.) and reinforcement of content knowledge (Garbett, 2003). In Institutional Survey 1, 63% of the participants indicated that they had an on-campus support writing centre with the emphasis of support being given at the undergrad level. This type of facility was not part of the NPO sector, but more part of the HEIs and one TVET. The cost of providing academic support as a separate programme was R500-R1000 extra per student.
- The skill and content above is integrated <sup>2</sup>in the subject specific knowledge of a discipline or offered as ‘discrete’ activities or courses. Wingate cautioned:
 

“Regardless of student needs, most universities still follow a remedial practice of learning support, offering extra-curricular skills courses in student support units or study skills centres. These generic skills courses address organisational techniques such as time management and revising for exams, as well as academic tasks such as essay writing, referencing, note taking and reading. For the latter, generic courses are not effective. Furthermore, the extra-curricular provision is based on the perception that effective learning at university requires a ‘set of atomised skills’ (Lea and Street, 1998, p. 159). The predominant ‘skills approach’ equals learning with ‘skills’. Targeting academic reading, essay writing, or problem solving with generic, decontextualized courses implies that they are context-independent techniques that can be practised in the void. However, they are complex tasks that require subject knowledge and, above all, an understanding of the nature of knowledge in the specific discipline.” (Wingate, 2007, p. 393)

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<sup>2</sup> The ‘methods’ of integration are discussed in the model section.

**Table 6:** Types of academic support identified by institutions

Type of Support	Percentage
Language support	95%
Writing support	90%
Reading	70%
Individual support linked to understanding assignments	85%
Support given as a result of disability, e.g., blind or deaf	35%

Analysis of the table above which was derived from institutional Survey 2, shows that teacher training institutions place the greatest emphasis in terms of academic support on language. This is not surprising given that 56% of the sampled students were studying in FAL. As writing forms the basis for assessment in assignments, 90% of institutions considered this to be an important area of academic support. Coupled with this is the 85% of individual support given to assisting students in understanding the requirements of their assignments.

- Completion of developmental courses are either required of all students or institutions offer these courses or opportunities to those who are identified (entry assessment scores or course failure) as needing them. The latter students however do not use these offers of support due to stigma and the additional requirements (time) that often adds to the already ‘burdened’ student, that is, balancing work and family commitments. Survey three of the empirical data indicated that students were appreciative of the academic support they received with comments such as:
  - “Facilitators explained the work to me when I didn’t understand.”
  - “I thank them because they gave me contact details to contact them when I experienced problems.”
  - “I love training because I get support.”
  - As these were not isolated comments across a sample of 398, it could be said that mostly students are responsive to academic support.
- Developmental courses that are credit-bearing allocate credits for discrete courses or embed some credits within the subject knowledge course itself, that is, students must attend a number of tutorials which will address information literacy or study skills using the course material being studied. These credits are either part of the qualification or institutional credits, that is, the student cannot progress into the qualification until these requirements have been fulfilled. This was supported in the empirical data which evidenced across all institutional types, the use of separate academic support modules that students were required to complete in order to obtain their qualification. In the NPO sector the use of ‘Fundamentals’ allows practitioners who have less than a matric the opportunity to receive academic support through the completion of literacy and numeracy fundamentals modules.
- The pedagogy is ‘most often’ described as interactive/engaging/activity based and aimed at problem solving and discussion with peers, tutors and lecturers either in person or on virtual platforms. The idea is for learners to test their explanations with others and therefore to ‘fail sometimes’ and receive feedback. Some programmes do

include lecture style classes to introduce concepts or reinforce prior foundational content knowledge. The empirical data from Surveys 1 and 2 revealed that lecturers/facilitators are often spending one-on-one time with students responding to their questions or communicating via WhatsApp or email. This is further supported by students having individual sessions with lecturers/facilitators. The use of tutorials and discussion groups were cited by students as a regular method of academic support.

- Many of these programmes were described as resource intensive/costly, but the alternative (low throughput rates and lack of employable graduates) was viewed as more costly. What appeared to be problematic when examining the costs of academic support was seen in the qualitative data from Surveys 1 and 2, showing that lecturers/facilitators were spending a lot of personal time supporting their students/practitioners, re-marking assignments and providing individual mentorship. The costs attached to actual resources was relatively minimal (R500-R1000) per student, but providing the time necessary to allow for a shift in knowledge and skills, speaks to the issue of how to implement a quality programme effectively.
- The language used is English so as to foster lifelong learning.

“Students require a range of proficiencies to meet coursework demands, such as class participation and presentations, essays, case studies and more practical teaching assignments. The practicum placements require specific proficiencies in written and spoken English, along with detailed knowledge of the cultures of schooling and context-specific ways of interacting with colleagues and students. There are also the English language requirements of employer bodies, which must be met.” (Cruikshank & Newell, 2003).
- Assessment or impact is measured by standardised tests (Maths and English), persistence in qualification, throughput rates, number of courses or credits successfully achieved. In Survey 3, 91% of students indicated that they were fairly assessed. The only criticism raised was in the weighting of assessment as students displayed a preference for more emphasis on their teaching practicals. It was, however, clear that assessment was spread across a variety of methods, for example, presentations, written assignments, group projects and practical lessons.
- As students progressed up the levels in NQF, they were required to meet certain level descriptors and, particularly for teachers, this involved transforming ECD practitioners’ craft knowledge, characterised more by its concreteness and contextual richness, to professional/scientific knowledge which is generalizable and context independent. Stott and Bowman warned:

“The changing nature of child development theory and research, the fact that it can only approximate reality, and its reflection of particular socio-cultural positions make it a slippery base for practice. Still, formal child development knowledge is necessary to teacher preparation-as is practice. They must, however, be grounded in their ambiguity and supplemented by attention to reflection on practice and self-knowledge. Finally, the process of teacher education itself is a critical element that must model a community of supportive relationships that create meaningful and transformational learning experiences.” (Stott & Bowman, 1996, p. 169)

## Models

This section briefly outlines some current academic support models gleaned from the literature.

### Information literacy and the Strathclyde Class (Johnston & Webber, 2003)

The aim of the Strathclyde Class, or information literacy class, is to provide students with a foundation in information seeking and communication skills, to enable more confident and competent performance during Degree studies, enhance employability and contribute to capacity for lifelong learning.

The class includes development of technical competence in selection and use of information strategies and technologies, but emphasises evaluation of information in relation to specific contexts, needs and uses. Key themes include information literacy as a concept; searching and browsing; selecting and evaluating information; writing appropriately and effectively; and the information economy. The teaching strategy adopted engages students in active development and regulation of their learning rather than passive response and examination of recall. This literacy class forms the keystone in students' information literacy education. However, it is just one aspect, in what is termed the information-literate student and information-literate university, that is, part of a bigger system.

Research thus far has indicated that usage of information literacy skills by students, teachers and people in the workplace, has positive outcomes. Students' progression and retention is higher, teachers' teaching methods were more innovative, and alumni felt that an understanding of information literacy gave them a distinct advantage in job finding and seeking promotion, as well as ability to apply these scholarly methods to the workplace. This model of student and university has also been used in a project to develop an information-literacy framework, which links secondary and tertiary education (Crawford & Irving, 2007). The aim is to produce secondary school leavers with a skill set which higher education can recognize and develop, or which can be applied to the world of work directly.

### Remedial English and Student Development – Opening Doors (Brock, 2010; Bloom & Somno, 2005)

Opening Doors is described not as developmental programmes, but as learning communities. Learning communities are defined as “any one of a variety of curricular structures that link together several existing courses – or actually restructure the material entirely – so that students have opportunities for deeper understanding and integration of the material they are learning” (Bloom & Somno, 2005, p. 13).

Opening Doors Learning Community programme uses the common paired or clustered-course model. Participating students are divided into groups of up to 25 each. The students in each group form a learning community, taking three courses together: an English course, usually at remedial/developmental level; an academic course required for their major, called a “content course”, and a one-credit freshman orientation class called Student Development 10.

The latter, which is open to all Kingsborough freshmen, teaches time-management, study skills, college rules and procedures, exploration of learning styles, career exploration, multicultural diversity, and other topics relevant to a new college student.

Faculty were specialists in the field and worked together as a group. They also reviewed student progress as a group. The idea was to build social cohesion between students and faculty and make subject matter more meaningful to students by integrating content and helping students apply concepts and lessons across courses. Faculty who teach the linked courses have a reduced teaching load, allowing them to meet regularly during the semester to discuss student progress, identify strategies to assist students having difficulties, and coordinate assignments. In addition, this learning community has enhanced tutoring. This means that tutors are assigned to developmental English courses and may actually attend the classes; students access tutoring by visiting a central lab, and receive counselling and financial supports such as book vouchers.

This model was tracked over two years and students reported feeling integrated, engaged in courses and passed more courses and earned more credits in the first semester and passed an English skills-assessment test. Results were statistically significant, but modest. Among students who had failed both the reading and writing skills tests prior to enrolment, 33% of Opening Doors students had retaken and passed both tests one year later. Community colleges are still testing strategies designed to promote persistence and academic success for low-income students. The strategies involve curricular reforms, expanded support services for students, and financial aid enhancements.

#### ECD example: IBEST

Only one ECD-specific study was located, namely Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (IBEST) model. This model was developed to increase the rate at which basic skills students advance to and succeed in college-level occupational programmes. An IBEST programme consists of a series of clustered courses in a particular professional/technical field that leads to a credential, often a college-issued occupational certificate, and prepares students for employment in jobs that are in demand and for further college-level education leading to Degrees. Thus, IBEST provides a structured pathway to college credentials and career-path employment so that students do not have to find their way on their own.

The integrated professional/technical course brings together basic-skills instructors with some experience, content knowledge, or interest in the professional/technical field in which they would be co-teaching, and a professional/technical faculty member who is interested in receiving additional support for his students and who is open to the team-teaching model. The team-teaching model in IBEST is implemented with varying degrees of integration success.

In non-integrated instruction, the professional/technical instruction was delivered in a traditional manner and the basics instruction helps students individually. In non-integrated

instruction with separate contextualised skills, the professional/technical and basic faculty members identify the skills and then they are taught separately. The basic-skills instructor assumes a support role and focuses on these skills.

Partially integrated instruction involves the professional-technical and basic-skills instructors who jointly modify the existing professional-technical course to accommodate needs of basic-skills students. The basic-skills instructor still assumes a support role, but the course content includes more focus on basic skills in addition to professional/technical content.

Fully integrated instruction sees professional/technical and basic-skills instructors working together to revise the content of the existing course more extensively (or, in some cases, to develop a new curriculum) to accommodate basic-skills students. The basic-skills instruction is interwoven fully into the professional/technical content.

In addition to integrated professional/technical courses, there are companion support courses for IBEST students, which provide supplemental instruction and support (i.e., vocabulary or mathematics review, study skills instruction) in both the content area of professional/technical courses and in more general basic-skills areas where students need help – improving study skills and providing supplemental instruction for integrated courses. These courses also often orient students to college life, much like a student success course. In most programmes, they are taught by the basic-skills co-instructor and provide an opportunity to review the reading, writing, and mathematics issues that students confront in trying to master the professional/technical content. This additional class time is an opportunity for students to complete assignments and stay on track with the work for the content courses.

IBEST is housed in the basic-skills division, but the model requires strong coordination between the basic-skills division and professional/technical departments. Developing such coordination and sharing responsibilities for managing programmes proved challenging to most colleges. However, similar to the pathways component of IBEST, it also led to greater awareness of the needs of basic-skills students.

### Mentorship

Mentorship can perhaps be seen as the ‘human’ aspect of academic support and traditionally involves a more capable other who guides a less capable student. The empirical data showed that 50% of the training institutions did not consider mentorship important, 33% offered mentorship as a stand-alone programme, and 17% adopted an integrated approach. This was spread across all types of training institution. The review, coupled with empirical data, showed that mentoring was provided in a variety of ways:

- setting up of WhatsApp groups to allow for support on assignments;
- providing group discussion with a tutor guiding the process;
- individual support by a lecturer/facilitator to a student;
- practical support given during teaching practice feedback sessions.

The gap in the current implementation model is a need for on-going mentorship for students and practitioners, beyond the confines of their training programme. Given that HEIs had the shortest periods of practical training time (3-12 weeks per annum), newly qualified teachers can frequently find themselves in contexts that are unfamiliar and intimidating. This can demotivate and negate knowledge acquired during a training course. Although in-service practitioners are arguably in a particular context already and therefore should know how to manage it effectively, experience in the NPO sector has shown that practitioners often struggle at the time of embarking on their studies. The advantage they have, however, is that they can explore their challenges and receive context-specific mentorship over the course of their training. The issue arises once training is complete and support is removed; then what happens in the classroom and to the teacher? To deliver a quality programme, consideration must be given to sustained and effective means of providing mentorship during and beyond the confines of a training programme.

#### Case study from empirical data

One of the programmes that emerged from the empirical data as yielding results, was the UFS 101 module which addressed academic support. This is critically evaluated using a report that was instigated in 2015.

#### Examination of a non-integrated approach to academic support:

Although the empirical data showed that most institutions (56%) felt that an integrated approach to academic support was desirable, the student survey suggested that a non-integrated approach was effective as it was the most cited academic support strategy to yield results and students felt comfortable to ask questions. Furthermore, the empirical data showed a predominance of a tutor approach to academic support, which the UFS 101 programme models. For this reason, a document analysis follows below.

The UFS101 programme adopted a tutor strategy, but specifically trained tutors for their role. Tutors underwent an initial eight-hour, intense programme, but it was suggested in a report (Botes, 2015) that this training should rather be ongoing in the form of mentorship, thereby avoiding the potential for information fatigue. Consequently, the programme was adapted in 2016 to include a once-off training session, semester updates and peer observation. The peer observation was a strategy that allowed the tutors to learn from one another and to present their planning, learning objectives and pedagogic strategies. It also allowed for a measure of quality control.

The same report (Botes, 2015) showed that students who attended five or more tutorials showed an average final mark of 74%, suggesting that this form of support is beneficial. Students who did not attend tutorials showed an average mark of 57%. Tutorials were compulsory for first-year students, but non-compulsory for modules considered to be 'at risk'. An 'at risk' module is one that demonstrates high class registration, suggesting that potential for individual attention is reduced. The students were therefore encouraged to work in small groups. The non-compulsory tutorials were conducted by a tutor who oversaw a group of students who worked on an aspect of the module.



All tutorials were planned in collaboration with lecturers implementing the courses/modules. There were 49 tutors for 51 modules in the education faculty. The intention, however, was not remedial, but rather one of improving academic performance. This was, therefore, directly linked to attendance at tutorials and why they were not considered compulsory beyond first year. The students were deemed to be motivated and having a desire to achieve better results, and consequently capable of self-regulating their attendance at tutorials.

In September 2016, the Faculty of Education conducted a survey of their UFS 101 programme (Table 7).

**Table 7:** SWOT analysis of 101 programme at UFS.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Theoretically well-informed, dedicated organization, monitoring and report system in place.	Blanket approach to the appointment of tutors.
Tutoring is a well-accepted form of student support.	The criteria for tutor support are too lenient. This is meant to be linked to the deficit of learning in a 'large class'.
There is an increase in lecturer involvement.	Elastic boundaries for the definition of a large class.
	Variation in the qualifications of different tutors catering for a specific module.
	Lecturers lack of clarity regarding tutor pedagogy.
Opportunities	Threats
Reconceptualising of criteria for tutor appointment.	Lecturers requesting tutors for the wrong reasons.
Diversification of the kind of tutorial support available (e.g., small-group, face-to-face/online/facilitation of flipped classes/generic boot camps).	Long-term financial sustainability of tutor appointment according to current model.
Harnessing of increased lecturer involvement (e.g., decoding their disciplines; identification of bottle necks; preparation of tutorial material in collaboration with T&L office, e.g., by conducting interviews with them prior to allocation of tutors).	Blanket approach of tutor recruitment without well-defined selection criteria puts tutoring programme in jeopardy.
Video-recorded tutorial sessions with a view to formative improvement discussion sessions.	

It is notable that this programme has already conducted an evaluation and determined their areas of strength and weakness. By continuing to monitor the student pass rate it will become possible to ascertain the efficacy of the programme as a form of academic support. The empirical data suggest that, to implement a quality programme, academic support should be integrated into the programme together with short support programmes that focus on student/practitioner needs. The UFS 101 programme is a combination of both in that it provides short bursts of support, but these are implemented over a period of time for specific

modules and years of study. The context of study across types of training institution will, to some extent, dictate how academic support is provided.

### Recommendations

ECD practitioners do not have access to, nor experience of, academic practice, both within current training in NQF Level 4 and 5 qualifications and within the workplace setting. Although some of these gaps are developmentally appropriate, that is, they are descriptive of the level at which they are training, others are a result of previous experience with teaching and learning. As this review indicates, ECD practitioners are not alone in this transition. In planning for Level 6 and 7 qualifications, the following should be considered:

- Active learning pedagogies, which engage smaller groups of students in a learning community that provides an emotionally supportive environment with opportunities to test ideas. The empirical data showed that students respond to WhatsApp groups, Communities of Practice (CoPs) and small-group tutorials, such as UFS 101, suggesting that this type of approach has potential for delivery of a quality programme.
- Facilitate growth mind-sets in students and promote realistic self-efficacy beliefs. Develop student grit through alignment of short-term and long-term goals and strengthen protective factors to increase student resilience. This can be achieved by putting in place mentorship structures that will allow students to build their confidence and feel comfortable to ask when they need support.
- Include compulsory, credit bearing, foundational courses or course elements, which target the following:
  - English: conversational, written and verbal presentation, essay writing, case studies, discipline-specific discourse, etc.;
  - Mathematical literacy/foundational understanding;
  - Digital literacy;
  - Academic information literacy, discipline-specific reading and writing, discipline-specific discourse;
  - Practicum/WIL: teaching assignments, record keeping, practicum placements require specific proficiencies in written and spoken English, along with detailed knowledge of the cultures of schooling and context-specific ways of interacting with colleagues and students;
  - Orientation: time-management, study skills, college rules and procedures, exploration of learning styles, career exploration, multicultural diversity, class participation and other topics relevant to a new student. These may be challenging to achieve if a training course is only one or two years long, but even a short orientation week would be preferable to none at all, which is the status quo.
- Have faculty teaching courses that can actively interweave basic skills instruction into the professional-technical content, or include another faculty member who acts as an active, engaged, class-attending tutor and mentor.

- Provide opportunities to reinforce early childhood development knowledge and challenge students to use research to understand what they observe and inform what they do. This is more easily achieved if students are given the skills to use technology to obtain information. Every effort must therefore be made to provide training in the use of computers, internet and email.
- Include practices and opportunities for students to reflect on their learning, individually, and with peers and mentors. These opportunities should target both career pathways and the constructs of persistence, grit and resilience. Reflective practice was strongly endorsed by student and institutional surveys as a means to enhance practice. Finding ways to ensure this happens and is seen as a priority by students/practitioners, will be the challenge.

Although the literature offers some recommendations for developmental support, it is clear that these interventions or courses must not be offered in isolation from the educational institution or as a panacea for ECCE challenges. Instead, it is imperative that ECCE practitioners are acknowledged as equal participants in the social practice of academic life at Levels 6 and 7, and developmental supports, with a strong evaluation component, are constructed to scaffold their transition from occupational to academic institutions.

#### Points to consider

How do we get the balance right between providing sufficient support in an integrated manner and meeting the demands of the programme as a whole? What are the cost implications when we have ‘Fees must fall!’ and ‘junk status’? This puts pressure on training institutions to deliver courses quickly so that people can be employed and also not have to pay exorbitant fees. The former will mean that quality programmes will need to be carefully designed if we are to provide effective academic support and meet the demands of the programme as a whole.

How do we achieve mentorship both during a course and subsequent to training, thereby maintaining a standard and ensuring students are fully supported. Do we need to take a multi-pronged approach that includes peer mentorship, tutor mentorship, lecturer mentorship, specific courses and CoPs within and across schools? Do we include district officials, and what is the role of DSD, DHET and DBE?

## WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING (WIL)

### Introduction

SA institutions of higher education are constantly in the business of offering quality education to students. They are doing their best to equip students with a strong knowledge base. However, this is not enough to fully prepare students for the real world of work. Theoretical knowledge alone does not make one an excellent teacher, since such knowledge does not naturally translate into the ability to intelligently apply it practically in the workplace.

As a result, there is a considerable need to prepare students both theoretically and practically, and this is where the Work Integrated Learning (WIL) comes in, to assist in improving students' work readiness. It is a vehicle that bridges the gap between theory and practical by giving students an opportunity to put the theory and the wide range of skills that they have learned into practice in a real classroom setup. Du Plessis (2010) put forward the notion that students get an opportunity to learn from authentic work experiences and are required to produce evidence of such learning in the form of portfolios, projects, reports, logbooks, applied assignments and/or presentations to panels for evaluation purposes. The Council of Higher Education (CHE) adds to this by suggesting that it is university learning that is less didactic and more situated, participative, and 'real world' oriented. In an attempt to reach a better understanding of WIL, we will break it down into four Ws and one H: What, Why, Where, When, and How.

### What is WIL?

Due to WIL's ability to incorporate theoretical forms of learning into practice, it makes sense to then describe it as "an educational approach that aligns academic and workplace practices for the mutual benefit of students and workplaces," as Engels et al. (2010) put it. The SA CHE defined WIL in the following ways:

- "...an umbrella term to describe curricular, pedagogic and assessment practices, across a range of academic disciplines that integrate formal learning and workplace concerns".
- "...an approach to career-focussed education that includes classroom-based and workplace-based forms of learning that are appropriate for the professional qualification".
- "...an educational approach that aligns academic and workplace practices for the mutual benefit of students and workplaces". (CHE, 2011, p. 4)

Engel-Hills et al.'s (2010) definition of WIL reiterated this by defining WIL as "an educational approach that aligns academic and workplace practices for the mutual benefit of students and workplaces". They further stated that WIL can be categorized into four different types (Table 8).

**Table 8:** Types of WIL.

Type		Structure	Application
1	Work-directed theoretical learning	Forms of knowledge are sequenced in ways which meet both academic criteria and are applicable and relevant to the career-specific components (Barnet, 2006)	Suits mathematics and physics learning in engineering programmes
2	Problem-based learning	Pedagogy that encourages students to learn through the structured exploration of a research or practice-based problem (Savin-Baden & Major, 2004)	Students usually work in small, self-directed groups upon a task which is usually based on a 'real-life' problem (Breslow et al. 2005). The 'problem', which brings more than one discipline together, is structured to direct the students' learning toward outcomes. The lecturer is usually the coordinator and resource person.
3	Project-based learning	Combines problem-based learning and experience learning by bringing together intellectual inquiry, real-world problems and student engagement in relevant and meaningful work (Barron et al. 1998)	Connects students with communities, service partners, and academic experts.
4	Workplace learning	A practical on-site experience at a site of professional practice. May be known as job-shadowing, an internship or a learnership.	Workplace learning can stretch from a few weeks to a few years. Can be strongly or weakly integrated into the academic learning programme. The workplace is considered a place of learning where model practice is demonstrated.

WIL is essentially an educational construct. It is predicated on the 'front-end model of learning' and then tries to bolt on some exposure to work in order to contextualise the context-free, supposed universal 'theory'. Hence it defines and describes WIL largely in terms of that paradigm.

In the working world, WIL operates in a different paradigm. It is primarily a social process. As Jay Cross described in his work on informal learning Work=learning; Learning=Work (Cross, 2007, p. 226). Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is the term given to an activity or programme that integrates academic learning with its application in the workplace. The practice may be real or simulated and can occur in the workplace, at the university, online or face-to-face.

Christoph Vorwerk (2009, 2012), in his description of WIL, focused on work experience as being the fundamental learning modality. If one focuses on how people engage with work, from the novice towards becoming proficient (e.g., Dreyfus', 2004, five-level model of skill

acquisition – then a different conception of learning emerges. There is a shift from being a consumer of pre-packaged information to becoming:

- an observer, relying on using the senses to acquire information;
- a participant in a process of producing goods and services;
- a producer of goods and services.

An example: Project-based or action-oriented learning:

This approach to teaching and learning is aimed at changing the role of the learner. The learner acts, not as a listener or a spectator, but as an active participant in the process. The approach is flexible but shares the following characteristics:

- The learning is purposeful and aimed at solving a problem for which there is no standard solution.
- The problem is authentic, that is, not just constructed for educational purposes, but has a use or purpose, that is, produces a tangible product or service.
- Learning is collaborative: learners form a team and engage socially to assign roles, plan, act and reflect as a group. But learners at times will act independently to fulfil their part of the team's effort. (They shoulder responsibility on behalf of the group.)
- The “contents” of the learning process must be identified, sought and accessed – they need to identify what they need to know in order to find the solution.
- The setting of the problem will contain success criteria that can be used for purposes of testing, formative evaluation by the learners and summative evaluation by the learning facilitator.
- The ‘teaching’ or knowledge transmission role of the educator becomes a facilitative role to support and provide access to resources when needed. But more than that the educator becomes a designer of learning experiences and activities, based on matching the group's learning needs and level to achieve the requirements of the curriculum or learning programme.

The primary focus of the model is skills and not knowledge acquisition. Skills would include the following:

- job/task/project interpretation
- planning
- information collection, evaluation and application
- decision making
- execution
- testing
- internal control (formative assessment by the learners themselves, “how are we doing?”)
- evaluation (summative assessment of the product, service and learning process).

