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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CAPS	-	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CATS	–	Children as Actors Transforming Society
CFC		Child-Friendly City
ECCE	–	Early Childhood Care Education
ECD	-	Early Childhood Development
ICECC	–	Inner-city early childhood centre
NCF	-	National Curriculum Framework
NELDS	-	National Early Learning Development Standards
NGO	-	Non-Governmental Organisation
PAR	-	Participatory Action Research
UNICEF	–	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WHO	–	World Health Organisation



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# CHAPTER 1

## CONCEPTUALISATION AND ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

*'You don't have to be old to be wise' – Yoruba proverb*

### 1.1 INTRODUCTORY ORIENTATION

This chapter provides the rationale, background and context, problem statement, aims and objectives, research questions and the process of the research. Reading about a post-modern paradigmatic shift which envisions pre-schoolers as rights-bearers, capable of extracting meaning out of experiences (Benhabib, 1992:5) and of participating with adults in improving their own well-being (Lansdown, 2005:3), made me curious to discover how practitioners in inner-city early childhood centres (ICECC) develop the agency of pre-schoolers (aged 5 and 6) through learning for well-being. In terms of this study, pre-schoolers' agency means that they are able to make choices and decisions to influence events that have an impact on their everyday lives (Sumsion Barnes, Cheeseman, Harrison, Kennedy & Stonehouse, 2009:45) and subsequent well-being.

I held the notion that pre-schoolers are not too young to be agents of their own well-being expressed through innovative and creative ways dependent on their age, experiences and development. I refer to MacNaughton, Hughes and Smith (2007:164) who assert that young children are able to “create and communicate valid views about the social world”. Furthermore, I linked agency to voice, which means more than mere verbal utterances of pre-schoolers. Wall, Jenney and Walsch (2018:4) assert that voice is not limited to words, but involves young children's behaviour, actions, pauses in action, silences, body language, glances, movement and artistic expression. In this study, pre-schoolers' agency or voice is expressed in creative ways through various art projects. Myself and practitioners document their interpretations of pre-schoolers' perspectives, thoughts and ideas expressed through their creativity. I argue that practitioners play a pivotal role in developing pre-schoolers' agency and well-being when they create environments which are open to dialogue, listening and participation

in innovative and creative ways. I further postulate that agency is developed through a process of learning for well-being.

According to Laevers (2005:4), children's well-being is linked to the degree to which they feel at ease, act spontaneously, feel confident and show vitality when taking part in activities. When practitioners secure the well-being of children it can make them thrive and keep in touch with their feelings. Fraillon (2004:17) mentions that children's well-being is closely linked to the context in which they find themselves in and that the context often acts as a catalyst for well-being. It is the view of Mayr and Ulich (2009:45) that well-being is determined by the quality of educational services and processes. I thus postulate that by researching ways in which practitioners develop pre-schoolers' agency their well-being can be better understood and enhanced. Furthermore, I investigated how agency can be developed through the process of learning for well-being. The Framework of Learning for Well-being offers a process of learning which values a rights-based approach. It advocates for the protection of children's rights, for meeting their basic needs and creating opportunities for them to reach their full potential by expressing who they are as unique and diverse individuals (Kickbusch, Gordon, Kropf & O'Toole, 2012:7,28). This framework, the Reggio educational approach (see 2.3.2) and the Framework of Indigenous Well-being (2.3.3), expounded upon in chapter 2 informed this study.

I learnt about the Framework of Learning for Well-being at a workshop held in Brussels in October, 2017 and about a post-modern paradigmatic shift of well-being for children of Europe and other parts of the world. The framework supported a paradigmatic shift that pre-schoolers are capable to express agency, act upon it and inform their life-worlds in participation with adults and peers. Within this framework the early childhood centre is conceptualised as a dynamic system which is influenced by pre-schoolers and practitioners. During this workshop I was informed that the interests and diverse learning styles of children should be accommodated in their home and learning environments and that well-being involves more than performance outcomes. It should lead to solutions and change of practice and policy (Kickbusch et al., 2012:9). I thus decided to use this framework to steer a study within a South African context.

I was further inspired at the Children as Actors Transforming Society (CATS) Conference in July 2017, held in Switzerland, where I witnessed first-hand how young children were able to share their insights, opinions and perspectives, and act upon them in creative ways. This conference inspired me to do research in South Africa on the topic of agency in early childhood centres. This annual conference is a week-long event which brings together children and adults from different parts of the world and diverse religious and cultural backgrounds to collaborate together around a relevant global theme (examples: the inclusivity of children in sharing their ideas and perspectives; children's perspectives on violence and war). The conference is co-designed and co-led by children and adults. It creates a space for children, young people and adults to share, exchange and engage with one another in order to enrich, challenge and expand their understanding of their own and others' experiences and realities. It aims to create meaningful partnerships and participation between adults and children (O'Toole, 2014:34). The vision of CATS of states:

*To enable children, young people and adults who are advocates for the rights and well-being of children to work together as agents of change and co-creators of a more just, sustainable, inclusive and equitable society (CATS, 2017).*

Prior to this study, I became interested in the Reggio educational approach which deems children as strong and capable to voice their opinions (Malaguzzi, 1993:10). This approach uses the tool of pedagogical documentation to make pre-schoolers' agency visible (Hoyuelos, 2004:7). In light of new knowledge gained, I was motivated to do this study in an early childhood environment which was predominantly attended by African children cared for by African practitioners. I found that pre-schoolers' voices were often marginalised. I thus included the Framework for Indigenous Well-being (see 2.3.3) which envisions the African child as a holistic being (mind, body, heart and spirit) and part of community (Rountree & Smith, 2016:206).

By including both a Western and African perspective I hoped to add to the decentring of a Western philosophy of education and the demarginalisation of non-Western philosophies of education by integrating diverse ideas and adding to discussions about new ways to think about the roles of practitioners, pre-schoolers and practice from a transformative perspective. I did not want to escape “elsewhere” as Harding (1993:2) puts it. He stated that we must learn to take ownership of the sciences and

philosophies we now have and have had in the past, and acknowledge their limitations and flaws in the same way that we value their strengths and achievements.

I chose an inner-city early childhood context as it was an environment which was known to me owing to my prior working experience in such areas. Inner-city early childhood centres were, in my experience, places where the voice of pre-schoolers (e.g. their perspectives about their experiences of the environment or ideas about the world) were often not listened to by practitioners. It was mostly practitioners who did the talking. I was curious to investigate if practitioners held the notion that pre-schoolers are not wise enough to share their insights and opinions or make decisions on matters which concern them. Lansdown (2001:3) states that the perception that adults always know best fails children who have the capacity to have a voice in early childhood care and education (ECCE). Adding to her view, Kickbusch et al., (2012:7) mentions that such a perspective deems them incompetent and unable to contribute to their own well-being by fully engaging and expressing who they are as individuals within their daily lives (Kickbusch et al., 2012:7). I thus wanted to inquire which discourses (e.g. knowledge shaped by cultural or educational influences) shaped practitioners' perspectives and the development of pre-schoolers' agency.

Subsequently, against a modernist discourse of quality, I reviewed the rights-based discourse (see 2.4.1) and the discourse of meaning-making (see 2.4.2), which deem pre-schoolers to be rights-bearers and meaning-makers of their experiences, and thus agents of their own well-being. Another discourse which I did not explore but which could be reviewed in a further study on pre-schoolers agency, I briefly mention the discourse of involvement and well-being as indicators of the quality of early learning environments (Declercq, 2011). Involvement is described as the urge to figure things out, to explore, to be interested in how things and people exist in the world, to be present in the learning encounter with full concentration (2011:68). Well-being and involvement constitutes quality in early childhood contexts. In terms of my study, I argue that when pre-schoolers are afforded agency the scores of well-being and involvement might rise in early childhood contexts.

In order to actualise how agency is manifested in early childhood environments, I reviewed the different roles practitioners take on (see 2.5) in the development of pre-schoolers' agency, considering that the practitioner is *in loco parentis* in the absence

of the parent for the better part of the child's day. These roles included: the practitioner as listener (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2000:51–53); the practitioner as a cultivator of core capacities such as listening and reflection (O'Toole & Kropf, 2013:30); and the practitioner as creator of the classroom atmosphere of ubuntu (Penn, 2009:51), which in this study means enabling pre-schoolers to share and participate responsibly in harmony with others (2009:50). These roles are explained in chapter 2 (see 2.5.1, 2.5.2 and 2.5.3).

Not only do the roles of practitioners and pre-schoolers' involvement in learning inform the development of agency but how they are perceived by adults. Various conceptualisations of children which led to a post-modern paradigmatic shift in terms of children and childhood (see 2.6.1 and 2.6.2) are reviewed in chapter 2. The way children were perceived influenced the way they were taught. This still occurs today and has an impact on the development of children's agency and well-being.

Learning further informs the development of agency and well-being. Various ways in which pre-schoolers learn to develop agency (see 2.7) are thus revealed, *inter alia*, in my choice of literature where the focus is on co-constructivist learning (Vygotsky, 1978), the Reggio pedagogical tool of documentation (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2013:225), and the process of Learning for Well-being (Kickbusch et al., 2012:5). Learning takes place in context. Therefore, I consulted literature that revealed two perspectives in which the inner-city early childhood centre and the city where the centre is located can be conceptualised: the ICECC as a forum in civil society (Dahlberg et al., 2013:81) (see 2.8.1) and the city as a child-friendly space based on the Child-friendly City Initiative (CFC) (UNICEF, 2009) (see 2.8.2).

I decided that a qualitative participatory action research design would be best suited to arrive at a most-called-for transformative practice that will empower practitioners to develop pre-schoolers' agency and subsequent well-being. This study thus offers a transformative and practice-based call on practitioners to conceptualise pre-schoolers as agents who can voice their opinions in creative ways such as through art projects which are documented by practitioners.

Table 1.1 below illustrates the various focus areas that undergird this study.

**Table 1.1: The literature study focus areas outline**

DISCOURSES			
Children's Rights		Meaning - making	
FRAMEWORKS			
LEARNING FOR WELL-BEING REGGIO EDUCATIONAL APPROACH Indigenous Well-being			
THE ROLE OF THE PRACTITIONER			
Listener to the perspectives, ideas and theories of pre-schoolers		Cultivator of core capacities such as reflection, being curious, paying attention to the environment	Creator of 'ubuntu' based on the principles of respect, showing empathy and caring for others
THE IMAGE OF THE CHILD			
Rights-bearer with a 'voice' to be heard	Co-constructor of identity, knowledge and culture	Unique and diverse and full of potential	Part of the 'village' - and contributes to it
LEARNING APPROACHES			
Co-constructivist learning - Pre-schoolers learn in partnership with practitioners and peers	The tool of pedagogical documentation Pre-schoolers agency becomes visible through practitioners' documented interpretations		Learning for Well-being process Take pre-schoolers' perspectives Encourages their unique expressions Holds a holistic perspective of development Focus on strength-based approach Values relationships between practitioners and pre-schoolers
APPROACHES TO THE ENVIRONMENT			
Early childhood centre - a forum in civil society where everyone takes part in decision-making and democratic dialogue		City - a child-friendly space where everyone contribute to its planning, design and implementation	

The literature review thus unpacked two predominant discourses which influenced the development of pre-schoolers' agency. Two frameworks and an educational approach which steered this study were explored. Knowledge about the roles of practitioners, the way pre-schoolers were conceptualised, and teaching/learning methodology to develop agency, and perspectives of the ICECC and the city provided a background for the data analysis, findings and summaries. I postulate that pre-schoolers have opinions and perspectives about their school and their city but that they are often not acknowledged or listened to by practitioners.

## 1.2 RATIONALE FOR THIS STUDY

Pre-schoolers' well-being is determined by multiple factors. The first 1 000 days are the most formative years in their lives and factors such as adequate healthcare, good



nutrition, good quality childcare and nurturing, a clean and safe environment, and stimulating early learning experiences will to a large extent influence their well-being and development as adults (StatsSA, 2017). The president of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, said during the SoNA 2018 that "If we are to break the cycle of poverty, we need to educate the children of the poor". I consider that developing pre-schoolers' agency is a way to educate them so that they can tell adults what they need, what they would like to change or make known how they can contribute towards their own well-being, of others and the environment.

In support of Ramaphosa's statement, there is a growing recognition that children's well-being depends on creating opportunities for them to be involved in making decisions about matters which affect their lives, and voicing their opinions, perspectives and ideas (Ben-Arieh, 2007:1). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989) promotes a holistic view of the child and stresses that the concepts of children's well-being need to be multidimensional and ecological, and provide equal scope to children's civic, political, social, economic and cultural rights (Bradshaw, Hoelscher & Richardson, 2007:134). Lansdown (2001:4) states that children have ample and unique experiences and knowledge about their life worlds and can voice their opinions about them. Yet in too many contexts, children are not recognised as legitimate contributors when it comes to decision-making in matters which affect their lives. It could be that they are deemed too young to do so.

Yet, in a study done by Shaik and Ebrahim (2015:7) it was found that Reception year (Grade R) children can function as agents in social processes, where teaching offers them many possibilities for engagement. They concluded that practitioners need to be exposed to child development training programmes which will enable them to understand different views about children, the roles they play as practitioners, their perspectives of children and how they acknowledge their agency. I postulate that reflective practitioners and nurturing and stimulating early childhood learning environments provide ideal opportunities to foster the development of pre-schoolers' agency. In order to do so, practitioners need to be trained.

### **1.3 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

The South African government recognises early childhood development as a fundamental and universal human right for all young children. Such recognition is

stipulated in various acts, policies and papers such as the National Integrated Plan for Early Childhood Development in South Africa 2005–2010 (Republic of South Africa, 2005) and the Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education 2001 (Republic of South Africa, 2001). Investment in early childhood development has been documented as one of the most effective and long-term strategies to eradicate poverty. Children learn skills which enable them to flourish early in life when their brains develop at a rapid rate. In order to flourish, pre-schoolers need to develop a strong self-image. Agency is a way to enhance this.

The Australian Early Years Learning Framework (Sumsion et al., 2009) recognises the following outcomes of agency which is significant to children's well-being:

- Children learn to become autonomous, interdependent and resilient, and to become agents (Learning Outcome 1.2, p. 22).
- Children begin to take increasing responsibility for their own health and physical well-being (Learning Outcome 3.2, p. 32).
- Children become confident and involved learners (Learning Outcome 4, p. 34).

This framework is a valuable summary of the importance to developing agency. Furthermore, the notion of well-being is an integral part of the South African National Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAPS) (Republic of South Africa, 2011). It proposes a prescribed curriculum for the Reception year (Grade R) up to Grade 12 with the purpose of:

equipping learners, irrespective of their socio-economic background, race, gender, physical ability or mental ability, with the knowledge, skills and values necessary for self-fulfilment, and meaningful participation in society as citizens of a free country. (Republic of South Africa, 2011)

This study implies that pre-schoolers should be afforded the opportunity to participate in matters which affect their lives. According to Green and Condry (2016:2), the General Aims of CAPS (Republic of South Africa, 2011) show that policy makers envisioned both the more traditional knowledge requirements of education alongside the development of democratic citizenship. Green and Condry (2016:5–6) explain that

the implementation of a more enquiry-based pedagogy could encourage more active and critical learning, collaboration, mutual respect, thinking and reasoning skills, and prepare learners to be active and democratic citizens of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

However, there is a primary focus on content in the CAPS document which overshadows its underlying principles of non-traditional pedagogy and more democratic relations in the classroom and school. Practitioners are often overwhelmed by the practical demands of the CAPS curriculum (Green & Condry, 2016:1). I believe that it is necessary that practitioners should be encouraged to ask questions such as: Who is this child in front of me? What is the meaning of what I teach to a child? How does my practice influence the expression of a child's agency? How does my relationship with a child or my practice impact the development of agency and well-being? Alderson and Morrow (2011:21) state that practitioners need to re-conceptualise their understanding of their roles and be skilled and flexible enough to understand children's perspectives. Reflecting and asking meaningful questions is one way towards transformation, empowerment and change of practitioners and their practice.

As I reflected on the concept of pre-schoolers' agency and reviewed literature I discovered gaps in the knowledge base. In terms of children's participation in general, Moses (2008:328), in an overview on children's right to participation, states that there has been no attempt to synthesise current knowledge or practice concerning how children's participation takes place in a South African context. Moses (2008:327) examined policy and practice on child participation and stated that critical questions should be asked about the equity, purpose and conditions of participation. Koran and Avci (2017:1054) propose in-service training programmes for practitioners, which should include knowledge on child-centred approaches, understanding of democratic classroom management, effective communication, gender and children's rights, and protection from abuse and neglect. The development of a framework for a training programme for practitioners to develop pre-schoolers' agency is thus an imperative objective in terms of pre-schoolers' rights and capabilities to act as agents of their well-being.

#### **1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

During my volunteering experiences in most of the ICECCs, pre-schoolers took little ownership of their own learning. They were not encouraged to share their opinions,

perspectives or provide input on matters which concerned them. I did not find substantial evidence of pre-schoolers' agency. Most practitioners' attention was on organising the environment, making sure that the children were disciplined and adhering to the prescribed CAPS curriculum. I found that routines and schedules were impediments to participatory practices. Power imbalances between the practitioners and pre-schoolers were evident. The practitioners appeared to be oppressed by the sheer weight of having to conform to rules and time tables, and to satisfy parents' expectations for their children.

Furthermore, there was much focus on rote learning and memorising the days of the week, the months of the year, the seasons and the letters of the alphabet. The teaching of the content of the CAPS curriculum overshadowed children's critical and creative thinking and there was limited active participatory engagement between children and practitioners. I did not find much evidence of multimodal pedagogical approaches such as art projects or activities which expressed children's agency, in spite of the Department of Education's emphasis on:

[m]ulti-level classroom instruction so that educators can prepare main lessons with variations that are responsive to individual learner needs; cooperative learning, curriculum enrichment. (Republic of South Africa, 2001:18)

From my prior experience, ICECCs operated mostly like knowledge factories where the collective capacity of children was to create and learn new knowledge cooperatively and collectively. Individual voices were often not heard.

## **1.5 THE RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

### **1.5.1 Aim of the study**

This research investigated the various ways in which practitioners' roles manifest in ICECCs in terms of the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being.

### **1.5.2 Objectives of the study**

The objectives of the present research regarding the roles of practitioners in ICECCs in Great Tshwane, South Africa, include:

- a) To investigate how practitioners' roles manifest in terms of the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being in inner-city early childhood centres.
- b) To investigate which factors have an impact on the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being.
- c) To critically examine which knowledge and attitudes practitioners demonstrate in terms of the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being.
- d) To investigate how practitioners' practices impact the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being.
- e) To find indicators of pre-schoolers' expression of agency through learning for well-being in inner-city early childhood centres.
- f) To develop recommendations for a training programme framework for practitioners to develop pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being in inner-city early childhood centres.

## **1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following research questions were formulated to steer this study.

### **1.6.1 Primary research question**

The primary research question is:

### **1.6.2 Secondary research questions**

The following are secondary (specific) research questions:

- a) Which factors have an impact on the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being?
- b) Which knowledge and attitudes do practitioners demonstrate in terms of the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being?
- c) How do practitioners' practices impact the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being?
- d) What indicators are there of pre-schoolers' expression of agency in inner-city early childhood centres?

- e) What recommendations for a training programme framework can be put forward for practitioners to develop pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being in inner-city early childhood centres?

## **1.7 RESEARCH PARADIGM, DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

I have discussed the research paradigm, design and methodology in Chapter 3. I focused on the interactions between myself, as researcher, three practitioners and nine pre-schoolers in three ICECCs in Great Tshwane, South Africa. I chose a postmodern, co-constructivist and transformative paradigm for this study. The aims for this study invited a collaborative approach between myself, the practitioners and pre-schoolers in exploring how practitioners develop agency in inner-city early childhood centres.

### 1.7.1 The research paradigms

#### 1.7.1.1 *The postmodern paradigm*

Through the lens of the **postmodern paradigm** I was able to establish that pre-schoolers are capable of and active in making meaning in their world. This paradigm underpinned the discourse of rights and meaning-making which values diversity, complexity, subjectivity and multiple perspectives and is part of an emancipatory practice, which enables children and practitioners to act as agents in order to produce rather than reflect meaning (Lather 1991:37; Dahlberg et al., 2013:112). Children thus need to be provided with opportunities to develop and demonstrate their agency while they are learning to make decisions and choices through facilitation by loving and caring practitioners towards their well-being.

This research thus rested on the philosophical assumption of ontology which is curious to discover how the social world is constituted by us and how we can go about studying it (Barbour, 2008:20). This study was undertaken in an inner-city early childhood centre and aimed to investigate the multiple roles of practitioners in terms of their engagement with pre-schoolers to foster or develop agency.

#### 1.7.1.2 *The co-constructivist paradigm*

Creswell (2014:37) explains that **co-constructivists** believe that individuals seek understanding of their lived experiences. Constructivist researchers recognise how their own backgrounds shape their interpretations and they are open to admitting that their interpretations flow from their personal, cultural and historical experiences. The participants seek to understand the world by becoming actively involved in all the phases of the research process (Creswell, 2007:20).

According to Vygotsky (1978), childhood is understood as a social construct for and by children and is always contextualised in relation to place and culture which varies according to class, gender and other socio-economic conditions. The co-constructivist paradigm values the open and democratic relationship between me and the practitioners (as researchers) (Glicken, 2003:31).