### Why is WIL important?

First and foremost, WIL is very significant for student development as it helps students obtain experience that is associated with their qualification while enhancing their learning. The effect of WIL is reiterated by different studies, and they all agree on the fact that WIL programmes develop students' competencies (Arnold et al. 1999). Other studies have also linked WIL with improved academic performance (Hughes & Moore, 1999). Without the WIL experience, it can be difficult for teachers to link their theoretical knowledge with the actual classroom context. Additionally, there are considerable benefits for students in WIL. (Dressler & Keeling, 2004, p. 225), found that WIL improves student confidence, increased discipline thinking; improved learning; taking responsibility for learning, learning how to learn; improved problem-solving; analytical thinking; improved performance in the classroom, increased GPA, increased commitment to educational goals. The Southern Cross University also agrees with these benefits and further highlights the following benefits for student teachers:

- Career gains: up-skilling and/or career change for older workers, work readiness for youth, direct recruitment into employment, networking.
- Academic gains: enhanced critical thinking and generic skills (due to the high levels of student engagement generated by active learning), enhanced disciplinary understanding through application of concepts and observation of skilled practitioners, enhanced problem solving skills.
- Personal gains: clarity regarding career preferences, professionalism and professional identity development, communication, time management, and other soft skills development.

CHE (2011) reiterated some of the many advantages for students who engage in WIL as follows:

- academic benefits, such as improved general academic performance, enhancement of interdisciplinary thinking, increased motivation to learn;
- personal benefits, such as increased communication skills, team work, leadership and co-operation;
- career benefits, for example, career clarification, professional identity, increased employment opportunities and salaries, development of positive work values and ethics; and
- skills development, including increased competence and increased technical knowledge and skill.

One of the HEIs in the PIECCE research project had a clear indication of why WIL is important since it articulates the purpose of this practicum as follows:

- To bring students into contact with the practice of teaching from an educational perspective.
- To provide students with the opportunity to practise the various roles of the teacher in an authentic class and school situation.

- To provide opportunities to students to experience schools in different social contexts.
- To give students the opportunity to witness experienced teachers' teaching and class activities.
- To give students the opportunity to plan lessons within subject context and as aspirant teachers to conduct classes and mediate learning opportunities.
- To give students the opportunity to make independent decisions with regard to the choice of suitable learning content, the teaching media that can be used, as well as teaching and assessment methods.
- To give students the opportunity to correctly execute a number of tasks, such as marking, setting tests and class administration, under the guidance of experienced teachers.
- To give students the opportunity to participate in extra and co-curricular activities.
- To create opportunities in which students' knowledge, competencies and attitudes can be assessed in practice.
- To give students the opportunity to reflect on their experiences during practicum teaching.

Windschitl (2002), as cited by Du Plessis, shared the same sentiment by stating that the following activities encourage meaningful learning:

- Students' ideas and experiences relating to key topics such as lesson plans, teaching media and assessment criteria are elicited, followed by the fashioning of learning situations which help students elaborate on or restructure their current knowledge;
- Students are given ample opportunity to engage in complex, meaningful, problem-based activities, such as designing lesson plans during the teaching practice periods at schools;
- Students receive external support in the form of coaching from supervisor teachers/mentors, as well as hints, feedback, models and reminders;
- Students work collaboratively. They are encouraged to engage in task oriented dialogue with one another;
- When planning and presenting lessons, students are asked to apply knowledge in diverse and authentic contexts to explain ideas, interpret texts, predict phenomena and construct arguments based on evidence, rather than to focus on the acquisition of predetermined 'right answers';
- Supervisor teachers/mentors employ a variety of assessment strategies to understand how students' ideas are evolving, and to give feedback on the processes and products of their thinking.

The above benefits and advantages of WIL show that although WIL cannot be an instant solution to transformation in terms of high skills, nor the lack of competitiveness in the working environment, it however plays a pivotal role with regard to graduates' readiness upon entering the world of work (CHE, 2011).



### What is the purpose of WIL?

There is increasing emphasis on work-integrated learning, as it aims to integrate academic study and practical work experience providing a point of difference for graduates that employers value. CHE is the Quality Council for Higher Education. CHE advises the Minister of Education and Training on all higher education issues and is responsible for quality assurance and promotion through the Higher Education Quality Committee. According to the CHE (2011), programmes that promote graduates' successful integration into the world of work and that enable graduates to make meaningful contributions in contexts of development, require innovative curricular, teaching, learning and assessment practices. SA universities' commitment to positive graduate outcomes, global citizenship and community engagement add extra dimensions to the importance of WIL in curriculum design and development, as a process of reciprocal involvement that can benefit students, professions, workplaces and communities. The Higher Education Quality Framework (HEQF) requires that all initial teacher-education programmes include work-integrated learning whereby teacher-students not only learn in practice but also from practice.

### Case study:

What follows is a detailed description of how one of the HEIs participating in this research project, conducts WIL for a Diploma in Grade R.

To support students in this opportunity to learn *in* and *from* practice, students receive tutorial notes, which should be used in conjunction with a study guide. Students are strongly advised to attend a WIL orientation that will be presented via a scheduled whiteboard presentation. Furthermore the student must prepare for this session by studying the respective WIL tasks and instructions and identify problem areas. During the whiteboard presentation students have the opportunity to discuss and ask questions in preparation for their WIL experience.

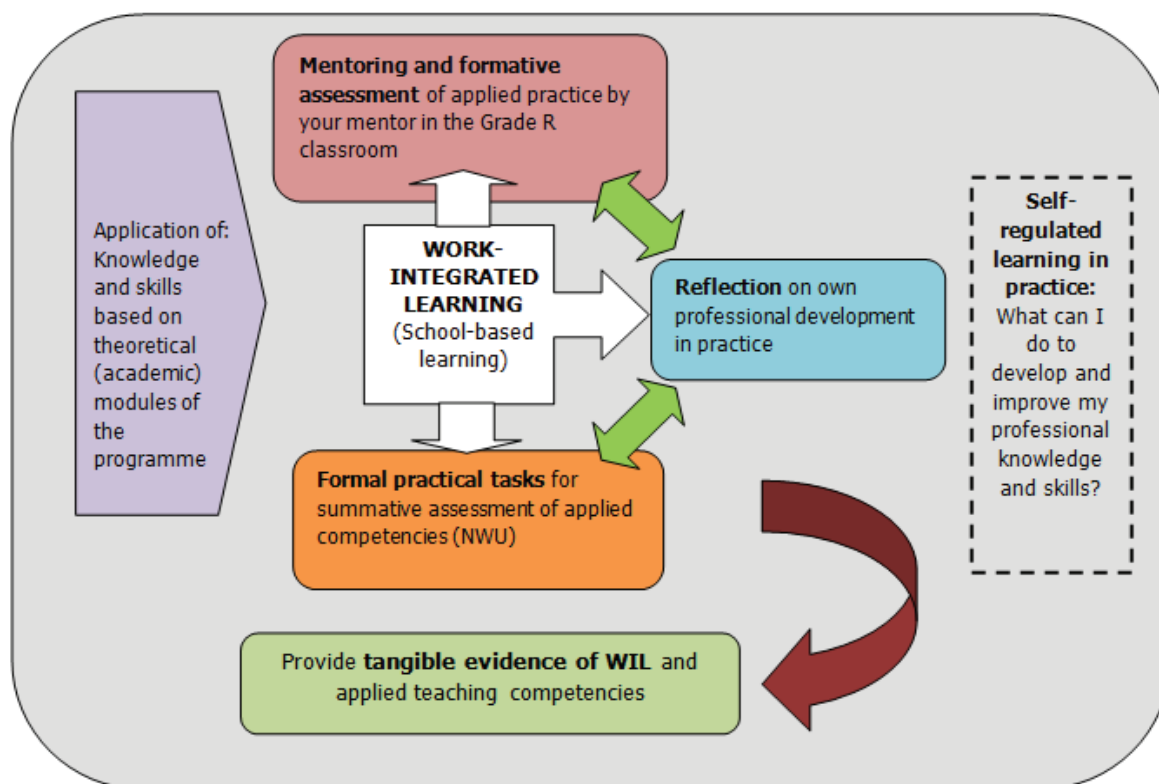


Figure 18: What does WIL look like?

WIL is implemented in an integrated way within the Diploma in Grade R teaching (Fig. 18). Students have to apply their knowledge and skills attained through the academic modules together with knowledge and skills mastered *from* and *in* practice, while guided by a professional mentor in the field of Grade R education. A study guide guides students in the implementation of informal and formal practical tasks, as well as reflective learning to develop an increasingly self-regulated teaching practice. Assessment of WIL by mentors and academic staff is based on tangible proof of applied competencies in the form of a portfolio.

#### What is a portfolio?

A portfolio is generally defined as a purposeful collection of a student’s work reflecting efforts and achievements in one or more areas, as well as evidence of self-reflection. Portfolios can also be seen as a mechanism designed in order to evaluate performance in relation to external evaluation requirements, and for exploring feelings, values, beliefs and dispositions, collected over time. The value of a portfolio to support the development of reflective thinking on practical teaching matters has been documented by various researchers (Orland-Barak, 2005, p. 27). Williams et al. (2003) viewed the portfolio as one tool that can be used to “house” a variety of authentic assessments. Candidates can demonstrate their knowledge and skills as effective teachers through the use of actual products that they develop in classroom settings (e.g., lesson plans, instructional units, learner work examples, classroom management plans, etc.).

Orland-Barak (2005) referred to research findings indicating that the implementation of portfolios in teacher education programmes enhances teaching practice by providing opportunity for:

- uncovering strengths and weaknesses in teacher-students' performance (Redman, 1994; Smith & Tillema, 1998);
- developing competence awareness (Topping, 1998);
- providing evidence of achievement in learning to teach (Loughran & Corrigan, 1995), and
- promoting reflective practice (Laboskey, 1994; Borko et al., 1997; Bain et al., 1993).

The role players in this WIL case study:

According to an HEI's Faculty of Education Sciences (2015) WIL manual, WIL is compulsory for all Diploma in Grade R Teaching, B.Ed. and PGCE students who are registered in the Faculty of Educational Sciences and must be successfully completed before a Diploma, B.Ed. Degree or the PGCE can be awarded. However, since WIL is a partnership between the student, the school, and the university, there are different role players as well. Particularly because "WIL is based on the principle that learning should be demonstrated to be appropriate for a qualification and should be assessed wherever it takes place or is provided" (Engel-Hills et al. 2010). These role players include: the practicum leader, practicum coordinator, mentor, and class teacher. All these people have specific roles and a collective responsibility to maximise the students' WIL experience.

The student:

One of the most important things for students during WIL is their WIL portfolio, which is a personal document in which their growth, learning and development are reflected. Among other things the student should:

- Be in the classroom of the allocated class teacher at all times, even when the teacher is busy with other subject classes.
- The learners in your class are your first priority – strive for excellence and make sure that your conduct is always exemplary.
- Always dress like a professional and behave like a professional – your example will determine the standard and tone of your class and command respect.
- Familiarise yourself with the class teacher's class rules and time-table.
- Try to lighten your class teacher's load by offering to assist where you can. In this way you will polish your skills with regard to planning, marking and classroom organisation and management.
- Thorough preparation is essential before you present a lesson.
- Always be punctual ("If he is careless about time, what else is he careless about?" – George Washington).
- Any form of punishment must be done in consultation with the class teacher.
- Be consistent and clear.
- Treat all documents as official – complete them fully, neatly and hand in in time.

- Take advantage of the opportunity to observe lessons in subjects other than your own, but get permission to attend first.
- Thank the teacher with whom you were placed for their help and guidance.
- It is also expected of students to fully participate in the extra and co-curricular activities of the school.

#### The practicum leader:

Practicum leaders contact the principal before the school closes for the vacation to find out on what day and time the students must report in the next term. The meeting time and other details must then be communicated to the members of the group of teaching students.

Practicum leaders meet the students at the entrance to the school and then introduce them to the principal and the practicum coordinator.

- Practicum leaders are responsible for keeping a general attendance register, but must also make sure that each student also keeps their own attendance register on a daily basis.
- Any problems with students must be immediately sorted out with the practicum coordinator at school. Any serious misconduct by students must be reported to the WIL office.
- The time-table for visiting lecturers is drawn up by the practicum leader and checked by the practicum coordinator before it is sent to the relevant lecturer.
- The lesson assessment times must be communicated to the relevant lecturer 48 hours in advance of the specific day by SMS, e-mail or telephone.
- Practicum leaders meet the lecturer at the school entrance and introduce them to the principal and/or practicum coordinator, if possible.
- The students who is to give the first lesson accompanies the lecturer to the class for the first lesson.
- Practicum leaders or the practicum coordinator take leave of the lecturer as soon as the last reflection has been completed.
- Practicum leaders must provide the required documents, the general attendance register and the practicum leader's report to the WIL office by the closing date.

#### The practicum coordinator:

The practicum coordinator serves as the contact person with the staff of the WIL office. They and/or the principal receive the necessary communications from the WIL office and act on them accordingly. They, in cooperation with the principal, deal with the placement of the students with specific experienced staff members.

- They also receive the students on their arrival at the school and they are responsible for all arrangements in the school with regard to the students.
- They monitor the students' assimilation into the school and ensure that the communication and cooperation between student and class teacher are functioning satisfactorily.
- They assist the practicum leaders with their arrangements for visiting lecturers.

- They serve as advisors for students in co-operation with the school principal, in all matters that the class teacher cannot address and with any disciplinary problems with students.
- All relevant documentation of the students at the end of the WIL period must be signed off and stamped by the practicum coordinator before the students depart from the school.

The above case study demonstrates that WIL is a complex process involving multiple parties in order to ensure a streamlined process. There are built in checks-and-balances which suggests that the training institution is aware that their students/practitioners are guests in the schools or ECD centres.

### Mentoring

An additional and fundamental aspect of WIL is mentoring. The Diploma in Grade R case study supports the mentoring model and therefore provides mentor-assisted tasks and also trains mentors in ways to assist the beginner-teacher in WIL and to guide the teacher-student in reflective teaching.

Mentoring is defined as follows:

“Promoting an individual’s awareness and refinement of his/her own professional development by providing and recommending structured opportunities for reflection and observation”.

### What is a mentor?

Synonyms for the word mentor include terms, such as advisor, counsellor, tutor, guide, teacher, guru. A mentor should adhere to all these roles by guiding you as the teacher-student to attaining practice-based competencies through advising, counselling and tutoring. Mentorship, however, involves more than guiding teacher-students through learning outcomes and skills as set out in the WIL Study Guide, but extends to providing strong and continuous emotional support. Good mentorship involves helping beginner-teachers work effectively within the school context. A mentor should have ample experience of Grade R teaching and learning and be able to give professional guidance while developing applied competencies within the Grade R context. Good mentors are not only sure of their own judgments regarding effective Grade R teaching and learning but should also be open and responsive to the opinions of others. Teachers have important things to learn from each other, from parents, from learners and also from other community members, about the particular children they teach and about ways to teach them. Mentors therefore have to provide guidance in ways sensitive to the context of the school, as well as the community.

The mentor will not only provide the teacher-student with valuable feedback to support his/her professional development, but the mentor will also be expected to report to the HEI regarding the progress and development of the teacher-student’s applied teaching competencies during the WIL process. The WIL reports form part of the teacher-student’s

portfolio in the Diploma in Grade R Teaching and accumulate to a final WIL mark. The summative assessment of the WIL is the responsibility of the HEI.

Mentor support should actually not stop after this qualification has been attained but should form part of professional teaching whereby each teacher identifies a mentor that can help to keep him/her accountable for the teaching and learning that takes place in his/her classrooms. A professional and self-regulated teacher will also extend mentorship by allowing the entire school community to act as mentors. We can all learn from one another and should be open to input from colleagues, parents and even learners. A beginner-teacher or teacher-student should be assured of the support of colleagues and should be able to ask for assistance and guidance from experienced teachers whenever necessary.

**Mentor identification:**

The HEI undertakes to ensure that suitably qualified and experienced workplace mentors are appointed that would enable students to recognise their strengths and weaknesses in their work, to develop existing and new abilities, and to gain knowledge of work practices. The partner school’s principal identifies programme-specific mentors in his/her school as part of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) and in accordance with the HEI’s criteria for the appointment of mentors. These mentors will be trained by the HEI’s lecturers. An example of a checklist for mentors is given in Table 8.

**Table 9:** An example of a checklist for mentors.

Criteria	Check	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Appropriate qualification	Does the person have an appropriate teaching and professional qualification?		
Substantial experience within the context of Foundation Phase Teaching (Gr R-3)	At least five years’ experience in Grade R/Foundation Phase?		
Good supporting skills (mentor not a tormentor!)	Does the person have the kind of professional attitude that will ensure professional mentoring of WIL?		
Assessment and administration skills	Will the mentor be able to assess and support teaching competencies through observations, such as lesson planning and implementation, administrative skills, etc.? (Are there any demographic or time constraints?)		
Professional role model	Is the person appropriate as a role model for Grade R teachers?		
Professional conduct	Does this person model professional conduct regarding all facets of Grade R/Foundation Phase education?		
	Is this person willing to act as a mentor?		

**Classification of mentors:**

Two types of mentor are applicable for implementing the WIL programme. Firstly, a generalist mentor is appointed to oversee the WIL programme at a school, to supervise and to

assess the phase-specific and general didactic aspects. Furthermore, the role of the generalist mentor entails amongst other aspects the responsibility for WIL administration at school, to coordinate, to support the students according to the HEI's requirements and to provide guidance, for example, portfolio compilation.

Secondly, a specialist mentor is appointed as an expert professional for subject specific/phase-specific guidance, supervision and assessment. An assessment report completed by the mentor should be submitted with each assessment tasks as set out in each WIL component. These reports and assessment forms can be found in the WIL admin booklet.

#### Mentor training:

Training of mentors is compulsory and is offered by the HEI as an accredited (SAQA approved) short learning programme. A database of all accredited mentors is established and maintained by the HEI's WIL office. Regional study centres and the centre coordinators are utilised for this purpose to serve partner schools in a specific cluster. The mentor short learning programme is presented by approved and qualified trainers. Comprehensive and programme related study material is provided for the mentoring training. The successful completion of the mentor training led to the acknowledgement of approved mentor status for this HEI's WIL programmes. The mentors receive a certificate after completion of the mentor short learning programme as proof of mentor status.

#### Student support:

Continuous support is provided by the faculty's WIL office to the regional study centre coordinators and facilitators, the school principal, mentors, educators and students. Support is provided by means of a comprehensive WIL programme manual and study guide, open access to a dedicated WIL official, as well as a call centre, electronic learning management platforms (eFundi and Moodle), while mentors, educators and students have full access via telephone and e-mail to the qualification programme leader, regional study centre coordinator and HEI lecturers. Therefore support from the HEI lecturers is provided through tutorial notes, whiteboard sessions, vacation schools, telephone, e-mail and face-to-face contact if necessary. No diploma can be presented to any student who has not completed the WIL as set out in the HEI's study guide.

#### The class teacher:

The class teacher is the most important link between the students and educational practice. For this reason it is important that students come into contact with experienced teachers who can serve as role models for them.

- The class teacher gives the student the opportunity to put into practice in the classroom the general assignments and tasks stipulated in the WIL modules.
- The class teacher gives guidance in the various roles of the teacher and in lesson preparation. The emphasis is on help and guidance.
- It remains the student's own responsibility to plan, prepare and present lessons to the class.

- The class teacher is responsible for assessing a number of lessons per year level per WIL period.
- The class teachers must be aware that the students will observe a number of their lessons.
- The class teacher is also the person who must go over the WIL documentation with the student and sign all the forms before these are given to the practicum coordinator for finalisation.

### When does WIL take place?

WIL layout for diploma in Grade R teaching:

During the three years of study the student will have to do a total of 18 weeks practical teaching in a Grade R classroom – three weeks per semester. As explained in more detail below the student is required to compile a portfolio as proof of WIL outcomes reached in the Grade R classroom context, during each of the three weeks practical teaching – thus six WIL portfolios need to be submitted as proof of WIL outcomes attained over the three years.

**Table 10:** Time devoted to WIL.

PER SEMESTER	PER YEAR	OVER 3 YEARS
8 credits	16 credits	48 credits
80 hours	160 hours	480 hours
15 days of teaching in school	30 days of teaching in school	90 days of teaching in school
3 weeks	6 weeks	18 weeks
1 WIL portfolio per semester	2 WIL portfolios per year	6 WIL portfolios in total

WIL takes place during the following time periods:

- At the beginning of the school year (Semester 1)
- At the beginning of the second term (Semester 1)
- At the beginning of the third term (Semester 2)

**Table 11:** Timing of WIL.

YEAR LEVEL	SEMESTER 1 January	SEMESTER 1 April	SEMESTER 2 July to August
B.Ed. 1/ODL	n/a	3 weeks	3 weeks
B.Ed. 2/ODL	n/a	3 weeks	3 weeks
B.Ed. 3/ODL	n/a	3 weeks	3 weeks
B.Ed. 4/ODL	n/a	3 weeks	3 weeks
PGCE/ADT	First 10 days in Jan. when schools open	3 weeks	3 weeks
PGCE	n/a	4 weeks	4 weeks
Grade R Diploma	n/a	3 weeks	3 weeks

### Where does WIL take place?

WIL takes place at schools. The students are expected to be at the school for the whole period of WIL. For placement in schools, students nominate three different schools per period. The schools are selected from two different lists, namely the Partnership Schools and Home Town Schools. Partnership Schools are schools which are visited by lecturers for



formal lesson assessment. All other schools where students are placed are known as Home Town Schools. Students who are to be assessed by a lecturer during a particular year must select schools from the Partnership Schools list only.

### Why is reflection so important?

The development and application of *reflective learning strategies* will instil in teachers the tendency towards a *reflective teaching practice*, which is often viewed as the most important characteristic of an expert teacher. Effective and meaningful learning, theoretical and practical, is always nestled in reflective learning. (See Fig. 19.)

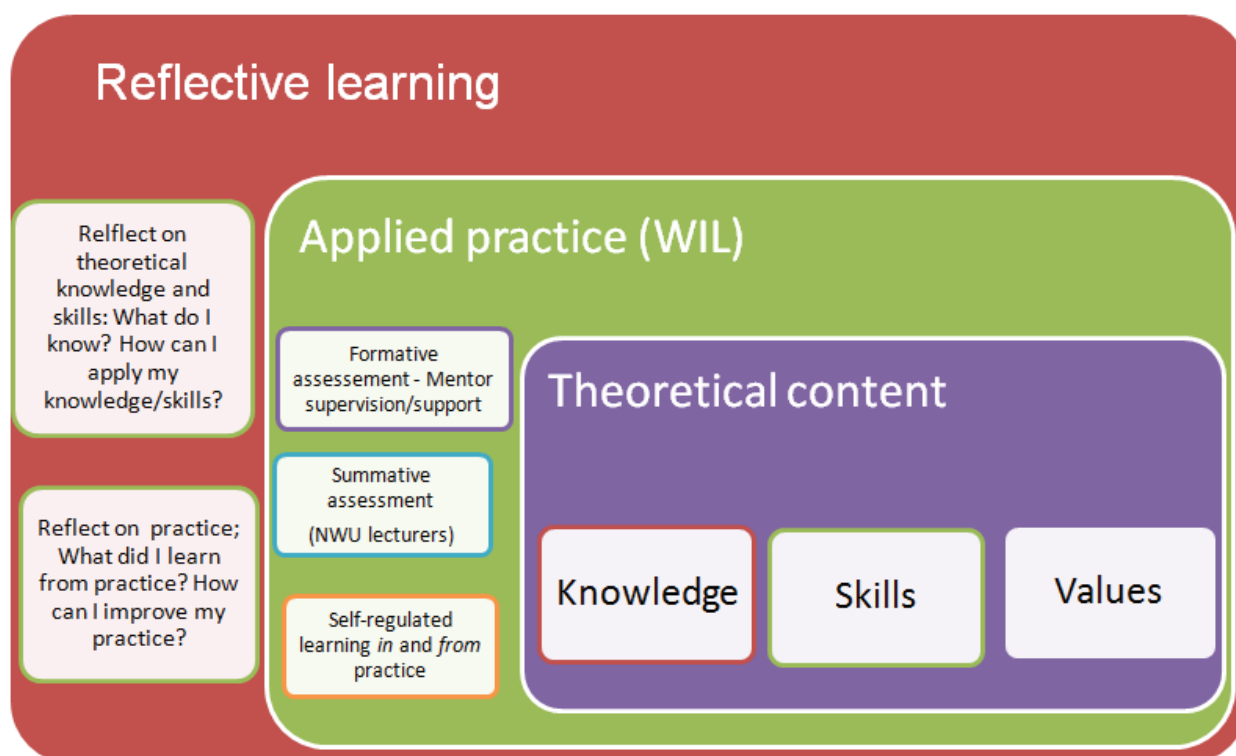


Figure 19: Reflective learning.

Students thus have to continuously reflect on learning through theory (academic modules), as well as on learning *in* and *from* practice. Research shows that reflective learning by teachers can make a lasting impact on their teaching practice.