### 1.7.1.3 *The transformative paradigm*

Through adopting the **transformative paradigm**, I was able to investigate the consequences of practitioners' roles, their conceptualisations of pre-schoolers and their actions relating to their real-world practice (Creswell, 2014:36). I chose this paradigm in order to encourage practitioners to reflect on the way their relationship and practices influenced the development of pre-schoolers' agency. Reflexivity is of paramount importance if a study is to transform and lead to change. Creswell (2014:295) explains that reflexivity means that the researchers reflect about how their biases, values and personal background such as gender, history, culture and socioeconomic status can shape their interpretations formed during the study. When practitioners reflected about the influences of their own upbringing it brought about change in how they engaged with pre-schoolers.

Research done within a transformative paradigm is influenced by social, political, cultural, gender and ethical factors (Lombard, 2016:8). McTaggart (1997:183) states that participatory action research (PAR) involves people who are deliberately changing their own action in the light of having reflected upon the shortcomings of their current practice. In the end, I was able to conclude that PAR could bring change, make teaching and learning interactive, build knowledge and skills, empower practitioners and pre-schoolers to contribute to human well-being and make them more self-reliant (Maree, 2007:124). At the end of this study practitioners commented on how the research process grounded in participatory action research changed their views of pre-schoolers and their teaching practice, and informed the development of pre-schoolers' agency (See Chapter 4 and 5).

### 1.7.2 **The research design**

The chosen qualitative participatory action research design (PAR) for this study is based on the principle of self-development in which practitioners organise themselves into action to create change (Strydom, 2011:496). I thus chose this design as the most suited for the research within the postmodern, co-constructivist and transformative paradigms. Baum, MacDougall and Smith (2006:854) states that PAR differs from conventional research in four ways. Firstly, it focuses on research of which the purpose is to inform change. Action which can lead to change of practice is achieved through a cycle of reflection, whereby participants collect and analyse data, then reflect and



determine what action should follow. The resultant action is then further researched and an iterative reflective cycle can then lead to more data collection, reflection and action. Secondly, PAR highlights power relationships and advocates that power should be negotiated between the researcher and the researched. Such negotiation can bring the researcher(s) and those being researched closer together. In my study everyone involved participated in the research process in different ways (e.g. the focus group interviews and documentation of the four art projects (see Chapter 4).

### **1.7.3 The literature review**

According to Mouton (2001:87), the literature review includes the existing scholarship and knowledge base. It is this knowledge base which helped me to understand how other scholars have investigated the research problem. The literature review forms a background to this study. Creswell (2014:60) maintains that the literature review provides a comprehensive theoretical and conceptual framework through which data can be collected, analysed and interpreted. In this study, the literature review complements the research process. Thus the summaries drawn from the literature, in compliance with the empirical data collected and analysed, were used to inform recommendations for a framework for training practitioners on how to develop pre-schoolers' agency through a process of learning for well-being.

In the literature review various foundational concepts were presented (see 2.2). I reviewed three frameworks (e.g. Framework of Learning for Well-being, the Reggio Educational approach and the framework of Indigenous Well-being (see 2.3). I explored various discourses which informed practitioners' perspectives on pre-schoolers' agency (e.g. the rights-based and meaning-making discourses) (see 2.4). I reviewed the various roles practitioners play in their classrooms (e.g. a listener, cultivator of core capacities and creators of ubuntu (see 2.5). Various ways in which children were conceptualised throughout history and present times (see 2.6) were explored. I reviewed three learning approaches and two perspectives of the inner-city early childhood centre (see 2.7 and 2.8).

## **1.8 DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES**

### **1.8.1 Two reconnaissance workshops**

Two workshops prior to the data collection were facilitated by me in order to inform the three practitioners about various concepts (such as agency, the pedagogy of listening and the tool of pedagogical documentation) and the methodology of participatory action research. Interviews conducted during these workshops were recorded and transcribed (see Appendix 11) and photographs were taken of the workshops (see Appendix 19) and the documented projects designed by the practitioners (see Appendix 16). The outlines of the workshops are discussed in Chapter 3.

### **1.8.2 Semi-structured interviewing**

I conducted two face-to-face, individual, semi-structured interviews with the three practitioners to discover what their views were about pre-schoolers, what their relationship was to them and what their practice entailed. An interview may be face-to-face, where the researcher elicits information about the participants' experiences usually through direct questioning (Gillis & Jackson, 2002:466). I designed a semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix 10), but the questions were not cast in stone. I needed to rephrase them as necessary during the interview for the sake of clarity. These interviews were recorded and transcribed. Upon completion of the data analysis I conducted a final feedback interview with two of the practitioners (the third practitioner had left the early childhood centre where the research was undertaken before I could finally interview her).

### **1.8.3 Individual and group conversations**

I held individual and group conversations with the nine pre-schoolers. I was curious to know how they saw themselves, their school and their city and to discover if they could express agency. The conversations were recorded and transcribed (see Appendix 10). The pre-schoolers each had to draw a picture of their school (see Appendix 18) and talk about them with me. According to Groundwater-Smith, Dockett and Bottrell (2014:116), conversations with pre-schoolers often take on the form of informal interactions during regular interactions, often with the 'insider' researcher participating alongside the child. I thus visited the pre-schoolers prior to the research and shared with them a bit about what I was going to ask them to do. This visit included gaining consent from their parents and the pre-schoolers themselves (see Appendix 8 and 9).

#### **1.8.4 Observations of circle time discussions**

I observed three circle time discussions, during which practitioners discussed the theme of the week with pre-schoolers, or recited specific concepts they had to learn (e.g. shapes, colours, days of the week). Marshall and Rossman (2006:99) state that observation is fundamentally important in all qualitative inquiry and is often done in classroom studies. My observations of the circle time discussions were documented in my self-reflective research journal (see Appendix 15). My observations were guided by an observation sheet (see Appendix 14). The practitioners were asked to write about their own experiences during the circle time discussions in answer to open-ended questionnaires (see Appendix 13). Photographs were taken of the circle time discussions to show the structure of the discussions and the way in which body language of practitioners and pre-schoolers could inform agency. These photographs are shown in Chapter 4.

#### **1.8.5 Focus group interviews**

I conducted three focus group interviews (prior to, midway through, and at the end of the data collection period) with the three practitioners (see Appendix 12). Focus group interviews are socially oriented. Participants share what they have understood, experienced or discovered about each other in order to generate data (Kritzing, 1995:299). The purpose of focus group interviews is that participants are given the opportunity to talk with each other in a safe setting and to share their diverse perspectives on aspects of the project. Berghold and Thomas (2012:69) define this as a space of communication. For the purposes of this study the focus group interviews were recorded and transcribed. The data collected from the focus group interviews were analysed and used together with the interviews and conversations and were supported by other collected data (e.g. written notes made in my research journal and the practitioners' fake Facebook pages) to inform recommendations for a training programme framework for practitioners to develop pre-schoolers' agency.

#### **1.8.6 Self-reflection: Research journal and fake Facebook pages**

I kept a self-reflective research journal during the entire research process (see Appendix 15). The practitioners each designed their own fake Facebook pages on A3

sheets on which they answered open-ended questions and reflected about their own discoveries (see Appendix 17).

#### **1.8.7 Four documented art projects**

Four art projects were planned, made and implemented by pre-schoolers through the facilitation of myself and the practitioners (see Appendix 18). Notes were written on some of them. Recordings were made of what pre-schoolers said when asked about their drawings, clay statues, posters or constructions. Documentation thus consisted of written notes, transcribed recordings and photographs taken of the art projects (Fyfe, 2012:275). Creswell (2014:242) mentions that visual data are representational and provide an opportunity for participants to make their opinions and perspectives known. Such data are creative and capture the reader's attention visually. The four art projects created by the pre-schoolers in each ICECC comprised drawings of their school, drawings of their route maps to school, clay statues and projects expressing *What I can change!* (see Appendix 18). A thorough explanation of the data collection procedure is explained in Chapter 3.

### **1.9 SELECTION OF THE RESEARCH SITE**

This study was conducted in three inner-city early childhood centres in Great Tshwane, South Africa (see Appendix 22). I was familiar with two of the research sites prior to the study. The ICECCs were part of a non-governmental organisation. It was not too difficult to gain access to these sites because I knew the managers. The research sites are described in greater detail in Chapter 3.

### **1.10 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS**

The participants (myself, three practitioners, nine pre-school children) were selected by means of convenience sampling. The practitioners knew the pre-schoolers well and were able to make the selection of which pre-schoolers would be able to take part in the research, according to my proposed criteria. They knew which pre-schoolers would be able to understand English quite well and converse with me. These criteria for selection are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

### **1.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

I ensured that all the relevant participants: managers, principals, parents, practitioners and pre-schoolers were consulted prior to the data collection phase and permission from all the participants were gained. All participants were allowed to influence the research and the wishes of those who did not want to participate or wanted to withdraw were respected. Finally, I took responsibility for maintaining confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process. The ethical procedures in line with the UNISA ethical clearance committee were followed.

## **1.12 DATA ANALYSES**

All transcribed recorded interviews and conversations were analysed by using a manual data analysis approach. I decided on this approach because it enabled me to reflect more critically and understand the data in greater depth. It felt like playing with playdough - an apt metaphor in terms of the early childhood research context. I highlighted themes, sub-themes and categories manually and then transferred and arranged these themes and categories on A2 sheets of paper (see Appendix 21). Additional data such as my research journal, the practitioners' fake Facebook pages, answers to open-ended questionnaires and photographs of the documented art projects supported the data analysis. All visual data were catalogued and sorted. Creswell (2014:247) explains that coding is the process of organising the data by putting text or image segments in brackets and writing a word which represents a category. I presented the data as a narrative through using direct quotations from the collected interviews and conversations.

### **1.12.1 Validity and reliability**

Creswell (2014:251) explains that qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for accuracy of findings from the standpoint of all the participants. The criteria for validity and reliability are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

#### **1.12.1.1 Credibility**

McMillan and Schumacher (2006:471) define credibility as the extent to which the results or findings are true to reality and can be judged to be trustworthy and reasonable. I ensured credibility by spending a considerable period of time (eight weeks) in the research setting in order to build trust between myself, the practitioners and pre-schoolers)

#### *1.12.1.2 Dependability and confirmability*

Dependability means that the research process is logical, well-documented and audited (Schurink, Fouche & De Vos, 2011:420–421). An audit trail of the transcribed recordings, written notes, art projects and photographs of the art work was kept while analysing the data to strengthen dependability. Confirmability is established when the findings of the study are confirmed by another informant, and in this case the practitioners themselves. I used my self-reflective journal, the practitioners' fake Facebook pages and the answers to the open-ended questionnaires for member checking. The focus group interviews further provided opportunities for the practitioners and I to reflect on what was discovered during the data collection process.

In Table 1.2 I provided the rationale, background, problem statement, aims and objectives of the study, as well as the primary and secondary research questions. I also referred to the six main focus areas of the literature review. Next a summary of the research design, research paradigms, data collection tools, a selection of the research site and sampling, and ethical considerations are presented. This is followed by an explanation of how the data were collected, analysed and interpreted. Finally the findings and recommendations were presented.

**Table 1.2: Summary of the research process used in the study**

INTRODUCTION, RATIONALE, BACKGROUND, PROBLEM STATEMENT, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY (Chapter 1)

Primary research question	Secondary research questions
How do practitioners' roles manifest in terms of the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being in inner-city early childhood centres?	<div>1. Which factors have an impact on the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being?</div> <div>2. Which knowledge and attitudes do practitioners demonstrate in terms of the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being?</div> <div>3. How do practitioners' practices impact the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being?</div> <div>4. What indicators are there of pre-schoolers' expression of agency in inner-city early childhood centres?</div> <div>5. What recommendations for a training programme framework can be put forward for practitioners to develop pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being in inner-city early childhood centres?</div>

LITERATURE REVIEW (Chapter 2)

Frameworks	Discourses	Various roles of practitioners	Adults' conceptualisations of children	Types of learning towards agency	Inner-city early childhood centre and the city
<div><div>• Framework Learning for Well-being</div><div>• The Reggio educational approach</div><div>• Framework for Indigenous Well-being</div></div>	<div><div>• Rights-based</div><div>• Meaning-making</div></div>	<div><div>• Listener</div><div>• Cultivator of core capacities</div><div>• Creator of ubuntu</div></div>	<div><div>• Rights-bearer</div><div>• Co-constructor of identity, knowledge and culture</div><div>• Unique and diverse, full of potential</div><div>• Child of the village – part of the educational environment, community and larger society</div></div>	<div><div>• Co-constructivist learning – partnership between the practitioner and the pre-schooler</div><div>• The tool of pedagogical documentation – making agency of pre-schoolers visible</div><div>• Learning for well-being process – pre-schoolers inform and experience well-being of self, others and the environment</div></div>	<div><div>• A forum in civil society</div><div>• Child-friendly space</div></div>

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY (Chapter 3)		
Paradigmatic assumptions	Research design and sampling	Ethical considerations
<b>Methodological paradigm</b> Participatory action research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative</li> <li>• Participatory action research</li> <li>• Convenience sampling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informed consent</li> <li>• Confidentiality</li> <li>• Anonymity</li> <li>• Validity</li> <li>• Reliability</li> <li>• Credibility</li> <li>• Dependability</li> <li>• Confirmability</li> </ul>
<b>Metatheoretical paradigms</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-modern</li> <li>• Co-constructivist</li> <li>• Transformative</li> </ul>		

Qualitative data collection tools	Qualitative data collection	Selection of the research site and participants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two reconnaissance workshops</li> <li>• Individual and group conversations with the pre-schoolers</li> <li>• Individual semi-structured interviews with practitioners</li> <li>• Observations of circle time discussions</li> <li>• Open-ended questionnaires</li> <li>• Focus group interviews</li> <li>• Researcher's self-reflective journal</li> <li>• Practitioners' fake Facebook pages</li> <li>• Four documented art projects (e.g. written notes, photographs, transcribed recordings)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbatim transcripts of all dialogue</li> <li>• Written notes in researcher's self-reflective journal</li> <li>• Written notes on fake Facebook pages of practitioners</li> <li>• Open-ended questionnaires of practitioners</li> <li>• Written notes on documented art projects</li> <li>• Photographs of four documented art projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three inner-city early childhood centres</li> <li>• Myself</li> <li>• Three practitioners</li> <li>• Nine pre-schoolers</li> </ul>



DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATIONS AND DISCUSSION (Chapter 4)		
THEMES	Sub-themes	Categories
1. The relationship between practitioners and pre-schoolers'	1.1 Communication	Listening Non-verbal interaction Who is talking
	1.2 Roles of practitioners	"I am everything to the child" "When I was a child"
2. Knowledge and attitudes of practitioners about pre-schoolers	2.1 Practitioners' concepts of pre-schoolers	"Pre-schoolers' have rights" Pre-schoolers' are researchers Innocence of pre-schoolers' "Pre-schoolers' are not like us"
3. Factors which impact the development of agency	3.1 Methodology	Rote learning Focus on work and performance
	3.2 Classroom atmosphere	Discipline and power display A happy place
	3.3 Challenges in practice	Parents Work load and time constraints Limited resources
4. Pre-schoolers' expressions of agency	4.1 How pre-schoolers see their school and city	"I like my school" (pre-schoolers' voice) "What I see in the city" (pre-schoolers' voice)
	4.2 How pre-schoolers see themselves, others and the environment	Care for others Empathy Theories Awareness of nature and space
	4.3 Pre-schoolers' initiatives for change	A public opinion "What I can change!" (pre-schoolers' voice)
5. Improvement of practice	5.1 Doing things differently	Asking probing questions Practitioners' relationship with pre-schoolers

	5.2 New discoveries in terms of practice	Understanding pre-schoolers The value of using the pedagogical tool of documentation
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUMMARY (Chapter 5)</b>		
Practitioners display multiple roles in the inner-city early childhood centres; various factors impede the development of pre-schoolers' agency and well-being; the knowledge and attitudes of practitioners are informed by their own cultural upbringing and conceptualisation of pre-schoolers; their practices transformed through using the tool of pedagogical documentation from a lecturing method towards a participatory active teaching and learning method; pre-schoolers express agency in inner-city early childhood centres in various ways. A training programme framework for practitioners to develop pre-schoolers' agency through using various learning for well-being approaches was recommended.		

In Chapter 3 a detailed discussion of Table 1.2 is presented.

## **1.13 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS**

### **1.13.1 Early childhood development**

Early childhood development is an umbrella term which applies to the processes by which children from birth to at least nine years grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially (Republic of South Africa, 2012:4).

### **1.13.2 Early childhood education**

Early childhood education is a teaching and learning approach focused on play for children in the period from birth to six years of age. Other terms that are often used interchangeably are early childhood learning, early care and early education (Morrison, 2006:4).

### **1.13.3 Early childhood centre**

Any building or premises maintained or used for the admission, protection and temporary of full-day care of more than six children that are not with their parents in the day. Depending on registration a ECD centre can admit babies, toddlers and/or pre-schoolers. The terms ECD centre in this study refers to a day care centre and pre-school (Republic of South African, 2012:6)

### **1.13.4 Inner-city**

Inner-city is an area that is located in or near the centre of a city. It is a densely populated and usually deteriorating, area, inhabited by mostly poor, and often minority groups (dictionary.com). In South Africa, more than 53% of children live in urban areas – i.e. equivalent to 9.75 million children (Statistics South Africa, 2010).

### **1.13.5 Practitioners**

The term refers to all ECD education and training development practitioners, i.e. educators, trainers, facilitators, lecturers, caregivers and development officers, and who are involved in providing child care services in homes, centres and schools (Republic of South Africa, 2012:6).

### **1.13.6 Pre-schoolers**

Pre-schoolers are children between the ages of five and six years old who are enrolled in a Reception year classroom before entering primary school (Republic of South Africa, 2012:6).

### **1.13.7 Grade R**

The National Department of Education has identified three models of provision of Reception Year (Grade R): those within the public primary school system, community-based sites and independent reception year programmes before primary school (Republic of South Africa, 2012:6).

### **1.13.8 Agency**

Giddens (1984:14) explains that to be an agent is to be capable of influencing others and making a difference in the world. When a child has agency they are able to make choices and decisions to influence events in their daily lives, and have an impact on their world (Early Learning Framework 2009:45)

### **1.13.9 Well-being**

Well-being can be described as health, comfort and happiness. It is understood as a universal human right for all on a personal, collective and environmental level (Kickbusch et al., 2012:35). When all children receive good nutrition, enjoy good health, are safe and secure, and have stimulating opportunities to learn they can thrive, develop and learn (Republic of South Africa, 2015).

### **1.13.10 Framework of Learning for Well-being**

The Framework of Learning for Well-being offers a process of learning to enhance well-being by cultivating core capacities (e.g. values, attitudes, practices, choices, and environments) which well-being for adults and children (Kickbusch et al., 2012:28).

### **1.13.11 Meaning-making**

In this study, meaning-making is about producing meaningful learning and lives, deepening understanding about children and the nature of childhood, valuing the position of children and early childhood institutions in society, and harnessing democratic and participatory processes through meaningful projects in early childhood centres (Dahlberg et al., 2013:117).

### **1.13.12 Children's rights**

Children's rights entail the rights of children to express their views freely and to be taken seriously. They also encompass the right to freedom of expression, religion, conscience, association, information and privacy (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010:12–13).

### **1.13.13 Traditional African approach**

The traditional African approach to education was prevalent in Africa before the coming of Western civilisations. It is a philosophy and practice of wholistic, lifelong and utilitarian type learning that calls for the input of everyone (including children) of the community, and which prepares each individual for a particular profession or occupational activity (Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2003:425). It can challenge the power relations that often inform Eurocentric discourses and can lead to the awakening of an African culture and identity (Parker, 2003:32).

### **1.13.14 Framework for Indigenous Well-being**

A Framework for Indigenous Well-being defines health and well-being from a holistic and strength-based perspective (Rountree & Smith, 2016:206). It focuses on concepts such as the individual and the system (family, community, organisation), context (family, culture, community, environment, history), mind (cognition, emotion, self-

identity), body (physical needs, genetic make-up, practical needs, including economic needs) and spirit (spiritual practices and teachings of native ancestry) (Friesen, Cross, Jivanjee, Thirstrup & Bandurraga, 2014:3-4).

#### **1.13.15 Reggio educational approach**

This approach values the child as a rights-bearer, an active constructor of knowledge, and a collaborator and co-learner with adults. The practitioner is a facilitator and a guide and a researcher who learns with the child. Knowledge is viewed as being socially constructed, involves multiple ways of learning and makes meaning of what is learnt (Hewett, 2001:95).

#### **1.13.16 Pedagogy of listening**

The pedagogy of listening is an educational approach based on ethics which means to be open to differences and recognising the value of another's perspective and interpretation. It is understood as an active verb that involves giving meaning and valuing the viewpoints, theories and perspectives of others, including children. It is understood as an encounter based on ethical relationships between adults, adults and children, and children and peers. It is envisaged as an attitude for life (Rinaldi, 2012:234).

#### **1.13.17 Tool of pedagogical documentation**

In this study, practitioners implement the tool of pedagogical documentation, i.e. they use the skills of observation and interpretation to document what the children have said and done in their projects. It involves taking written notes, making recordings and taking photographs and sharing them with others. It makes visible the thoughts, ideas, learning processes and strategies of children's thinking (Rinaldi, 2012:238).

#### **1.13.18 Forum in civil society**

The early childhood centre is a forum in civil society when it is open to all systems of relationships and communication. It is understood that the early childhood centre is in a close relationship with local communities (including families and local government), society and the world (Dahlberg et al., 2013:80). The early childhood centre is understood as an example of a local micro project where a form of municipal learning

occurs through collective co-construction of local knowledge. Such knowledge is then expressed through project work and a pedagogy of listening which informs the relationship between all stakeholders in the early childhood context. Such a perspective emphasises democracy and experimentation as central values which are expressed through democratic learning, democratic decision-making and democratic evaluation of what has been done (Moss, 2012:105–106).

#### **1.13.19 A child-friendly space**

A child-friendly space is a city or local system of governance that is committed to honouring the rights of children, including their rights to participate with adults and peers, and to be provided with opportunities to engage in decision-making towards their own well-being, those of others and the environment. It focuses on providing basic services such as health care, safe spaces and education for all children as equal citizens (UNICEF, 2009).

#### **1.13.20 Living system perspective**

The living system perspective implies that everyone's lives are dynamically connected to and within various systems around us. In terms of this study practitioners and pre-schoolers organise, express and influence these systems and are influenced by them (Kickbusch et al., 2012:29).

### **1.14 CHAPTER DIVISIONS**

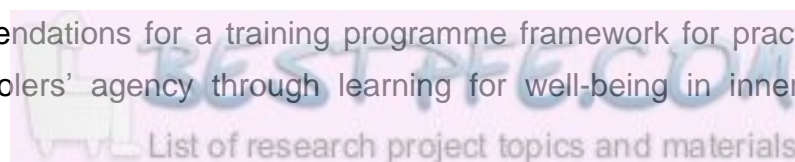
**Chapter 1** provides a theoretical orientation and background to the study and introduces the research design, paradigms and methodology.

**Chapter 2** reviews the literature on all the aspects pertaining to the research.

**Chapter 3** explains the research design and methodology.

**Chapter 4** presents the data analysis, interpretations and discussion

**Chapter 5** provides a discussion of the findings and recommendations of this study. It presents recommendations for a training programme framework for practitioners to develop pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being in inner-city early childhood centres.



## **1.15 SUMMARY**

In this chapter I introduced the study and the rationale for the study. I contextualised the study in terms of children's agency and well-being in discourses and research, against the background paradigms of postmodernism, co-constructivism and transformation. I discussed the problem statement, research aims and objectives of the study and formulated the research questions. The design and methodology applied in this study were briefly outlined. A brief description was done on the ethical guidelines, and the issues of validity and reliability were discussed. Finally, the key concepts used in this study were clarified, after which the chapter divisions were given.

In Chapter 2 a thorough review of the relevant literature in terms of agency, well-being, the frameworks and approach which steer this study, the discourses which inform this study, the roles of practitioners and their conceptualisations of children, learning approaches to develop agency, and perspectives of the inner-city early childhood centre and the city are discussed. The literature review guided me in envisaging the themes that may come from the data collection, and I used my imagination to make sense of the large amount of data collected during the data collection process. I now take the reader to Chapter 2 of this study.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

*It takes a whole village to raise a child – Igbo proverb*

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1 I contextualised the study, explained the rationale and presented the problem statement, aims, objectives and the research questions. I briefly introduced the methodology. In Chapter 1 the primary objective of the study is presented which is to investigate the various ways in which practitioners' roles manifest in inner-city early childhood centres (ICECCs) in terms of the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being. In this study agency is linked to pre-schoolers' well-being. Learning happens in the everyday lives of pre-schoolers and their well-being is created in the context where they live, love, learn and play. I argue that when pre-schoolers are afforded an opportunity to express their viewpoints, perspectives and theories about matters which concern or interest them, they contribute to their own well-being, that of others, and the environment.

Chapter 2 expands on the contextual framework presented in Chapter 1 by focusing on the discussion about the overarching and interconnected theoretical frameworks, namely the Learning for Well-being Framework (see 2.3.1) and the Reggio educational approach (see 2.3.2), with further reference to the Framework of Indigenous Well-being (see 2.3.3). This chapter starts with providing various meanings of the concept of **agency** (see 2.1.1), the importance of listening to the voice of pre-schoolers (see 2.2.1), and makes a case that pre-schoolers are not too young to express agency (see 2.2.1.1). It mentions four models which can inform the development of pre-schoolers' agency (2.2.1.2). Thereafter the concept of **well-being** (2.2.2) and how it relates to the Framework for Learning for Well-being and to the South African National Qualifications Framework Birth to Four Years is briefly explained. An introduction to the **process of learning for well-being** follows (See 2.2.3). The chapter makes a case for researching the roles which practitioners play in developing pre-schoolers' agency and subsequent well-being from both a Western and African perspective (see 2.2.4). Then follows a discussion on the two frameworks and the learning approach (see 2.3) and

the two discourses, namely the discourse on rights and meaning-making (see 2.4) against the modernist backdrop of a discourse of quality.

Next the roles of practitioners (as listeners, as cultivators of core capacities and as creators of the classroom atmosphere of ubuntu (see 2.5) in terms pre-schoolers' agency and well-being are explained. Society's present and past conceptualisations of pre-schoolers follow the discussion on practitioners' roles (see 2.6). Three learning approaches to develop agency: Vygotsky's co-constructivist learning (see 2.7.1), the tool of pedagogical documentation (see 2.7.2) and the learning for well-being process are explored. Finally two ways in which the early childhood centre and the city can be envisioned, namely the early childhood centre as a forum in civil society (see 2.8.1) and the city as a child-friendly space (see 2.8.2), are discussed in order to indicate that an early childhood centre can be more than just a place of teaching and learning. It can be a place where agency is developed and subsequent well-being is enhanced.

In summation, an exploration of the manifestation of practitioners' roles; various factors in early childhood contexts; and the knowledge and attitudes of practitioners and what they do in their practices to impact the development of pre-schoolers' agency are investigated. Finally evidence of pre-schoolers' agency is explored to support my argument that pre-schoolers do have agency and that it needs to be developed by practitioners in inner-city early childhood contexts. The literature review thus aims to support my argument that pre-schoolers are not empty vessels that have to be filled with pre-determined knowledge from outside experts, but are capable of contributing to their own well-being, those of others and the environment through expressing and sharing their ideas, perspectives and theories about their world. Various researchers commented on young children's agency in literature.

James and Prout (1990:8) state that children are not just passive bystanders of social structures and processes. They [pre-schoolers] can be envisioned as constructors of their own lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Such perspectives of children are in line with my argument that pre-schoolers have agentive capabilities. As a point of departure it is of utmost importance to introduce the concepts of agency, well-being and the process of learning for well-being.

### **2.1.1 Various meanings of the concept of *agency* in early childhood education**

According to Giddens (1984:14), agency does not refer primarily to the intentions which people have to do things, but to their ability to take action, which includes their ability to influence their own lifeworld and those of others to make a difference. The role which individuals [i.e. children] play in constructing their experiences of the world implies that they are “agents of experiences rather than simply partakers of experiences” (Bandura, 2001:4). Pufall and Unsworth (2004:8) refer to agency as voice, understood as children's expressions of intentions, hopes, grievances and expectations. The concept of agency is further explained by Morrow (2011:10) as “the capacity to act”. Malaguzzi (1993:10), founder of the Reggio educational approach, which further informs this study, offers an apt description of children's agency by stating children are “rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and, most of all, connected to adults and other children”. These statements suggest that children should be conceptualised as agents of change and not merely as silent observers of events or experiences. Edwards, Gandini and Forman (2012:150) states that children – even young children – can act as protagonists [i.e. change makers] in society. They are rights-bearers who need to be listened to and afforded opportunities to participate with adults and peers, and take action alongside them on the basis of their unique experiences and development.

Such perspectives of children are in contrast to some common images of children as being deficit, passive, adult-driven, or who have to follow a predetermined path set out by adults and/or determined by children's biological development (Dahlberg et al., 2013:49). This study shares the Reggio perspective that children seek meaning of the world and are co-constructors of identity, knowledge and culture in relationship with others (Dahlberg et al., 2013:53). The above descriptions of children's capacities to act as agents of their own well-being summarises how practitioners should envision pre-schoolers and thus develop their agency through learning for well-being.

The argument which may be put forward that pre-schoolers are too young to act as agents is contradicted by the frameworks and educational approach which informs this study. The Learning for Well-being Framework (see 2.3.1) illustrates in Figure 2.3 that pre-schoolers influence and express themselves in relation to self, others and the environment. The Reggio educational approach deems pre-schoolers capable of agency (see 2.3.2) when practitioners listens to their perspectives and ideas. The

Framework of Indigenous Well-being (see 2.3.3) further underscores that pre-schoolers' sense of agency is informed by who they are through their relationships and experiences with others

## **2.2 FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS OF THIS STUDY**

### **2.2.1 The importance of listening to the voice of pre-schoolers**

To listen to pre-schoolers' voice implies, first, that practitioners need to move beyond their conceptualisation of pre-schoolers as weak, dependent and immature to envisioning them as strong and capable agents in society. If pre-schoolers are regarded as voiceless it perpetuates the stereotypical power imbalances between practitioners and pre-schoolers. In disregarding pre-schoolers, it implies that they are not worthy of being listened to by adults (James, 2007:262). When practitioners deem pre-schoolers to be empty vessels in need of being filled with predetermined knowledge, the multiple ways in which pre-schoolers can share their perspectives and theories about the world around them and take part in making decisions about matters which affect their well-being are ignored. Practitioners may then ignore the various ways in which children express, and act upon, their ideas and perspectives through creative and imaginative means (e.g. drawings of their school, route maps about their city or expressions through making clay statues), as evidenced in this study. Such lack of attention may perpetuate the silencing of pre-schoolers and thus hinder the development of their agency and well-being. This study thus envisions the encouragement of practitioners to reconsider their roles in terms of the development of pre-schoolers' agency.

Bae (2009:395) states that if the right of children to participate on their own terms is to become evident in practice, they need responsive practitioners who recognise their competencies and encourage them to develop and learn, and simultaneously be aware of their vulnerabilities and dependence. The Learning for Well-being Framework (which is discussed in 2.3) looks at children from a competency and strength-based perspective (Kickbusch et al., 2012:100), hence its central place in this thesis. The Reggio educational approach (see 2.3.2) further underscores the multiple ways in which pre-schoolers can express themselves and how practitioners, by listening to them, can make their agency visible through the tool of pedagogical documentation

(see 2.7.2) (Dahlberg et al., 2013:156). The Framework of Indigenous Well-being indicates that pre-schoolers are holistic beings who live and learn in relationship with others (see 2.3.3)

#### *2.2.1.1 Indicators of pre-schoolers' agency*

In light of the above-mentioned perspectives, I thus argue that pre-schoolers are not too young to express their opinions or share their perspectives, especially in terms of matters which concern them. Corsaro (2005:24) states that even very young children, alongside their parents, participate in cultural routines such as learning to talk and playing children's games. They are social actors right from the start, but as they develop they begin to strive to interpret and to make sense of their culture, and to participate in it. Emberly and Davhula (2016:439), for instance, showed how young children use musical arts to share their views and perspectives. A study from western Kenya revealed that young children acting as carers for their ailing or ageing guardians affected by HIV/AIDS mobilised social support, engaged in income generating activities and constructed positive social identities around their caring roles. This study concluded that young children's ability to cope was determined by the extent to which they were afforded the opportunity to participate in their community and harness support from it (Skovdal, Ogutu, Aorob & Campbell, 2009:587). Conceptualised in such an agentic way, I postulate that pre-schoolers do exhibit agency.

However, despite evidence from research that pre-schoolers can participate with others to take action, Lansdown (2005:v) states that although thinking about and providing activities for participation is increasing, the focus has mostly been on school-aged children. She mentions that children younger than eight years have not been afforded many opportunities. Thus in terms of participation they are the most marginalised. Their capacity for participation and agency is underestimated and remains unrecognised. Lansdown (2001:3-4) goes so far as to say that adults have failed children in various ways by abusing their power over children; not always acting in the child's best interest; protecting parents' rights over children; and disregarding children's interests in policy. She states that it is therefore imperative that adults reconsider their roles and conceptualisation of children and the nature of their relationships with them. Children's own experiences, views and concerns should be valued and recognised. Such a shift in thinking requires researchers and practitioners

to question how their responsibilities towards children hinder or develop their agency (Lansdown, 2001:1). This study thus brings to the forefront the important role practitioners play in the development of pre-schoolers' agency in early learning environments as there are numerous benefits for pre-schoolers' well-being (see 1.3).

There are various ways in which agency can be expressed. I refer to four models in which agency was realised in terms of children's participation about matters which affected their well-being. These models were consulted when a recommendation for a training programme framework for practitioners to develop pre-schoolers' agency was conceptualised at the end of this study.

#### *2.2.1.2 Agency manifested through various models of participation*

Various models have been proposed in research to enable children's agency to be expressed through participation and which are appropriate for this study. Lansdown (2001:16) groups children's meaningful participation into three categories as shown in Table 2.1 below:

**Table 2.1: Lansdown categories of children's participation**

Consultative processes	Participative initiatives	Promoting self-advocacy
Adults initiate action to collect information from children which informs legislation, policies or services.	The process of democracy is strengthened and children are enabled to understand and apply democratic principles. They are involved in the development of services and policies that impact their lives.	The aim is to empower children to identify and take ownership in fulfilling their own goals and initiatives.
<b>Characteristics:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult-initiated;</li> <li>• Adult led and managed;</li> <li>• Children do not control the outcomes;</li> <li>• Children may be provided with opportunities for organising together and building confidence by contributing to the outcomes.</li> </ul>	<b>Characteristics:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiated by adults;</li> <li>• Involves collaboration with children;</li> <li>• Children are involved in taking self-directed action in partnership with adults;</li> <li>• Involves power sharing between adults and children;</li> <li>• The traditional relationship between adults and children is renegotiated</li> </ul>	<b>Characteristics:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The issues of concern are identified by children themselves;</li> <li>• Adults act as facilitators and do not take the lead;</li> <li>• The process is controlled by the children.</li> </ul>

**Adapted from Lansdown (2001)**

Lansdown's model of participation involves consultation, participation and self-advocacy, which I argue should be evident in early childhood centres. Consulting with pre-schoolers are predominantly driven by adults and pre-schoolers do not control the outcomes. Through participatory initiatives pre-schoolers are afforded more opportunity to voice their input and contribute to policy and practice. In this way democracy in the classroom is strengthened. The way in which to empower pre-schoolers is through promoting their self-advocacy so that pre-schoolers can take responsibility towards their own well-being. This study envisions to empower practitioners to empower pre-schoolers to make their voice heard and act upon it.

Another example to epitomise children's participation is Shier's (2001) model which poses 15 questions which practitioners can use to evaluate the levels of participation in their classrooms, and how their relationships with children and their practices inform the development of pre-schoolers' agency as shown in Table 2.2.

**Table 2.2: Shier's (2001) model of participation**

<b>LEVEL 1</b> Children are listened to.	<b>LEVEL 2</b> Children are encouraged to express their viewpoints.	<b>LEVEL 3</b> Children's perspectives are acknowledged.	<b>LEVEL 4</b> Children are involved in making decisions.	<b>LEVEL 5</b> Children share power and take responsibility for making decisions.
<b>OPENINGS</b> Are you open to listening to children?	<b>OPENINGS</b> Are you open to supporting children in expressing their viewpoints?	<b>OPENINGS</b> Are you open to taking children's perspectives into account?	<b>OPENINGS</b> Are you open to letting children take part in your decision-making processes?	<b>OPENINGS</b> Are you open to allowing children to take ownership with you to make decisions?
<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b> Is your practice structured in a way that enables you to listen to children?	<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b> Do you have a range of activities which enables children to express their viewpoints?	<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b> Do your decision-making processes enable you to take children's viewpoints into account?	<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b> Do you have procedures in place that enable children to take part in your decision-making processes?	<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b> Do you have procedures in place that enable children and you to share power and take responsibility for decisions?
<b>OBLIGATIONS</b> Are there policy requirements that children are listened to?	<b>OBLIGATIONS</b> Are children supported to express their viewpoints through policies?	<b>OBLIGATIONS</b> Are children's viewpoints given due weight through policies?	<b>OBLIGATIONS</b> Do children take part in your decision-making processes through policies?	<b>OBLIGATIONS</b> Do children and adults share power and responsibilities for decisions through policies?

**Adapted from Shier (2001)**

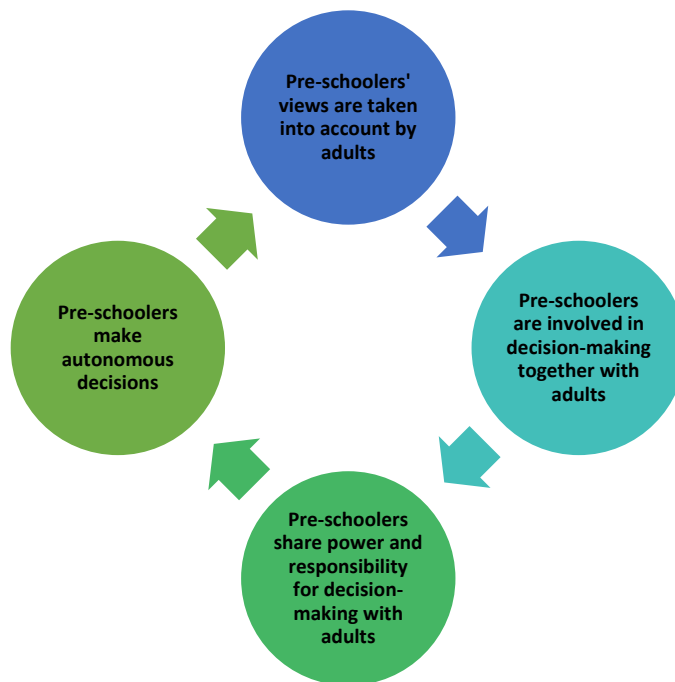
At each level of participation adults and children have varied degrees of commitment to the process of empowerment. The model identifies three stages of commitment at each level: openings, opportunities and obligations. **Openings** indicate that the adult or child have made a personal commitment, or statement of intent to participate. **Opportunity** takes place when there are situations created that will enable the adult or child to operate at this level in practice, for example using resources in a way to enhance participation. An **obligation** is established when both adult and child have agreed that they should work in a certain way, for example to participate to inform policy or procedures in early childhood practice (Shier, 2001:110).

I postulate that both Lansdown and Shier's categories or levels of participation can guide practitioners in their self-reflections about how to develop agency of pre-schoolers. The varied ways of participation and the questions to be asked can enable practitioners to change their practice towards being more participatory to allow pre-schoolers to express agency.



The third model adapted from *Building a Culture of Participation* (Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin & Sinclair, 2003:22) can further guide practitioners towards developing agency.

Figure 2.1 indicates some aspects that practitioners can consider to evaluate pre-schoolers' agency in practice.

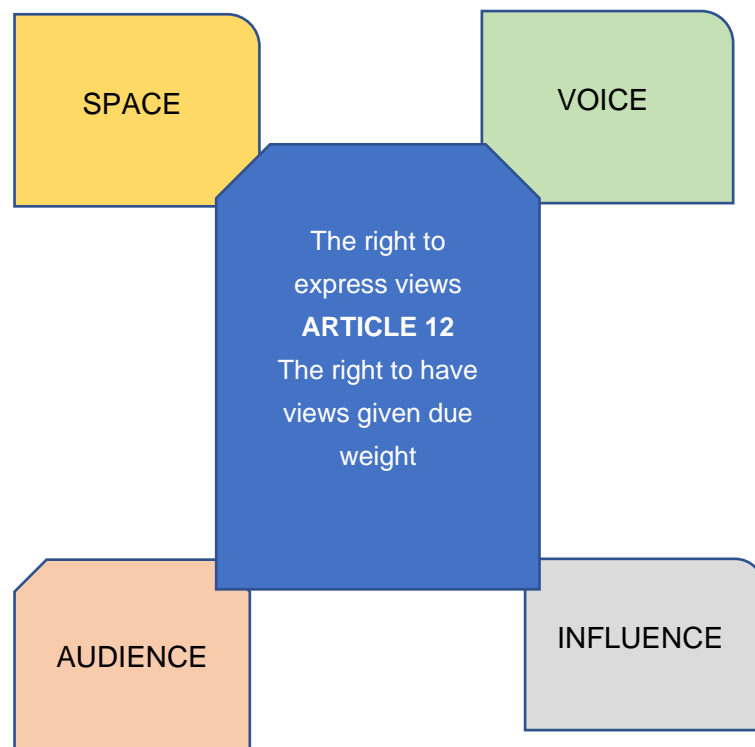


**Figure 2.1: A model of participation for inner-city early childhood centres**  
**Adapted from Kirby et al., 2003:22**

Practitioners can use this model to reflect upon their practice by posing questions: Are pre-schoolers' views taken into account? Are pre-schoolers afforded opportunities to make autonomous decisions? Are pre-schoolers involved in decision-making initiatives or activities with practitioners? Do pre-schoolers share power with practitioners and take responsibilities for decision-making during their learning experiences? More recently, Lundy's rights-based approach to child participation gives due weight to the development of their agency.

Lundy's model states that children need safe and inclusive opportunities to express their views. They need an audience that listens to their opinions and ideas. Their input needs to be listened to and taken seriously, and they need to be afforded opportunity to act upon them in participation with adults. They need to be facilitated by adults to express their views freely in medium of choice. The below figure describes Lundy's model of child participation.

Figure 2.2 highlights aspects that can be taken into consideration when developing pre-schoolers agency.