All three surveys indicated that reflective practice is valued by students (99%), lecturers (100%) and institutions (95%) as a whole. Data from surveys one and two show that lecturers/facilitators encourage and support reflective practice in the following ways:

- through workshops dedicated to the topic (63%);
- the use of reflective journals (79%);
- assignments specific to reflective practice and how to encourage this skill (71%);
- space is provided on a lesson plan/unit standard template for daily reflection or reflection at the end of a module of study (90%).

Qualitative analysis described the use of the reflective journal as a common practice in the NPO sector and for the in-service B.Ed. F.P. However, when using the practice of AR to obtain more information on this strategy, it became clear that there are a number of issues attached to the use of the reflective journal:

- They increase the marking load for the facilitator and therefore students/practitioners do not receive regular feedback on what has been written.
- Students/practitioners often feel threatened by the idea of revealing where they think they have ‘failed’ and therefore prefer to simply list the events of the day rather than reflect on their efficacy. This renders the process redundant.
- Owing to the pressure of a full training programme and insufficient time, facilitators/lecturers do not spend enough time discussing reflective practice or introducing ways in which students/practitioners can reflect daily without it being seen as a ‘chore’. This means that students/practitioners are not developing the skill of reflection and therefore do not know how to hone their skills.

A few lecturers commented that they make use of a ‘reflective portfolio’. The reflective portfolio forms part of the Portfolio of Evidence (PoE) and is usually a set of assignments that are specifically designed to encourage reflection on the part of the student/practitioner. For example, a student may be asked to reflect and write a short piece on their early experience of learning to read. The purpose behind such an activity would be for the student to understand their attitude towards teaching reading and what their learners might be experiencing. In this way they may adjust how they approach their teaching.

In its simplest definition, reflection can be described as “consciously thinking about and analysing what one has done (or is doing)” (Learning Development Unit, 2004). Reflective learning encourages deeper learning, and offers a relevant framework for the development of professionals who will be lifelong learners, committed to continuous improvement of their practice (Henderson, Napan & Monteiro, 2004).

Reflection is the process that includes a series of steps, including reviewing, reconstructing, re-enacting, and critically analysing one’s teaching in order to improve. Reflection is a means for reliving and recapturing experience in order to make sense of it, to learn from it, and to develop new understandings and appreciations (Knapp, 1993 as cited by Rahima & Donald, 1996). The root of the word reflection comes from the Latin *reflectere*, which means ‘to bend back’. As a mirror reflects a physical image, so does reflection as a thought process reveal to us aspects of our experience that might have remained hidden had we not taken the time to consider them. Whether students apply reflective thinking to practical teaching matters, problems in the midst of teaching, or institutional goals and criteria, conscious reflection begins with a focus on experience (Rahima & Donald, 1996, p. 64).

- A. *Reflection on practice: You need to reflect on each of the WIL days in practice*
- B. *Reflection on theory (academic modules of the semester)*

### The purpose and value of reflection on and in practice

Reflection as a term is used in a number of different ways by different authors. We take our definition from Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985, p.19) as "a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations".

Boud et al. (1985) developed a three-stage model of the reflection process focusing on: returning to the experience, attending to feelings connected with the experience and re-evaluating the experience through recognizing implications and outcomes. This model has subsequently been extended into a model for facilitating learning from experience (Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993). The essence of this model is that learning from experience can be enhanced through both reflection in action (reflection, which occurs in the midst of experience), and through reflection after an event (reflection on action). Both forms of reflection can be introduced into courses, though in different ways" (Martin & Hughes, 2011, p. 12).

As research clearly indicates the value of reflection on teachers' knowledge and skills regarding their practice, students need to reflect on a daily and continuous basis on their professional development through their programme of study. Although students will reflect *on practice after* their daily teaching experience, they should try to also remember and note down their reflections *in practice*, which may have played a role in the way they managed a teaching/learning experience or any aspect of their education.

It should be noted that 100% of the lecturers/facilitators who completed Survey 2, indicated that they consider reflective practice an important part of their own development. Some of the reasons given were:

- "It improves my quality of delivery."
- "It deepens my understanding of the programme I am delivering."
- "Learning can achieve new dimensions."
- "Reflection promotes growth and critical thinking."

Finally the voice of the student in Survey 3 considered reflective practice important as a means to understand their practice, improve implementation and seek solutions in their teaching and learning contexts.

Perhaps the challenge with reflective practice does not lie in convincing lecturers/facilitators or students/practitioners to consider the aforementioned as important, but in providing ways to easily achieve reflective practice on a daily basis, thereby ensuring improved quality of learning for all parties concerned.

### Case study – WIL in the NPO sector:

As training of practitioners in the ECD sector has resided in the NPO sector over a number of years prior to HEIs and TVETs taking up the mantle, it is appropriate to examine how WIL is

implemented. The following is an overview of the NPO implementation model specific to WIL.

#### Do WIL policies exist?

Generally the practice is that the NPOs have some kind of articulation of how they blend theory and practice teaching for the ECD learners. Most NPOs follow an accredited curriculum with the ETDP SETA which tends to structure a modular training that is interfaced with practical chunks of work experience gained. In many respects this type of interface is similar, at least in part, to the kind that Christoph Vorwerk described in the literature review above. The approach is geared to teach the learner to 'do' ECD rather than to simply 'know' ECD. However, despite the good intention, it is a weakness that specific WIL policies are not developed to any degree of depth within organisations. Suffice to say that many do have standard operation procedures in addressing practical work experience as this is often a requirement of the ETDP SETA verification protocol.

#### The NPO WIL experience

Generally the ECD NPO mostly comes from a philosophy of developmental, coaching and mentorship. This has been necessitated by the fact that the history of ECD teaching and learning as well as service delivery comes from a background of working with the most disadvantaged and marginalised (often women) and least literate population of SA. The ECD programmes offered by all NPOs have a significant tilt towards a strong component of showing, coaching and supporting alongside the theoretical teaching. In a systemic review of ECD working conditions for over 28 countries, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2015) found that Long-term CPD interventions integrated into practice, such as pedagogical guidance and coaching in reflection groups, have proved effective in very different contexts – in countries with a well- established system of ECEC provisions and a high level of qualification requirements for the practitioners, but also as in countries with poorly subsidised ECEC systems and low qualification requirements. Thus, independent of the kind of ECEC system, long-term pedagogical support to staff by specialised coaches or counsellors in reflection groups was found effective in enhancing the quality of ECEC services, as well as in improving children's outcomes.

WIL is one aspect of the NPOs commitment to the concept of Real World Learning. Many courses and qualifications that are offered by the NPOs offer WIL as an opportunity for academic and practice-based professional learning to occur together within a work environment as part of the course of study. In some organisations this is referred to as in-service training. The mix or balance between contact sessions (theoretical teaching) and in practice (field application or practical experience) differs greatly from organisation to organisation. Also it's noted that within organisations, this time is disaggregated according to the type of course for example accredited vs non accredited ECD courses. In other words, each course varies in relation to the nature of the ECD intervention required.

Many NPOs consider work experience in the sector or community-based learning to be (WIL). By and large this activity is covered by providing learning support to the practitioner during the learning activity. The work integrated learning forms a part of a course. Learning support for work experience includes the following:

- interaction with the practitioner which include site visits and practice observations as well as assessments;
- organization of placements;
- ongoing monitoring of playgroup work and progress; and
- Assessment of practitioners and playgroup facilitators learning and performance during the learning activity.

**Table 12:** Summary of models of WIL in NPOs.

	Contact Learning	Onsite Support	Evidence Generation
NQF Level 4 &5	Residential training one week per month during which they cover one theoretical module. They then go back to their places of work to implement this theory and complete set assignments.	Additional structured on-site visits at the practitioner’s places of work for support, assessment and observation	Most NPOs have an accredited curriculum they follow and which requires the learners to develop a portfolio of evidence that blends both practical and theoretical learning PoE compilation, Moderation, Verification from ETDP SETA
Short & Skills Courses	Facilitators attend an initial week of orientation to ECD training which can be residential. Stronger emphasis placed on experiential learning( playgroups, Home Visiting programmes) under guidance of mentors and clusters of practitioners	Thereafter they work as ECD facilitators in their communities and come back for one day of training every month. (Most of these play facilitators have already finished their L4 certificate, but not all of them)	Most NPOs don’t have a POE in place for the short courses although there is evidence of extensive contact by coaches and mentors
Other types of learner support	There are some organisations (not very many) that have modified the practical field work into role play or simulations (e.g., demonstrations of practical experiences (e.g., practitioners acting out play activities or case studies, and drawing principles from their experiences). Although site visits are mainly used for assessment.		

#### Administrative support for WIL in the NPO sector:

Many organisations depend on the training staff to organise and arrange WIL with their learners. Given the human resources within NGOs, it is not practical to have a dedicated WIL officer. Although what does tend to happen is that there is often administrative staff that support the trainer with training plans as well as field support plans. As alluded to earlier the model that many NPOs use is that of an in-service approach so the workplace is already defined because the practitioner is employed there.

Training organisations are now ensuring that they enforce clearance as per provisions of the Children's Act 38 of 2005. The empirical data on Survey 1 showed that only 40% of staff indicated that they were cleared as a person suitable to work with children and 60% were unsure if their students/practitioners had been cleared. This suggests that there is a lack of awareness of the importance of obtaining clearance and possibly of informing students/practitioners of the act.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy to mention that the majority of students/practitioners training through an NPO, are already in the employ of ECD centres that recruited them sometimes without a relevant qualification. As most NPOs adopt an approach of having an orientation week at the beginning of their training programmes perhaps it is appropriate to include in this week the importance of the Children's Act and obtaining clearance. This is a valuable period of time in which topics such as assessment, site visits, PoEs and the general expectations of the training programme, are covered.

#### Institutional capacity:

Many NPOs use standardised assessment templates aligned to the qualification they are registered to train. In many cases the same trainer who trains the practitioners is also the one that goes out to evaluate the practical work and to observe the practitioner in practice. This set up places a lot of strain on the NPOs capacity and thus those who do this will spend an incredible amount of time on the site support and monitoring visits which in turn can limit the NPOs capacity to train and increase the costs attached. There is no evidence of a standalone evaluation responsibility within NPOs. However, the advantage is that the ECD trainer knows what they are looking for and therefore the practitioner really benefits from the visit of the trainer because the trainer is an expert themselves in ECD. The onsite support visit is an intensely structured process that utilises set templates and documents for recording progress or lack thereof.

Example: Illustrating NPO process course structure WIL integration

**Table 13:** Matching processes

Step 1	Matching process
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community stakeholder engagement to disseminate information about the learning programme and invite applications.</li> </ul>
<b>Step 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Applications in writing or via community meeting.</li> </ul>
<b>Step 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Placement assessment, placement and registration administration</li> </ul>
<b>Step 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 day learner orientation, guidance and support (varies depending with course).</li> <li>3 days of learner administration (including possible contracts and compliance forms for working in the ECD sector, e.g., police clearance.</li> </ul>
	Training skills programme formally commences:
<b>Step 5</b>	5 days of theory learning block for clustered and sequenced Module 1 related to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with families and communities to support ECD</li> </ul>
	15 days of experiential learning working in the Playgroup programme under guidance of mentor and coaches.
	Assessment of Module 1 theory and practice.
<b>Step 6</b>	5 days of theory learning block for clustered and sequenced Module 2 related to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepare resources and set up the environment to support the development of babies, toddlers and young children</li> <li>Interact with babies, toddlers and young children</li> </ul>
	45 days of experiential learning working in Playgroup programme under guidance of mentor and coaches.
	Assessment of Module 2 theory and practice.
	Feedback on assessment for module 1 (remediation as required)
<b>Step 7</b>	Final exit assessment presentations
<b>Step 8</b>	Training administration (including QA admin, PoE compilation, moderation, verification and statements of results from SETA)
<b>Step 9</b>	Certification ceremony

Unlike HEIs, the NPO training courses are primarily SETA accredited which has an impact on delivery as the SETA is problematic and this causes delays in providing certificates for newly qualified practitioners. What is evident from the above table is that considerable effort is put into training practitioners and this should not be hampered by delays in obtaining final certificates.

**Empirical findings for WIL**

The above case studies and literature review has illustrated how important WIL is in developing teacher skills. Of the sampled students, 69.7% indicated that they had done some sort of WIL. Findings shared earlier in this report have shown that students in HEIs would like more emphasis on practical experience. It is therefore appropriate to pause and examine how much practical WIL experience is offered across the various qualifications and institution types as evidenced by the empirical research.

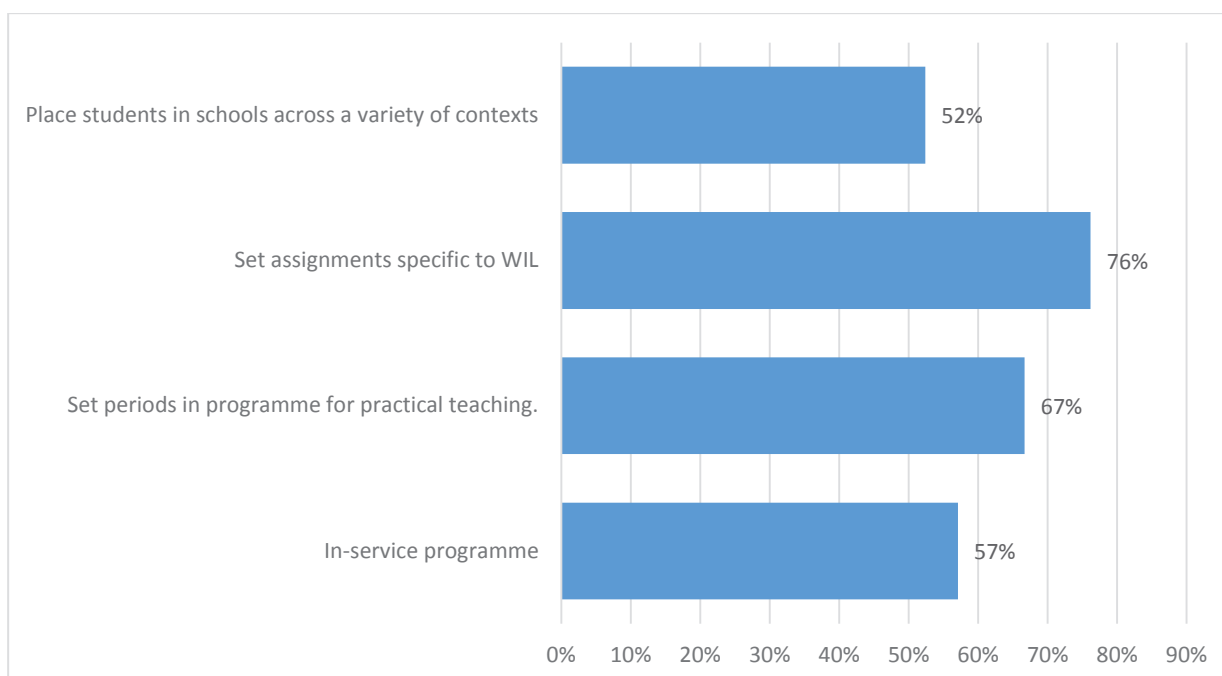
**Table 14:** Qualifications, institutions and amount of WIL.

Qualification type	Institution type	Amount of WIL per annum	What does this mean?
NQF ECD Level 4	NPO	Monthly	At level 4 the implementation style shows a more regular WIL but this is largely due to the in-service model.
	NPO	Fortnightly	
	NPO	Monthly	
	NPO	Monthly	
	TVET	Weekly	
	TVET	Weekly	
NQF ECD Level 5	HEI	Quarterly	NPOs & TVETs are showing the same as above, namely regular WIL with the HEIs having a less regular WIL
	HEI	Quarterly	
	HEI	2 x week	
	TVET	Weekly	
	TVET	Weekly	
	NPO	Monthly	
Diploma Grade R	HEI	Monthly	This is on a par with the NPO & TVET model of more regular WIL
B.Ed. F.P. In-service & Full-time	HEI	Quarterly	The implementation is mainly quarterly with two showing a more intense WIL programme.
	HEI	Quarterly	
	HEI	Weekly	
	HEI	Quarterly	
	HEI	Quarterly	
	HEI	2 X week	

The above table demonstrates that across institution types there is an extensive WIL programme but HEIs generally prefer a quarterly approach. This may be due to the difference in implementation model between in-service and full-time student.

All institution types indicated that they use WIL as a form of assessment and provide personalised feedback to their students. 90% stressed that WIL is integrated across their modules of training with the theoretical aspects discussed together with practical experience. 81% indicated that when preparing students for WIL, they were provided with the skills to address diversity and inclusivity through specific training and opportunities to observe. 47% of institutions suggested that mentorship is an important part of WIL. The graph below shows the responses to how training institutions describe their approaches to achieving WIL.





**Figure 20:** How institutions address WIL in their programme of delivery. (Number of respondent institutions = 13)

There is some emphasis on setting assignments specific to WIL (Fig. 20). These included activities such as making resources for teaching, observing a learner with learning difficulties, providing a specific set of lesson plans and projects on play based learning. Generally training institutions have adopted an implementation model that includes set periods for WIL with the reverse of that being the in-service model, where practitioners are mostly in classrooms and have set periods/contact session for training. It should be noted that placing students across a variety of contexts is considered to be an important part of a WIL programme.

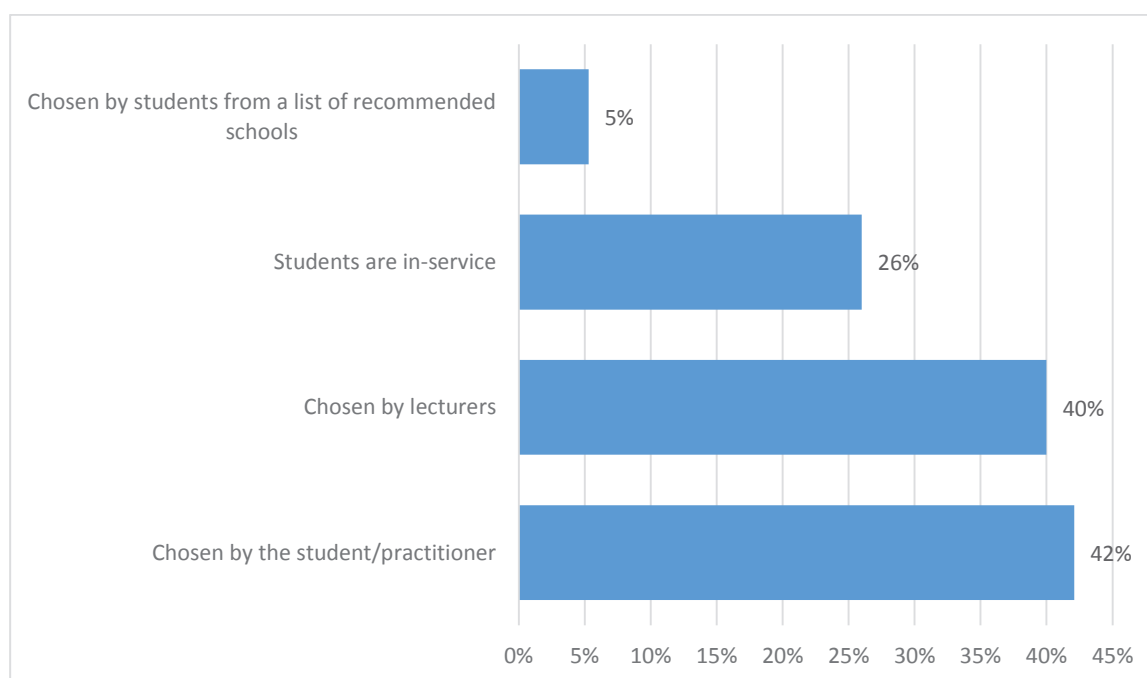
#### [Best practice: what this means and how to benefit from it](#)

The term ‘best practice’ suggests an opportunity for a student/practitioner to observe and engage with mentors or teacher mentors who are considered expert in their field. It would be expected that training institutions should expose their students/practitioners to the aforementioned best practice in order to assist the student/practitioner in either upskilling a current pedagogy or growing a new set of skills. This was supported by the student comments in Survey 3 which described their exposure to best practice as being through observation and modelling from lecturers/facilitators. With 15% of the students making specific reference to observation as being a major part of their WIL.

According to the student Survey 3, WIL consists of a combination of a period of observation (usually more in the first year than later years of training) and some practical teaching (an increase in practice from second year at the HEIs but not in NPOs or TVETS). There was very little evidence in the student survey of simulated lessons or using YouTube or video clips as a means to witness best practice. The institutional surveys were in conflict with this

stating that demonstration lessons, video clips, simulated classrooms, use of clips on interactive white boards and informal observation in communal ECD centres, were all methods used to allow students to see best practice. Consequently in keeping with the practice of AR, specific institutional lecturers and facilitators were asked about their use of video clips and simulated lessons. One HEI confirmed that they use video clips, others cited the intention to use technology to support understanding best practice but experienced challenges around inadequate facilities, lack of knowledge as to how to access material, lack of sufficient equipment and the aggravation attached to setting up technology to support this approach to pedagogy. One institution described making a concerted effort to use video clips despite difficulties around non-availability of equipment to display the clips. The lecturer set specific questions on video clips to encourage students to watch the clips in their own time. She also showed the clips as part of a programme she was delivering in 2015 but when she went on study leave, this pedagogic approach ceased. This would suggest that whilst most of the institutions agree that video material is a useful pedagogic strategy for conveying best practice when real life situations are unavailable, there is some apathy and frustration in the implementation of this approach.

Best practice is additionally relevant in the choice of schools at which students may conduct WIL as the opportunity to observe or benefit from best practice can be directly linked to where the student/practitioner is placed for their period of WIL. This therefore raises the question of who chooses the school, how easy it is to gain access to schools and the relevancy of exposure to a variety of contexts for teaching and learning. As some of the participants in this research project, are in-service practitioners, they do not have a choice in their context for teaching and may therefore need the opportunity to visit other ECD centres or schools to observe best practice.



**Figure 21:** How are schools selected for WIL? (Number of respondent institutions = 13)

There was a balance between schools chosen by lecturers and those that are chosen by students/practitioners (Fig. 21). The possible reason for this is that in the TVET and NPO sector, students/practitioners are frequently required to find a placement at an ECD centre before being allowed to gain access to training or are already in-service. The reason for this is that it is acknowledged that the style of implementation for example an NQF Level 5, requires the student to be able to practice their craft in order to answer their assignments. In the case of HEIs the lecturers often have an established relationship with specific schools that have agreed to allow students in their classrooms, the lecturers have made it part of their training strategy to expose the students to a variety of teaching contexts, but they do allow the students some choice per semester as to which schools on the 'recommended list' they may visit for WIL.

The empirical evidence surfaced that 70% of institutions indicated that there were limitations attached to accessing schools for WIL. These included geographic (41% being situated in deep rural areas far from a variety of schools); transport issues (82% indicated this was a problem as students struggled to get to and from their placement schools); language limitations (64% noted this was a problem as students who did not speak an African language struggled to teach in this context) and finally, schools not being open to receiving students (18%).

Of the sampled institutions, 25% said they had an average of five staff members dedicated to WIL with the staff given approximately six months of training specific to WIL. Generally the training was in-house and non-accredited. The main role of the staff was to observe the student as indicated by 84% of the sampled institutions. It was interesting to note that course co-ordinators, junior lecturers and facilitators are included in the staffing for WIL. Staff involved in WIL are expected to have anything from an Honours Degree (20% of sampled institutions), Master's (20% of sampled institutions) to a Doctorate (40% of sampled institutions). While 10% of sampled institutions listed a Degree as an appropriate qualification and 10% sited an NQF Level 5 as the minimum qualification required. This approach was indicated across all types of institution. This would suggest that training institutions are recognizing that considerable expertise are attached to the supervision of WIL.

Survey 3 provided qualitative evidence that students consider WIL to be highly beneficial for the following reasons:

- "It allows them to put theory into practice."
- "It confirms my passion for teaching."
- "It assisted me in seeing my issues with teaching and how to reflect on improving my practice".
- "It provides the necessary tools that prepare teachers to provide quality education".
- "It is a wonderful experience".
- "It is a good learning experience as to what to expect in a classroom as a teacher."
- "It is nice to see what I'm going to do one day and learn a lot from the other teachers."

There was additionally some evidence of mentorship from classroom teachers and tutors when students noted:

- “I was given a chance to teach with guidance of my mentor.”
- “We observe teachers teach and understand the classroom environment with the teacher’s support.”
- “Tutors are given to students and they come and observe and give us feedback on the lessons.”
- There were a few negative comments from students who indicated that they were treated as ‘teacher assistants’ and made to feel ‘unwelcome’ whilst being expected to ‘know everything.’ The negative comments were however minimal in the empirical data.

### Recommendations

Drawing from the literature review and the empirical data the following recommendations emerge:

- Mentorship is a key component of WIL and supervisors must be trained in how to be a mentor, devote sufficient time to feedback for students and allow for different sources of mentorship. One of the primary sources should be the class teacher as well as tutors and peers.
- More use can be made of technology when exposing students to ‘best practice’. Training institutions should empower their staff to understand how to access relevant clips, download them and use them in their lectures. This must be coupled with making sure that the relevant technology is available in training centres/lecture theatres so that lecturers/facilitators are not demotivated by a failure of technology.
- Reflective practice is a key aspect of WIL and students must be given the tools to acquire this type of skill in order to improve on their pedagogy.