**Figure 2.2: Lundy's model of child participation**  
**Adapted from Lundy's model of child participation**

All the above mentioned examples of models in terms of children's participation indicate that there are various ways in which practitioners can develop pre-schoolers' agency and subsequent well-being. This study is specifically in favour of Lundy's model. An early childhood setting can provide a safe **space** in which pre-schoolers' express their **voice** through creative projects in participation with an **audience** (practitioners and peers) in order to **influence** and inform their environments.

### **2.2.2 Well-being**

Agency implies that when children are afforded the opportunity to have a say and act upon matters which concern or interest them they can create their own well-being. Well-being is harnessed when people's lives are fulfilling and they can make a contribution to society (Shah & Marks, 2004:2). The same applies to the lives of pre-schoolers (Kickbusch et al., 2012:106) explain that children play an active role in creating their own well-being when they are asked directly about their subjective experiences of well-being. Children's subjective knowledge of themselves, their health and their environment empowers them to develop their well-being. The best place for children to develop agency and subsequent well-being is in the context of the family,

school, community and society in which they learn, work and play. The concept of well-being means more than just happiness or being healthy. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defined health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO, 2008). Preschoolers' well-being is thus a complex construct but in terms of this study it means being able to share their perspectives, ideas and make meaningful contributions towards their well-being.

#### *2.2.2.1 Introducing the concept of well-being*

Two explanations of well-being are put forward which can inform how practitioners understand well-being. The European Framework of Learning for Well-being define five components of well-being (Kickbusch et al., 2012:160) as follows:

- Children's well-being and their rights are interdependent.
- Children's well-being is a condition and a product of their development.
- Children's well-being entails their holistic development.
- Children's well-being underscores their unique potential and their inner diversity.
- Children's well-being is relational and contextual.

From a South African perspective, the National Curriculum Framework for children from birth to four (Republic of South Africa, 2015) includes well-being as a component of learning. It states that when children have a strong sense of well-being they have secure and supportive relationships with their caregivers; enjoy their rights and gradually learn to be responsible to themselves, others and their environment; enjoy good health; live in a safe and secure environment; are well-nourished from conception; develop abilities and interest in physical activities; are able to respond to difficult circumstances and daily stresses through the cultivation of their strengths, inner resilience and by experiencing feelings of happiness. In light of the above-mentioned explanations of well-being, teaching and learning should lead to the development of agency through a process of learning for well-being (Kickbusch et al., 2012:28).

### **2.2.3 The process of learning for well-being**

Learning for well-being is a process approach which recognises that pre-schoolers' express and influence the people and the contexts of their lived experiences. It takes children's subjective perspectives into account. It allows pre-schoolers to assess their own well-being and report it in their unique ways to those who are responsible for their interests and well-being. The process does not merely assess pre-schoolers from an adult perspective. The process focuses on the strengths and inner differences of pre-schoolers and the cultivation of their assets, beliefs, morals, behaviours and capacities. It is based on the principles of holism and embraces the cognitive, emotional, physical, social and spiritual aspects of children. It emphasises the nature and qualities of relationships (Kickbusch et al., 2012:32). Pre-schoolers are part of a living system such as their families, schools, communities and society at large (Kickbusch et al., 2012:28).

Learning for well-being as process enables practitioners to create innovative ways through which pre-schoolers can relate to one another, express agency and make a difference. Practitioners further contribute to the development of pre-schoolers by caring for them, teaching them in meaningful ways, and giving them purpose and direction. This process leads pre-schoolers to engage fully and express who they are as individuals. Through this process pre-schoolers develop, are challenged and develop themselves for the future in order to live harmoniously with themselves, others (such as family and friends), the community and the wider world (Kickbusch et al., 2012:5). This study was informed by the learning for well-being process. Practitioners were afforded opportunities to consider ways in which pre-schoolers expressed agency. They were encouraged to reflect on their understandings of pre-schoolers in terms of their capabilities to be agents of change (i.e. how their roles as practitioners manifested in terms of the development of agency in their classrooms) and how their practices fostered or hindered agency. I discovered prior to the study that in a South African context the voice of pre-schoolers was seldom heard. The predominant focus was on getting through the CAPS curriculum, teaching content (e.g. shapes, numbers and days of the week) and satisfying the expectations of parents in terms of their children. Such realities spurred me to make a case for researching practitioners' roles in terms of the development of pre-schoolers' agency.

#### **2.2.4 A case for researching the roles which practitioners play in developing pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being from both a Western and African perspective**

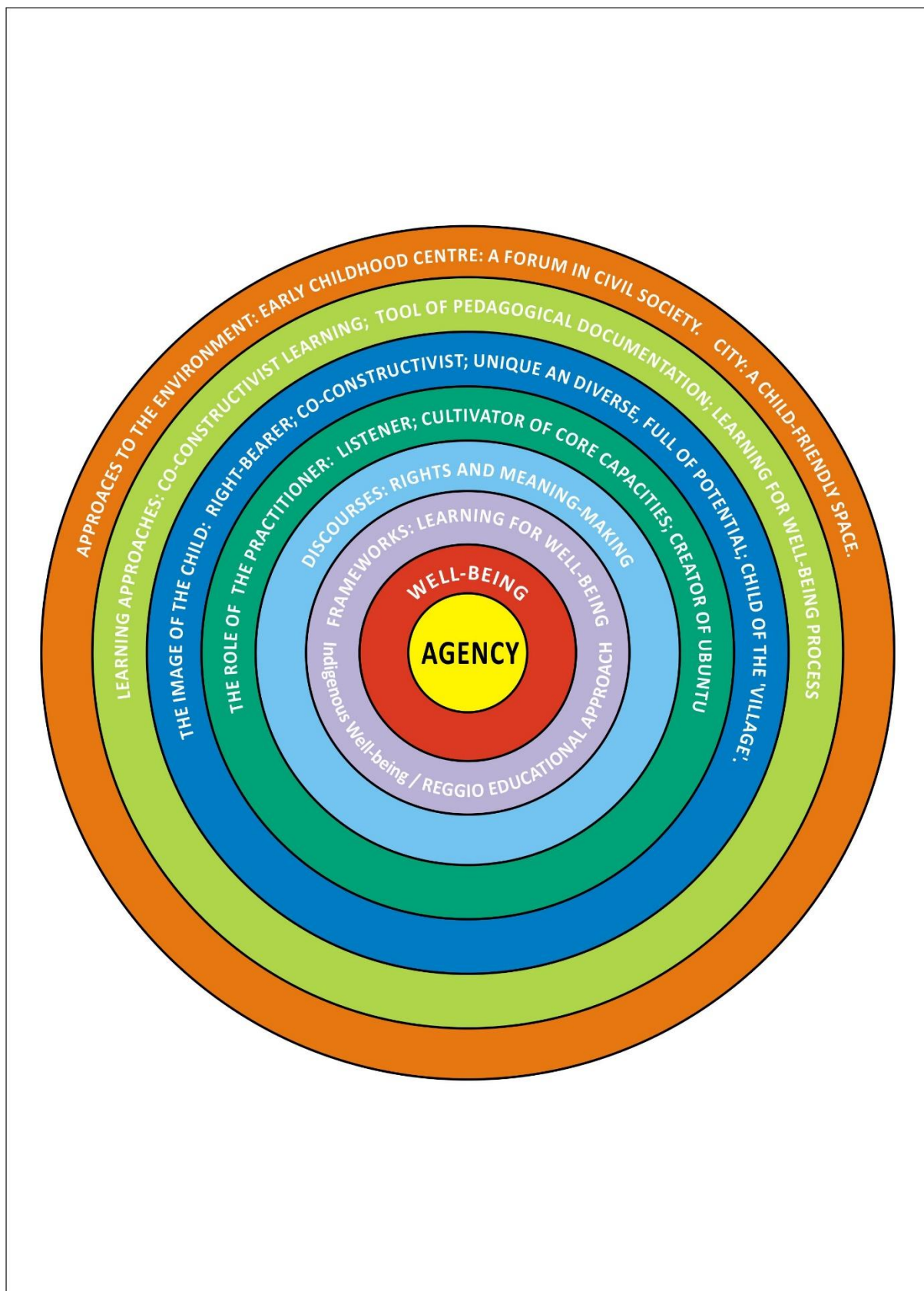
I decided to do this study from a Western and African (indigenous) perspective. I argued that pre-schoolers should not be understood as mere individuals (a Western perspective) per se but also as members of a tribe (e.g. family, school, community and city) (an African perspective). The indigenous worldview conceptualises pre-schoolers as individuals who stand interdependently and relationally within a family, a neighbourhood, a community, a society and the world (McCubbin, McCubbin, Zhang, Kehl & Strom, 2013:356). Rountree & Smith (2016:207) state that an indigenous worldview understands that children's well-being is based on their strengths and connections among themselves, their general health and support, their family, community, cultural and spiritual practices. Understood in this light, pre-schoolers are part and parcel of a whole system, but are also people in their own right. In support of my decision, I refer to Ovens (2003:68) who calls for both Western and African [indigenous] perspectives to become part of the educational frame of reference. The indigenous notion is underscored by the Framework of Learning for Well-being (see 2.3.1) and the Reggio educational approach to education (see 2.3.2). Within the Learning for Well-being Framework the pre-schooler is understood as part of a living system (Kickbusch et al., 2012:28). The Reggio educational approach to education envisions the early childhood centre as being relational and interdependent to community, society and the wider world (Dahlberg et al., 2013:80).

Furthermore, various South African acts and policies support the rationale for this study (see 1.2) to investigate how practitioners' roles inform the development of pre-schoolers' agency. Two examples are:

- The Children's Act (Republic of South Africa, 2005, as amended) which provides the legislative framework for a holistic child protection strategy and which advocates that children's views are to be considered in matters affecting them.
- The Child Justice Act (Republic of South Africa, 2008) which provides for the participation of children who are in conflict with the law in all processes that affect them.

Although the right of children's agency is stipulated in these mentioned acts, it does not mean that their agency is always evident. I was thus curious to discover evidence of pre-schoolers' agency. Honwana and De Boeck (2005:2) concur that, generally speaking, children in post-colonial Africa have rarely been listened to. They claim that adults believe that only they know what is best for their children and that from a very young age children are taught to respect and revere adults. Such a paternalistic perspective puts children in a subordinate position to adults. The relationship between adults and children, although characterised by deep filial respect is reinforced by a spirit of dominance. This in turn denies the participation rights of children because of the paternalistic and problematic child–adult relationships. Honwana and De Boeck (2005) advocate that the successful implementation of children's rights in Africa will depend on a reconsideration of the power imbalances between adults and children, and the development of a culture of listening to children. These researchers claim that when children's voices are not silenced they indeed have something to say.

In light of Honwana and De Boeck's advocacy to make children's voice heard, I decided to do this research in an African early childhood context. In Figure 2.2 (How the various focus areas link together) I conceptualise how the discourses, frameworks and other focus areas link with one another and frame this study.



**Figure 2.2: How the various focus areas link together**

Agency is informed by the Framework of Learning for Well-being, the Reggio educational approach and the Framework of Indigenous Well-being. To encourage pre-schoolers to develop agency, practitioners fulfil various roles such as listeners,



cultivators of core capacities and creators of the classroom atmosphere of ubuntu (harmony and participation). Pre-schoolers are conceptualised as rights-bearers; as co-constructors of identity, knowledge and culture; as unique, diverse and full of potential; and as children of the village (e.g. family, school, community and society). Various teaching methodologies can interlink to develop pre-schoolers' agency, such as Vygotsky's (1978) co-constructivist approach to learning, the tool of pedagogical documentation (Dahlberg et al., 2013:156) and the cultivation of core capacities through the learning for well-being process (O'Toole & Kropf, 2013:30). Finally, in terms of this model, the inner-city early childhood centre is perceived as a forum in civil society (Dahlberg et al., 2013:80) and the city as a child-friendly space (UNICEF, 2009).

The main Framework of Learning for Well-being is explained in the next section followed by an explanation of the Reggio educational approach and the Framework of Indigenous Well-being.

## **2.3 THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK IN THIS STUDY**

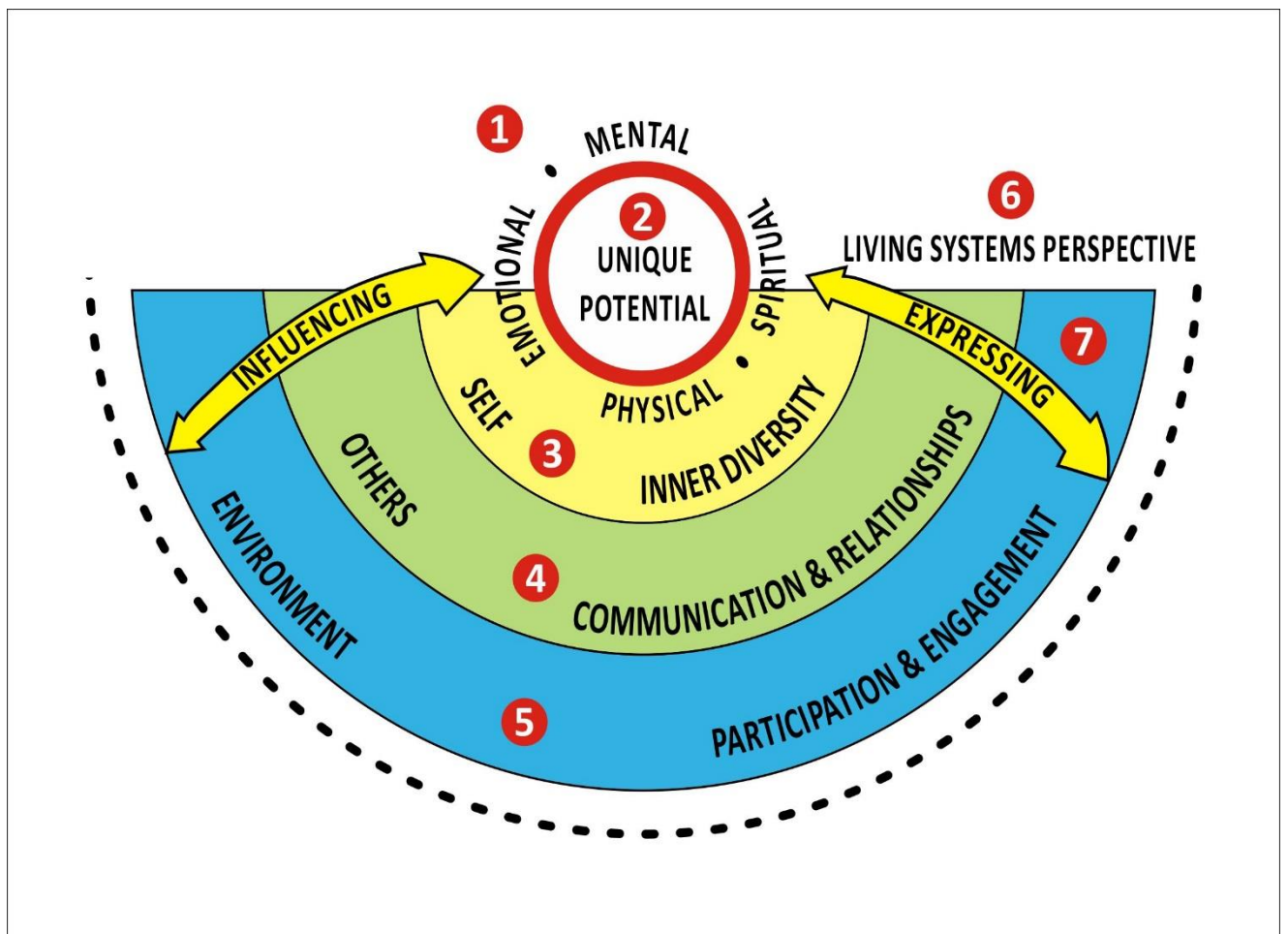
In order to investigate how the roles of practitioners inform or influence the development of pre-schoolers' agency and subsequent well-being, I decided to choose the Framework of Learning for Well-being as the main framework because it conceptualises pre-schoolers as being capable and competent to participate, engage and influence their own lives, those of others and the environment.

### **2.3.1 The Framework of Learning for Well-being – a process to develop agency and well-being**

The Framework of Learning for Well-being puts forward the notion that pre-schoolers are holistic beings who express themselves and influence their life worlds. They are full of vital energy and qualities which provide meaning, purpose and direction to their lives. Such qualities can be understood as specific gifts, innate temperament and diverse ways of expressions (Kickbusch et al., 2012:99). In terms of the Framework of Learning for Well-being all aspects of their development should be valued and respected (i.e. mental, physical, emotional and spiritual) (Kickbusch et al., 2012:162). The physical aspect relates to their senses, their bodies, and their material and natural environments. The emotional aspect relates to their intrapersonal functions – their

inner feelings and interactions with others. The mental aspect refers to their cognitive and rational processes. The spiritual dimension refers to their sense of connection with everything which is experienced through their sense of wonder and curiosity (O'Toole & Kropf, 2013:42). Conceptualising pre-schoolers from a holistic perspective, as being part of a living system such as the inner-city early childhood environment and the city in which it is located, means that practitioners should enable pre-schoolers to investigate and experience their own ways of being and to discover their full potential. Practitioners should thus foster their agency. The learning for well-being process defines three facets of exploration: being aware of pre-schoolers' inner core capacities (such as being able to listen, to be self-reflective, to show empathy); to integrate all aspects of their being; and to know their deepest motivations and aspirations (O'Toole & Kropf, 2013:74). These are aspects that practitioners should know about pre-schoolers but also about themselves.

In order to implement the process of learning for well-being, the nature and qualities of the relationship between pre-schoolers and practitioners are critical to enhance well-being (O'Toole, 2014:26–27). Figure 2.3 gives a diagrammatic presentation of the Framework of Learning for Well-being and illustrates the interrelatedness between self (i.e. pre-schoolers), others (i.e. practitioners) and the environment (i.e. the inner-city early childhood centre and the city).



**Figure 2.3: Framework of Learning for Well-being**  
Adapted from O'Toole and Kropf, 2013:77

In terms of this study, pre-schoolers are conceptualised as holistic beings, unique and diverse and full of potential. Pre-schoolers are encouraged to express agency according to their capabilities and age in their own ways. The practitioner is conceptualised as a developer of pre-schoolers' agency by affording pre-schoolers an opportunity through engagement and participation to contribute to their own well-being, those of others, and the environment. The practitioner facilitates learning in a holistic way so that pre-schoolers can develop mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually through the cultivation of core capacities. The practitioner becomes a listener to the voice of pre-schoolers (i.e. their ideas, opinions, theories) and relates to their voice in a loving and caring way. The early childhood centre and the city are envisaged as a living system where pre-schoolers act upon their rights and express agency. The Reggio educational approach links to the Framework of Learning for Well-being. This approach conceptualises pre-schoolers from a strength-based perspective as explained in the following section.

### 2.3.2 The Reggio educational approach to develop agency and well-being

The Reggio educational approach conceptualises pre-schoolers as strong and capable and able to express agency (see 2.21.1). Pre-schoolers are envisaged as having multiple intelligences and ways in which to express themselves (Edwards et al., 2012:10). In relation to the roles of practitioners within the Reggio educational approach, Rinaldi (2001:28) expands on these thoughts by suggesting that the primary aim of schools, including pre-schools, is to educate children as citizens of the world. Children must not only be encouraged to learn how to learn, but learning must also be understood as a quality of life. It must enhance pre-schoolers' well-being. Multiple learning opportunities must be provided where pre-schoolers and practitioners learn together in ways that are enjoyable and pleasurable. Such perspectives are in line with the learning for well-being process. The learning for well-being process encourages practitioners to envision a world in which they and pre-schoolers learn how to engage fully and express who they are as individuals in the present moment, yet also developing, challenging and creating a better future for themselves and others (Kickbusch et al., 2012:80). One way to encourage this vision is to listen to what pre-schoolers have to say. There has in recent years been growing recognition of the importance of listening to children's perspectives and acknowledging them as social actors in their environments (Dockett & Perry, 2005:519; Lansdown, Jimerson & Shahroozi, 2014:8).

The pedagogy of listening is foundational in the Reggio educational approach and harnesses the relationship between practitioners and pre-schoolers. According to the Reggio educational approach the practitioner needs to listen to pre-schoolers' perspectives, ideas and theories. Rinaldi (2012:235–236) explains that the pedagogy of listening is not only a pedagogy for a school, but also an attitude for life. It is one of the most important attitudes necessary for identity formation. It involves sensitivity to all that connects us (i.e. practitioners, pre-schoolers, parents, community) to others and involves making time to listen to one another. Readings (1996:165) explains that listening to thoughts implies thinking beside another. It means asking questions about the meaning of experiences and asking questions such as: What am I doing? Where am I going? Am I a listener, a *provocateur* [initiator of discoveries], a negotiator of meaning, an observer or a researcher? Rinaldi (2012:235) defines listening as a sort of interior listening and reflection.

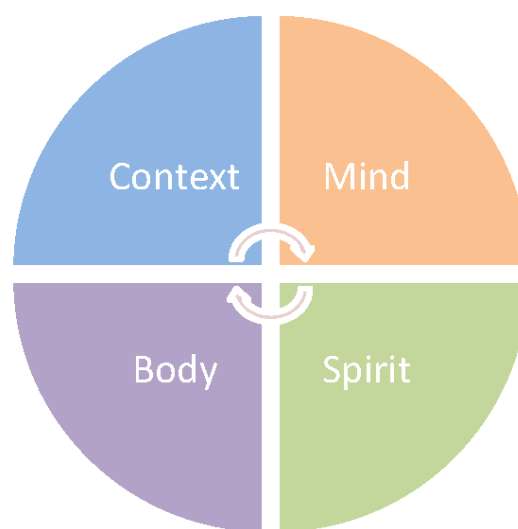
I deem it important that practitioners continually ask: What is the meaning of what we are teaching and how does it develop pre-schoolers' agency and well-being? What is the meaning of our relationship with pre-schoolers and how do we contribute to pre-schoolers' well-being? What are the characteristics of our communication with pre-schoolers? Is our communication characterised by power imbalances and dominance or by love, attentiveness and listening. During the research, practitioners found answers to such abovementioned questions through their reflections as described in Chapter 4.