### Some points to consider

Is there a benefit from the different models of WIL namely only a few weeks per year as opposed to the in-service model or vice versa or something in between? How can we ensure that our teachers are exposed to good quality teaching and receive mentorship at multiple levels? It appears that there is some emphasis on observation by both the assessors and the student. Are we perhaps putting too much emphasis on this and not enough on actual practical teaching where the student teacher has to ‘get their hands dirty’ from the onset. Perhaps this balance needs to be re-evaluated in the HEIs where students are complaining about insufficient practice. How do we assist our teachers in the rural environments to gain access to opportunities to practice and to observe? Does the solution lie in sharing film clips of best practice or using WhatsApp CoPs to share ideas across contexts?

Whilst everyone agrees that reflective practice is essential if a teacher is to continue to improve on their efficacy in the classroom, empowering teachers to value this approach is a little more challenging. Perhaps the answer lies in incorporating reflection into the structure

## PIECCE: Output 2: Baseline Findings

of the lesson plan diary rather than focusing on reflective journals which teachers consider to be threatening and extra work.

## RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL)

### Definition

SAQA (2014) noted that RPL is a process through which formal, non-formal and informal learning are measured, mediated for recognition across different contexts and certified against the requirements for credit, access, inclusion or advancement in the formal education and training system or workplace. Moreover, Andersson, Fejes & Sandberg (2013) contended that RPL is based on the fundamental concept of providing recognition for prior learning regardless when or where it occurred. Since it recognises non-formal and informal processes, it makes prior learning visible. In contrast, while Gair (2013) also noted that RPL can be defined as non-formal and informal learning, she stressed the need to distinguish RPL from credit transfer for formal learning. She further noted that the defining assumption of RPL is that adults have prior practice learning and current competencies that can be recognized, assessed, and accredited.

In SA, RPL has a specific purpose, namely to facilitate transformation of the education and training system. Consequently, institutional policies and practices must explicitly address the barriers to learning and assessment. Moreover, it must generate the commitment of all role players to eradicate barriers and establish a “visible, usable and credible system” as an “effective and creative vehicle for lifelong learning”. Another important element is to generate consensus on the criteria and support systems within which the integrity and quality of assessments will be protected (SAQA, 2004).

This review suggests that, although most HEIs are implementing RPL, they are not really addressing its true purpose of righting the wrongs of the past or allowing for access to qualifications. We advocate for HEIs to recognize the equivalence of the NQF ECD Level 4 occupational and vocational directed qualifications as this is relevant to righting the wrongs of the past. The reason given is that as many of the ECD practitioners who wish to study further do not necessarily have a matric but do have both many years of relevant experience in the field and an NQF Level 4 which is equivalent to matric, this should be the entrance requirement of an HEI. There is a sense that not enough credit is given to the practical experience of the ECD practitioner who wishes to study further. It was felt that some of the credit could be given by foregrounding this aspect in the ECCE Diploma/Degree as it would boost students’ confidence and build on prior knowledge. Consequently one of the key goals for RPL should be to widen participation in new programmes. A list of recommendations are given.

Recommendations for the implementation of RPL include:

- Develop guidelines for how RPL could be implemented to advance equity, social justice and inclusion, building on current best practice.
- View RPL as a specialized pedagogical practice, since PIECCE programmes have a specific purpose and a specialized design.
- Develop mechanisms for facilitating access to students across diverse contexts and building these into the programme design.

- Propose a credit accumulation, exemption, recognition and transfer system, accompanied by a convincing rationale appropriate for the ECD context. In particular, there should be (i) credit recognition for experience gained in the early childhood workplace, and (ii) credit transfer for students who completed qualifications or part qualifications with another training provider and transfer to a HEI.
- Recognise the equivalence of Level 4 ECD qualifications to Grade 12/matric.
- Recognise that ECD students with prior knowledge constitute non-traditional HEI students, since they are experienced practitioners.
- Explore additional forms of RPL to augment portfolio assessment such as workplace assessment, interviews, simulations and admission tests.
- Provide appropriate pedagogical support to students who lack the advanced literacy skills required to complete portfolios of prior learning, and for success in academic learning.
- Provide pedagogical support for students to progress from experiential knowledge to codified/formal knowledge.
- Consider how to support students to transition successfully to higher education.
- Explore the possibility of developing guidelines for credit transfer towards practice teaching requirements.
- Explore whether credits could be allocated toward some modules, where credible and appropriate.
- Examine ways of building student confidence especially when they are faced with transitioning into an HEI.
- Consider how to encourage meta-reflexivity and assess students' reflective skills. This will enable students to explain the impact and implications of their learning in practice.

The recommendations show that there are connections between RPL and academic support, namely that academic challenges of the individual student can make being RPLed problematic or might have contributed to her not having a formal qualification in the first place. This suggests that, when PIECCE considers academic support, this aspect of RPL must be addressed.

The RPL team did a desktop literature review that included a document analysis of the following:

- Academic institutions' RPL policies and procedures (refer to the list of HEIs' websites);
- DHET guidelines for RPL;
- Ministerial Task Team on a National Strategy for RPL: Final report incorporating a proposal for the national implementation strategy, 2013;
- ETDP SETA guidelines for RPL;
- QCTO guidelines for RPL;
- SAQA RPL policy, level descriptors and guidelines;
- CHE RPL policy;

- Google Scholar search for published research on RPL;
- international and local published scholarly articles across databases through a UNISA library search using Discovery Service for UNISA.

### Findings

The most common finding reported in existing research is that uptake of RPL is very limited. Reasons are attributed to conceptual and implementation difficulties (UMALUSI, 2010).

These include:

- absence of articulation between unit standard based qualifications and non-unit standard based qualifications;
- a diversity of teaching, learning and assessment, standard setting and quality assurance approaches;
- absence of a credit accumulation, exemption, recognition and transfer system, accompanied by a clear rationale within a particular context for its establishment;
- limited understanding of ‘equivalence’ or recognition across systems and qualifications, despite being promoted by the NQF. This requires one-on-one comparisons of qualifications, curricula and syllabi according to principled agreements within communities of practice.

To summarise, uptake of RPL is limited because it relies heavily on an institution’s capacity to identify, analyse and clarify acquired learning in order to establish relationships with disciplinary and academic knowledge. These are extremely complex processes, as noted by Cavaco, et al. (2014).

The empirical data from Survey 2 showed that 67% of the sampled institutions address RPL in some way and 33% did not.

Whilst the literature review suggested that RPL is not easily implemented, this was further confirmed by qualitative comments made by lecturers and facilitators who suggested:

- “There is limited uptake of RPL in ECD.”
- “There are too many courses in ECD to use RPL.”
- “I have announced in strategic planning sessions that RPL for ECD be looked at, but in vain.”
- “It is not applied at all in ECD.”

More recently, DHET (2013) identified the bias toward formal education and training at the expense of workplace experience, as a key reason for low uptake of RPL. Further reasons include:

- a poor understanding of RPL;
- HEIs’ persistent demand for matric certificates, and their 50% residency clause for awarding qualifications;
- a lack of funding to adequately implement RPL;



- use of portfolios as the dominant assessment tool which relies heavily on a masterful application of advanced literacy skills;
- inability of portfolios to assess a range of competencies or the diversity of practice and prior learning experiences.

*International studies suggest:*

The assessment of prior learning is focused on demonstrable evidence of learning. In other words, universities recognise other universities' qualifications. There is a hierarchy of institutional cultural capital. Most highly regarded are other universities' qualifications, less valued but still recognised are qualifications from Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions. This has relevance for PIECCE, specifically for recognition of qualifications obtained through NGOs' programmes where the final summative assessment excludes formal written examinations. According to Pitman and Vidovich (2013), there is resistance to learning acquired outside a formal context, and students often encounter barriers to having their prior learning mobilised, despite an explicit policy environment that appears amenable to RPL. Other restrictions on RPL include HEIs' admission requirements and the residency clause (i.e., a student may receive a maximum of 50% of credits towards a qualification, and is compelled to register for the remaining 50% in the traditional manner. (See list of HEIs' websites for more detail.)

In many countries, RPL is recognised as a mechanism to improve Degree completion rates (Klein-Collins & Wertheim, 2013). HEIs have a greater understanding of the connections between learning and the workplace. This involves new uses and applications of RPL. In addition, self-guided study is no longer only for the exceptionally motivated individual. Instead, lifelong learners can acquire knowledge and new competencies through access to open and free educational resources (OERs) through mechanisms such as YouTube videos, iTunes lectures, open textbooks and massive open online courses (MOOCs), some led by professors from elite institutions. Some of these courses are at higher education level, and some are equivalent in depth and breadth to degree-programme offerings (Klein-Collins & Wertheim, 2013). Open Distance Learning (ODL) in SA is an avenue for employed students to pursue further education. ODL provides access to students in the context of HEIs and TVET colleges who are unable to accommodate the vast numbers of applications for full-time study.

The new competency-based framework, known as the Degree Qualifications Profile, is being implemented to measure what students know and can do, as an alternative to the previous focus on accumulation of credit hours (Klein-Collins & Wertheim, 2013). In this way, competency-based programmes are well suited to RPL because they rigorously assess the outcomes of student learning, and they therefore fulfil the same function. The Norms and Standards review also supported a competency based approach. (See later in this document.)

ECD practitioners, as a historically marginalised group, could benefit from the notion of 'recognitive justice' that has been applied to immigrant professionals. In a study conducted by Guo and Shan (2013), recognitive justice was promoted as a strategy to question dominant

perspectives, values and standards, and build a more inclusive and equitable RPL system. Similarly, Hyland-Russell and Syrnyk (2015) stressed the importance of transforming learning through consciously creating ways for students to reflect on their experience and actively participate in learning, especially if they have previously been excluded. In so doing, students' beliefs about themselves and their place in the world, could also be transformed. Similarly, Burkšaitienė (2015) pointed out that students require moral support throughout the RPL process to build their confidence, and that RPL staff at HEIs therefore need counselling skills.

### Potential of RPL

As noted above, much of existing research notes that uptake of RPL is limited. Many countries are currently addressing the barriers to uptake since RPL has potential to:

- Advance economic goals through stimulating mobility in the labour market (Pitman & Vidovich, 2013).
- Promote social/democratic objectives, for example, the validation of informal and non-formal learning to increase access to education (Diedrich, 2013; Pitman & Vidovich, 2013; Shah et al., 2013).
- Redress social injustice through addressing the needs of historically under-represented learners in higher education (Pitman & Vidovich, 2013).
- Embody emancipation and social justice by advantaging the excluded and illuminate knowledge that was previously invisible, breaking down discriminatory barriers to education to advance a human rights agenda (Gair, 2013; Barros, 2013).
- Endorse lifelong learning and recognise mature women's contributions to the economy and the skilled labour market, enhance access to learning institutions, and help workers acquire 'qualified' status without compelling them to relearn what they already know (Gair, 2013).
- Facilitate the conversion of not-for-Degree studies into Degree studies by recognising NFD studies as an alternative entry mechanism for students without the requisite qualifications (Klein-Collins & Wertheim, 2013). (Could completion of short learning programmes be used to apply to a Degree course?)
- Implement contextualization as a teaching strategy, where students' prior knowledge acquired at home, school and community is linked to academic content to enhance the meaning and relevance of academic material. HEIs should, therefore, make meaningful connections between what the student knows and the new content to be learned (Wyatt, 2016).
- Make education more accessible and assist in closing the gap between privileged and marginalized groups.
- Reduce the time to complete a Degree, and reduce education debt (Cavaco et al., 2014; Foster & Gielczyk, 2015).
- Increase higher education completion rates and retention (Foster & Gielczyk, 2015; Klein-Collins & Wertheim, 2013).
- Increase the number of professionally qualified citizens and raise their standard of living.

- Increase practitioners' self-esteem while developing their competencies in reading, writing and using new technologies (Cavaco et al., 2014).

### Methods of RPL

RPL methods include examinations, individual portfolios or the formal review of training programmes to determine whether they are at university level (Klein-Collins & Wertheim, 2013). The first two methods assess what the individual knows and can do, or the learning outcomes. The last method assesses inputs of the programme, including materials and learning activities. According to Popova-Gonci and Lamb (2012), it is essential to assess students' integrated learning and critical thinking abilities and suggest that concept mapping be employed as an assessment tool.

Survey 2 showed a number of approaches to how institutions implement their RPL programmes (Fig. 24), of which 77% of the sampled institutions were CAPs aligned.

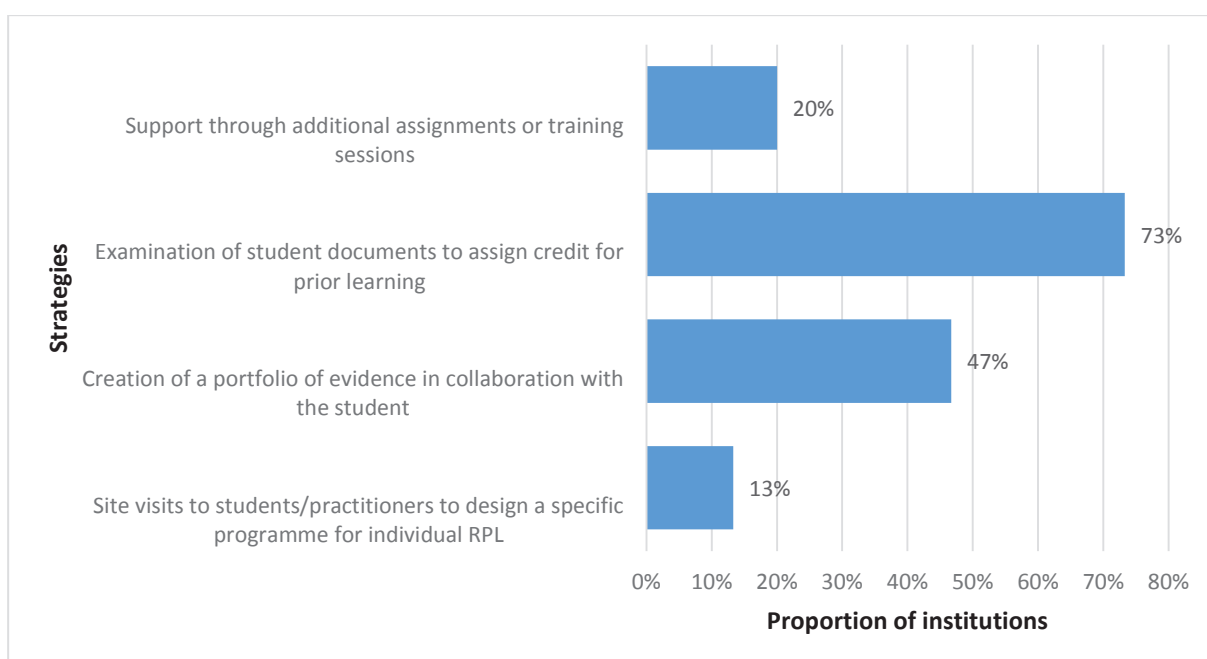


Figure 22: Strategies for implementing RPL. (Number of respondent institutions = 13)

There was an emphasis on document analysis and the creation of a PoE (Fig. 22). Both of these strategies could be expected as a means of providing proof of learning. The literature review suggested that creation of a PoE is often challenging, owing to the fact that students/practitioners struggle with academic literacy, and PIECCE would need to look at this or consider alternative methods. Furthermore, the review considered the issue of dealing with students who are working in multilingual contexts, have literacy challenges of their own, but are expected to be RPLed in non-mother tongue. The empirical data showed that 95% of RPL programmes run by participating institutions, are delivered in English and only 15% in isiXhosa. The use of support through additional assignments or training sessions (20%) echoes with empirical data linked to academic support which showed that lecturers spend

considerable time providing extra training sessions, readings and workbooks for practicing of a concept.

It is perhaps concerning to note the low percentage assigned to site visits as the practical aspect of practitioners' knowledge is the foundation upon which they are traditionally being RPLed. What is not clear with this approach is that the design of an individual RPL programme is time consuming and it is therefore difficult to implement when RPLing a number of students simultaneously. This raises the question of how much can an institution practically do in terms of implementing RPL?

Case study:

Many HEIs stipulated their assessment procedures or methods of RPL. The following examples are used to illustrate how RPL is currently implemented within HEIs.

A distance learning HEI noted that, apart from the portfolio assessment procedure, the following assessment may also be used if deemed necessary by the assessment panel:

- school visits by HEI supervisor;
- practical demonstrations;
- interviews;
- observation and assessment of lessons through video-conferencing.

The HEI is in the process of developing a 5-10 minute podcast on "How to apply for RPL" (May 2017).

At non-distance learning HEIs, RPL is currently practised in three different ways:

- An admissions test is used as a means of alternative admission into undergraduate programmes for disadvantaged learners lacking matriculation endorsement.
- Applicants lacking the necessary formal qualification (an Honours Degree) may be admitted by senate, on the recommendation of HoDs, deans and faculties, to Master's Degree study as *ad eundem gradum* candidates.
- Limited use is made of RPL to award credits towards certain qualifications.

Regarding the currently limited use of RPL for credit at this HEI, it is unlikely that there will be large numbers of potential RPL adult applicants in the short term. The entering cohort of undergraduates comprised almost entirely recent school-leavers.

The distance learning HEI in the above example challenges the status quo by introducing the use of technology to support their RPL programme. The non-distance learning example shifts toward acknowledging an alternative admission strategy, but it appears to be an exception rather than a rule.

### Limitations of RPL

There is a fear on the part of HEIs that by RPLing a student there will be a lowering of standards. This is frequently derived from a de-valuing of experiential knowledge as opposed to book knowledge. Policy actors interpret and enact policy for the benefit of HEIs, rather than for the benefit of the student (Pitman & Vidovich, 2013). Students using non-traditional social and cultural capital (life and work experience) are considered a threat to institutional habitus. According to Barros (2013), RPL is more concerned with individual advancement, than collective advancement. Furthermore, many institutions employ RPL to construct new invisible forms of exclusion rather than to promote innovative ways of inclusion (Barros, 2013).

### Recommendations and implications of RPL in PIECCE

A lack of RPL in PIECCE would be a significant disincentive to mature-aged ECD students, as asserted by Gair (2013) in her study on social workers in Australia. In particular, Gair (2013) convincingly argued that students with prior practice knowledge should be recognised as being at a different starting point as compared to inexperienced students. Moreover, failing to recognise indigenous knowledge within curricula would constitute an ongoing barrier to learning.

The PIECCE RPL working group concurred with Klein-Collins and Wertheim (2013) that ways of promoting access to RPL need to be explored. In addition, we need to explore how RPL could be repurposed within HEIs, to ensure that we meet the demands of (i) staff capacity development and support related to the rationale for the process, the learning theory that supports it and the academic integrity and rigor of the RPL methods employed, (ii) financial aid for the costs associated with assessing students' knowledge, skills and abilities for the purpose of awarding credits, and (iii) a learner support system. This will require dramatic transformation in how HEIs structure the new programmes, award credits and implement the programmes, as recommended by Klein-Collins and Wertheim (2013).

Portfolio assessment should be supplemented by demonstrated competencies beyond written narratives and supporting documents submitted by the student, by including video demonstrations, work products and simulations (Klein-Collins & Wertheim, 2013). Moreover, the word 'prior' may no longer be relevant. Learning may have occurred years ago, or minutes ago. Instead, evaluating learning competencies can assist to address quality concerns related to HEI programmes.

Pitman and Vidovich (2013) promoted an alternative approach to understanding RPL as a Bourdieuan process of 'capital conversion'. Consequently, an individual's economic, social and cultural capital were assessed as equal to academic experience (Pitman & Vidovich, 2013). Rather than considering epistemology of prior learning, institutions should consider the equivalence in socio-cultural influence. In addition, HEIs should view RPL as more than an objective act of measuring specific learning outcomes. Furthermore, RPL requires ongoing communication and reflection to allow the student and the assessor to reach mutual

understanding of what learning has occurred (Pitman & Vidovich, 2013). This would ensure that RPL is more learner-centred in nature.

As noted by Armsby (2013), reflective practice is a cornerstone of work-based learning and institutions should recognise that learning occurs most effectively through participation in a community of practice. Therefore, by accepting RPL on the basis of prior life and work experience, universities could engage in the process of capital conversion.

We should heed Gair's (2013) warning that RPL should not be misinterpreted as implying diminished standards or expectations. Instead, the rigor and integrity of the Degree should be maintained, while recognising that some students will possess knowledge and skills 'beyond the novice'. Furthermore, institutions must strive to balance the recognition of prior knowledge and skills, current learning needs and graduate knowledge as skills, including how to translate theory into practice in diverse ECE settings. Equally important is recognising that RPL must be accompanied by support required for success in academic learning.

In PIECCE, we should remain cognizant of our core commitment to lifelong learning, social justice and inclusivity, and therefore value experiential learning. A critical/radical perspective could be drawn upon to motivate for RPL as an essential feature of programme design and implementation.

#### Summary of recommendations:

- Develop guidelines for how RPL could be implemented to advance equity, social justice and inclusion in ECD programmes, building on current best practice.
- View RPL as a specialized pedagogical practice, since PIECCE programmes have a specific purpose and a specialized design. Mechanisms for facilitating access to students across diverse contexts will be built into the programme design.
- Propose a credit accumulation, exemption, recognition and transfer system, accompanied by a convincing rationale appropriate for the ECD context. In particular, there should be (i) credit recognition for experience gained in the early childhood workplace, and (ii) credit transfer for students who completed qualifications or part qualifications with another training provider and transfer to a HEI.
- Recognise the equivalence of Level 4 ECD qualifications to Grade 12/matric.
- Recognise relevant TVET qualifications at NQF Levels 5 and 6.
- Recognise that ECD students with prior knowledge constitute non-traditional HEI students, since they are experienced practitioners.
- Explore additional forms of RPL to augment portfolio assessment such as workplace assessment, simulations and admission tests.
- Provide appropriate pedagogical guidance and support to students who lack the advanced literacy skills required to complete portfolios of prior learning, and for success in academic learning.
- Provide pedagogical support for students to move from experiential knowledge to codified/formal knowledge

- Considering how to support students to transition successfully to higher education.
- Explore the possibility of developing guidelines for credit transfer toward practice teaching requirements. (In addition, could credits be allocated towards some first year modules? For discussion.)

### Credit accumulation and transfer

According to UMALUSI (2010) credit is the quantified recognition of verified (assessed) achievement of learning outcomes at a specific level of performance. It represents a particular volume of learning. When the NQF was introduced, the intention was that credits could be accumulated and transferred, and that credits attained in different contexts would be recognised. However, there is a need to distinguish between credit accumulation and credit transfer. Credit accumulation is “the totalling of credits required to complete a qualification, usually limited to a specific programme, often within a particular institution”. Paradoxically, credit transfer is “the vertical or horizontal relocation of specific credits towards a qualification on the same or higher level, that usually takes place between programmes, often between different institutions” (SAQA, 2006).

The Policy on the Minimum Requirements for Programmes Leading to Qualifications in Higher Education for Early Childhood Development Educators (PMRP; DHET, 2017) noted that:

- Many students who enter ECD educator programmes are already employed in ECD contexts and possess knowledge as a result of learning in the workplace.
- In order to recognise relevant prior learning, a key principle is that learning outcomes must not be compromised in the process. RPL must, therefore, occur on an individual, student-by-student basis in order to make a professional judgment of prior learning.
- RPL for access and advanced credit standing must be conducted by the admitting institution in accordance with national policies, quality council policies and institutional policies. SAQA’s National Policy for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (SAQA, 2013), provides for implementation of RPL in the context of the NQF Act, Act 67 of 2008, and it describes how providers should implement RPL in respect of all qualifications and part-qualifications in SA.
- The RPL policy of the CHE must be taken into account in interpretation of this Policy.
- The RPL Coordination Policy (2016) provides a strong enabling policy environment for the further development and implementation of RPL across the post-school education and training system, and across all levels of the NQF.

Regarding Credit Accumulation and Transfer, the PMRP (DHET, 2017) further noted that:

- Many students who enter ECD educator programmes will already hold prior qualifications or part-qualifications that could be considered for credit accumulation and transfer purposes. These include credits gained at Level 5 and above through the completion of qualifications or part-qualifications that are developed and delivered under the mandate and quality assurance of the CHE, the Quality Council for Trades

and Occupations (QCTO) and the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training (UMALUSI).

- For prospective students holding credits gained through relevant prior qualifications or part-qualifications, it is possible to provide recognition for credits earned in the prior qualification, provided that there is equivalence between the learning for which credits have been achieved in a prior qualification and the learning that will be ‘credited’ in the new qualification, both in terms of learning content and the NQF level at which it is pitched.
- HEQSF (2013) provided that “any and all credits for an incomplete qualification may be recognised by the same or different institution as meeting part of the requirements for a different qualification, or may be recognised by a different institution as meeting part of the requirements for the same qualification”.
- HEQSF (2013) also provided that “a maximum of 50% of the credits of a completed qualification may be transferred to another qualification, provided also that no more than 50% of the credits required for the other qualification are credits that have been used for a completed qualification”.
- CAT must be applied in alignment with the HEQSF and with the CAT policy of the CHE.

Furthermore, for Advanced Standing, RPL and CAT can lead to advanced credit standing since:

- The HEQSF (2013) emphasizes the general principle that the admitting institution must be “satisfied that the applicant has competence in the appropriate field of intended study at the appropriate entry level of the target qualification”.
- The HEQSF (2013) also requires that “the point of entry into a target programme must be such that candidates complete at least all the required credits at the exit level of the qualification”. (DHET, 2017)

### Transitioning to higher education

RPL should consider how to support students’ transition to higher education. Given the historical barriers of accessing HEIs, PIECCE should promote confidence building as suggested by Armsby (2013), Dismore (2016), and Hyland-Russel and Syrnyk (2015). In the first two studies, researchers applied a practice approach to understand how students learn to learn in higher education. Armsby’s (2013) study explored how RPL could facilitate professional learning and identity. Dismore’s (2016) study on internship students who progressed to higher education, examined the relationship between learning and a student’s *modus vivendi* or way of life, and concluded that reflexivity can form a bridge between experience and knowledge. Furthermore, reflexivity enabled students to navigate constraints and enablements. Similarly, PIECCE programme design should consider how to encourage meta-reflexivity and assess students’ reflective skills. This will enable students to explain the impact and implications of their learning in practice (Armsby, 2013; Dismore, 2016).



In contrast, Cooper and Harris (2013) asserted that progressing from experiential knowledge to codified knowledge requires ‘deliberate pedagogy’, especially since experiential learning can sometimes block the acquisition of codified knowledge. Consequently, these authors recommended that RPL should be reconceptualised as a specialized pedagogy.

Finally, in advocating RPL, we need to pay attention to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students and employ contextualisation to link their personal experiences and cultural knowledge with academic content, as recommended by Wyatt (2016). This will enable linkages between what students know and desired learning outcomes of new PIECCE programmes. Academic Literacy and Fundamental Competencies have been identified as possible gaps. PIECCE may provide an opportunity to develop bridging programmes in partnerships with HEIs and TVETs to ensure that students are able to meet the academic demands of full qualifications at university level.

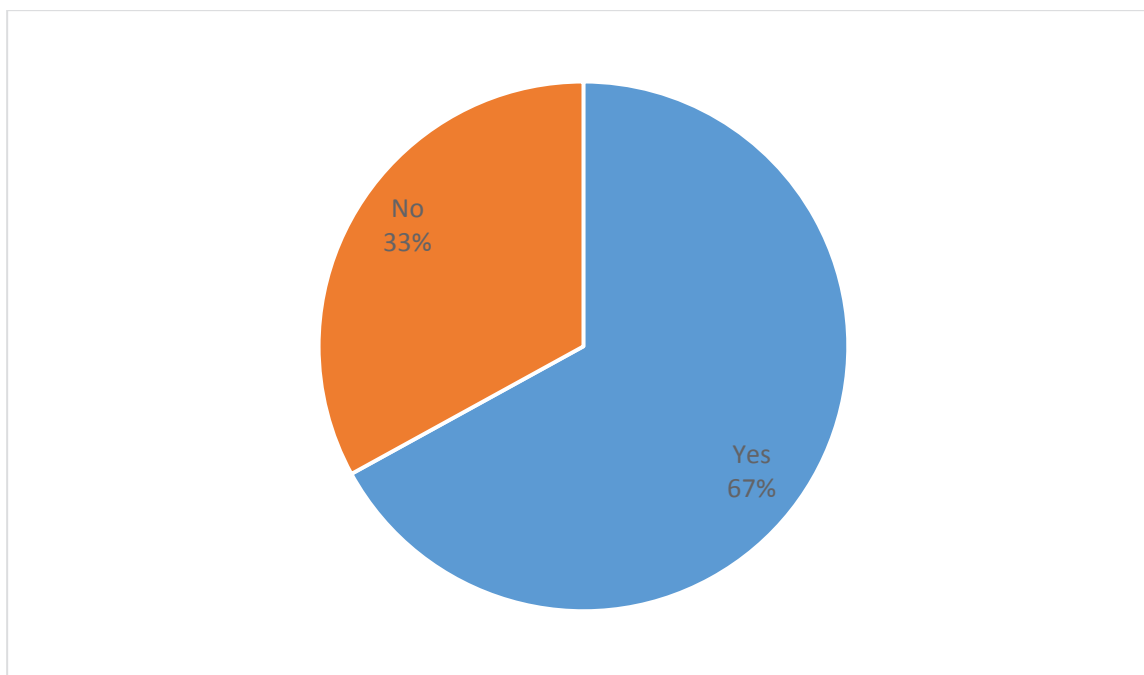
Points to consider:

While PIECCE cannot prescribe to HEIs, it can offer recommendations for implementation of RPL within specific disciplinary settings. Therefore, the PIECCE core team should identify possible barriers to implementation of RPL and develop guidelines for RPL tools and techniques (DHET, 2013) specific to the needs of ECD practitioners. This will advance systematic application of RPL in the post-school education and training system. Mechanisms to track students admitted to programmes through RPL should also be explored.

PIECCE has the potential to transform the ECD field in SA. How RPL is understood and applied by PIECCE will determine who enrolls in new programmes. If we wish to be inclusive, our programme design and delivery must ensure redress of our historically marginalized field of education. This compels us to think creatively about how we facilitate access to higher education and success for all ECD practitioners, as they are key to quality enhancement of programmes for our youngest and most vulnerable children.

[The voice of the student](#)

It is appropriate that we look at the responses of the students in Survey 3 to the question, “If you are a final year student, do you feel properly prepared to enter the classroom?” (Fig. 23).

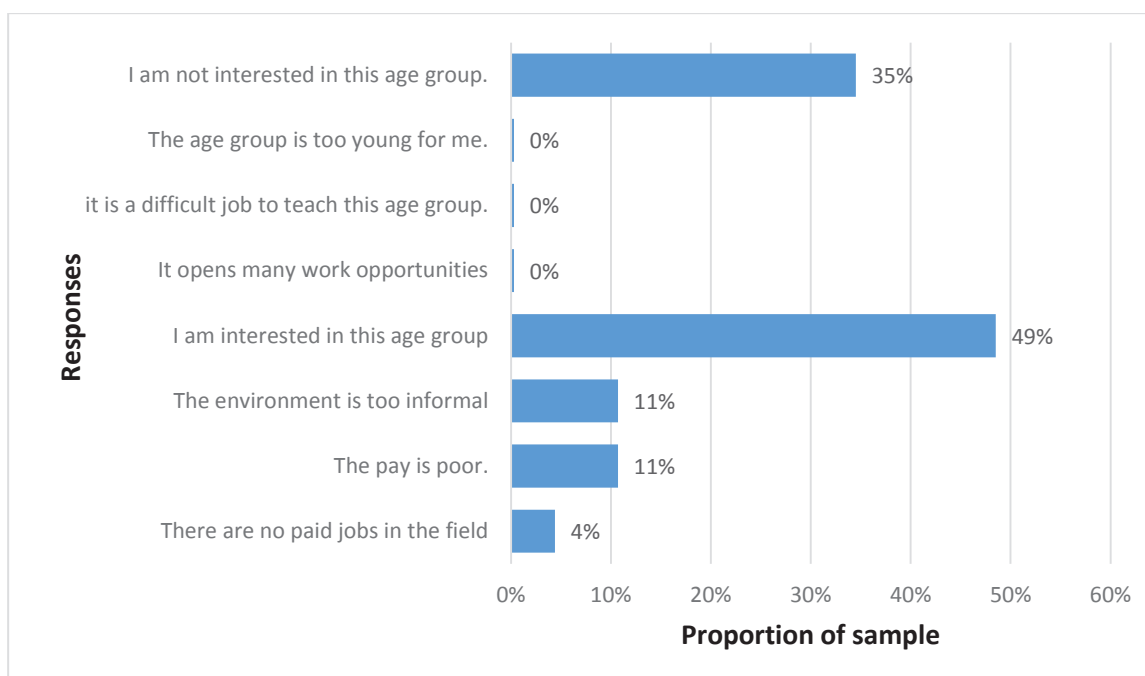


**Figure 23:** If you are a final year student, do you feel properly prepared to enter a classroom next year? (Number of respondent students = 398)

Some of the negative responses came from students who were not yet in their final year of training and therefore felt that they could not yet make a judgement on this question. The rest stemmed largely from students saying they felt the need for more practical experience. “I feel like the issue of diversity has been addressed, however special needs (physically and mentally) has yet to be addressed. I would still recommend the course to other people, as even though it is an extremely demanding course, the content is extremely valuable on both a theoretical and practical level.” This was not the case from the NPO sector as their students are in-service. Suggestions from students included more frequent practicals, but for shorter periods of time, as there was a feeling that there is still too much emphasis on the theoretical and not enough on practice: support in how to manage the discipline of the classroom; more emphasis on content knowledge as some teachers felt ill-prepared in this sense, and also a concern that there is no attention given to equipping teachers with knowledge around the admin load that they face.

When asked if they would consider training to be a teacher in the 0-4 age group, 56% indicated that they would and 44% said no. The reasons given are illustrated below (Fig. 24).

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**Figure 24:** Would you consider training to be a teacher of the 0-4 age group? (Number of respondent students = 398)

There was an interest in a 0-4 qualification, but there was also a concern that the field is poorly paid, children are difficult to teach because they are so young, and there are insufficient jobs available (Fig. 24). The issue of pay and availability of jobs would need to be taken up by government if the plans to professionalize the 0-4 sector is to succeed.

## NORMS AND STANDARDS

### Introduction

In early childhood, children are developing at a rapid pace. Richter (2013) noted that children direct their energies towards building their bodies and minds, forming relationships, learning, exploring and developing knowledge and skills about their culture and language. What children experience in their environments will have a profound effect on who they are, who they will become and how their sense of belonging will be shaped. Adults who care for and education young children therefore have a great responsibility for children's health, growth, development and laying the foundations for lifelong learning.

In low and middle income (LMIC) countries there is growing recognition of the importance of investing in early childhood. The challenges, however, relate to systems development, infrastructure, delivery of equitable and quality provision and the ability to recruit, retain and support ECCE personnel in different settings (UNESCO, 2015). There are also stark differences between children's learning and development experiences according to categories of difference such as social class and geographic location (urban-rural disparities) (Neuman & Hatipolu, 2015). What this means is that the children who have the greatest need for intervention might not be receiving appropriate interventions to turn their lives around.

The science of child development together with insights on how to best support learning in the early years draws attention to the fact that working with young children is complex, dynamic and challenging and makes demands on a variety of professional roles (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015). These demands must be understood in context. Whilst the ECCE workforce in LMICs face similar issues as rich countries, what is concerning is the scale of the issues that the workforce has to deal with (UNESCO, 2015). Poverty, violence, poor health, nutrition, social and economic marginalisation, diversity and inequality complicates what educators have to contend with in their professional capacities. This is exacerbated by the fact that ECCE is a domain populated by women in a low status job.

In SA, the issues facing the ECCE workforce resonate with the concerns in LMIC. ECCE in contemporary South Africa embodies an ideological and political struggle towards a society founded on social justice and human rights. There is recognition of the centrality of childhood and children as individuals and citizens (DBE, 2001; Martin, 2015). The latter is particularly the case given the inequities in ECCE provision in the apartheid past (Ebrahim 2010). Richter et al. (2012) together with Berry et al. (2013) highlighted the multiple risks that affects young children. They draw attention to how poverty, high infant mortality rates, malnutrition and anti-social behaviour lead to risky early childhood development. The workforce who receive these children are largely underqualified black females who are in need of quality training (DSD & Economic Policy Research Unit 2014).

Morrow (2007, p. 28), in his response to the challenges in SA education, maintained that the "remedy is going to have to be professional". For ECCE there is agreement for the urgent

task of professionalizing the workforce, creating a career path and improving the quality of teachers to make a difference to child outcomes (Biersteker, 2008; Ebrahim et al., 2013; Motala 2012; ETDP SETA, 2012). There is concern that the most vulnerable groups, namely, babies and toddlers are not receiving developmentally appropriate stimulation that is critical to support early learning. The Human Resource Development Strategy tabled in the National Integrated ECD Policy (DSD & UNICEF, 2015) recognized the need for the expansion of the size and diversity of the workforce with necessary knowledge and practice skills to address the needs of children in early childhood.

The Policy on Minimum Requirements for Programmes Leading to Qualifications in Higher Education for ECD Educators (PMRP) (DHET, 2017) is historic as it officially opens up the doors of HEIs to develop and deliver ECCE programmes through a competency-based model in ITE and continuing teacher education. Sayed, et al. (2016) argued that ITE in SA is an important arena of focus. It creates opportunities for entry level student teachers to shift towards new working cultures. These cultures must be nurtured through building foundational capacity to effect change in students as professionals-in-the-making and for the children they will educate.

This literature review focuses on ITE with special reference to unpacking the background information necessary for building the Programme Framework for 0-4 ITE. This framework will be directed at the preparation of educators “to facilitate learning in the ECCE context with confidence” (DHET 2017, p. 140). In many respects, the work of the norms and standards task team is essential as it forms the backbone of the development of the Level 6 and 7 Diploma and Degree in ECCE which is key to Output 3 of the PIECCE project. The literature review will unpack the following:

- context of ECCE in relation to children’s development and workforce issues;
- knowledge and practice standards for Diploma and Degree in ECCE which is considered to be ITE for the early childhood profession;
- curriculum development for the Diploma and Degree in ECCE.

It is envisaged that the above three aspects will be used in dialogue platforms to make decisions on the final content related to standards and curriculum development in the Programme Framework.

The norms and standards task team lit review addresses some of the philosophies behind how we train and view ECCE. Below is the initial thinking that is coming through in the empirical data.

#### [Philosophy behind current programme development](#)

The empirical data asked the question of what the philosophy was behind current ECD programmes that are being delivered across the different institutions. The table below contains qualitative data extracted from Survey 2.

**Table 15:** What is the philosophy behind your training programmes?

What is the philosophy behind your training programmes?
To produce teachers that can teach in any context.
To provide a practical approach to ECD.
To meet a need where there is a shortage of trained teachers e.g. Grade R.
To train teachers to teach with a play-based approach to learning.
To train teachers to identify barriers to learning.
To empower practitioners in our ECD communities.
To ensure a well-rounded education for beginner teachers.
To produce a motivated and committed teacher who has the best interests of the children she teaches at heart.
To teach in-service practitioners new knowledge and concepts.
To broaden students' knowledge of the young child's cognitive, linguistic, physical, social and aesthetic development and how this development relates to their learning skills.

The table above describes a teacher who is potentially capable of functioning in a variety of contexts, has sound content and practical knowledge whilst working within her community to meet the needs of the child. What needs to be considered is how much of the above philosophies are applicable to the 0-4 Diploma/Degree and if these are our generic ideas behind a quality qualification in ECCE. The qualitative comments will be considered in relation to the competency approach to teacher training in ECD. It is important however to first understand is derived from the literature.

A review of policies, research reports and literature on teacher education provided four key messages which are important to consider for standards generation and curriculum development in ECCE initial teacher education.

- Key message 1: Children in early childhood in SA experience many vulnerabilities that needs to be addressed in teacher education – context matters.
- Key message 2: SA policies provide foundations for the preparation of ECCE educators.
- Key message 3: A competency-based model with knowledge and practice standards can be used flexibly to guide the preparation of the ECCE educators.
- Key message 4: A shift from a technical to a more engaging approach is needed for curriculum development for ECCE ITE.

Taking into account the new thrust towards professionalization of the SA ECCE workforce, the messages above point to new directions that the field of teacher education in the early

years should be taking. The championing of the new thrust has to come from an ECCE community of practice which is already emerging in the PIECCE research. Such a response is essential if the new National Programme Framework for ECCE ITE is going to be contextually relevant to realities in SA.

#### Discussion of key messages

**Key Message1: Children in early childhood in SA experience many vulnerabilities that needs to be addressed in teacher education:**

Any teacher education programme in SA would be impoverished if it did not take into account the bigger picture of young children's lives and the factors impacting on the workforce development. Educators work is informed by how children develop and learn in the variety of contexts in their lives. It is also informed by the conditions that shape their service. In what follows, the plight of children and their educators are presented with the view to motivate for contextually responsive models of ITE for ECCE.

#### Vulnerable early childhoods:

The situational realities of children in early childhood in SA affects their growth, development and learning. There are varied childhood experiences that shape the nature of ECCE work. Whilst some children live in enabling environments that contribute to their optimal development there are many whose development is compromised. There are 6,311,000 children under six in SA (SA ECD Review, 2016). Geographical location and socio-economic conditions impacts negatively on children's lives. In Eastern Cape, Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga more than 60% of children under six live in rural areas. Four million children under six live in the poorest 40% of households. Children are left in the care of grandparents, relatives and neighbours as their mothers seek employment. There is child poverty but this has decreased since the introduction of the child support grant. The living conditions brings a constellation of risk. Poor infrastructure and access to basic amenities results in poor hygiene contributes towards disease and infections. This state of affairs calls for ECCE educators to be trained in ways that they are able to address the needs of young children in all context with due attention being given to children in the disadvantaged context. It should be noted that the empirical data regarding what competencies students should acquire during WIL, mentioned placing students in a variety of contexts (52%), but providing the tools to adapt to a variety of contexts did not emerge sufficiently from the data. The priority areas were language skills (95%) and practical teaching (90%).

#### Women's work with little or no pay:

ECCE is naturally taken to be women's work. As such it has been regarded as unpaid labour where there is an expectation that work will be done as part of a moral orientation towards values of love, commitment and interdependence (William, 2010). Volunteerism is still viewed as an entry point to paid labour in ECCE in SA. This response is more likely for those working in non-centre based settings in poor rural locations (Biersteker, 2007). ECCE educators need to be developed in their professional roles, responsibilities and mind-sets to

embrace the challenges of care and education work in an emerging professionalization system.

Unstable workforce – low retention:

The unstable workforce has resulted from the lack of a government-led ECCE system and specifically a human resource strategy for the early years. Whilst this is being addressed under the Human Resource Strategy in the National Integrated ECD Policy (2017) it is still to be effected at grassroots. Working in the early years sector below Grade R is a poorly paid job (Ebrahim, 2010). In LMICs including SA the status, pay, and benefits for the ECCE workforce are poorer than those of primary teachers and this can lead to low job satisfaction and retention rates (UNESCO, 2015). Whilst centres receive subsidies they also charge fees and poor parents are unable to pay. This results in practitioners having little or no money. Poor job security and conditions of service (ETDP SETA, 2012) serve as reasons to leave the sector. Where support was provided through learnerships there were unintended consequences. Biesteker (2008) drew attention to how practitioners who received financial support for training were dissatisfied with what they received once the training was completed. They therefore left the sector, sought other learnerships or made their way towards Grade R which is more established. The empirical data regarding reasons for not being interested in obtaining a 0-4 Degree or Diploma resided in the issue of poor pay and lack of jobs in the sector therefore verifying the need to address this issue if the goal of professionalising the sector is to be achieved.

The impact of HIV/Aids and natural attrition also contributes to the instability in the workforce. Both the conditions of service and the poor qualifications of the ECCE workforce draws attention to building knowledgeable and skilful professionals in a very volatile job market. Hence the need to factor the basic knowledge and skills for prospective student who will take the entrepreneurship route. As well as practitioners who will be required to support learning and play the role of managers. Leadership, management, administration and knowledge of policies and legislations are important. When asked in the empirical data, which top five competencies training institutions would want to develop in their teachers none of the aforementioned were listed. Assessment, practical teaching and the set-up of the classroom were considered priorities.

Teacher quality:

Quality is a relative concept and recently there is some agreement that at a minimum we should be able to see something making a difference in the lives of young children and their families. Research has shown that quality is a more consistent predictor of children's growth, development and learning, than race, socio-economic status, parental education (Darling-Hammond, 1999). Improvement of access and quality is linked to the development of competent, well-trained and well-supported teachers (UNESCO, 2015). In SA the knowledge and practice competencies and qualifications of the workforce is a cause for concern.

The Western Cape DSD (HSRC & Early Learning Resource Unit, 2010) conducted an audit of the quality of service in centre-based provision for pre-grade R children. Findings showed



that activities provided for babies and toddlers were of low quality. Early identification of children with special needs was problematic. Training was limited, but valued when offered. The National Audit of 19,971 ECD centres across the nine provinces found that qualifications were poor (DSD & Economic Policy Research Unit, 2014). Only 30% of practitioners had ECD certificates on any level and Diplomas and Degrees were rare. 55% percent of the practitioners had no formal qualifications. There is evidence in LMICs to show that both the programme quality and child outcomes can be attributed to input from teachers who are better educated and trained (Engle et al. 2011; Behrman et al. 2013; Rao et al. 2014). For this to happen in substantive ways the support in ITE as well as continuing professional development has to be strengthened.

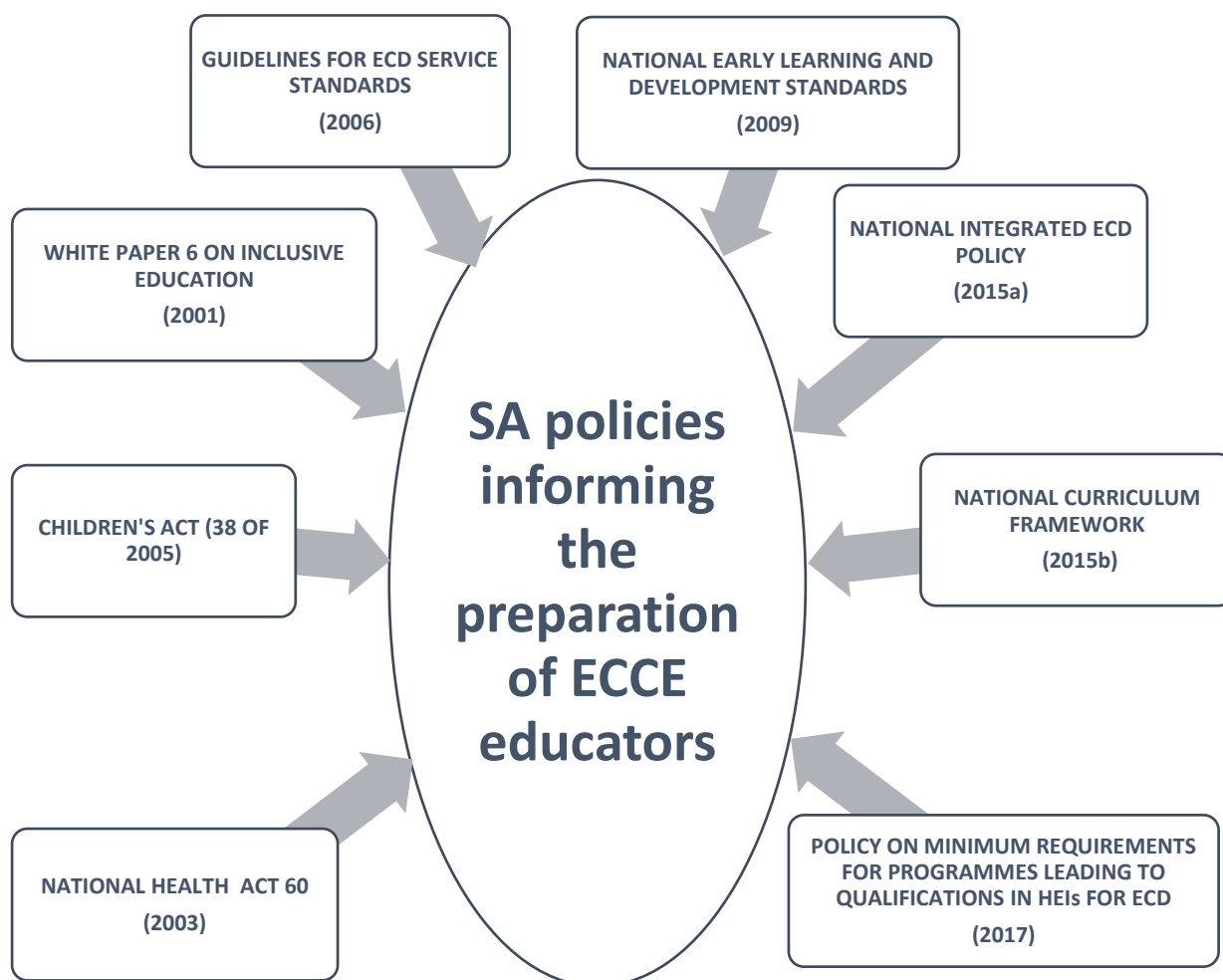
**Key message 2: SA policies provide foundations for the preparation of ECCE educators:**

It is important to outline the policies that impact on the preparation of ECCE educators. Each of the policies and guidelines are aimed at advancing children's rights. One of the key roles ECCE educators will play is that of advocates for children's rights. The following policies and guidelines are important to consider for qualification development and content for the care and education of babies, toddlers and young children:

- National Health Act 60 (2003): Focuses on the protection of the rights of vulnerable groups. Makes provision for free health care services for pregnant women and children under the age of six. Also pays attention to fulfilling children's rights to basic nutrition.
- Children's Act 38 of 2005: Includes early childhood development in a comprehensive framework of norms and standards for care and education in the early years. Aims at managing and regulating the ECCE system. Also focuses on children with disabilities, chronic illness, safety, child protection. Recognises parent and family support interventions.
- White Paper Six on Inclusive Education (2001): Seeks to put in place procedures for early identification of risk and interventions for children with disabilities.
- Guidelines for ECD Service Standards (2006): Provides norms and standards for monitoring and evaluation of ECCE services.
- National Early Learning Standards (2009): Sets out the developmental and learning expectations for children from birth to four.
- National Integrated ECD Policy (2015): Ensures universal and equitable access to ECD services through a national integrated framework which focuses on legal provision, organisational and institutional arrangements, funding streams, workforces development, essential package and quality assurance.
- National Curriculum Framework for birth to four (2015): Focuses on the planning, facilitation and assessment of care and learning experiences in six early learning developmental areas, namely, wellbeing, identity and belonging, communication, mathematics, knowledge and understanding of the world and creativity.
- Policy on Minimum Requirements for Programmes Leading to Qualifications in Higher Education for ECD Educators (2017): Provides a set of qualifications for ECCE

educators who are delivering programmes or assisting to do so with an approved curriculum framework.