Finally, within the Reggio educational approach the inner city early childhood centre is not understood only as a place of instruction or a workplace, but as the place where values are transmitted, discussed and constructed. A place where learning becomes meaningful. Rinaldi (2001:38) describes some of the imperative Reggio values for learning: the value of subjectivity which implies that learning is holistic; the value of difference which asks questions about diversity; the value of participation which values a sense of belonging and participation between practitioners and pre-schoolers; the value of democracy which envisions the ICECC in relation to society; the value of learning, understood as relational and which should foster reflection about what is meaningful in terms of education. It is learning which searches for new possibilities in a personal and professional sense: the value of play, of fun, of emotions and of feelings. Learning involves emotion, curiosity and humour. Such values of learning bring about a harmony between the individual and his/her context, through establishing warm and caring relationships in learning environments such as the inner-city early childhood centre (Rinaldi, 2001:39–43). The holistic perspective of pre-schoolers and their interconnectedness to the environment, found in the Framework of Learning for Well-being and the Reggio educational approach is also evident in the Framework for Indigenous Well-being.

### **2.3.3. The Framework of Indigenous Well-being**

The Framework of Indigenous Well-being holds a holistic vision of the child as being mind, body, spirit, emotions, and part and parcel of context (Rountree & Smith, 2016:206). The Relational Worldview (Cross, 1997) provides a Framework for Indigenous Well-being which harbours common values such as the importance of the extended family, the meaning of land and spiritual values (Goodluck, 2002:22). It is

based on traditional medicine wheel doctrine which emphasises that well-being develops when there is balance and harmony in relationships influenced by multiple variables, including spiritual forces. I refer to the Framework for Indigenous Well-being to support my argument that Western perspectives can be combined with an African perspective to strengthen pre-schoolers' development of agency and well-being. It is beyond the scope of this study to elaborate on the Framework of Indigenous Well-being. I only use it as reference point. Below Figure 2.4 gives the relational worldview to illustrate how the pre-schoolers' learning for well-being encompasses context, mind, spirit and body.



**Figure 2.4: Relational worldview**  
**Rountree and Smith, 2016:208**

The Framework of Learning for Well-being, the Reggio educational approach and the Framework of Indigenous Well-being are encapsulated within the discourses of rights and meaning-making. As explained, all three frameworks hold the perspective that pre-schoolers are holistic beings able to express agency and contribute to their own well-being. I now discuss two discourses against the backdrop of a modernist understanding of quality.

## **2.4 TWO DISCOURSES WHICH UNDERSCORE AGENCY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CONTEXTS**

Foucault (1980:131) explains that each society has various forms of discourse (i.e. knowledge) which it accepts as truth. Discourses can transmit and produce power and can be an important instrument of power. Early childhood practice and policy has been informed by various discourses such as the modernist discourse of quality, the rights-based and meaning-making discourses. The way pre-schoolers are conceptualised by practitioners or the way in which practitioners view themselves or their practices, or how they act or teach is informed by their own cultural knowledge or the perspectives of society or the wider world. Discourses are not just linguistic, but also inform practitioners' actions and practices – the way they relate to children and teach them (Dahlberg et al., 2013:33).

In terms of the concept of childhood, Ebrahim (2012: 80) state that global childhood as a concept is Western based. The ways in which children grow up, are educated and prioritised are backed by Euro-American knowledge, international conventions and scientific evidence. However, in the majority world, the real conditions of young children's lives, the complexity and diversity should be seen from a multiple and diverse childhood perspective.

The modernist discourse of quality views the pre-schooler "as a unified, rectified and essentialised subject ... that can be viewed and treated apart from relationships and context" (Dahlberg et al., 2013:46). From such a perspective, quality in early childhood education has been constituted by a search for objective, rational and universal standards, derived from indisputable knowledge and guidelines for good practice (Dahlberg et al., 2013:103–104). Examples of measurements to assess quality in early childhood education (ECD) are the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) (Harms & Clifford, 1980) and the Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs (Bredekamp, 1987). These measurement tools decontextualise the pre-schooler as they focus more on the 'how' questions (e.g. How do they learn?) than the 'why' questions (e.g. Why do they learn or why are they interested in certain things?).

I thus argue that the discourse of quality and developmental psychology which underscores pre-schooler development according to fixed developmental stages does not take into account the diversity, complexity, subjectivity and multiple perspectives

of pre-schoolers (Dahlberg et al., 2013:112). Focus on a modernist view of quality is more on what is produced in ECD services than on what meanings are constructed (Lather, 1991:37).

In the study done by Declercq and research partners (2011:67), it was found that often context and outcomes are measured according to environmental rating scales, but that the child as important actor in early childhood research is often neglected. According to this study quality should be measured in terms of process as a link between context and outcomes, by focusing on the degree of well-being and children's involvement in the learning environment where they are presently engaged.

In the light of the review of the findings in Declercq's article I consider that quality in early childhood contexts should, for the purpose of my study, also be informed by additional discourses such as the rights-based and meaning-making discourse. Such discourses can support the discourse on involvement and well-being in early childhood contexts, and subsequently the discourse on quality in early childhood contexts.

The South African National Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Republic of South Africa, 2011), the South African National Curriculum Framework for children birth to four years (NCF) (Republic of South Africa, 2015) and the National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS) (Republic of South Africa, 2009) suggest a quality, practice-based approach to pre-schoolers' learning. These frameworks can easily lead to a more prescriptive approach to teaching and learning and disregard the flexible and dynamic aspect of quality (Excell, 2016:2) if quality is only understood as structure or outcomes. I argue that quality should also be defined as affording pre-schoolers rights and opportunities to contribute to their well-being in meaningful ways.

Excell (2016:3) unpacks four levels and five dimensions of quality which considers pre-schoolers and their holistic well-being; the characteristics of practitioners and how their roles influence pre-schoolers' well-being, development and learning; the characteristics of the early childhood centre; and the support of larger organisational and institutional structures which contribute to pre-schoolers' agency and well-being. The dimensions of quality include alignment with the values and principles of a community or society, their resource levels and their distributions, the physical and spatial characteristics of ECD services; the leadership and management of ECD services; and, finally, the interactions and communications between all involved in early childhood education.



Such dimensions of quality calls for different discourses from a modernist discourse of quality. It calls for discourses that encourages teaching that enables pre-schoolers to express agency and enhance well-being; and for practitioners to manage early childhood environments so that they become places of dialogue, collaboration and decision-making. Such discourses should be in line with the notion of pre-schoolers being rights-bearers and meaning-makers. I thus review two post-modern discourses which underscore the agency of pre-schoolers as explained in the following section.

#### **2.4.1 The discourse of rights**

The postmodern discourse on rights takes the pre-schoolers voice into account. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) (Art. 12- and 13) recognises children's rights as individuals and citizens who have a right to be heard and considered in decisions affecting their lives. It states that:

States Parties shall assure to the child *who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.*

and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) states that:

If children can voice their opinions, then those opinions should be heard and taken into consideration during legal and administrative proceedings (Art. 4)

and

Every child who is capable of communicating his or her own views should be allowed to express his or her opinions freely (Art. 7)

These articles, both from a Western and African perspective highlight the rights of pre-schoolers to express their views and opinions in all matters affecting their well-being. These articles gave impetus to children's right to express agency.

Cook, Blanchet-Cohen and Hart (2004:1) state that the rights-based approach introduced a renewed focus on ways in which children, according to their age and capabilities, could exercise their rights through participatory initiatives. Increasing recognition was given to the value of children's participation in matters which concerned them, and how participation in decision-making furthered their survival, protection, development and contributions to society. By being afforded the right to have a say in matters which concerned them, children's agency and well-being was put on the rights-based agenda.

The value of affording children an opportunity to develop as agents is further explained by Lansdown (2001:8) who found in her research on children's participation that they want to exercise their rights for various reasons: to be involved in decision-making and express their agency which offers them new skills; to build their self-esteem; to challenge their sense of importance often understood as part of childhood; and to empower them to confront abuses and neglect of their rights. Lansdown (2001:8) states that children have much to say and they think that adults often misunderstand them. They feel that their contribution could lead to improve their well-being and they want to contribute to the betterment of the world. Furthermore they feel that having a say is fun as it enables them to meet with other children from different environments, ages and experiences.

This study holds the view that pre-schoolers have a right to be listened to and to be afforded the opportunity to act upon their rights as agents of change in their environments (e.g. families, schools and communities). I consider that when practitioners are knowledgeable about pre-schoolers' rights and take them into account and teach them to pre-schoolers, agency could be developed in early childhood centres. The rights-based perspective is further evident in the discourse of meaning-making.

#### **2.4.2 The discourse of meaning-making**

The discourse of meaning-making conceptualises young children as having agency and suggests that they should be listened to, should take part in decision-making and should share their perspectives on how they make meaning (sense) of their experiences (Dahlberg et al., 2013:53). In terms of this discourse, learning is not the transmission of knowledge and the accomplishment of pre-determined outcomes; neither are young children understood as passive receivers and reproducers of

knowledge. What they learn emerges in their learning of self and by being active agents in their socialisation where learning is co-constructed with others (Rinaldi, 1993:105). In terms of the discourse of meaning-making, pre-schoolers are understood and recognised as being actively part of society. They are envisioned as citizens with rights and responsibilities (Dahlberg et al., 2013:54). This discourse thus implies that practitioners should take pre-schoolers seriously and cultivate capacities towards the development of their active agency and well-being.

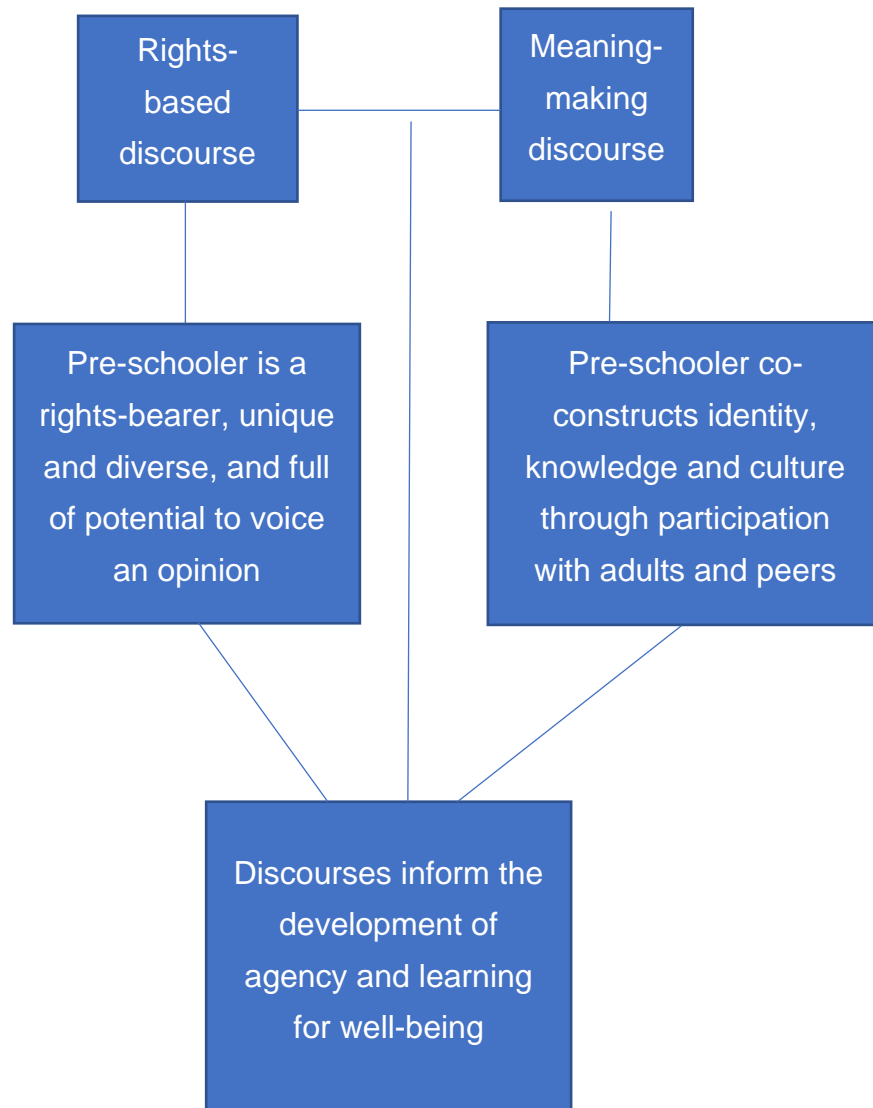
(Dahlberg et al., 2013:114) explain that the discourse of meaning-making requires very precise and demanding social conditions which deconstruct and decongest prejudices, self-interest and biased assumptions through dialogue and interaction. It is a discourse that values the following:

- Asking questions such as: "What do we want for our children?" "What is a good childhood?"
- Critical and reflective thinking which includes problematisation and deconstruction of that which is domineering.
- The tool of pedagogical documentation to assist critical and reflective thinking.
- Encounters and dialogue which are sensitive to hearing other voices and respect equality and diversity.
- Participation of reflective facilitators drawn from diverse backgrounds and experiences.

In light of the explanations by Dahlberg et al., (2013:114), practitioners thus need to reflect critically upon their relationships with pre-schoolers and their practices, and ask questions to pre-schoolers which encourage critical thinking, dialogue and taking action. Practitioners need to deconstruct their conceptualisations of pre-schoolers as weak and passive, and view them as being strong and capable of being agents enhancing their own as well as others' well-being. Practitioners must teach in ways that make pre-schoolers' thinking and learning visible by using the tool of pedagogical documentation. Furthermore, the discourse of meaning-making conceptualises the early childhood centre as a forum in civil society because it provides an opportunity for "constructing a new public discourse about early childhood" and promotes "an informed, participatory and critical local democracy" (Dahlberg et al., 2013:82). Seen from this perspective, I envision that the inner-city early childhood centre and the city then becomes a place where adults and children, by listening to each other, by critically

reflecting on what they have discovered and by participating together on projects, can become agents of change.

The learning for well-being process integrates both the discourse of rights and meaning-making as it considers pre-schoolers as competent partners with practitioners by expressing their unique potential and taking responsibility for their well-being (Kickbusch et al., 2012:9). Below is a diagrammatic presentation of the integration between the rights-based and meaning-making discourses and the Framework of Learning for Well-being.



**Figure 2.5: Two discourses which inform agency and learning for well-being**

I argue that discourse, influenced by practitioners prior knowledge, culture and upbringing informs the way pre-schoolers are conceptualised. I was curious to discover how discourse informed the roles of practitioners in their practice. I reviewed various roles of practitioners in literature, with specific reference to the role of the practitioner within the Reggio educational approach, the learning for well-being process and the traditional African educational perspective.

## **2.5 THE ROLE OF THE PRACTITIONER IN DEVELOPING AGENCY THROUGH LEARNING FOR WELL-BEING**

Pre-schoolers need loving and caring practitioners so that they can feel secure and nurtured to learn. Typical job descriptions of early childhood practitioners involve

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planning and presenting daily activities for pre-schoolers; planning and maintaining the physical environment; preparing all materials required to implement the programmes; be aware of pre-schoolers' needs, interests and abilities; attend and participate in staff meetings and training sessions; conduct ongoing assessment of pre-schoolers' development and progress; maintain and nurture parent relationships; and assist in public relations related to the centre/school (Meier & Marais, 2007:78). I argue that these roles, however important, are not sufficient to develop pre-schoolers' agency. I thus reviewed three roles from three different educational perspectives that can lead to the development of pre-schoolers' agency and well-being.

### **2.5.1 The practitioner as listener in terms of the Reggio educational approach**

The ability to take on the role of listener to pre-schoolers is of critical importance in early childhood settings. When pre-schoolers feel that they are loved, accepted, supported and encouraged, they develop positive self-esteem (Louw & Louw, 2014:193). Hua (2012:57) states that listening' leads to the development of learners' competencies in agency and reflective practice. Listening involves the practitioner as listener and also the pre-schoolers and practitioners as mutual listeners. It is like a tune which is heard by both.

Prior to the research I discovered limited evidence of a culture of listening in the inner-city early childhood contexts. During the data collection process I saw more of a lecturing approach in the classrooms. According to Hua (2012:62), a lecturing pedagogy is a modernist oppressive, dogmatic and manipulative process which fills the learner's mind through the transmission of knowledge and skills. It does not value mental enquiry and creative processes (Hua, 2012:57).

In terms of this study I propose that the practitioner takes on the role of listener in the classroom. Guided by the principles of listening, explained by Rinaldi (2012:234) in

The principles of listening in table 2.3 can enable practitioners to listen to the voice of pre-schoolers.

**Table 2.3: The principles of listening**

Listening is non-biased and includes listening with all senses.
Listening is sensitive to that which enhances relationships.
Listening understands that everyone is part of a bigger picture.
Listening is about questions and not so much about answers.
Listening recognises the many languages through which people communicate (e.g. symbols, languages, codes, non-verbal expressions).
Listening involves listening with emotions
Listening takes time and involves reflection and dialogue.
Listening occurs in the present moment, but also takes the past and future into consideration.
Listening involves being silent and observing
Listening involves curiosity, doubt, uncertainty and a desire to listen.
Listening involves emotions, stimulates emotions and is driven by a desire to have empathy with another
Listening is open to diverse perspectives, different interpretations and others' points of view.
Listening is an activity and means interpreting, making meaning and valuing those who are listened to by others.
Listening is not easy. The listener must be aware of possible prejudices and value judgements.
Listening involves being open to change and transformation.
Listening values the unknown and overcomes the feeling of insecurity of not knowing everything.
Listening removes the individual from anonymity and legitimizes others. It makes thinking visible. It enriches both the listener and the one listened to who produces the message.
Listening is the basis of any relationship. Learning occurs through action and reflection.

**Adapted from Rinaldi, 2012:234**

Table 2.3 illustrates that listening involves respect for pre-schoolers' viewpoints, theories and inputs. It values their diversity and uniqueness. Listening can be understood as an ethical encounter between practitioners and pre-schoolers. Listening involves practitioners listening to pre-schoolers with all their senses (e.g.



body language and dialogue). It is characterised by curiosity and an attitude of not having all the answers, but by asking meaningful questions. It involves engagement and participation, and removes the pre-schooler from a situation of not being acknowledged or heard. Listening is also one of the core capacities that the process of learning for well-being cultivates.

### **2.5.2 The practitioner as cultivator of core capacities**

The learning for well-being process underscores that pre-schoolers have innate core capacities which should be developed in order that they may contribute towards their own well-being, that of others, and the environment. These capacities relate to all aspects of their development (i.e. physical, emotional, mental and spiritual development). The word 'cultivating', and not 'building' or 'creating', is chosen because it explains that practitioners take on the role as mentors and become role models in their classrooms by developing their own core capacities and those of pre-schoolers (O'Toole, 2014:30). The learning for well-being process involves the cultivation of nine core capacities which enable children's agency and well-being. The core capacities are summarised as follows (O'Toole, 2014: 32):

- Autonomy (children feel a sense of independence and uniqueness)
- Appreciation (children feel respected and valued for who they are, and respect others)
- Agency (children feel their lives have meaning and significance, and they can make decisions that affect them)
- Achievement (children feel that they have opportunities and are encouraged to work to their fullest potential)
- Attachment (children have relationships in all aspects of their lives for those they care for and those that care for them)
- Altruism (children have the means and opportunities to express their caring for others through various behaviours and attitudes)
- Adventure (children have opportunities to be curious and are encouraged to try out new experiences)
- Aliveness (children have a sense of vitality, playfulness and of being alive)
- Awe (children have a feeling of wonder, peace and connection with their environment)

According to the learning for well-being process, the cultivation of these core capacities are critical to encourage and support full human functioning in children and adults. The capacities may be cultivated in diverse ways in different contexts but they are central to pre-schoolers' experiences of being human, being uniquely themselves and being able to contribute to their own well-being, that of others, and the environment (O'Toole & Kropf, 2013:63). Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to explain each one in detail, I highlight the capacities of reflection, critical thinking, listening and empathy in this study. When they are engaged in activities and projects which encourage critical thinking, imagination and intuitive awareness, they become more aware of themselves and their uniqueness and diversity.

The cultivation of core capacities such as imagination, intuition, sensory awareness and empathy has a ring of the African notion of ubuntu about them. In the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999), the principle of ubuntu means something like togetherness, sharing and mutual responsibility (Penn, 2009:50). In common terms it means being in harmony with all. Penn (2009:51) elaborates on young children's agency by linking it to the African principle of ubuntu, which is necessary for the development of pre-schoolers' agency and well-being in the classroom. And so I decided to incorporate the role of the practitioners from an African perspective into this study. In communal societies, such as African societies, individual goals are subordinate to collective goals. Learning approaches value interdependence, obedience and conformity (Louw & Louw, 2014:194).

### **2.5.3 The practitioner as creator of a classroom climate of ubuntu to enhance the development of pre-schoolers' agency**

From an African perspective the pre-schooler is part and parcel of a community (e.g. family, school or community) (Mwamwenda, 2004:328–329). This perspective links to the proverb at the beginning of this Chapter, namely: "It takes a village to raise a child". Crick (1999:337) described the concept of ubuntu as a vision, a virtue, agency and citizenship. A person must respect the community and the whole ecological system and show respect for young and old, community and the world at large. The child thus deserves respect and afforded opportunity to make their ideas and perspectives heard. In terms of pedagogy, the pre-schooler is because of the practitioner and the practitioner is because of the pre-schooler. Both contribute to

ubuntu, express themselves and influence self, others and the environment, as encapsulated by the learning for well-being process (see 2.3.1). Furthermore, Penn (2009:51) states that the concept of a collective ethos such as ubuntu conceptualises children as contributors to the household. From an African perspective, most children (in early childhood), especially children growing up in rural areas, herd animals along with their more mature and older siblings, assist with household chores, work in the fields, deliver messages and call other children. In most urban and rural areas children even make their own toys (Mwamewenda, 2004:46).

These examples of activities show that young children do have agentic capacities which can be developed as they enter pre-school when there is a relationship of togetherness, sharing and mutual responsibility between practitioners and pre-schoolers. I reason that a classroom atmosphere of ubuntu strengthens African educational principles of functionalism, communalism, holism and perennialism, as explained by Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2003:432–433). I argue that these traditional African educational principles, incorporated in the early childhood environment further strengthen the development of pre-schoolers' agency and well-being. These principles are described by Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2003:432–433) as:

*Functionalism* which implies that educational practice is participatory in the sense that pre-schoolers learn through imitation, initiation ceremonies, work, play and oral literature.

*Communalism* which implies that everyone (i.e. practitioners, children, parents and other adults) share a spirit of community which is evident in activities in which children partake with adults.

*Perennialism* which implies that in most traditional communities in Africa education was understood as a means to maintain or preserve the cultural heritage or status quo.

*Wholistism* which implies that children acquire a variety of skills which they use to participate as productive members of a community.

Agency and well-being could be developed when pre-schoolers are afforded opportunities to perform specific tasks (functions) according to their interests; when they learn creatively through play how to take on agentic roles; when they are seen

as a valuable part of the system and share in a community of spirit (communalism; when they are understood as co-constructors of their own identity, knowledge and culture (perennialism) and when they are conceptualised as holistic beings with their own skills and capacities (wholistism).

The Reggio educational approach with its emphasis on listening is foundational in creating a platform for the development of core capacities through learning for well-being of pre-schoolers and for creating a classroom atmosphere of ubuntu which strengthens the development of pre-schoolers' agency and well-being. It is however not only the multiple roles of the practitioner in the classroom, but also the way in which they think about pre-schoolers which impact the development of agency and well-being.

## **2.6 HISTORICAL AND PRESENT CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF CHILDREN**

In the past children were conceptualised in ways that did not take their unique strengths and capacities into account until a paradigmatic shift occurred in research (Prout & James, 1990:8).

### **2.6.1 Historical conceptualisations of children**

History has shaped the way in which children have been conceptualised. Views of children and childhood were determined by economic and social realities. It is only in the current post-modern age that children were conceptualised as agents towards their own well-being.

#### **2.6.1.1 *The child in medieval times***

According to Aries (1979:128), children in medieval society were not envisaged as separate from adults and were not treated any differently nor recognised as special because of their young age. The idea that childhood did not exist does not suggest that children were neglected, forsaken or despised. It seemed rather that there was no collective distinction made between the adult and the young child. People's status in the world was not made in terms of their age or physical maturity, and, as soon as children were able to live without the care of their mother or caregiver, the children belonged to the world of adults. Children learned about life by participating in the lives of their communities.

#### 2.6.1.2 *The child as worker*

Throughout the 16th and 17th century, economic status began to influence perceptions of childhood. An emergent realisation of children's distinct presence in the world began to occur among privileged groups or classes within society as a result of their demands on material provision, time and emotion. For most families the vast majority of children had to work and contribute to the family's income. Children were thus envisaged as an investment in human capital and a buffer against infant mortality (Jenks, 2005:57). Viewing children as human capital and assigning them tasks and chores, and even difficult labour, is still evident in many African rural families where young children work in the home and fields in present times (Pence & Nsamenang 2008:22, 23).

Schildkrout (1980:482), examined the role and activities of children in the town of Kano in northern Nigeria and commented on the diverse economic activities undertaken by boys and girls. Children are paid money by adults for school allowances, or for work they have done, or from their own investments, and regard the economic activity they do for profit as work done for themselves, even though they may give the money to adults for safe-keeping for themselves.

#### 2.6.1.3 *The child as 'tabula rasa'*

Impressions of childhood during the 17th century were greatly influenced by the writings of the philosopher, John Locke. He held the view that children's minds had to be seen as 'tabula rasa' or a blank slate which had to be written on from a young age through strict discipline, although he advocated that reason rather than physical punishment leads to the development of self-control and sound moral judgement. Locke believed that all ideas which children had were derived from their experiences and that children could learn much through play (Locke in Clark, 2013:20). Such beliefs implied that the child's mind had to be filled with knowledge, skills and dominant cultural values, which were predetermined and socially sanctioned and ready to be administered in order for the child to become school-ready (Dahlberg et al., 2013:48).

#### 2.6.1.4 *The child as innocent*

Rousseau (1974) reflected on the idea of childhood as a time of innocence. He states that:

Nature wants children to be children before they are men. If we deliberately depart from this order we shall get premature fruits which are neither ripe nor well flavoured and which soon decay ... Childhood has ways of seeing, thinking and feeling peculiar to itself; nothing can be more foolish than to seek to substitute our ways for them (Rousseau, 1974:55).

He argued that children have their own way of seeing things and must be protected from that which is bad for them or from an adult way of looking at the world too early in their lives. He wanted their innocence to be protected.

#### *2.6.1.5 A child as a biological product of development or scientific being*

James and Prout (1990:10) explain that a dominant developmental discourse informed by psychology produced the idea that a child's growth occurs according to biologically determined stages up to full adulthood. Dahlberg et al., (2013:49) talks of the scientific child or Piaget's child and states that children were mostly seen in terms of their development according to separate and measurable categories such as their social, mental and physical development. The discourse of developmental psychology is an example of seeing children as decontextualised individuals who develop according to natural and autonomous processes (Vadeboncoeur, 1997:33–34).

The historical conceptualisations of children mentioned above show that children were mostly seen as passive bystanders of outside influences and in need of protection. As the world changed from a modernist paradigm to a postmodernist paradigm, children were afforded agentive opportunities.

#### **2.6.2 A paradigm shift towards conceptualising children as agents of well-being**

A postmodern shift of rights and meaning-making inspired an alternative way in which childhood and children were conceptualised. It called for an understanding that children, early childhood education and the early childhood centre should not be understood only through "the eye of the beholder" (the adult's perspective on childhood, cultural patterns and personal values) (Pence & Moss, 1994:172; Woodhead, 1996:17, 37); the key role children played in making meaning of their world in partnership with others should also be emphasised (Benhabib, 1992:5). Children were thus held in more agentive esteem.

### 2.6.2.1 *The child as rights-bearer*

Apart from thinking that children are able to contribute towards their own well-being, they were also seen as rights-bearers (see 2.4.1). In terms of early childhood, United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child: General Comment No. 7 on implementing children's rights (UNCRC 2005) states that young children are best understood as social actors whose survival, well-being and development are dependent on and built around close relationships. These relationships are normally with a small number of key people, most often parents, members of the extended family and peers, care givers or early childhood professionals.

This rights-based approach does not imply that children must have full autonomy, or can control all decisions irrespective of their implications either for themselves or others. Yet, acknowledging children's rights does radically and significantly challenge traditional attitudes that their voice is not valuable. The implementation of children's rights now requires researchers and practitioners to listen to children and to take their views, their experiences and concerns seriously. Furthermore, it requires them all to reflect upon their responsibilities towards children and participate with them in order to enable them to shape their own lives, develop strategies to enhance their well-being and exercise their rights (Lansdown, 2001:1).

### 2.6.2.2 *The child as co-constructor of identity, knowledge and culture*

The discourse of rights and meaning-making is a far cry from the discourse of quality and developmental psychology which viewed children as poor, weak, passive, incapable, dependent, isolated and underdeveloped (Dahlberg et al., 2013:51). The discourse of meaning-making (see 2.4.2) underscores the perspective that children are co-constructors of identity, knowledge and culture. Such a vision provides them with agency and encourages the idea that they should be listened to by taking what they have to say seriously. They should be involved in a democratic dialogue and decision-making, and contribute to social resources and production. In light of a co-constructivist perspective, the relationship between practitioners and pre-schoolers should involve the exercise of power as well as the expression of love (Dahlberg et al., 2013:53). Such a perspective produces a child who is understood as being rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent, connected to adults and other children, and not considered as isolated and egocentric (Malaguzzi, 1993:10).

#### 2.6.2.3 *The child as unique and diverse and full of potential*

The learning for well-being process conceptualises children's capacity to experience and influence their life worlds. Children are seen as having unique individual differences (inner diversity) especially in the diverse ways in which they learn. This process takes the child's perspective, encourages the expression of each child's unique potential, focuses on their strengths and inner differences, emphasises the nature and quality of relationships between children and adults, with special emphasis on a sense of belonging and feeling secure in that sense of belonging. Pre-schoolers' well-being is understood as a dynamic process in which external influences (e.g. socio-economic background, family relationships, physical surroundings) dynamically interact with their individual characteristics (e.g. personality, cognitive ability, emotional development) (O'Toole and Kropf, 2013:45,50).

#### 2.6.2.4 *The child of the village*

The traditional African educational perspective conceptualises the child as being part of the community. Oyeshile (2006:104) places the child in close contact with a larger group and this group in turn is responsible for the child. The child is understood as responding to adults by offering specific tasks to not only immediate family members but also to the larger community. A reciprocal relationship thus plays out through sharing of resources, burdens and social responsibilities, mutual aid, caring for others, interdependence, solidarity, reciprocal obligation, social harmony and mutual trust. As a result, daily activities and tasks are shared between adults and children (Mwamwenda, 2004:327). Therefore in terms of the African notion of ubuntu, the child is understood as one of many and are deemed capable, curious, autonomous and secure (Penn, 2009:53).

Reviewing various ways in which children have been conceptualised, informed my understanding of how pre-schoolers are conceptualised in inner-city early childhood centres. I used my knowledge to guide the recommendations for a training programme framework for practitioners to develop pre-schoolers' agency. I argue that the way pre-schoolers are viewed also influences the way in which they are taught. Therefore it was important for me to read about various approaches to learning which could be used to develop pre-schoolers' agency and subsequent well-being in inner-city early childhood centres.



## **2.7 THREE LEARNING APPROACHES TO DEVELOP PRE-SCHOOLERS' AGENCY**

Three learning approaches which could support the development of pre-schoolers' agency required elements of participation, listening and respect for pre-schoolers' unique and diverse voice as directional. The following learning approaches further informed this study.

### **2.7.1 Vygotsky's co-constructivist learning to develop agency**

Vygotsky's theory states that pre-schoolers' cognitive development takes place through social interactions. Vygotsky formulated the zone of proximal development, which is the distance between the levels of children's capacities and their levels of potential development attainable with the help of adults or advanced peers (Gandini, 2012:58). Within this zone the child is actively engaged in the learning process and is guided by the practitioner who acts as participant in the learning process. The practitioner structures the learning activity, offers helpful hints or instructions according to the child's interest and current capabilities, but gradually allows the child to become more competent (Shaffer, 1996:276).

In the light of Vygotsky's theory, I postulate that the development of agency and well-being occurs when pre-schoolers are engaged in projects and activities by participating with others. Pre-schoolers then make meaning of their experiences. When pre-schoolers begin to talk about what they have drawn, made or constructed, they begin to organise their actions, perceptions and experiences. Practitioner listens and encourages them to think further, discover and explore according to their capabilities, and assists where necessary so that meaningful experiences can occur. Practitioners then document and interpret what pre-schoolers said or did, and thus make pre-schoolers' thinking visible. The pedagogical tool of documentation occurs within the Framework of Vygotsky's co-constructivism and is thus an important learning theory to consider in this study.

### **2.7.2 The tool of pedagogical documentation**

Dahlberg et al., (2013:152–153) explains that the socially constructed character of knowledge treats all pedagogical activities as social constructions by adults and children. Pedagogical documentation offers practitioners the possibility of searching

for new ways in which pre-schoolers can be represented and can challenge fixed norms and ways of understanding of their practices. This challenges the discourses of predetermined truth which influence the way practitioners think about themselves, pre-schoolers and their practices. Pedagogical documentation calls on practitioners to be self-reflective and to engage with their colleagues to create a platform for lively and critical discussion about their practice and what is needed. In this study, the tool of pedagogical documentation was used to show how pre-schoolers' thoughts, ideas and theories were expressed through four art projects.

Dahlberg et al., (2013:153–164) explain the tool of pedagogical documentation as follows:

- It is about trying to see and understand what is going on in practice and what pre-schoolers are capable of without any predetermined framework of expectations or norms.
- It is a process of visualisation which does not represent true reality or a direct representation of what the pre-schooler says and does. It is not a true account of what happens during the activity or project.
- It is a social construct where practitioners, through their selection of what is valuable to document, are also co-constructivist participants.
- It is produced in acts of interpretation of what pre-schoolers are thinking, doing and saying.
- It is contextual, selective and partial to what pre-schoolers are expressing.
- It is about choosing multiple perspectives, uncertainties and ambiguities.
- It is a story about how practitioners have viewed pre-schoolers and themselves as practitioners.
- It is a way in which practitioners can see how they relate to pre-schoolers.
- It is part of the daily activities in the classroom and part of theoretical understandings of what practitioners know about pre-schoolers.
- It is a practice for resisting power and control by asking critical self-reflective questions about what right practitioners have to interpret and document pre-schoolers' doings and what is ethically legitimate.

Pedagogical documentation as a learning process means that practitioners listen to pre-schoolers' perspectives, hypotheses and theories. Practitioners focus on a more systematic way of how children learn and make meaning of their learning experiences, as well as their own way of challenging pre-schoolers' learning processes through the

process of documentation. The practitioner asks questions such as: What interests the pre-schooler the most? What kind of theories does the pre-schooler have? How can I challenge the theories? How can I deepen the pre-schoolers' knowledge by lengthening the activity? How should the work continue? (Dahlberg et al., 2013:157).

I consider that using the tool of pedagogical documentation can make pre-schoolers' agency visible. It can empower practitioners and inform their practice. It can further enhance the relationship between the pre-schooler and the practitioner. By documenting practitioners must listen attentively to the pre-schooler's perspectives, ideas and theories, and interpret them.

### **2.7.3 The link between Vygotsky's co-constructivist learning theory, the of pedagogical documentation and the learning for well-being process approach**

Vygotsky's co-constructivist learning theory, the tool of pedagogical documentation, and the learning for well-being process encourage teaching and learning that occurs in partnership between practitioners and pre-schoolers. All three approaches value the unique and diverse capacities, perspectives and contributions pre-schoolers contribute to their learning experiences. Within these approaches pre-schoolers are deemed competent as social actors who influence and experience their environments and express themselves within them.

Through learning for well-being pre-schoolers realise their unique potential. The process encourages them to express their diverse perspectives in multiple ways. Their holistic development is enhanced and they learn life skills such as decision-making and respect. The process further fosters strong bonds between practitioners and pre-schoolers as they participate and learn together (O'Toole, 2014:28).

Furthermore, the learning for well-being process involves pre-schoolers' self-directed learning in partnership with others; focusing on their holistic development and valuing their individual learning processes and needs; and understanding learning to be an inherently social activity. The core capacities cultivated through the learning for well-being process are also evident in the use of the tool of pedagogical documentation (i.e. listening, paying attention, critical thinking, subtle sensing). In order to document, the practitioner needs to pay attention to what pre-schoolers are saying and doing; they need to read between the lines and critically reflect upon their understanding of

pre-schoolers' thinking. Practitioners need to use their intuition and imagination. Learning for well-being as conceptualised in this study takes the elements of Vygotsky's co-constructivist learning theory, the pedagogical tool of documentation, and the learning for well-being process into account.

The recommendations for developing a training programme framework for practitioners thus incorporate elements from the frameworks and educational approach discussed in this study. The development of agency occurs in environments where pre-schoolers play and spend most of their time – the early childhood centre and the city. I thus reviewed two perspectives of place which understood these places as living systems. I used them as themes to provide evidence of the expression of pre-schoolers' agency. Pre-schoolers had to draw pictures of their school and a route map of their city, make clay statues for their city and do a project in which they initiated change.

## **2.8 TWO PERSPECTIVES OF THE INNER-CITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRE**

There are multisectorial perspectives that support the learning for well-being process. One such multi-sectorial perspective is how the environment is perceived and structured in terms of the development of pre-schoolers' agency and well-being. I refer to two perspectives of the environment as a vehicle to develop agency and well-being: the early childhood centre as a forum in civil society and the city envisioned as a child-friendly space. I envisage the early childhood centre as providing the ideal space in which the practitioner can listen to children and co-construct identity, knowledge and culture in partnership with them. Moss and Petrie (2005:9) interpret children's spaces not just in terms of physical spaces which serve as a setting for children. They also term such spaces as a *social space* where social practices and relationships occur; as *cultural space* where values, rights and cultures are created; and as *discursive space* where dialogue, confrontation and diverse viewpoints and experiences are discussed.

### **2.8.1 The inner-city early childhood centre as a forum in civil society**

Dahlberg et al., (2013:79–80) describe the early childhood institution (centre) as a forum in civil society when the stakeholders (i.e. practitioners, children, parents, community members) envision it as such. Seen in this light it is a system of relationships and communication, closely linked to the local community where the centre is located and also inextricably part of the larger system of society (i.e. city, municipality, government). Unger (2005:179) states that "the provision of public

services [by the inner-city early childhood centre] must be an innovative collective practice" which can only happen through the organisation of a collective experimental practice by all involved. He describes such collective practice as "the genius of ordinary men and women" who form the core elements of democracy (2004:1xxii). Through dialogue and sharing of ideas and perspectives the early childhood centre then becomes a place of democracy. Everyone (e.g. parents, practitioners, managers of early childhood centres, community members, government officials, city planners) is responsible for the well-being of children

Moss (2012:104) terms the early childhood centre as a local project of democratic experimentalism, a term he borrowed from Unger. The learning approach of democratic experimentalism values the emotions of wonder, amazement and excitement. It searches for unexpected and surprising outcomes. When pre-schoolers take part in activities which enhance their agency and well-being, they contribute toward the vision of a good life. Moss explains that through a collective co-construction of context-related knowledge implemented in a variety of projects (such as is done in this study through drawings, clay statues and various constructions), a pedagogy of listening and relationships between practitioners and children occurs. Everyone takes part and democratic experimentation becomes a form of collective municipal learning (Moss, 2012:106). The Reggio educational projects of the pre-schools in Reggio Emilia, Italy, are examples of experimentation that function on several levels. At a municipal level the city democratically took responsibility for the education of young children and initiated a local educational project to do so. It embarked on such a journey by asking critical questions about children and childhood (Moss, 2012:107). I envision that findings in this study can lead to the establishment of collective partnerships between early childhood centres, the community and local municipalities that endeavour to develop the agency and well-being of all young children.

One way to do this is to use the tool of pedagogical documentation to make pre-schoolers' agency visible. This can be done by affording pre-schoolers the opportunity to plan, make and implement projects in which they express their hopes and desires in collaboration with adults (e.g. practitioners), and by documenting what they are expressing.

The perspectives of Dahlberg et al., (2013), Unger (2005) and Moss (2012) shed light on a different way to view children's learning spaces. During the data collection process I investigated the voices of pre-schoolers in terms of their school to discover how they experienced their learning environment and if they could express their

perspectives or wishes about them. I further investigated pre-schoolers' perspectives and impressions about their city to find evidence of agency.

### **2.8.2 The city as a child-friendly space**

The impetus for the initiative to promote the concept of child-friendly cities came from The Child Friendly Cities (CFC) initiative which was launched at the United Nations Habitat II Conference of Human Settlement in 1996. At the launch, nine key elements based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child to be implemented at local governance settings, namely the child-friendly city, were declared. The first of these elements calls for children's participation. A child-friendly city is a place where children are safe, protected from exploitation and violence, have access to basic resources (e.g. water and housing), and have safe and healthy places to play, and where children have a voice to participate in social and cultural activities in their daily lives (Wilks, 2010:27).

According to my perception, pre-schoolers are hardly ever afforded opportunities to make their voice heard about the design or improvement of the places where they spend most of their daily lives. In this study the voice of pre-schoolers about their city was investigated in order to find evidence of their agency towards change. I postulated that pre-schoolers would make suggestions about having safe and fun spaces to play.

According to the Child-Friendly Cities fact sheet (UNICEF 2009) a child-friendly city is a city or local system of governance that is committed to fulfilling the rights of children, including their rights to:

- Influence decisions about their city;
- Express their opinion about the type of city they want to live in;
- Participate in family, community and social life activities;
- Receive basic services such as health care, education and housing;
- Drink clean water and have access to proper sanitation;
- Be protected from exploitation, violence and abuse;
- Have safe streets to play in;
- Meet friends and play with them;
- Have green spaces for plants and animals;

- Live in an unpolluted environment;
- Participate in cultural and social activities; and
- Be an equal citizen of their city with access to every service, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, income, gender or disability.