The above list of policies are represented diagrammatically to illustrate how they feed into the preparation of the ECCE educator (Fig. 26).



**Figure 26:** SA policies and guidelines informing the preparation of ECCE teachers.

**Key Message 3:** A competency-based model with knowledge and practice standards can be used flexibly to guide the preparation of the ECCE educators:

The competency-based model and knowledge and practice standards:

PMRP (DHET, 2017) uses a competency-based model for ECCE teacher education. This model works from the fundamental premise that it is necessary to define *what educators should be able to know and do*. This means that students have to demonstrate the knowledge and practice competencies through the learning opportunities in the ECCE programme and

then effect it as professionals once they graduate. The competencies provide benchmarks of what the minimum levels of achievement in various aspects of practice should be. The competencies are outlined in the knowledge and practice standards.

In the PMRP (DHET, 2017), the basic competencies for professional qualifications are listed in Appendix One. There are also indications of competencies in other parts of the document such as the knowledge mix, for example, pedagogic learning. There needs to be a better organisation of the competencies for it to function as knowledge and practice standards that can inform programmed design, monitoring, evaluations etc. If thoughtfully designed then the knowledge and practice standards can be used not only for ITE but also be expanded for continuing teacher education.

The pros and cons of knowledge and practice standards for ECCE teacher education:

In rich countries such as Australia, UK and US there are guidelines on competencies for ECCE educators. The knowledge, practice and professional dispositions are detailed. Of late there has been a move to harmonise all teacher education competencies from early childhood to basic education in rich countries. In LMIC countries, however, the professional competencies and guidelines are less forthcoming but this is changing (UNESCO 2015). One of the reasons for the slow uptake is that there is not enough evidence on the level, content and organisation of teacher training and professional development to pass judgement on what is most effective for improving quality. Additionally, too many changes are attempted at the same time and it is difficult to ascertain which aspects make a difference to quality ECCE. The PIECECE project is beginning to address the issue of providing evidence on level, content and organisation of teacher training as it considers the input of a variety of teacher training institutions and what they have found to be effective or priorities. The empirical evidence suggests that mentoring students, providing integrated academic support, opportunities to experience WIL across a variety of contexts and promoting reflective practice, are paramount when addressing issues of quality.

In SA for ECCE practice, the NELDs specified what children at different ages should be able to know and do. It is unclear to what extent the NELDS has been used for the development of core competencies for ECCE educators. Thus far in ECCE an example of drawing on knowledge and practice standards is evident in qualifications accredited by the ETDP SETA. The Further Education and Training Certificate for ECD which is an entry level qualification makes use of unit standards informed by international comparability. There is some evidence of knowledge and practice standards.

The danger of a government-imposed knowledge and practice standards:

With regard to qualifications offered by HEIs, the core knowledge and practices have not been comprehensively outlined in policy documents. Sayed et al. (2016) drew attention to how the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) policy (DHET, 2011) aimed at ECCE (Foundation Phase), does not provide details on pedagogies, theories and structures that providers need to be adhering to. This approach has been taken to avoid a government-imposed regulatory framework. When this approach is strong, then

there can be the risk of promoting one particular view of teaching and what it means to be a teacher (Sachs, 2003). To obviate this, it is expected that the field would collaborate to develop a shared framework to inform programme development. In the Foundation Phase this has been problematic as there is no community of practice guiding this type of work. Additionally, there is institutional competitiveness and this hampers collaborative endeavours for programme development.

The value of minimum standards and knowledge and practice standards developed and overseen by the ECCE profession:

The establishment of minimum standards as outlined in the PMRP (DHET, 2017) is important to expand and strengthen the ECCE profession. Minimum standards can guarantee the health and safety of children in ECEC environments. They can ensure the conditions of learning and care by defining duration, staff qualification levels and curriculum to shape staff behaviour (Burchinal et al., 2009; OECD, 2001). National regulatory frameworks with appropriate minimum standards can better “level the playing field” by ensuring that all children benefit from a minimum quality of education and care (Belsky, 2011; Eurydice, 2009; Vandenbroeck, 2011). Raising standards or setting minimum standards can help reduce knowledge gaps for all, although the effect is greater for low-income, immigrant and minority children (OECD, 2006; 2011).

For minimum standards to be relevant it must have input from the ECCE field and be owned and overseen by the profession of ECCE. The defining of knowledge and practices for ECCE standards must be done by a community of practice made up of a variety of providers from the profession. It should be used flexibly and adapted to address contextual realities together with concerns for career pathways. This is important so that the uniqueness of the ECCE profession is acknowledged and a one-size-fits all approach is avoided. This is particularly important for SA where the ECCE teacher education system is fragmentary, in need of a shared vision and shared understanding of knowledge and practice standards that unites the variety of training providers.

There needs to be acknowledgement that students will be able to perform in a variety of contexts. The outlining of the knowledge, skills and professional dispositions can guide the building of foundations for a strong workforce. What must be avoided at all costs, is the use of middle class urban norms to define the knowledge and practice standards. Attention must be given to situated and value-laden definitions of quality if there is to be sensitivity to the variety of ways in which knowledge and practice competencies can be looked at.

This response above is valuable. ECCE educators can begin to identify themselves not just through a Diploma and Degree qualifications but through knowledge and practice competencies that are gained through participating in the learning opportunities offered in the qualifications. To function like this, professional learning opportunities must be well thought through to help students embrace new cultures, new thinking and related actions. The goal should be the use of the knowledge and practice standards as a basis for curriculum

development, approval of programmes by the DHET and CHE, evaluations by teacher educators and awarding of Degrees.

### SA core competencies for ECCE professionals

In order to gain fuller picture of the competencies for ECCE professions in SA, an analysis was conducted using two qualifications, namely, the Occupational Certificate: Early Childhood Development, the Further Education and Training Certificate: Early Childhood Development and the PMRP (DHET, 2017) (see Appendix 1). The first two qualifications are entry level qualifications. Both qualifications aim at developing practitioners for centre and non-centred-based provision. The occupational qualification has an explicit focus on supporting practitioners dealing with conception to school going age. The FETC Level 4 certificate is aimed at practitioners who are in ECCE settings but have no formal qualifications. Both these qualifications aim at offering the basic knowledge and practical competencies. The FETC Level 4 pays attention to communication and the basic mathematics requirements for building professionalism in practitioners. The PMRP (DHET, 2017) is aimed at developing educators who will be able to deliver structured ECCE programmes which include but is not limited to the implementation of formal ECCE curriculum frameworks.

When the Occupational Certificate for ECD and the Further Education and Training Certificate for ECD were compared with competencies in the PMRP (DHET, 2017) it was possible to identify some common competencies that needs further engagement for knowledge and practice standards in the SA context. Ten competencies were identify. They do resonate with international core competencies for ECCE educators. This is not surprising as the international response to standards has been referenced in the two qualifications. There were some absences in the entry-level qualifications. For example, the content knowledge does not feature, the ethics of working with young children is absent and there is a limited response to context responsiveness although mention is made of diversity and inclusivity. Parity at levels of qualifications is also an issue of concern. This fragmentation could be addressed through more standardisation of competencies.

The 10 core competencies provide a good starting point to develop knowledge and practice standards for the field. They can be used not only for pre-Grade R but also the Foundation Phase. They show some alignment to international standards, for example, the National Association for the Education of the Young Child and the Teacher Standards in the UK.

Note that these ten competencies can be used to facilitate dialogue on the kind of ECCE educators we need in the SA context.

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**Table 16:** Core Competencies found in SA ECCE qualifications and the PMRP (DHET, 2017).

1.	Becoming a professional by paying attention to mindset, roles and responsibilities.
2.	Understanding and promoting child development and learning in different contexts.
3.	Building family and community relationships.
4.	Ensuring effective health, safety and nutrition practices.
5.	Creating effective learning environments including managing behaviour.
6.	Planning and facilitating learning through play and other transformative pedagogies in appropriate ways (developmentally, culturally linguistically).
7.	Using curriculum and relevant content knowledge to build meaningful learning opportunities (6 Early Learning and Development Areas in NCF).
8.	Observing, documenting and assessing to support young children’s development and learning.
9.	Understanding and addressing diversity, inclusion and equity to act in the best interest of all children.
10.	Showing basic leadership, management and administration skills.

The 10 competencies and the knowledge mix

In order to operationalise the 10 competencies they must be linked to the knowledge mix in the PMRP (DHET, 2017). The table that follows shows the link to the knowledge mix:

**Table 17:** The link between the 10 competencies and the knowledge mix.

10 ECCE Professional Competencies	Knowledge Mix					
	FL	EL	DL	PL	SL	PR L
Becoming a profession by paying attention to mindset, roles and responsibilities	X	X			X	X
Understanding and promoting child development and learning in different contexts			X			
Building family and community relationships			X		X	
Ensuring effective health, safety and nutrition practices			X		X	X
Creating effective care and learning environments including managing behaviour				X		X
Planning and facilitating care and learning through play and other transformative pedagogies in appropriate ways (developmentally, culturally, linguistically)				X		X
Using curriculum and relevant content knowledge to build meaningful learning (e.g., 6 Early Learning Areas in NCF)			X	X		X
Observing, documenting and assessing to support young children’s development and learning			X	X		X
Having knowledge and addressing diversity, inclusion and equity to include all children			X	X	X	
Showing basic leadership, management and administration skills			X	X		

A comparative analysis between the proposed 10 competencies and the qualitative data on the philosophies evidenced three areas that were not raised as priorities by training institutions.

**Table 18:** Professional competencies and current philosophies.

10 ECCE Professional Competencies	Current philosophies
Becoming a profession by paying attention to mindset, roles and responsibilities	To ensure a ‘well-rounded’ education for beginner teachers. To produce a motivated and committed teacher who has the best interests of the children she teaches at heart.
Understanding and promoting child development and learning in different contexts	To produce teachers that can teach in any context.
Building family and community relationships	To empower practitioners in our ECD communities
Ensuring effective health, safety and nutrition practices	
Creating effective care and learning environments including managing behaviour	To provide a practical approach to ECD.
Planning and facilitating care and learning through play and other transformative pedagogies in appropriate ways (developmentally, culturally, linguistically)	To train teachers to teach with a play-based approach to learning.
Using curriculum and relevant content knowledge to build meaningful learning (e.g., 6 Early Learning Areas (ELDAs) in NCF)	To teach in-service practitioners new knowledge and concepts. To broaden students’ knowledge of the young child’s cognitive, linguistic, physical, social and aesthetic development and how this development relates to their learning skills.
Observing, documenting and assessing to support young children’s development and learning	
Having knowledge and addressing diversity, inclusion and equity to include all children	To train teachers to identify barriers to learning.
Showing basic leadership, management and administration skills	

The competency of ‘ensuring effective health, safety and nutrition practices’ may not be seen as a broad philosophy linked to teacher training as it is often seen to be part of the domain of the community development practitioner in ECCE. Furthermore when training a cohort of 36 in-service B.Ed F.P. students on health and safety at one of the participating HEI’s, it became evident that most of them did not have a health and safety policy in their schools, a first aid kit, outside play rules or a vegetable garden. As these teachers were teaching from Grade R to Grade 3, it would be expected that they would have some awareness of health and safety. This suggests that current training is not raising the awareness of the student/practitioner as to the importance of the latter.

‘Observing, documenting and assessing to support young children’s development and learning’ was not listed as a philosophy in the qualitative data, but does feature in the empirical data as necessary to the practices of WIL. However at no stage across the three surveys, is the reason for observing or assessing given. Observation is mainly seen as a strategy to be used by incumbent/in-service teachers to learn from other teachers. The

concept of observing and assessing to *support* the development of the child is something that would need to be actively addressed.

‘Showing basic leadership, management and administrative skills’ are qualities that were not addressed by the two institutional surveys as being important competencies. Furthermore the student survey showed that there was no support given to the administrative load of the teacher, how to be a leader or manager. The latter two aspects did not come up in mentorship either. Given that teachers in ECCE are often placed in a situation where they are self-employed or in charge of an ECD centre, it is essential that our students/practitioners are empowered with the aforementioned skills.

Organising the 10 competencies to function as knowledge and practice standards

The 10 competencies fall under three broad themes, the themes are overlapping and interrelated.

- Professional Knowledge (Knowing):

Different types of knowledge are needed in order to help students to be responsive to children’s need and interests in different contexts and in an inclusive way. This knowledge needs to be linked to practice for a strong theory-practice relationship. The empirical data from Survey 2 showed that 94% of the sampled institutions stated that they are preparing their students for practice in different contexts. This is achieved primarily through the following:

- Visiting different sites to teach
- Observing of mentor teachers in different contexts
- Specific training related to diverse contexts of learning, for example, multilingual classrooms/special needs.

- Professional Practice (Doing):

Students need to draw on professional knowledge and apply this in practice. The knowledge must be relevant to afford the student the tools they need to make practice contextually responsive and inclusive. For the SA context they should be equipped with a variety of strategies, methodologies and techniques to effect quality care and education experiences for children. There should be opportunities to learn *in* and *from* practices.

- Professional mind-set, roles and responsibilities:

Students must take seriously the fact that they are developing as members of an ECCE profession. The model of teacher education discussed in the next section is important to consider. The shaping of mind-sets as critically reflective educators is imperative in order to prevent the rise of technical educators who privilege outcomes without taking into account the contextual needs of individual children. It is also important to promote the actions of an ethical educator who understands and effects the ethical protocols and other guidelines for working with young children. Empirical data from Survey 2 showed that 95% of sampled institutions stated that they supported reflective practice. This is achieved by means of the following:

- Allocating time in lectures for reflection



- Ensuring a dedicated space in a lesson plan template for reflection on the daily practice of the teacher
- Students being given the opportunity to discuss the role of reflection in teaching.
- Writing a reflective journal both as a means to improve academic literacy and to encourage the practice of reflection.



**Figure 26:** Three themes informing the professional competencies.

An example of content for professional knowledge, practice, mindsets, roles and responsibilities to be factored into the knowledge mix of PMRP (DHET, 2017):

The 10 competencies are broken down into the three themes to define content for the qualifications. This needs to be discussed and refined by ECCE professionals.

**Table 19:** The three themes around which the 10 competencies are organised.



Example of developing levels of knowledge and practice standards for the Degree and Diploma:

The SAQA level descriptors provide the overall direction for how to pitch the knowledge, skills and mind sets, roles and responsibilities at various levels from 5 to 7 for the Diploma and Degree. The profession of ECCE teacher education needs to agree on what content we will place under each of the knowledge and practice competencies for ITE. The example below is adapted from Competencies for EC Professional (Virginia ECD Alignment Project,

2008) and the New Jersey Core Competencies (2015) for the competency area of observing, documenting and assessing to support young children’s development and learning.

**Table 20:** Example of knowledge and practice standards

Observing, documenting and assessing to support young children’s development and learning	
Com- petency Area	
Standard	Knowledge
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessment and evaluation must be valid, reliable, and sensitive to the cultural and linguistic background of the child. Theoretical insights must also be use.</li> <li>Practices must include observing children in natural situations and documenting observations through a variety of strategies.</li> <li>Assessment procedures must be planned in accordance with up-to-date information on appropriate methods, sensitivity to individual and cultural differences, and with regard to the overall purpose of assessment.</li> <li>Informal assessments and initial screenings are used to determine whether additional assessment and/or consultation are needed.</li> <li>Families are encouraged to share information about their children’s interests, activities, behaviours, developmental progress, health, and prior experiences.</li> <li>Confidentiality of assessment results is respected with legal and ethical considerations.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Practice based on the knowledge</b></p> <p><u>1. Assessment Plan and Procedures</u> Plan assessment procedures that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use formal and informal methods to identify and document children’s interests, strengths and challenges.</li> <li>Employ assessment theories used for decision making and curriculum planning.</li> <li>Implement assessment practices and interpret results with sensitivity to individual differences in children's ability levels as well as families' cultures, languages, and environmental factors.</li> <li>Reflect the overall purpose of assessment and articulate the limits of norm-referenced and standardised assessments.</li> </ul> <p><u>2. Communication with families</u> Communicate with families to share assessment plans and information as well as to plan follow-up services and developmental learning experiences based on assessment.</p> <p><u>3. Confidentiality</u> Maintain confidentiality of assessment results in accordance with ethical and legal considerations, including the importance of avoiding negative labelling of children.</p>
	<p><u>Diploma</u> (Should include and build on knowledge and practice standards from the certificate.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifies various ways to get to know each child as an individual and his/her background (cultural, linguistic, developmental).</li> <li>Follows procedures for collecting data about each child’s development.</li> <li>Uses a system for collection of children’s work samples and</li> </ul>
	<p><u>Degree</u> (Includes and builds on the Diploma.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses assessment tools that are relevant to curriculum or programme planning.</li> <li>Objectively observes and documents children’s activities and interactions with others.</li> <li>Uses observation on a regular basis to document children’s growth and development including social</li> </ul>

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	<p>observations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explains the importance of screening children for health and developmental progress.</li> <li>• Shares notes with families about children’s day and their learning.</li> <li>• Participates in making referrals to key personnel and maintains confidentiality.</li> </ul>	<p>emotional, physical, cognitive, language, and creative, using multiple measures (e.g., running records, anecdotal records, time sampling, checklists, surveys).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keeps accurate and up to date records of children’s health and developmental screening.</li> <li>• Maintains a collection of work samples and records of varying types of observations for each child (e.g., pictures, written observations, tape recordings).</li> <li>• Uses assessment information in curriculum planning, designing the environment, working with parents, and developing goals for the children.</li> <li>• Maintains confidentiality when dealing with sensitive information.</li> </ul>
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### Progression through competencies:

The empirical data indicated that 82% of training institutions claimed that the content of their courses are sequenced for progression from one course to another. This is achieved by the following:

- One module builds on another.
- Programmes are sequenced according to the NQF levels.
- A spiral approach towards curriculum development with each year’s content deepening and extending students’ knowledge.

### Materials and programme development

The empirical data surfaced that 33% of the sampled training institutions developed their own training materials and 38% who did not do so, made use of materials purchased from ‘The Alliance’ or ‘Eduwrite’. Amongst the NPO sector there was evidence of a sharing of materials but with the proviso that the organisation that had developed the materials, did the training of other organisations that chose to use those materials in order to ensure quality of implementation. Some materials were obtained through bookshops such as Van Schaik, Jutas or Pearsons and some materials were obtained from the WCED. Most in-house materials for ECD courses are developed over a period of three months with 53% of the sampled institutions stating that they work collaboratively with other organisations. Furthermore 57% of the institutions indicated that they prefer to develop their training programmes in a collaborative manner.

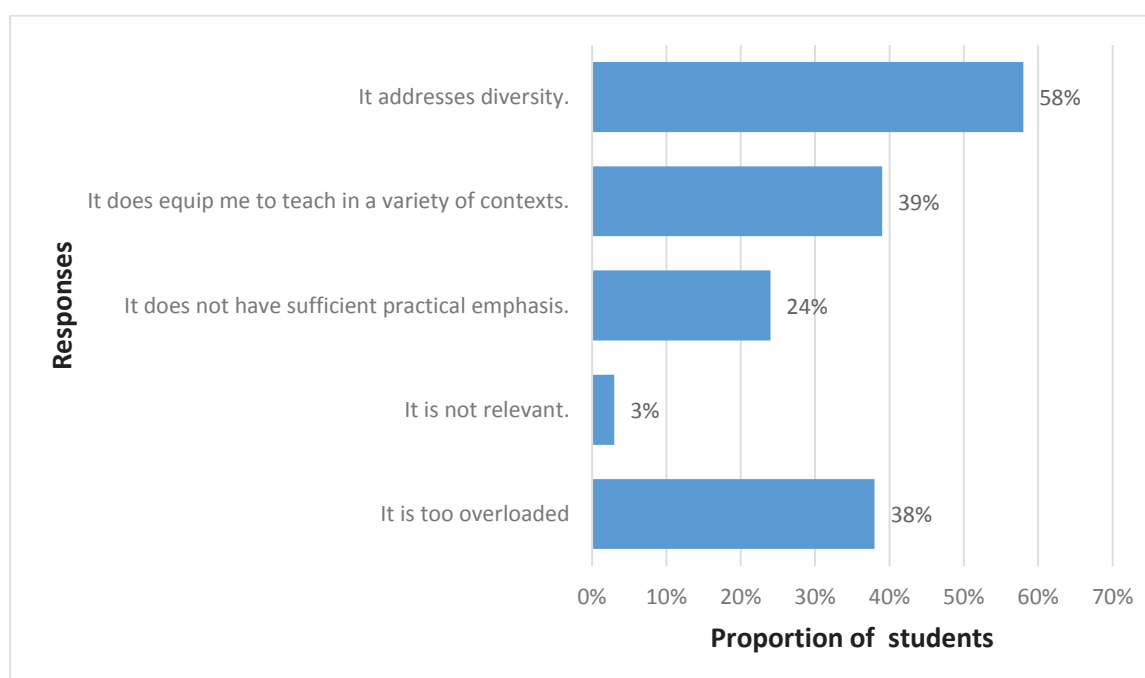
### Authenticity of programme content:

In Survey 2, programme heads, facilitators and lecturers were asked in what way their teacher training programmes are authentic to ECD. The table below presents the qualitative answers.

**Table 21:** How is the programme content authentic to ECD?

How is the programme content authentic to ECD?
It is tried and tested in ECD contexts.
We use experienced lecturers who have worked in the field.
All content is specifically focused on children from birth to 6 years old.
The programmes focus on ECD.
The programme focuses primarily on Foundation Phase which includes Grade R-3.
Moderation, assessment, verification are all according to the SAQA authorities guidelines.
It focuses on the development of the baby, toddler and young child.

There is an awareness of the need to focus on ECD with a few participants unpacking what this might mean (Table 20). There is also some indication of being guided by policy. 97% of the students/practitioners in Survey 3 said that they could identify with their curriculum with 92% stating that it was sufficiently content specific to ECD.



**Figure 27:** The positive and negative aspects of your curriculum? (Number of respondent students = 398)

The student response to the positive and negative aspects of their curriculum showed that there was a general sense that the issue of diversity was being addressed (Fig. 27). In addition there is some suggestion that students do feel equipped to teach in a variety of contexts. This is particularly important given the proposed competency to achieve the latter and the nature of SA’s teaching environments that inevitably require teachers to be flexible. When examining which of the students were stressing a lack of practical emphasis, the data showed that these were all from HEIs. Finally, the issue of a curriculum being overloaded is a challenging one as teaching in ECD is a complex activity due to the nature of the field and therefore it will always be difficult to keep a balance when designing a programme of quality. It is important

however to remain cognisant of the student/practitioner voice especially given the additional burden many face with combining studies with academic support.

**Key Message 4: Shift from a technical compliance approach to a more engaging approach to curriculum design in ECCE:**

This technical approach to curriculum looks for a functional fit between policy and the curriculum without engagement on the philosophical foundations of curriculum, the contextual particularities, the priorities for effecting change for quality and equity in ECCE. The concerns are related largely to complying with the technical requirements. Whilst this is an important part to ensure that qualifications are accepted, the ECCE curriculum team needs a more engaging approach to ensure contextually responsive teacher education. In what follows, there are particular dimensions that could help to make curriculum development an arena of dialogue and thoughtful action.

International best practice principles for teacher education:

When designing the Diploma and the Degree for ECCE it is important to know the principles that should inform teacher education programmes. Darling-Hammond (2005) provided the following synthesis of best practice principles for teacher education programmes which is adapted for concerns in ECCE:

- Coherence, based on a common, clear vision of good teaching grounded in an understanding of learning, must permeate all coursework and work integrated experiences.
- A strong core curriculum must be taught in the context of practice, grounded in knowledge of:
  - child development in context,
  - learning in social and cultural contexts,
  - curriculum,
  - assessment,
  - developmental domain and subject-matter pedagogy.
- Extensive, connected teaching practice experiences must be carefully developed to support the ideas and practices presented in simultaneous, closely interwoven course work.
- Well-defined standards of professional knowledge and practice must be used to guide and evaluate course work and practical work.
- Explicit strategies must be used to help students:
  - confront their own deep-seated beliefs and assumptions about learning and students;
  - learn about the experiences of people different from themselves.
- An inquiry approach that connects theory and practice, including regular use of case methods, analyses of teaching and learning, and teacher research applying learning to real problems of practice, and developing teachers as reflective practitioners, must be used.

- Strong ECCE settings-university partnerships that develop common knowledge and shared beliefs among ECCE settings-and university-based faculty must be used. It must allow for students to learn to teach in professional communities where modelling of the state-of-the-art practice for diverse learners and collegial learning for adults is evident.
- Assessment based on professional standards that evaluates teaching through demonstration of critical skills and abilities using performance assessments and portfolios that support the development of ‘adaptive expertise’ must be forthcoming (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 276).