I refer to this fact sheet in order to guide future projects which afford pre-schoolers opportunities to make their voice heard to enhance their well-being. The perspectives described in this section can lead to a new understanding of how to incorporate the voice of pre-schoolers in terms of their well-being. Malaguzzi (1996:40) placed enormous value on the role of the environment. He described its role as a motivating and animating force to create spaces for relationships, opportunities and holistic learning situations which can develop a sense of well-being and security.

## 2.9 SUMMARY

In this chapter I explored the literature about what has been researched and documented about agency, well-being and learning for well-being. I discussed two frameworks and an educational approach and how discourses influenced the development of pre-schoolers' agency. I reviewed various roles of practitioners and how pre-schoolers were perceived in the past, as well as the new paradigm shift which values their agency. I discussed three learning approaches which could enable the development of agency and well-being. Finally, I focused on two perspectives in terms of place understood as a motivating factor towards developing agency and well-being. In Chapter 3 I provide a detailed explanation of the research design and chosen methodology.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Social research is defined as "a collection of methods and methodologies that researchers apply systematically to produce scientifically based knowledge about the social world" (Neuman, 2006:2) or it can be defined as an endeavour to accomplish humanistic goals such as compassion, problem-solving and practical endeavour (Rubin & Babbie, 2001:6). In Chapter 1, I explained that the present qualitative research is conducted within the postmodern, co-constructivist and transformative paradigms (see 1.7). Chapter 2 presented and reviewed the literature related to the study in order to put the research in perspective. In Chapter 3 I discuss in detail the research paradigms, research design and data collection process which includes the site selection, participant sampling, data collection tools, how the data was thematically analysed, presented and interpreted, and the issues of ethics adhered to in this research. The rationale for this study was to investigate how practitioners' roles manifest in terms of the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being. The primary research question is: How do practitioners' roles manifest in terms of the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being in inner-city early childhood centres?

The secondary research questions that were asked are:

- a. Which factors have an impact on the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being?
- b. Which knowledge and attitudes do practitioners demonstrate in terms of the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being?
- c. How do practitioners' practices impact the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being?
- d. What indicators are there of pre-schoolers' expression of agency in inner-city early childhood centres?
- e. What recommendations for a training programme framework can be put forward for practitioners to develop pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being in inner-city early childhood centres?



In the following section an outline of the paradigms, sampling and selection of participants, and data collection process is presented. Brief mention is made of the analysis and interpretations, quality criteria and ethical considerations of the research.

**Table 3.1: An outline of the research process**

<b>PARADIGMATIC ASSUMPTIONS</b>	
<b>Paradigms</b>	
Meta-theoretical paradigm	Postmodern, co-constructivist and transformative
<b>Design</b>	
Methodological design	Qualitative participatory action research (PAR)
<b>Sampling and selection of participants and site</b>	
Sampling	Convenience sampling
Selection of participants	A researcher, three practitioners (one from each of three inner-city early childhood centres) and nine pre-schoolers (three from each inner-city early childhood centre)
Selection of site	Three inner-city early childhood centres
<b>QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION TOOLS</b>	
<b>Manner of data collection</b>	<b>Data collected</b>
Two reconnaissance workshops for the three practitioners facilitated by the researcher	Transcribed recordings of interviews, and photographs of practitioners' project of documentation
Two individual conversations by me with the nine pre-schoolers	Verbatim written transcripts of recorded conversations by me
One group conversation with the pre-schoolers in each inner-city early childhood centre	Verbatim written transcripts of recorded conversations by me
Three individual semi-structured interviews by me with the three practitioners	Verbatim written transcripts of the recorded interviews
Three observation sessions by me of the circle time discussions	Written notes in my self-reflective journal
Three focus group interviews between me and the practitioners	Verbatim written transcriptions of recorded focus group interviews between me and the practitioners
My self-reflective research journal	Written notes
Practitioners' fake Facebook pages. The Facebook pages were not real, but fake in the sense that they were created on paper in the outline of online Facebook pages	Written notes
Open-ended questionnaires answered by practitioners	Written notes
Documentation of pre-schoolers' four projects via recording of verbal conversations, written notes and photographs	Verbatim written transcripts of the recorded conversations, researcher's and practitioners' written notes and photographs of pre-schoolers' projects

<b>ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS, RIGOUR AND QUALITY</b>
Informed consent, sensitivity to context, integrity, accuracy, honesty and truthfulness, respect of rights and dignity, avoidance of harm, credibility and internal validity, transferability and external validity, triangulation, and impact and importance
<b>DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION</b>
Qualitative data analysis derived from recorded and transcribed conversations and semi-structured interviews, and focus group interviews supported by observations of the circle time discussions and written notes made in my self-reflective journal, open-ended questionnaires, fake Facebook pages and documented (recorded conversations, written notes and photographs) of pre-schoolers' projects. Data was analysed manually according to themes, sub-themes and categories which I highlighted in various colours and outlined on large A2 sheets of paper (see Appendix 21).

## **3.2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

### **3.2.1 Meta-theoretical paradigm**

The scientist Thomas Kuhn (1970: 85) referred to a paradigm as a set of concepts and practices that signify a scientific discipline in a specific time period. From a postmodern perspective, there is no absolute knowledge or reality waiting out there to be discovered (Dahlberg et al., 2013:24). From this perspective all knowledge is socially constructed and as human beings we seek to make meaning of our experiences rather than to seek for truth and solid answers. The facts of knowledge are born in contexts and are social constructions created by our efforts as researchers, practitioners and pre-schoolers to understand our situations (Lather, 1991:99).

The multiple voices of the participants in my study were investigated. I did not aim to covertly manipulate or mask the expression of the participants, but endeavoured to hear their true understanding, perspectives and ideas of their experiences. I managed to do this through using various data collection tools, member checking through focus group interviews, and final feedback interviews.

#### **3.2.1.1 *Postmodernism***

Postmodernity values multiple perspectives, is historically embedded and value-based (Lather, 1991:52). In terms of this study, the practitioners and pre-schoolers create identity, knowledge and culture in participation with one another through projects and activities. Together they make meaning by sharing their perspectives, ideas and theories about their experiences. When pre-schoolers are afforded an opportunity to voice their understanding of the world through the use of the tool of pedagogical documentation, they create knowledge. Pre-schoolers are unique and diverse individuals and therefore their voice cannot be assessed according to predetermined

criteria or standards. Thus, this study had to be framed within a postmodern discourse which valued multiple perspectives, and knowledge which is embedded in culture. It was my perception that practitioners teach from their own cultural perspectives and their perspectives informed the way they saw their roles, their relationships with pre-schoolers and their practice.

### **3.2.1.2      *Co-constructivism***

Schwandt (2000:197) describes constructivism as follows:

In a fairly unremarkable sense, we are all constructivists if we believe that the mind is active in the construction of knowledge. Most of us would agree that knowing is not passive – a simple imprinting of sense data on the mind – but active; mind does something with those impressions, at the very least forms abstractions or concepts. In this sense, constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as construct or make it.

Using ethnographic methods such as conversations with pre-schoolers, interviews with practitioners, observations of what was taking place during circle time discussions and establishing ethically grounded relationships with the participants, I was able to gather reliable and authentic data (Mertens, 2004:9).

Furthermore, I used the tool of pedagogical documentation as a primary way to gain deeper understanding of the expression of pre-schoolers' agency. It is a vital tool for the creation of reflective and democratic pedagogical practice (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999:31). The practitioners and I documented (e.g. written notes, photographs, recordings) what the pre-schoolers were saying about their projects as part of the PAR process. In doing so, we could reflect on pre-schoolers' expressions of agency, and how they understood their experiences and environments. Such reflections led to transformation as it gave an inside look at what pre-schoolers were thinking.

### **3.2.1.3      *Transformative paradigm***

Participatory action research is interested in what people do; how they interact with the world and with each other; what meanings are constructed and what people value; and the discourses in which people understand and interpret their world. Such interests informs the transformative outcomes of PAR research. In order for participatory action research to transform, reflexivity is of paramount importance. The

practitioners reflected about how they conceptualised pre-schoolers, how their own cultural upbringing influenced their knowledge and attitudes about pre-schoolers, how their practices developed agency and what needed to be changed (Creswell, 2014:235). At the end of the research they gained deeper insights into their perspectives of pre-schoolers, their relationships to them and their practice (see chapter 4.6.2).

I chose participatory action research (PAR) as the approach to this study. Boersema and Maconachie (1995:6) and Collins (1999:2) describe participatory action research (PAR) as "the collective production, transformation and control of knowledge towards the outcomes of planning, development and achievement of jointly set objectives". The joint set of objectives were reached at the end of this study by answering the research questions.

### **3.2.2 Participatory action research design**

Through this chosen design, all participants were enabled to become actively involved in a collective effort to address and awaken the 'silenced' voices of pre-schoolers so that the quality of pre-schoolers' lives and their social functioning might improve. The approach further aimed to bring more meaning to the learning experiences of pre-schoolers and the teaching experiences of practitioners. The PAR approach provided a sense of belonging, a willingness to assume responsibility for self and others, a commitment to common goals, a readiness to share and interact and problem-solve together (Patton, 2002:221). When I, the practitioners and the pre-schoolers did research together, a sense of relationship was cultivated and together they worked towards the planning, making and implementation of projects.

Table 3.2 illustrates the characteristics of participatory action research (as adapted from Kemmis and McTaggart (2007:280–283)).

**Table 3.2: Characteristics of participatory action research (PAR)**

<b>Terminology</b>	<b>Incorporating PAR in the study</b>	<b>Examples of PAR in the study</b>
Social process	The relationship between the practitioners and the pre-schoolers as research participants were investigated.	The practitioners took part in participation with the pre-schoolers and the researcher to discover pre-schoolers' agency through planning and implementing the four arts projects. The relationships between all participants were strengthened.
Participatory	Practitioners examined their knowledge, skills and values and interpreted them in terms of the pre-schoolers' actions in the social and material world.	The circle time discussions and the four arts projects enabled all participants to work together in a participatory manner
Practical and collaborative	Practitioners examined their classroom pedagogy, and reflected on their communication, the projects they made and implemented, and the activities and social interactions with pre-schoolers in order to deconstruct their practice.	The four art projects were practical and doing them together encouraged collaboration between all participants.
Emancipatory	PAR is a process in which practitioners investigated various ways in which their practices were shaped and constrained by wider social, cultural, economic and political discourses. Practitioners reflected on how they could act and intervene, release themselves from discourses or deconstruct them (Kemmis & McTaggart 2007:280–283).	Throughout the study practitioners reflected upon their relationship with pre-schoolers' their own teaching practice and how they encouraged or hampered pre-schoolers' expressions of agency. The various research tools enabled "thinking out of the box" which led to a emancipatory paradigm shift in practitioners' practices and conceptualisation of pre-schoolers'.
Reflective	Practitioners aimed to investigate things 'as they are' in order to change them through a deliberative spiral of cycles of critical and self-critical action and reflection through self-reflective writings.	The workshops encouraged practitioners to begin thinking about their concepts of pre-schoolers and how agency was expressed. The use of the fake Face book pages, the open-ended questionnaires and the focus group interviews encouraged reflection.
Transformation of both theory and practice	PAR views theory and practice as interrelated. Practitioners explored their different perspectives and influences, which enabled them to	This study introduced practitioners to the theory of agency and well-being, the tool of documentation and how

	illuminate their particular practices and practical contexts as a basis for developing critical insights and ideas towards transformation of practice in general.	various art projects can develop pre-schoolers' agency. The workshop were instrumental in introducing practitioners to the various theoretical concepts. The circle time discussions and the four art projects were practical ways in which transformation of practice could take place.
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Pascal and Bertram (2014:269) explain that participatory, practice-led research is now widely accepted as making important and significant contributions to the knowledge foundation of early childhood. Such a statement supports my chosen research context and design. Creswell (2007:18) reveals that qualitative researchers conduct their studies in the field where the participants live and work, namely in this case the inner-city early childhood centre. My choice is further in line with the resolution of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which states that the child has a right to have his or her voice heard and to contribute to his or her well-being. Such a resolution places central importance on pre-schoolers as research participants.

The PAR design encouraged me to ask: Why are pre-schoolers voices not heard and acted upon? What can be done to ensure that their agency is acknowledged and expressed? How is pre-schoolers' agency expressed? The PAR design created circumstances in which all participants collaboratively searched "for more comprehensible, true, authentic, and morally right and appropriate ways of understanding and acting in the world" (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2007:296–297). All participants were engaged in projects that were relevant and authentic. Pre-schoolers made art projects related to their schools and city and their perspectives were interpreted and documented by myself and the practitioners.

### **3.3 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS**

#### **3.3.1 Selection of research context**

The pre-schoolers and practitioners were selected from three inner-city early childhood centres in Great Tshwane which are part of an educational project of a non-governmental organisation. My selection was based on convenience sampling. It is used in circumstances of time constraints and unaffordability (Lombard, 2016:102). Time constraint informed my choice of sampling. Furthermore, Patton (1990:184)

states that there are rules in qualitative research for sample size as long as the participants can offer what you want to know, adhere to the purpose of your study, and show what is important, what can add value and credibility, and what can be done within a specific time frame and with specific resources. The particular research settings and participants were selected because they qualified according to my criteria and were able to provide rich data through the various data collection tools used.

In Table 3.3 below, the criteria for participant selection is provided.

**Table 3.3: Participant selection**

Participants	Number	Selection criteria	Sampling
Researcher (academic)	1	Doctoral student	Not applicable
Practitioners	3	Can understand and speak English Teach in an inner-city early childhood centre Have one year of teaching experience Most practitioners in inner-city early childhood centres are black	Convenience sampling
Pre-schoolers	9	Can speak and understand English Turned six years before July 2017 Attend pre-schools in the inner-city Can write their names Most children in inner-city early childhood centres are black	Convenience sampling

### 3.3.2 Researcher

I was a researcher coming from an academic environment into a pre-school setting. I needed to address the issue of 'otherness' which lies in the inevitable difference of racial background and power between me as researcher and the practitioners and pre-schoolers as research participants. Christensen (2004:166) suggests that two questions need to be asked in order to address 'otherness': Are the practices used in the research sensitive to and reflective of the participants' experiences, their interests, values and everyday routines? The practitioners in the ICECCs reflected on their own experiences, teaching and perspectives through primary accounts.

Groundwater-Smith et al., (2014:33) offer a few key points in terms of ethical sensitivity:

- The research methodology needs to be holistic whereby it acknowledges the practitioners and the pre-schoolers as active agents within an authentic inquiry process.
- The researcher should be alert to issues of manipulation and coercion and their relation to power and authority when doing research in early childhood contexts.
- Participation is a developing, planned and resourced process which has the potential to change and transform the lives of participants.
- The researcher should create conditions which make the participants feel honoured, trusted and respected for sharing their perspectives and knowledge.

I adhered to Groundwater-Smith et al., (2014) suggestions by taking into account the holistic perspectives (e.g. thinking, feelings, dialogue) of practitioners and pre-schoolers. I was cautious not to force my views upon them and valued their participation in the focus group interviews and during the art projects. I encouraged their input and feedback during these interviews. Making written notes in my self-reflective journal which I typed during the data analysis (see Appendix 15) enabled me to check my possible biases and prejudice. I spent a prolonged period in the field to gain participants' trust and respect.

### **3.3.3 Practitioners as participants**

Practitioners were identified and assigned to me by the managers of the NGO responsible for the inner-city early childhood centres, after I informed them of the necessary criteria. The following criteria were used:

- Can understand, speak and write English
- Presently teaching in an inner-city early childhood centre
- Have at least one year of teaching experience

I advised the practitioners that they needed to be innovative in terms of being and knowing and take some risks in order to be equitable, respectful and empowering to all involved. The focus group interviews, open-ended questionnaires and fake Facebook pages enabled them to do this. It was important that power should be shared between practitioners and pre-schoolers. Working together on art projects led to power-sharing and participation. Furthermore, the tool of pedagogical documentation and asking more direct open-ended questions to pre-schoolers led to deeper exploration, innovation and experimentation.



### **3.3.4 Pre-schoolers as participants**

To best understand how pre-schoolers' agency is expressed I was informed and guided in the selection by the practitioners who knew the pre-schoolers in their care best.

The selection was based on the following criteria:

- Turned age 6 before June 2017
- Understand and speak English
- Enrolled in an inner-city pre-school
- Can write their names
- Pre-schoolers are black (Most children in inner-city early childhood centres are black).

### **3.3.5 Advantages and challenges in selecting pre-schoolers in participatory action research**

As a stranger, I had to build a very strong and trusting bond with the pre-schoolers before I engaged with them, otherwise they may have been hesitant to share their ideas with me. Consequently, I needed to take special care to establish an ethically sound bond with them. I thus had to acknowledge their right to make their views known and to make them feel that I respected and took them seriously (Pascal & Bertram, 2014:273). In order to gain their confidence and trust I visited the research sites prior to the study and told the pre-schoolers what they were going to do with me.

One of the advantages of participatory action research which engages pre-schoolers as participants in early childhood research is that it can interrupt the dominant discourse that pre-schoolers are weak, innocent and in need of protection (see 2.6). The PAR design encouraged the input of pre-schoolers.

Groundwater-Smith et al., (2014:11) emphasise that we as researchers need to consider the variations which occur between cultural boundaries which may be governed by issues such as social class, ethnicity, race and gender and consider the social history and nature of places where pre-schoolers live and learn. We also need to consider the different experiences of childhood and how these experiences impact on the identity and sense of selfhood of the individuals and groups. They warn that engaging pre-schoolers in participatory research cannot be a one-size-fits-all formula. I thus made an effort to listen to pre-schoolers individual voices by having individual conversations with them and documenting their perspectives during their art projects (e.g. drawings of their school, route maps of the city and clay statues).

I thus took heed of Pascal and Bertram's (2014:279) suggestion that I make use of various strategies which can create and maintain democratic encounters with pre-schoolers during research processes. Pascal and Bertram state that transforming and changing pre-schoolers' lives takes time, much follow-up, collaboration, innovation, documentation and development within real-world settings. I thus spent eight weeks in the field and used multiple data collection strategies (e.g. conversations, observations of circle time discussions and documentation of the art projects). Schurink et al., (2011:590) mention that PAR data collection takes time, especially if multiple sources of information are collected.

### **3.4 DATA COLLECTION TOOLS**

I used various tools to collect the data. Patton (2002:436) explains that in the course of data collection, ideas come to mind which direct analysis, patterns take shape and possible themes emerge. Researchers become aware of intuitions which inform subsequent data collection. I thus used a self-reflective research journal and encouraged the practitioners to comment on their fake Facebook pages and open-ended questionnaires which served as their self-reflective journals.

According to Mills (2011:89) there is a specific taxonomy of participatory action research data collection techniques namely:

- Enquiring through informal discussions.
- Experiencing through observation and written notes by being an active participant in the research process.
- Examining audio tapes, journals, maps, written notes and art projects.

I used informal discussions through the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews with practitioners, and the conversations I held with the pre-schoolers. The circle time discussions were observed by me and the art projects documented and photographed by the practitioners and me.

I applied triangulation techniques to strengthen the credibility of my research. McMillan and Schumacher (2006:374) suggest that validation is strengthened when various responses are compared and contrasted with each other. I thus compared the conversations, interviews, written notes on documented art projects, fake Facebook pages, open-ended questionnaires, self-reflective research journal and the photographs with each other to gain an in-depth understanding of how the data complemented or contradicted each other. The route which I followed to collect the data is presented in Figure 3.1 which follows.





Figure 3.1: The data collection route map

### 3.4.1 Two reconnaissance workshops

These workshops comprised of discussions with practitioners about the key elements and concepts of the research (such as the concept of agency, the tool of pedagogical documentation, and the pedagogy of listening) and how research would be undertaken through the methodology of PAR. I took photographs during the workshops (see Appendix 19). Strydom (2011:503) states that workshops are specifically targeted towards the interest group and normally takes place after some of the preliminary research has been completed and a framework devised. I realised from having been in the field prior to the research that the practitioners did not have knowledge of the concepts mentioned above or the PAR methodology.

The reconnaissance workshop allowed me, as researcher, to enter the field and build a rapport with the practitioners. These workshops further introduced them to the concept of reflection. In qualitative research participants reflect about their role in the study; how their personal background, culture and experiences shape their interpretations of the themes and meaning of the data to their practices. It can actually steer the direction of the study (Creswell 2014: 235). Hendricks (2006:28) refers to three types of reflection for participatory action research: Reflection in action; reflection after action; and reflection for action. **Reflection in action** took place during the workshops. I guided the practitioners to consider what they knew or thought about the voice of pre-schoolers. They agreed with me that pre-schoolers were not afforded much opportunity to speak their mind. Thus we all agreed to do research about this topic. During the first workshop I informed them about the interviews and requested their permission to conduct interviews with them. Thereafter I held the first individual interviews with them and they were able to design their fake Facebook pages and do a project of documentation to prepare them for the research process in the field (see Appendix 16).

**Reflection after action** took place when final interviews were held with the practitioners. Practitioners reflected about the importance of asking more probing questions to pre-schoolers and affording them the opportunity to plan and implement projects of change. **Reflection for action** will take place when future research is conducted in early childhood contexts about pre-schoolers' agency and/or when practitioners implement a more participatory and agentic approach in their teaching of pre-schoolers.