Principles informing SA teacher education programmes:

In early childhood the principles are developed from what is considered to be effective practice with and for young children and for the development of practitioners/educators as people providing a professional service. It was possible to identify principles from a variety of policies in both an explicit and implicit way. The table that follows shows the principles and the thematic focus of SA policies and guidelines. All programmes for ECCE must take into account the principles in cross cutting ways.

**Table 22:** The principles and themes found in SA policies and guidelines

Principles in SA policies and guidelines	Thematic message	Reference
Embrace lifelong learning.	ECCE educators are lifelong learners and need to be developed (critically) reflective practitioners.	Department of Higher Education (2017) Policy on minimum requirements for programmes leading to qualifications in HEIs for ECD
Position as reflective practitioners to deal with complexities in children’s development; reflect in and on their practice with and for children.		Department of Education & UNICEF (2015b) National Curriculum Framework
Respect, protect and promote children’s rights.	Children’s rights must be respected and all actions must be in the best interest of children.	Childrens Act 38 of 2005
Address the needs and rights of all children.		Department of Social Development and UNICEF (2006) Guidelines for ECD Service Standards
Act in the best interest of children.		Children’s Act 38 of 2005 Department of Social Development & UNICEF (2015a) National Integrated ECD policy
Accept that all children can learn and all children need support.		Department of Education (2001) White Paper 6 on inclusive education
Recognize babies, toddlers and young children as competent people whose learning and development are important and	Children in early childhood are competent people.	Department of Higher Education (2017) Policy on minimum requirements for programmes leading to qualifications in HEIs for

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who need strong connections with adults.		ECD Department of Education & UNICEF (2015b) National Curriculum Framework
Respect the views of the child.		Department of Social Development & UNICEF (2015a) National Integrated ECD policy
The resourcefulness of each young child should be promoted.		Department of Social Development and UNICEF (2006) Guidelines for ECD Service Standards
Adults have the responsibility to ensure that the rights of children are protected and their growth and development are promoted.		(Department of Education & UNICEF 2009)
Recognise the holistic nature of (children's) learning.	Holistic child development and learning must be the focus of all programmes.	Policy on minimum requirements for programmes leading to qualifications in HEIs for ECD (DHET 2017)
Embrace an integrated child-centred approach which is critical to ensure holistic growth and development of young children. This allows for a child's freedom of expression and ability to explore their environment and experience healthy well-being.		Department of Education & UNICEF (2009) National Early Learning Standards
Promote broad values that underpin an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality, fairness and freedom.	Equity, diversity and inclusion must be addressed.	Department of Higher Education (2017) Policy on minimum requirements for programmes leading to qualifications in HEIs for ECD
Promote equity and non-discrimination.		Department of Education (2001) White Paper 6 on inclusive education
Children need to develop a positive self-identity early in life. They need to understand their identity as South African citizens and aspire to contribute positively to, and benefit from, their community, their country and the rest of the world.		Department of Education & UNICEF (2009) National Early Learning Standard
Respect and encourage democracy and foster a culture that promotes human rights and children's rights		Department of Higher Education (2017) Policy on minimum requirements for programmes leading to qualifications in HEIs for ECD
Pursue excellence and promote the full realization of the potential of every child, tolerance of ideas		Department of Higher Education (2017) Policy on minimum requirements for programmes



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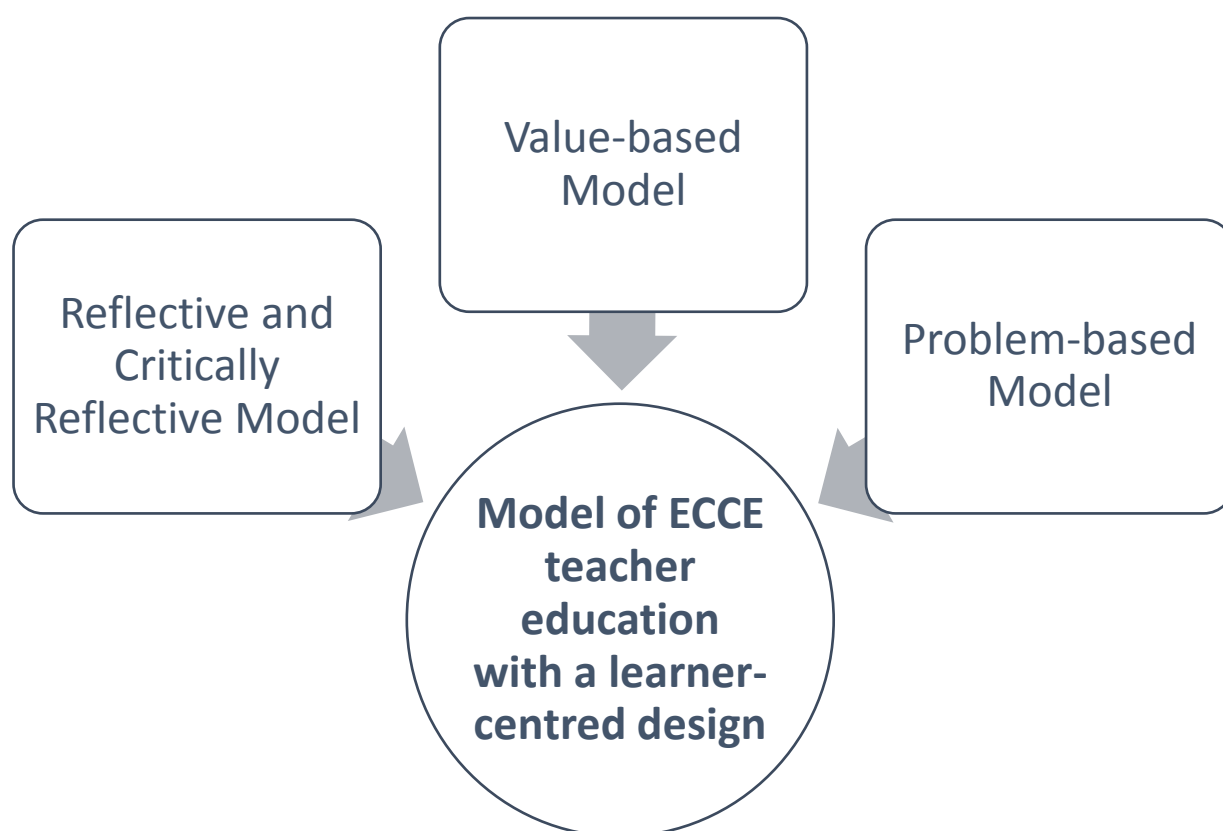
and appreciation of diversity.		leading to qualifications in HEIs for ECD	
Appreciate and understand that inclusivity, equity and diversity need to be fostered in early childhood through anti-bias curriculum practices.		Department of Education (2001) White Paper 6 on inclusive education Department of Education & UNICEF (2009) National Early Learning Standards	
Recognize quality early learning and development as a way of ensuring the optimal development of babies, toddlers and young children, and lay the foundations for lifelong success in education, employment and responsible citizenship.	Quality early care and learning supported by responsive pedagogies including play must be addressed.	Department of Higher Education (2017) Policy on minimum requirements for programmes leading to qualifications in HEIs for ECD	
Children need to develop skills, knowledge, values and attitudes for living and coping with life and its challenges, as well as life-long learning experiences.		Department of Education & UNICEF (2009) National Early Learning Standards	
Promote optimal opportunities for culturally responsive pedagogies that are transformative in nature and inclusive.		Department of Higher Education (2017) Policy on minimum requirements for programmes leading to qualifications in HEIs for ECD	
Recognize play as a principle by which children learn and explore the world around them while developing, cognitively, socially, emotionally, creatively and mentally.		(Department of Social Development & UNICEF 2015a)	
Recognition and respect for parents as primarily responsible for early development.		Parents, families and members of the community must be recognised, respected and encouraged to work as partners.	Department of Social Development & UNICEF (2015a) National Integrated ECD policy
The resourcefulness of families should be promoted.			Department of Social Development and UNICEF (2006) Guidelines for ECD Service Standards
Strengthen programme delivery for the family.	Department of Social Development and UNICEF (2006) Guidelines for ECD Service Standards		
Multi-sectoral and integrated response	Interprofessional and multisectoral partnerships are important.	Department of Social Development & UNICEF (2015a) National Integrated ECD policy	

Models of ECCE teacher education to be considered for SA ECCE context:

There are different models of teacher education that can be used on their own or in combination (Fig. 28). The principles discussed already point to the direction of which models are appropriate for SA. The model/s chosen must be informed by:

- How children develop and learn
- The situational realities of children and their families
- The priorities set for workforce development
- The priorities for shaping a new citizenry through early childhood not only for school but for life.

In the SA context it is imperative to understand which model would suit the needs of preparing a high quality workforce that can make a difference to child outcomes in the present and for the future. The following are models that can be used alone or in combination for effective ECCE teacher education:



**Figure 28:** Relevant models for ECCE teacher education.

**Reflective and critically reflective model:**

In the recent past, the terms “reflection” and “critical reflection” have increasingly appeared in descriptions of approaches to teacher education. It is clear, however, that the terms are often ill-defined, and have been used rather loosely to embrace a wide range of concepts and strategies (Concept of Teacher Education, n.d., p. 230). Reflection is a natural process that facilitates the development of future action from the contemplation of past and/or current behaviour. Reflection refers to the ongoing process of critically examining and refining practice, taking into careful consideration the personal, pedagogical, societal (including social, political, historical and economical) and ethical contexts associated with schools,

classrooms and the multiple roles of teachers (Knowles, Cole & Presswood, 1994; cited in Concept of Teacher Education, n.d., p. 230).

What type of knowledge do teachers or prospective teachers draw upon when they reflect? Content includes understanding children, including their developmental levels and perspectives. Educators must also consider appropriate teaching methods, teachers' image, professional collaboration and support, and the impact of society on schools; they must have knowledge of a wide range of educational environments, evaluation and interpersonal relationships; and they must have an ethical commitment to children, parents and the field (Surbeck, Han & Moyer, 1991, cited in Concept of Teacher Education, n.d., p. 231).

The basic assumptions of reflective teacher education are as follows:

- Promoting critically reflective teachers is a value-laden goal, with direct implications for deciding the direction of reflection, its aims and scope.
- Critical reflection involves critical reason, critical self-reflection and critical action.
- Critical reflection should facilitate teacher autonomy, especially through the mediation between pedagogical goals and situational constraints, within a research-like approach to teaching, whereby educational contexts are questioned and scrutinised in order to be understood and changed.
- Critical reflection must entail an understanding of the nature and goals of school education and of its role in social transformation (Concept of Teacher Education, n.d., p. 231).

#### Problem-based learning:

Problem-based learning (PBL) is used in a number of disciplines as a way of engaging students in “real” problems. Unlike conventional teaching, PBL starts with a problem and requires the student to research, select, analyse and apply information and theories to solve it. Students work in groups or teams to solve or manage these situations, but they are not expected to acquire a predetermined series of “right answers”. Instead they are expected to engage with the complex situation presented to them and decide what information they need to learn and what skills they need to gain in order to manage the situation effectively (Savin-Baden, 2000).

#### Value-based teacher education:

Values are integral to the process of education. From the SA principles informing policies and guidelines it is evident that democratic values are important. It is linked to humanistic education. When a value-based teacher education is taken seriously then educators are exposed to learning opportunities that require deep thinking about themselves as ethical practitioners. They have to internalise the important values related to character formation, social justice, inclusion and children's right. Their attitude and their actions need to be examined and aligned to professional expectations. The competencies in professionalism as a cross cutting principle must be given attention in any teacher education programme.

#### Points to remember when working with the PMRP:

It is appropriate to consider the points below when addressing the issue of programme development as the PMRP is the driving policy document that informs Output 3.

- Create a curriculum design committee. Schedule meetings to make curriculum design decisions.
- Develop the model of ECCE teacher education you will use based on your institutions vision, mission statement, the principles, the PMRP, knowledge and practice standards developed for ECCE teacher education and possibility international benchmarks not covered in this report and dialogue thereafter.
- Ensure that the curriculum design features afford quality learning experiences for students. Pay attention to the following in a learner-centred curriculum design:
  - The scope: The policy, the SAQA level descriptors and guidelines for professional competencies for the Diploma and Degree will guide you here.
  - The sequence: Put first things first. Pay attention to moving from the simple to the complex.
  - Prerequisites: getting the basics before the elaborations in the next level.
  - The continuity: Make decisions about what appears in a module and how it is pulled through in the next module either as a full module sequence or integrated into particular units in the module.
  - The integration: Think carefully about the knowledge and practice relationship in the curriculum and specifically how theory is applied in practical learning.
  - The articulation: Look at the vertical and horizontal articulation of modules in a qualification and between qualifications.
  - Balance: The balance for constructive alignment must be done in accordance with the guidelines in the PMRP (DHET, 2017).

#### The way forward

Develop an ECCE Community of Practice (CoP) for teacher education:

- The PIECCE project has already initiated the above. This needs to be formalised to ensure that what happens in ECCE is, in fact, guided by the ECCE profession and not just a top-down response. We need the policy, but the building of a profession must be informed by strong bottom-up input.
- The PIECCE team, led by BRIDGE, must explore the formation of an ECCE CoP for teacher education.

Develop ECCE qualifications from the perspective of preparing a workforce for realities that drives quality, contextual responsiveness and inclusivity

- This literature review has presented a wealth of information that needs to be unpacked to ensure that we get the best response for the ECCE SA ITE.

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- The following must be scrutinised by the task team for standards and curriculum in the PIECCE project:
  - the elements that will make our ECCE programme responsive to the realities we face;
  - the shift from fragmentary institutional response of ITE to a knowledge and practice standards response;
  - the models of ECCE teacher education and the curriculum development processes.

## QUALITY IN ECD and ECCE

### Determining quality

It is only in the past decade that various government departments have expressed greater commitment to the ECD field. DBE has developed two documents, the National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS, 2007) and the National Curriculum Statement (2015) to inform curriculum development and implementation in the sector. DSD has become the lead organisation for the ECD sector and published a comprehensive ECD policy document, the National Integrated Policy for ECD (RSA, 2015), which outlined the government's intentions for the sector and how it envisages addressing the effects of a prolonged marginalisation.

This marginalisation has resulted in a fragmented sector in which many ECD centres are not registered, the majority of teachers (commonly known as 'practitioners') lack any formal teaching qualifications (RSA, 2014) and are un-qualified or under-qualified. ECD training has largely been the domain of ECD NPOs and many of the ECD qualifications are vocational or occupational in nature. The emphasis is currently on practical application.

Consequently, in SA, ECD remains an under-theorised and under-researched field. The introduction of formal ECCE qualifications has thus been a stimulus to the higher education sector to pursue debate and scholarship on what would constitute a quality ECCE qualification that would best meet the needs of SA's diverse population. It has provided an opportunity to critically reflect on issues related to quality ECD provisioning in SA.

'Quality' has become a buzz-word. Frequent references are made to 'quality ECD'. However, there has been little attempt to clarify its meaning. Before we can design new ECD qualifications, we need to interrogate what our collective understanding is around quality ECD provisioning in SA. This raises questions:

- Can we identify the relevant components of quality in ECD?
- How do we recognise and assess quality?

Only once we have an agreed understanding on what constitutes quality can we begin to address questions such as, "What constitutes a quality ECCE qualification?" and "How should these qualifications be designed?" If these questions are unpacked further, issues to be addressed include, "What is relevant content knowledge for ECD students?"; "Is there a place for indigenous knowledge in the curriculum, and if so, what is this knowledge and how is it best included?"; and "What are appropriate ECD pedagogies for the SA context?" It is probable that many more questions will be identified during the curriculum development process. In this report, therefore, the empirical data is used to begin to benchmark the existing situation, with a view to exploring what constitutes quality ECD in a diverse SA context, with specific reference to development and design of appropriate formal programmes/curricula for ECCE.

### Exploring the contested nature of quality

The question of what constitutes quality in ECD has become a frequently recurring question. According to Peralto (2008), it is also one of the least developed topics in the literature, both conceptually and operationally. Peralto (2008) and Moss and Pence (1994), argued that quality is difficult to construct or define because, in education, quality implies judgement and this judgement is based on specific theory and defined paradigms. They argued that there is rarely agreement on underpinning paradigms and thus there is no single universal understanding of what quality means in ECD. Understanding of quality in ECD remains elusive.

But as Moss and Pence (1994) noted, it is a dynamic, flexible and adaptable construct which is subjective in nature. This argument was strengthened by Vonta's (2000) claim that growing insights into the multiple influences on children's well-being, development and learning, the use of multiple research methodologies, increasing awareness of the impact of contexts and culture, as well as recognition of the interdependence of preschool, family and community environments, has led to new perspectives on quality in early childhood education. As Britto, Yoshikawa and Boller (2011) commented, "quality contours itself across cultures, settings, time and types of intervention," strengthening Peralto's (2008) observation that real quality improvement happens when there is a shared understanding and agreement by stakeholders on what quality is and how it can be achieved.

This expanded understanding of quality acknowledges that children's health and well-being, including their behaviour, thinking and social relationships, are culturally as much as biologically determined. Environmental influences and children's experiences (good or bad) cannot be separated from social and cultural practices. Together they develop values and goals, and the political context within which children's lives are shaped, and inform the ways that children are treated and understood. These realisations have led to increasing international recognition that good quality ECD is sensitive to and builds on local and indigenous knowledge, practices and efforts of caregivers, families and communities (Albino and Berry, 2013).

Thus, contemporary conversations about quality should acknowledge diversity and the notion of 'both/and' rather than a dualistic 'either/or' approach (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2013) as well as address issues of social justice. By adopting an open-ended approach toward construction of quality, possibilities are created for multiple and varied understandings of the term, and opportunities arise to explore understandings of quality in differing teaching and learning contexts and settings.

Britto et al. (2011) argued that despite increasing insight into the contested and multifaceted nature of quality, there remains strong support for a uniform 'taken for granted' approach to evaluating quality where 'one size fits all'. This singular understanding is evident in many policy documents. The notion of an absolute standard is reinforced, perhaps unintentionally. Various contradictory policy documents guide practice and set out a developmental framework and a series of learning outcomes that all children should attain before starting

school. These learning outcomes frequently drive ECD practices in SA. On the one hand, policy documents suggest a quality practice based on children's play interests, but on the other hand, curriculum and other guidelines establish relatively fixed learning outcomes (see for example the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS; DBE, 2012); the National Curriculum Statement (DBE, 2012); National Early Learning Development Standards, (DBE, 2009). Within these frameworks, the flexible and dynamic aspects of quality can easily be disregarded in favour of a more prescriptive approach to teaching and learning negating contexts and cultural appropriateness. Furthermore, prescriptive ECD approaches promote more 'paper and pencil' activities at the expense of playful, purposeful teaching and learning which is now acknowledged as a hallmark of good quality ECD practice (Wood, 2009; Moyles, 2010). Peralto (2008) argued that increasing prescriptiveness is one of the challenges within current ECD service delivery in SA. This point was recently reinforced through development of early learning outcome measurements (Biersteker, Dawes & Girdwood, 2015).

#### Some recognised elements of quality ECD practice

Despite having previously argued for quality to be viewed as an open-ended, flexible construct which is dependent upon culture and context there are nonetheless some overall features of child care and education that are identified as critical to the development, learning and well-being of children, and to quality ECD delivery. Safeguarding adequate health and safety practices, which include good hygiene, health promotion and nutrition, is crucial. Another priority is ensuring a well-maintained and resourced indoor and outdoor environment. Pivotal to a quality programme is the role of the adult or, in this case, the ECD practitioner (Christie, 2008).

Sammons et al. (2007) maintained that staff relationships with both children and parents are a fundamental aspect of a quality programme. Appropriately qualified staff, sensitive and responsive to children's needs and interests, are better able to establish positive interactions with children and ensure a high quality learning programme. Other staff attributes central to high quality teaching and learning include being able to guide children's learning by providing opportunities for active as well as quiet play and rest, joining children in their play and asking open-ended questions which promote sustained shared thinking (Sammons et al., 2007). Such practices provide opportunities for developing motor, social, language and cognitive skills and concepts through play, sustain positive interaction among children, and promote emotional growth and well-being. Furthermore, support for and communication with parents, as well as respect for diversity and difference, social justice, gender equality and inclusion of children with disabilities, are essential indicators of quality. Such practices allow 'children to be children' and promote experiential learning and teaching through play (Irwin, Siddiqi & Hertzman, 2007; Peralto, 2008). They also recognised the value of children's individual contexts and the importance of including local ways of knowing and doing in quality programme implementation. However, on their own, these observations do not provide a lens through which to view quality.



### Ways of viewing quality

Vonta (2000) contended that there are different ways of viewing quality; firstly, a classroom perspective and secondly an ecological perspective. Each perspective is briefly reviewed:

#### A classroom perspective:

Viewing quality from this perspective is an easier and more popular way of considering whether or not the recognised elements of quality mentioned above have been met. In this perspective, quality has structural as well as process elements and this view resonates with recognised elements of quality espoused by Sammons et al. (2007).

The structural perspective focuses on organisation and structure. Aspects such as teacher qualifications, teacher-child ratio, age and gender of teachers and children, staff development, assessment processes, infrastructure, organisation of the environment, and classroom management are considered.

The process factors are more difficult to pinpoint. These include interpersonal interactions, relationships with children, caregivers and other stakeholders, and pedagogical approaches which assure conditions and possibilities for learning and playing.

According to Vona (2000), this perspective offers a limited insight into quality. It focuses on the microsystem, the child and the child's immediate surroundings, ignoring all other factors which impact on education quality. Quality is seen as a separate, isolated component; a standalone, impervious to other influences. Yet we know that ECD practices cannot be separated from contextual and cultural influences in a child's life (Dahlberg et al., 2013; Peralto, 2008; Britto et al., 2011). Vona (2000) contended that if we think of quality only in terms of the microsystem, we will not make any difference to quality ECD provisioning. If we want to positively influence quality provisioning, we ought to consider an ecological perspective which provides a lens to consider quality from multiple perspectives (Vono, 2000; Britto et al., 2011).

#### An ecological perspective:

Adoption of a broader understanding of quality means that quality ECD should not only be considered within a specific ECD setting, such as an ECD classroom or site.

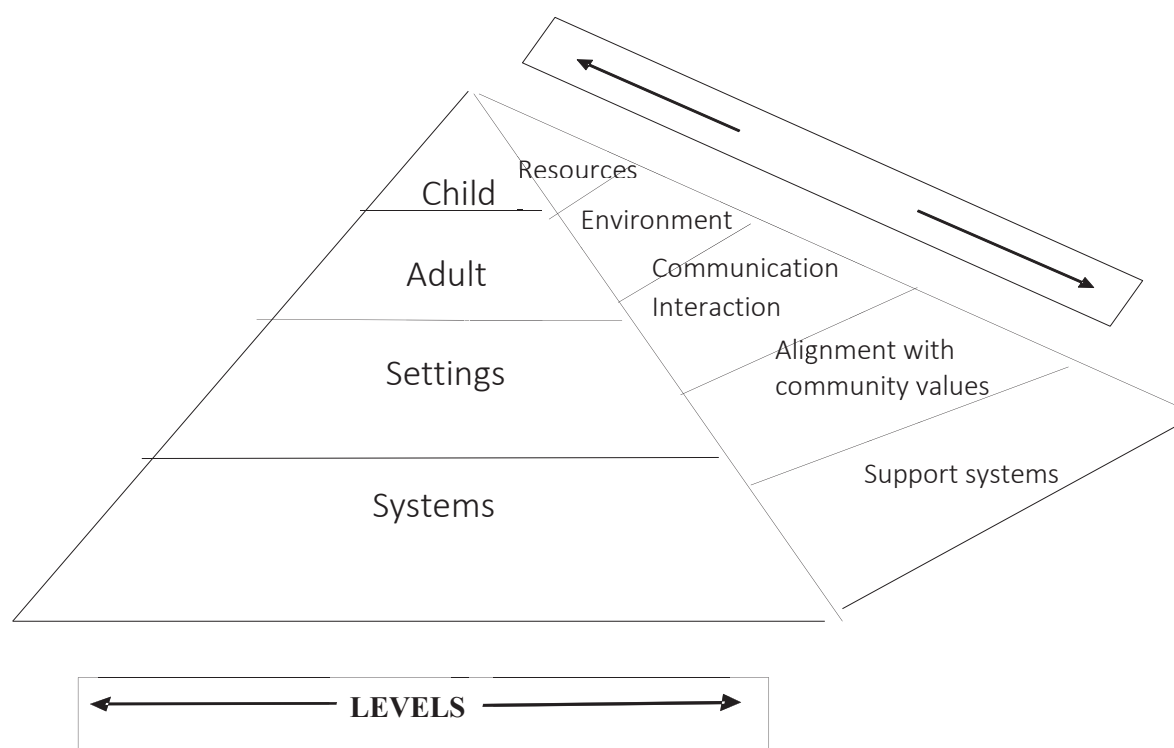
Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1994) ecological model provided a useful framework for viewing quality from different perspectives and settings (Vona, 2000; Britto et al., 2011). Britto et al. (2011), drawing on Bronfenbrenner's model, developed an ECD ecological pyramid which expands upon quality indicators and offers an alternative view of how these could be realised within differing the ECD contexts (Fig. 29).

The model is underpinned by the previously mentioned elements of quality (which are both structural and process driven). These elements are interrogated according to five broad dimensions of quality. These dimensions cut across various stakeholders and organisations (grouped into four levels) responsible for ECD service delivery (Fig. 29). So, in essence, the ultimate responsibility for ensuring quality ECD provisioning is no longer the province of

the classroom or site. Accountability rests with other organisations which, in many instances, directly or indirectly control most of what happens in a classroom. This is considered further in relation to what the PIECCE project’s empirical data has evidenced in terms of the current situation in ECD.

Levels of quality (Fig. 31)

The first level of the pyramid, starting from the top down, considers children and their well-being (Fig. 29). Children’s well-being is usually measured by characteristics shown by carers demonstrated through their interactions with children. Well-being (physical, emotional and social), cognitive stimulation, language and managing behaviours typically form part of these interactions and can best be measured through appropriate observation. While the PIECCE project’s empirical data showed that observation is considered important by institutions, particularly in regard to observation of mentor teachers, there was no mention of observing the child as a means to inform developmental strategies. This suggests that the links between observing for teachers’ own knowledge of self, and the act of observing as a form of assessment and goal setting for the child, are not being made. When one considers the importance of the first 1000 days in a child’s development, and maximising the potential of this phase of learning, it is essential that the teacher be aware of the connection between observation, assessment and the child’s development.



**Figure 29:** An ecological pyramid model for conceptualising quality in ECD. (Adapted from Britto, Yoshikawa & Boller, 2011.)

The second level targets the adults (parents, practitioners, childcare providers, health and other service providers) who are responsible for care and education of children (Fig. 29). Again, according to Britto et al. (2011), quality can be measured through observing the characteristics of the adult and how these might influence children's health, development well-being and learning. Empirical data showed that teachers spend a considerable amount of time observing as a primary activity during WIL, but what is not clear is what they are looking for when they observe. Without an indication of what they should be 'noticing', how would the student/practitioner know what adult characteristics might influence the child's health, development, well-being and learning?

The third tier is that of settings (Fig. 29). These are conceived broadly and include a variety of centre- as well as home-based and other communal settings; in fact any space where child care services are offered. Quality assessment measures include adult-staff ratios, qualifications of caregivers, quality of interactions with children and other stakeholders. In the PIECCE project research, exposing students/practitioners to a variety of contexts was considered an important aspect of teacher training. What was problematic, however, were issues related to access, such as transport to sites, rural position making it difficult to access alternative sites, and language constraints limiting the type of school where students/practitioners can practice their craft. Furthermore, there was limited evidence in the empirical data on how teacher training institutions prepare their students to be flexible within different contexts of teaching and learning.

The base of the pyramid comprises the larger organisational and institutional structures within which ECD services are situated and managed (Fig. 29). These structures are referred to as systems. Three sublevels are identified: local support systems, subnational (provincial) systems, and national systems. These systems align well with existing governing structures found in SA and which provide similar functions to those outlined by Britto et al. (2011).

Functions of the local support systems might be delivered by NGOs, private providers or local government and include ways of providing resources to local programmes; training provisioning and places of local service delivery such as health centres. In SA, subnational systems could be viewed as a provincial competence responsible for administering local support systems and coordinating policy. They could be private, public or a combination. The third sublevel is the national system comprising various government departments, international NPOs and foreign based support. Though Britto et al. (2011) recognised that it is essential to assess quality at all four levels, they noted that it is more challenging to assess quality at a systems level. Consequently the quality of these support systems is frequently overlooked when conceptualising ECD.

With quality comes accountability and with accountability comes the need to employ methods of quality assurance. As one of the primary systems involved in ECD is the training institutions, it seemed appropriate to consider what QA methods are employed across the institutional types. The PIECCE project empirical data showed that considerable effort is put into training staff, requiring a high level of qualification, together with employing a variety

of methods of review. These included observing one another teach; re-curriculating programmes and inviting review from other training institutions and collaboration on materials development. In Eastern Cape, the NPO ECD sector has been actively invited to assist DSD with advocacy, policy implementation and development suggesting that there is a will for multiple stakeholders across the systems of the ECD profession to work together.

### Dimensions of quality

The dimensions, which cut across each of the four levels, provide opportunities to consider what constitutes quality in fundamentally different contexts. The five dimensions are:

#### 1. Alignment with the values and principles of a community or society

This dimension recognises cultural and contextual differences and allows for quality to be viewed accordingly. For example, child-rearing patterns might differ and tensions between approaches can be resolved in appropriate and different ways. Or the values and principles that drive donor organisations may clash with local values and result in misguided implementations of ECD programmes. This is an important dimension, especially in SA where increasing attention and recognition is given to cultural practices and local and indigenous knowledge as foundations for good ECD practices.

It should be noted that empirical data showed that 98% of students/practitioners could identify with their curriculum and only three students expressed that their curriculum was too westernised. This may be the result of core values embedded in ECD being universal, or that the voice of the ECD student/practitioner has not yet been radicalised. It does not mean, however, that there should not be a concerted effort to explore indigenous knowledge and how it may enhance the field. This has already been shown in the use of indigenous games to enhance language and learning which, given the recent focus on ‘play’ as an integral part of learning in ECD, may be an important point of entry (Joseph et al., 2014).

#### 2. Resources

Resources cut across each level and include both human and material. Examples of human resources are the educational level of the caregiver, ratio of staff to children, competencies and skills of the caregiver, practitioner, health worker, etc. Material resources include appropriateness and accessibility of toys or equipment, provisioning of nutritious food, and other health services.

The PIECCE research demonstrated a concern around accessibility to teacher training, especially for practitioners who have no matric or only part of an NQF Level 4. The RPL review team suggested that HEIs in particular need to review their processes of RPL and entry level requirements if there is to be a genuine upscaling of teacher qualifications.

#### 3. Physical and spatial characteristics (environment)

These are associated with meeting basic needs and minimising environmental dangers. This dimension includes infrastructure and the physical environment. Safety factors and the reduction of accidents become important considerations. Do facilities allow adequate access

for those with disabilities? It should be noted that the PIECCE research revealed that teacher training institutions do provide infrastructural support for their students with disabilities, and train their students in how to address issues specific to disability, but that this was largely done by means of a non-integrated approach using individual modules. There was limited evidence of students spending time with learners with disabilities or addressing developmental lags and more common issues such as ADHD or FAS.

#### 4. Leadership and management (support systems)

Requirements differ for each level. At the top of the pyramid, for example, an important question is how does the adult manage the learning environment? At the setting level, this dimension encompasses the relative degree of priority given to ECD, and responsiveness to issues such as provider or practitioner turnover. At the local support systems level such factors as responsiveness to local staffing shortages, commitment to improve professional development opportunities, and capacity to monitor local delivery channels for material resources are considered. At sub-national and national systems levels, inter-sectoral ECD policies require collaborative leadership and sharing of information across donor agencies, ministries and their associated sub-national organisations.

#### 5. Interactions and communications

Britto et al. (2011) stressed that interactions and communications are critical to quality ECD implementation. This dimension which also captures the nature of the communications in all settings is applicable to all levels and incorporates communications with and between children, adults and across sectors, organisations and institutions. This supports the complexity of ECD and that it is interdisciplinary therefore requiring multiple stakeholders to work collaboratively in order to deliver quality.

In brief, the ecological pyramid model argues for a more complex conceptualisation of quality and provides an alternative lens for in-depth interrogation of this concept in disparate and complex settings. This model could therefore inform a different conceptualisation of quality within our diverse SA context. It allows us to recognise various element of quality and acknowledges that if quality ECD provisioning is to be realised it will take more than quality classroom practice to do this. We now have to ask ourselves, “How do we build this realisation into a new ECD qualification which will support the goal of high quality ECD provisioning?”

#### [A preliminary exploration of quality within the SA context](#)

Some initial work on exploring alternative understandings of quality and how it is interpreted in different teaching and learning contexts began in 2012 through the BRIDGE ECD CoP. Initial findings were published in 2016. A brief overview of the pilot study (2016) and findings is presented.

This action research based study explored different understandings of quality amongst different ECD stakeholders. A working committee was appointed to oversee what was an extremely collaborative process. The research instruments were influenced by the ecological

considerations outlined in the Britto et al. (2011) model. However, given the disparate SA contexts and informed by the discussions held during the BRIDGE ECD CoP workshops, four dimensions were ultimately agreed upon as being appropriate for current South African contexts. These dimensions when unpacked aligned well with the Britto et al. (2011) model. They were: quality in leadership and management, quality in teaching and learning, quality in the ECD environment and quality in the ECD policy framework.

The CoP working committee took the decision to locate the pilot project within the second and third levels of the ecological pyramid as practitioners have been identified as being crucial to ECD quality practice and within our context training organisations also play a significant role. The fact that many practitioners and training organisations are associated with the CoP was another reason to locate the pilot in these levels.

The four chosen dimensions informed the research instrument which became known as the ECD reflection ‘tool’. This tool was intended to be both participatory (to allow practitioners to voice their opinions) and developmental (to assist practitioners to think about different components of quality ECD practice and the extent to which they do (or not) offer quality services). The developmental component was deemed to be an essential component as from the outset it was not envisaged that this would become an evaluative ‘tool’. Rather, it was to be used to gain deeper insights into practitioners’ understandings of quality within their contexts. To meet the developmental criterion, a strong self-reflective element was built into the ‘tool’ and during the research process the tool was mediated to the participants. This decision was taken because of the realisation that quality is multifaceted, presents itself in different ways that are contextually driven and that there is an inextricable link between quality and practice.

The empirical data evidenced that 99% of the sampled students considered reflective practice an important part of their course. Some of the reasons given included: “It was a means to consider what I have learnt in this course,” “Through reflection I can work on improving my teaching because I am learning from my mistakes,” and “I am a critical teacher through reflection”. The sampled institutions indicated that they consider reflective practice to be essential (95%) as it allows teachers to adjust their teaching to meet the needs of learners. This suggests that there is already a will to use reflective practice as a means to enhance quality delivery in the classroom.

Table 23 sets out the framework for the Quality Reflection Tool. It provides a comprehensive overview of the important indicators of quality that were identified in the literature.

**Table 23:** ECD Quality Reflection Tool: dimensions of quality in ECD.

	Teaching & Learning	Leadership & Management (Applies to the Principal or Site Manager)	Environment	Policy and Systems Frameworks
Elements of each dimension	Understanding pedagogical theory	Instructional leadership	Physical	Policies and procedures
	Implementing appropriate methodology	Organisational management	Mental and emotional	Regulatory authorities
	Reflecting on attitudes, beliefs and ethics	Support for sites	External (influence of parents /home /community)	Support systems (for practitioners, for learners and for parents)
	Managing oneself	Quality assurance	Resources	
		Ethics		

For the purposes of the Quality Toolkit the goals of the pilot were:

- To gather information from practitioners on the ground about their views on quality
- To test whether practitioners find the ECD Quality Reflection Tool useful for their own professional development including reflecting on their practice, estimating their own areas of strengths and weakness and identifying potential areas for change
- To gather data on practitioner views on dimensions of quality in which they need assistance/resources/guidance.

### Findings from the pilot project

Findings are presented based of the four agreed dimensions. These are:

#### Findings in relation to teaching and learning:

Practitioners acknowledge that play is important but stressed the difficulties of how to use play for learning. They acknowledge the importance of positive interactions with children and recognise that children need a varied, active learning programme, but they are not sure how to plan and implement good daily programmes. In addition, cultural practices and religious influences are sometimes difficult to deal with. Dealing with multiple classroom languages also provide challenges but practitioners say they code-switch to different languages in the classroom when it is necessary that children understand.

Many practitioners were not aware of the National Curriculum Framework for Birth to Four (DBE, 2015), and relied on specific programme-based curricula. Many practitioners lacked explicit knowledge about different theories of learning and different teaching methods, and only knew about their provider-specific training.

#### The ECD environment:

Practitioners acknowledge that love and commitment to the children is the key element in quality ECD provisioning. Again knowledge is a challenge, “We worry about safety in the environment, but are not given enough training on different procedures.”

They understand that quality ECD responds to the needs of the immediate community, “The learning environment and the resources we use need to stimulate learning, and therefore need to be interesting, appropriate and safe.” However they state that it is difficult to create or improvise resources in resource-poor environments. They also understand the importance of parental involvement but commented, “It is difficult to communicate to them about their children’s development.” In practice, practitioners tended to prioritise different things according to their own contexts.

In the NPO sector parent programmes have become a strategy that is used to inform parents of their role both in terms of the school as a whole and in the life of their child. The empirical data on Survey 1 surfaced that 8% of the sampled institutions offered a stand-alone parent programme; 25% offered an integrated programme and 67% did not consider a parent programme to be an important aspect of their teacher training. The latter was drawn from the HEI sector and therefore suggests that some thought should be given to how the curriculum addresses the role of the parent. This is particularly important for the 0-4 Diploma/Degree where parents should be actively involved in the first 1000 days of their child’s life but may need guidance as to how to achieve this. This means that the students/practitioners would need to be informed as to how to build positive relations with parents in order to provide mentorship when necessary.

#### ECD policy frameworks:

Nearly all practitioners see the need for training and professional development in all aspects of ECD, ranging from curriculum knowledge to issues related to childcare and psychology. Nearly all practitioners feel strongly that government needs to provide more support to ECD in order to achieve quality. However, ideas on quality were not linked to national policies, as many practitioners were not familiar with these. Neither were ideas on quality linked to internal policies and procedures at sites, as these were not well understood. It could be said that SA has amongst the most dynamic and forward thinking policies in ECD; however, unless the links between policy and practice are established, the policies will remain pieces of paper that cannot drive change. When developing a quality qualification, there will need to be a conscious effort to inform students/practitioners as to the role of policy in their profession.

#### Leadership and management:

Quality depends on professional development for ECD practitioners. Good relations between the principal and his/her staff members are essential for quality ECD. Principals comment that, “Staff must be able to trust the leader and come to her with any problems,” and that, “We need to bring the parents into the system more closely.” Again the plea for clearer



communication from government around regulatory issues was made. Ideas about quality were not linked to issues such as sustainability and succession planning.

Leadership is mainly seen as ‘organisational management’ of staff, resources and finance. There was little focus on ‘instructional leadership’ in terms of curriculum.

The empirical data confirmed the above as it yielded no evidence of leadership or management being actively addressed in curricula or teaching activities. This is concerning especially in the drive to develop a quality 0-4 Diploma/Degree where there is considerable potential for student/practitioner to be caring for the child in a home-based scenario therefore needing to manage their own teaching and learning environment. Quality should therefore include training for students/practitioners that empowers them in their role as leaders in their community and managers of their own ECCE centres.

Some examples of areas where practitioners say they need support are presented according to the four dimensions:

#### Teaching and learning:

Practitioners have a myriad issues relating to teaching and learning. These include issues relating to mixed cultural groups and contexts; differentiated themes and activity planning, with an emphasis on play-based learning and as request for learning about different methodologies. Implementing appropriate discipline strategies is also problematic. More insight into different learning theories is required including how to recognise barriers to learning.

#### ECD environment:

Practitioners’ chief concern is accessing affordable resources and equipment for outdoor play, as well as for indoor activities. Included in this request is information on how to create their own resources and materials. A plea for strategies on how to involve parents and the community was also reiterated. Aspects related to health and safety were also prioritised; these included improving nutrition through growing a vegetable garden or accessing food programmes and first aid training.

The PIECCE project empirical data, with the exception of NPOs, showed that at present teacher training institutions do not consider the aspect of health and safety, parental involvement and developing inexpensive resources, to be key to their training of students/practitioners. It is here that the collaboration between diverse stakeholders in the ECD sector can be beneficial as the NPO sector has dealt with these issues for many years and is able to share their knowledge with TVETS and HEIs. Given that much of our teaching workforce find themselves in impoverished environments with substandard infrastructure leading to issues around health and safety, no resources to create exciting learning environments and challenges in communicating with parents, it is essential that the 0-4 Diploma/Degree addresses how teachers are trained to resolve these issues.

#### ECD policy frameworks:

Practitioners echoed the old call of improving qualifications and greater understanding of possible career pathways. Improving computer skills and attending curriculum workshops were also a priority. From government they want evidence of clear guidelines on support for parents/community in terms of understanding of ECD, and a proactive response to community problems which affect children in care – specifically getting support from local government/DSD in relation to drugs in the community. In brief, they require improved communication and regular updates from government.

#### Leadership and management:

Answers to this dimension were provided by principals and centre managers. Again an important request was to receive clearer communication and assistance from government, especially on regulations, compliance, legislation. The need for management skills training in relation to improving fundraising, budgeting and overall financial management skills was stressed, as was how to improve administration and human resource skills, including learning ways of motivating/improving teachers' attitudes. In addition, guidelines on giving appropriate feedback to teachers and parents were requested.

#### Considerations in the design of a new quality ECD qualification

Based on the aforementioned conceptual and empirical understanding of quality indicators and perceived gaps in understanding, and providing quality ECD provisioning, we can identify important underpinning criteria to inform the development of a quality ECD curriculum. In brief, curriculum content should include aspects of leadership and management, what constitutes appropriate infrastructure and use of physical space, as well as how to ensure adequate resources. Sound interpersonal interactions between teacher and child, teacher and caregiver, as well as other stakeholders, are crucial. Appropriate interactions include appropriate pedagogies. But what are, for example, appropriate pedagogies for the diverse SA contexts? Based on the ecological model, we know that contemporary understandings of quality call for a deepening of insight into certain criteria.

The need to align content and pedagogies with cultural and contextual value systems is becoming increasingly apparent. This point is strengthened if we, in addition to the previously mentioned findings, take heed of student protests in the majority of HEIs in SA over the past two years. Value systems must surely include issues related to human rights and social justice from a contemporary SA perspective? Teaching through and for democracy becomes an important consideration as this is a foundational value of the SA Constitution (RSA, 1996). We will need to explore how to include appropriate indigenous knowledge in the ECCE curriculum and early childhood education.

Another area to interrogate is what constitutes appropriate pedagogy in SA? We know from research evidence (Sammons et al, 2007; Wood, 2009; Moyles, 2013) that playful pedagogies where teachers co-construct knowledge with children in an interactive play-based approach appears to offer the greatest learning potential for children. Yet we have still to

explore how practitioners understand play, and playful approaches to teaching and learning. We know from the CoP study many practitioners are not proficient in implementing playful pedagogies and other appropriate ECD methodologies. In addition, in many cultures and family value systems there still appears to be the idea that children should be seen and not heard and that teachers are teaching only when they instruct children. From the research evidence, similar observations could be applied to other dimensions of quality, such as appropriate resources and learning environment.

Another area that impacts quality provisioning is that of leadership and management. The ecological model identifies the pivotal roles of different stakeholders and clearly highlights that, if quality ECD provisioning is to be realised, all stakeholders have definite responsibilities. This shifts accountability for quality provisioning from the classroom and site to local, national and international organisations. Classroom/school/centre leadership and management remain an integral part of any ECCE curriculum. We know principals and practitioners ask for more insights in this regard. From a curriculum development perspective, two questions need to be asked, namely, “To what extent should curriculum content explore the leadership and management roles of other stakeholders?”, and “To what extent should curriculum content pursue networking and collaboration with these organisations?”

#### [A transformative curriculum and pedagogy](#)

When considering quality ECD, it would be remiss to not include the topic of a transformative curriculum and pedagogy. The research report from the Transformative Pedagogy Project (TPP) shows that, “The concept of pedagogy for early childhood is multi-faceted, contested, dynamic and complex” (Ebrahim et al., 2017). It must go beyond an examination of pedagogy to include issues such as context, historical background, equity and diversity. There should additionally be a shift in how children are perceived from one of deficit to one of competency. The study further revealed considerably support for a play-based approach to pedagogy however with the understanding that teachers will require support in developing their knowledge of how to bring this into effect.

When asked in Survey 2 of the PIECCE project to describe in what way curricula should be transformative the following responses emerged:

**Table 24:** In what way should curricula be transformative?

In what way should curricula be transformative?
“We need to consider CAPS and our level of English when training teachers.”
“We need to be adaptive to contexts of teaching.”
“Make provision for exposure to different learning environments and schools.”
“Curricula must provide opportunities to reflect on contextual realities of both teachers and children in a meaningful manner, i.e., home grown and empowering.”
“More SA examples should be shared.”
“The curriculum should be sensitive to indigenous knowledge.”
“The curriculum should be relevant to all cultures.”

Context and sensitivity to culture dominate the thinking on the ground. This is further supported by the findings illustrated in the TPP report which isolated the following aspects as being important to consider for transforming early childhood pedagogy in SA:

- theoretical lenses from the rights-based, social and critical constructivist perspectives;
- multi-faceted, situated and context-bound conceptualisations of pedagogy;
- pedagogy aimed at equity, inclusion, diversity, intentionality and relationships;
- equity in pedagogical relationships – working with competent and yet vulnerable children;
- play-based pedagogies and other pedagogies to meet developmental and academic outcomes;
- working in partnerships with multiple stakeholders.

#### A possible way forward

As a first step we (ECCE curriculum developers in HEIs) should reach some common understanding of broad quality indicators in early childhood education. We should then interrogate these indicators for their appropriateness in the diverse SA context. This does not imply that we all have to agree on all quality indicators and that these will be realised in the same way. Rather it implies that we have some consensus about the multifaceted nature of quality and that it can be realised through different pathways, as illustrated in the TPP report findings above. Only when we have common consensus on what constitutes quality in ECCE provisioning can we address the questions related to development of a quality ECCE curriculum.

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*Issues in Teacher Education*, 25(2), 117.

## APPENDIX: LINKS TO RELEVANT WEBSITES

### List of websites containing HEIs policies and procedures:

Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT):

[www.cput.ac.za/study/rpl](http://www.cput.ac.za/study/rpl)

North West University:

[http://www.nwu.ac.za/sites/www.nwu.ac.za/files/files/i-governance-management/policy/8P-8.4.3-RPL\\_e.pdf](http://www.nwu.ac.za/sites/www.nwu.ac.za/files/files/i-governance-management/policy/8P-8.4.3-RPL_e.pdf)

Rhodes University (RU):

<https://www.ru.ac.za/admissiongateway/>

<https://www.ru.ac.za/registrar/info/policies/>

<https://www.ru.ac.za/media/rhodesuniversity/content/institutionalplanning/documents/RPL%20POLICY%202007.pdf>

University of Fort Hare (UFH):

<http://www.ufh.ac.za/tlc/sites/default/files/UFH%20Recognition%20of%20Prior%20Learning%20Policy.%20TLC.005.pdf>

<http://www.ufh.ac.za/files/tlc/policy/UFHRecognitionofPriorLearningPolicyTLC005.doc>

<http://www.ufh.ac.za/tlc/sites/default/files/UFHTeachingandLearningPolicy.pdf>

University of the Free State (UFS):

<https://www.ufs.ac.za/supportservices/departments/recognition-of-prior-learning-office-home>

<https://www.ufs.ac.za/supportservices/...of-prior.../rpl-application-forms-and-information>

University of Johannesburg (UJ):

<https://www.uj.ac.za/studyatUJ/sec/Pages/Recognition-of-Prior-Learning.aspx>

<https://www.uj.ac.za/studyatUJ/sec/Documents/RPL%20Request%20Form.pdf>

University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN):

<https://ukznextendedlearning.com/about-us/>

[http://www.joe.ukzn.ac.za/.../Exploring\\_RPL\\_assessment\\_device\\_and\\_or\\_specialised\\_pedagogy](http://www.joe.ukzn.ac.za/.../Exploring_RPL_assessment_device_and_or_specialised_pedagogy)

University of Limpopo:

[https://www.ul.ac.za/index.php?Entity=agri\\_rules](https://www.ul.ac.za/index.php?Entity=agri_rules)

[https://www.ul.ac.za/index.php?Entity=bio\\_rules\\_post](https://www.ul.ac.za/index.php?Entity=bio_rules_post)

University of Pretoria (UP):

<http://www.up.ac.za/en/yearbooks/2017/modules/view/RPL%20320>

University of South Africa (UNISA):

[http://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Search-results/Apply-for-admission/Undergraduate-qualifications/Recognition-of-Prior-Learning-\(RPL\)/RPL-for-module-credit](http://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Search-results/Apply-for-admission/Undergraduate-qualifications/Recognition-of-Prior-Learning-(RPL)/RPL-for-module-credit)

[www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/.../Recognition-of-Prior-Learning-\(RPL\)](http://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/.../Recognition-of-Prior-Learning-(RPL))

University of Stellenbosch (US):

<http://academic.sun.ac.za/chaer/rpl.html>

Walter Sisulu University of Technology:

<http://wsu.ac.za/studywithus/images/resources/folded%20recruitment%20brochure.pdf>

University of the Witwatersrand (WITS):

<https://www.wits.ac.za/glu/academic-programmes/application-process-for-the-glu/>

Other links:

<http://www.saseta.org.za/content/tinymce/plugins/openfile/uploads/Key%20success%20factors%20and%20approaches%20to%20translate%20the%20model%20to%20South%20Africa..pdf>

<http://www.ssaci.org.za/about/ssaci-team> talk to Claudia Rudolph +27 11 642 2110

<https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/35089.html> (*Resources provided by Christoph Vorwerk.*)

DGMT Learning Briefs (<http://www.dgmt-community.co.za/organisations/itec/learning-briefs/skills-development-early-childhood-development-practitioners>)

<https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/programs-services/i-best/team-teaching-models.aspx>

<http://edglossary.org/academic-support/>)