### **3.4.2 Individual semi-structured interviews with the practitioners as researchers**

An interview is a two-way conversation in which I asked the participants questions in order to collect data and hear their views, opinions, beliefs and experiences (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:92). Individual semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix 11) was asked to obtain an in-depth exploration of the practitioners perspectives on what they thought about pre-schoolers, their relationships with them or their role in society. I recorded the interviews after I obtained their permission. I made sure that the recordings were done thoroughly by having two recorders available.

According to Thomas (1998:12), semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to rephrase the questions that participants do not understand and also allow participants to elaborate on their perspectives. I often had to rephrase the questions because English was not their home language. Creswell (2014: 241) explains various advantages and challenges when conducting interviews:

#### **3.4.2.1      *Advantages and challenges when conducting interviews***

##### **Advantages**

- It is useful when participants are not directly observed.
- Participants can provide information from their historical experiences or personal perspectives.
- It allows the researcher to take initiative in formulating the interview questions.

##### **Challenges**

- The views, perspectives and ideas of the participants are filtered and not direct experiences.
- Interviews are often not conducted in the natural research setting.
- Not all participants are comfortable in being interviewed.
- Language barriers can create frustrations in understanding the interview questions or interviewee's response.

### **3.4.3 Conversations with the pre-schoolers**

I held one individual and group conversation (see Appendix 10) with the nine pre-schoolers at each ICECC in order to gain some understanding of how they perceived

themselves, and their experiences of their school and the city. According to Groundwater-Smith et al., (2014:116), conversations with pre-schoolers often take on the form of informal interactions during regular interactions, with the researcher participating as an insider alongside the child. The defining feature of informal conversations with pre-schoolers is reciprocity which requires a genuine interest in the child and active listening. Active listening implies listening to more than just words, but also to the many languages, symbols and codes that pre-schoolers use to express themselves (Rinaldi, 2012:234). Listening becomes a way of initiating pre-schoolers' different theories and perspectives without judgement and prejudice (Rinaldi, 2012:236). I made sure that I listened to them by sitting on the carpet with them, making eye contact and focusing on what they said while I recorded their conversations. Dockett and Perry (2005:513) state that one of the advantages in using drawings are that they provide non-verbal focus of expression, that can be supported by verbal feedback. I used the tool of pedagogical documentation in order to do gain deeper insight. Pre-schoolers were familiar with the activity of drawing and were able to take their time. I further discovered some of the advantages of conversing with pre-schoolers.

#### *3.4.3.1 Advantages and challenges when conversing with children*

##### Advantages

- Pre-schoolers are mostly eager to talk to adults whom they feel safe with and can trust.
- Rich data can be obtained when talking to pre-schoolers about their experiences.
- Conversations are a good way to discover themes and topics of interest to pre-schoolers.
- Questions can lead pre-schoolers to think about and express more complex ideas.

##### Challenges

- Language barriers can lead to frustration and misunderstandings.
- Some pre-schoolers are too shy to talk
- The researcher are not familiar to the pre-school participants so they are not always keen to open up.

### **3.4.4 Observations during circle time discussions**

Nieuwenhuis (2016:90) defines observations as the systematic recording of what participants are doing, or of what takes place without necessarily asking questions or communicating with them. Observation is looking and hearing without talking. I was present during the circle time discussions which provided ample opportunity for me to make my observations and reflect upon the circle time discussion in my research journal (see Appendix 15). The practitioners were also afforded the opportunity to comment on their experiences in their open-ended questionnaires (see Appendix 13). I observed three circle time discussions on how practitioners engaged with pre-schoolers, to find evidence of pre-schoolers' agency and to investigate how practice informed the development of their agency. My observation sheet guided me (see Appendix 14). The aim of observation in this study was to gather first-hand information about the social interaction occurring between the practitioner and the pre-schoolers in a natural setting (Silverman, 2000:21). Photographs were taken by me of the circle time discussions (see Chapter 4). Creswell (2014: 241) explains the advantages and challenges when doing observations:

#### *3.4.4.1 Advantages and challenges when doing observations*

##### Advantages

- The researcher is part-and-parcel of the research experience.
- Information is recorded or written down as it occurs.
- Unusual aspects can lead to surprising discoveries.
- It is useful to discover 'voices' (perspectives, ideas, thoughts) or topics that are not clearly noticeable.

##### Challenges

- The researcher may lack attending or observation skills.
- Certain participants (e.g. children) may feel uncomfortable or shy in being observed.



### 3.4.5 Focus group interviews

Morgan (1997:6) describes focus group interviews as a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic which is determined by the researcher. Focus group interviews enabled me to build trust and a sense of openness. These interviews also promoted a willingness in the practitioners to share their responses on what they had observed, the details of their experiences and reflections with me as the facilitator of the focus group interviews. These multiple perspectives led to richer interpretations of meanings (Mertens, 2004:15).

Morgan and Krueger (1998(4):3-7) propose the following guidelines:

- Interest in the participants and showing a positive attitude
- Acting as a facilitator
- Open to hearing uncomfortable viewpoints
- Using unique talents as a researcher to gain the trust of participants

I tried to show interest in what everyone was saying by listening and paying attention to the practitioners. I acted more like a facilitator and tried not to give the impression that I had all the answers. It was important for me to gain their trust by not interrupting them and making them feel valued. I held three focus group interviews (prior, during and after the data collection was completed) with the practitioners (see Appendix 12). Creswell (2014: 241) mentions some advantages and challenges when using focus group interviews.

#### 3.4.5.1 *Advantages and challenges when using focus group interviews*

##### Advantages

- Participants can provide information on their background and cultural experiences, and historical contexts.
- Allows the researcher more control over the line of questioning.
- It is useful when participants are not directly observed.

##### Challenges

- It provides indirect input which is filtered through the eyes of the participants.

- Information is gathered in a designated place and not in a natural setting.
- The presence of the researcher can form bias.
- Not all participants are equally prone to or comfortable with interviews and focus group discussions

### **3.4.6 Self-designed fake Facebook pages**

During the reconnaissance workshop the practitioners designed fake Facebook pages on A2 cardboard (see Appendix 17) as a way of reflecting on their impressions and insights during the research process. Each participant had to design her own creative profile picture and write something about a child (i.e. a quote). Specific open-ended questions were then answered during the research process on their fake Facebook pages. Merriam (2002:5) explains that researcher-generated documents (such as the fake Facebook pages used in this study) can be developed by the researcher or by the participants with a particular aim of providing a better understanding of the investigated research topic. The Facebook idea was based on the multimedia communication system that is known to the practitioners. I chose this idea so as to challenge their creativity and make them reflect 'out of the box' about themselves, the pre-schoolers and their practice.

#### *3.4.6.1 Advantages and challenges in using the fake Facebook pages*

##### **Advantages**

- Creativity of participants can be enhanced.
- It can serve as a tool for reflection.
- The concept of Facebook is familiar to participants.
- It is a fun and innovative way to answer open-ended questions.

##### **Challenges**

- It can be time-consuming to create fake Facebook pages.
- Resources such as scissors, crayons, paper are needed.
- Participants need to be literate in order to write their reflections on their fake Facebook pages.
- Language can serve as a barrier.

- It may need translation when participants do not write in English.

### 3.4.7 The tool of pedagogical documentation

Documentation is about the practitioner trying to see and understand what the pre-schooler is thinking without having any pre-determined framework of expectation. It is being open to the pre-schoolers own ideas and perspectives. According to Dahlberg et al. (2013: 153 - 163) the tool of pedagogical documentation can enhance meaning making. It thus hold several advantages to this study. Creswell (2014: 241) explains that the use of documents holds several advantages for research such as:

#### 3.4.7.1 *Advantages and challenges of using the tool of pedagogical documentation and documents*

- It is a process which involves the use of various materials (such as crayons, pencils, paint, box constructions as noted in this study).
- It can serve as a means of reflection.
- It can be interpreted in a very rigorous, methodological and democratic way.
- The tools used to document make the pedagogical work concrete and visible (or audible). Multiple tools are used to document (i.e. hand-written notes, recordings, video camera recordings, still photographs, computer graphics, the children's work itself).
- It is a way of communication, exploration, reflection and participation which can takes place during the research process.

#### Challenges

- Training may be needed in order to use this tool
- It is more time-consuming to discover the 'voice' of pre-schoolers through using this tool.
- It requires the practitioner to be open to share power with pre-schoolers.
- The practitioner needs to be quite literate in order to write down what pre-schoolers are saying about their projects.
- Language may be a barrier in using this tool.

Four arts projects done by the pre-schoolers (e.g. drawings of my school, route map to my school, clay statues, and a project of What I can change!) were documented (see Appendix 18). Documentation consisted of recordings, written notes and photographs taken of the projects. The use of documents holds several advantages and challenges as explained by Creswell (2014: 241)

#### 3.4.7.2 *Advantages and challenges of using documents*

##### Advantages

- It enables the researcher to obtain the language and words of the participants.
- It is an unobtrusive way source of information.
- It represents data to which the participant have given attention.
- As written or drawn evidence it serves the researcher time and financial cost in transcribing the data.

##### Challenges

- The researcher has to probe more deeper for information.
- Activities or materials may be incomplete.
- The documents may not be authentic or accurate.

Here follows an outline of the documented art projects.

#### 3.4.7.3 *Outline of the documented art projects*

##### ❖ **Circle time 1**

I asked the pre-schoolers what they liked about their school. We then walked around the school and talked about what we saw in the environment. Thereafter I held individual conversations with the nine pre-schoolers to gather their understanding of what they saw. I recorded the conversations which were later transcribed. Thereafter they drew pictures of their school and we talked about what they drew. Written notes were made by me on their school drawings (see Appendix 18).

❖ **Art project 1**

The pre-schoolers drew a picture of their school. (see Appendix 18)

### ❖ **Circle time 2**

I showed the pre-schoolers photographs I took of the city, real maps and a map book during the circle time discussion. Creswell (2014:224) explains that the technique of photograph elicitation is used in order that participants may discuss the contents. The pre-schoolers were encouraged to share their own impressions on what they saw on their way to school. The photographs and maps elicited conversation from the pre-schoolers and the viewing was intended to activate their thinking. They were then asked to draw their own route maps to school (see Appendix 18). I asked each of them to tell me what they had drawn and I recorded the conversations.

#### ❖ **Art project 2**

The pre-schoolers drew a route map of what they saw on their way to school. They were encouraged to pretend to be imaginary visitors going to visit their school. Photographs were taken of the route maps (see Appendix 18).

### ❖ **Circle time 3**

During a circle time discussion I showed the pre-schoolers examples of small statues and photographs of statues. They were then given potter's clay to make their own statues (see Appendix 18). The practitioners then documented what pre-schoolers said about their statues by making written notes on paper about each pre-schooler's impressions of what he or she had made.

#### ❖ **Art project 3**

The pre-schoolers made clay statues. Photographs were taken of the statues (See Appendix 18).

### ❖ **Circle time 4**

During the circle time discussion the practitioners discussed with the pre-schoolers what they wanted to change in their school or city. The practitioners and pre-schoolers then planned, made and implemented a project titled *What I can change!* which expressed what pre-schoolers wanted to change in their school or city (see Appendix 18). This circle time was not observed by me, but during the final interview the practitioners explained to me how they undertook the final art project. The practitioners took photographs of the pre-schoolers' art projects.

#### ❖ **Art project 4**

The pre-schoolers plan, make and implement a project: *What I can change!* Photographs are taken of the projects (See Appendix 18).

#### 3.4.7.4 *Rationale for the final project: What I can change!*

The idea behind *What I can change!* is to demonstrate the intuition, sensitivity and natural wisdom of pre-schoolers, as well as their ability to say important things with few words and to express complex concepts with simple phrases (Davoli & Ferri, 2000:9). My aim was to determine how pre-schoolers could share their perspectives and act upon them by planning, making and implementing a project which indicated change and which could contribute to their own well-being, that of others, and the environment. Their voice expressed through these projects confirmed that they were able to express agency. Pre-schoolers impressions about their school and the city were like the unfolding of an "urban text" (Rinaldi, 2000:10) that opened up before our eyes, as researchers. The pre-schoolers were appreciating and critically reflecting upon their environment. The tool of pedagogical documentation was a way to make pre-schoolers thinking and subsequent agency visible.

### 3.4.8 **Photography**

Creswell (2014:224) emphasises that using photographs taken during the workshops, circle time discussions and four art projects are very much part and parcel of qualitative inquiry. Taking photographs has advantages and challenges.

#### 3.4.8.1 *Advantages and challenges in the use of audio-visual materials*

##### Advantages

- Participants are familiar with the technology and eager to use it.
- Participants can control what they photograph and can delete and re-take photos until the desired outcome is achieved.
- Photographs can help evoke feelings, information or memories which would not otherwise be accessible.

## Challenges

- Some technology is not readily accessible.
- Battery life and camera capacity needs to be checked.
- Photographs can involve recognisable people and places which challenges confidentiality and privacy.

The practitioners took photographs of the project *What I can change!* with their school cameras (see Appendix 18). I took photographs of the rest of the pre-schoolers projects as this was convenient. The challenges for practitioners in taking photographs were that the batteries of the cameras had to be checked and because there was only one camera in each centre it was not always readily available. The advantages were that the photographs provided evidence of the art projects and could be used for reflection and discussion. Photographs further provided evidence of pre-schoolers' expression through their art projects. The disadvantage was that it was costly to print out all the photographs.

### 3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is important to highlight ethical considerations which are an essential aspect of this study. I undertook to obtain and safeguard proof of the following: the protection of all participants' identities, the letters of informed consent, the permission from the parents to hold conversations with the pre-schoolers, the consent to interview the practitioners, the commitment to destroy audiotapes and to familiarise myself with the UNISA code of ethics. Moss (2007:73) emphasises that an element of trust between the researcher and the participants should be forged and that both parties must act caringly and respectfully towards the other, and behave in a trustworthy manner.

#### 3.5.1 Informed consent

Rapley (2007:25) states that seeking informed consent means that participants should be provided with information about the nature and the purpose of the study in order to make an informed choice about whether they want to take part or not. All relevant parts of the sections below are featured in my consent and assent letters (see Appendix 6,7 and 8). Informed assent to do research at the pre-schools was sought from the participants (managers, principals, practitioners, parents).



### **3.5.2 Sensitivity to context**

A good qualitative research study entails sensitivity to context (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009:180). I needed to have respect for the daily learning environment where the practitioners teach and the pre-schoolers learn. I had to be careful not to impose on their time commitments and daily activities. Mills (2011:29) comments that what makes the issue of ethics challenging in PAR is the intimate and open-ended nature of action research. This also implies that data collection cannot be coercive. Participants were allowed to opt out of the study at any stage if they so wished, without being penalised in any way. Nobody was ever to be coerced into participation (Neuman, 2003:124). Participants did not need to explain their decision and did not experience any consequences.

### **3.5.3 Integrity, accuracy, honesty and truthfulness**

Kvale (2007:29) states that integrity, knowledge, experience, honesty and fairness is important. In PAR research there should thus be open and transparent participation, a respect for people's knowledge, democratic and non-domineering dialogue, and positive and sustainable social exchange among all participants. The time spent in the research field and the focus group interviews enabled the above-mentioned ethical principles to be followed.

### **3.5.4 Respect rights and dignity**

King and Horrocks (2010:67) explains that the identity of those taking part in the study should not be known outside the research team and that the researchers should avoid comments in reports or presentations that would identify participants. Participants' views should be held in trust and their identity only expressed upon their permission being granted. Their rights should be respected throughout the study. I was cognisant of the requirement to protect the rights of the practitioners and pre-schoolers by listening to what they had to say, building trust with them through spending time with them, working together with them during the entire research.

### **3.5.5 Avoidance of harm**

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009:53) explain that confidentiality, anonymity and the freedom to withdraw from the study at any stage must be respected. I did not show the identity of the participants on the photographs or mentioned their names. As researcher,

I have an ethical obligation to protect participants within all reasonable limits from any form of physical discomfort which may emerge from the research study. Participation was at all times voluntary. The faces of all participants in the photographs were blacked out to prevent being recognised.

### **3.6. RIGOUR AND QUALITY**

In qualitative studies, trustworthiness is of utmost importance. The discussion now turns to how trustworthiness was ensured in this qualitative research.

#### **3.6.1 Credibility and internal validity**

I became familiar with the participants through the workshop, the conversations with the pre-schoolers, the interviews, the circle time discussions, the projects and the focus group interviews. There was continuous member checking during the focus group interviews and I reflected with the practitioners on what they had discovered during the research. Such reflective thinking led to new insights for the practitioners. Gasson (2004:95) mention that internal consistency is dependent upon how we communicate to others about what have been discovered during the research process. The tool of pedagogical documentation further contributed to credibility as the nature of the documentation ensures that the contents is open and transparent, and leaves a clear 'audit trail' of what the pre-schoolers did and said during the PAR process. Examples of the transcribed recordings, open-ended questionnaires, self-reflective research journal and photos taken, as well as the coded data, are included in the final dissertation.

I spent a prolonged period in the field (8 weeks) and became well-acquainted with the participants (pre-schoolers and practitioners), made continuous observations during circle time discussions, took part in the process of pedagogical documentation and obtained regular feedback during the focus group interviews in order to ensure credibility and internal validity.

#### **3.6.2 Transferability and external validity**

There should be connections between the elements of the study and the participants' own experience. Questions asked are: Are the participants typical to the issue being studied? Is there a complete understanding of the context? Can what is discovered be found in another similar setting? Is there a thick description of data which provides a full and purposeful account of the setting, the context, the participants and design through

convenience sampling? Do the participants represent the entire population and do the data make connections to local community and practice? (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:124) Morrow (2005:151) argues that transferability is achieved when the researcher provides information about the self (the researcher as instrument), the research context, processes, the relationship between the participants and the researcher, and explains how findings can be transferred. During the preliminary workshops, I introduced myself to the practitioners and gave them the opportunity to tell me about themselves. The focus group interviews offered further opportunity to discuss how the findings in this study could be used in other contexts.

### **3.6.3 Dependability and reliability**

The research process should be well-documented and -audited. It should follow a logical process. However, the co-constructivist methodological paradigm in this study made it difficult to replicate this research context to all early childhood contexts because the social world is always changing (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:420). Yet, there should be a transparent chain of evidence through the documentation of the data, the methods used, the decisions made and the relationships formed among the participants. I have shown such presence through examples of transcribed recordings of the interviews and conversations, the fake Facebook pages and photographs taken during the research.

### **3.6.4 Confirmability and objectivity**

Confirmability means the degree to which the findings are neutrally shaped by the participants and not by the researcher's bias, motivation or interest. The focus group discussions enabled the participants to check for bias and admit their own dispositions. I was continually aware of my own bias as researcher coming in from the 'outside'.

### **3.6.5 Triangulation**

Flick (2009:444) describes triangulation as a combination of a variety of methods, study groups, local and temporal settings, and different theoretical perspectives to research a phenomenon. In this study various data sources (e.g. transcribed recordings, examples of written notes and photographs of the art projects) were used in order to triangulate the findings.

### **3.6.6 Impact and importance**

Upon completion of the data analysis the primary question was asked: What were the lessons learnt? Creswell (2014:249) states that these lessons could be the researcher's personal interpretation derived from personal culture, history and experiences during the study. It could also be about the meaning of what was discovered by comparing the findings to information gathered from the literature study. The questions also asked were: What is the impact and importance of the research? Does it reveal something new and interesting? It is useful? Does it have direct implications for practice- and policy-makers or the community? During the final interviews and upon completion of this study, the practitioners commented on the impact that the research had made on them, their practice and their relationship with the pre-schoolers. Recommendations for a training programme framework for practitioners were developed from their feedback and contributions during the research process. Ultimately this study hopes to contribute to the development pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being.

## **3.7 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

Nieuwenhuis (2016:109) states that qualitative data analysis aims to establish how participants make meaning of a specific phenomenon related to the study. In this study the research findings must emerge from the recurring, dominant and significant themes, sub-themes and categories found in the raw data.

Sarantakos (2005:364) states that, when data are prepared, the researcher checks and edits the collected data and eventually codes the data. I coded all data (i.e. transcriptions of recorded interviews and conversations, written notes on observations in my research journal and focus group interviews, open-ended questionnaires and written notes made on the fake Facebook pages; and copies of photographs of art projects). I could have done the coding via ATLAS.ti, but I chose to do it manually as this was a more creative and visual process. Creswell (2014:247) explains that coding involves taking text or photographs collected during the data collection and segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories and then labelling those categories with a word or term based on the actual language used by the participant (called an *in vivo* term). I coded my material by highlighting themes, sub-themes and categories in various colours on all transcribed data (see Appendix 21). I then tabulated all the themes, sub-themes and categories on large A2 papers (see Appendix 21).

During the entire coding process I asked myself the following questions: What happened? What was heard? What was experienced? As I conducted the analysis, new sub-themes and categories emerged from additional data such as photographs and fake Facebook page comments. After analysis of the data, I held feedback interviews with two of the practitioners to gain their input on the entire research process. I wrote a narrative of the analysis, interpretations and findings in Chapter 4 of this study. Finally, in Chapter 5, I concluded the research and suggested recommendations for a training programme framework for practitioners to develop pre-schoolers' agency which addressed the final research question.

### **3.8 SUMMARY**

In this chapter, I discussed the research paradigm, research design, the data collection tools and the ethical strategies. I discussed how I ensured rigour and quality in this study. Finally, I explained the way in which data was captured and analysed. In Chapter 4, I discuss the qualitative data analysis, the interpretations of the data and the findings.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter 3, I described the research paradigms, research design and methodology which I undertook in three inner-city early childhood centres in Great Tshwane from June 2017 to December 2017 and again in March 2018 when I provided feedback to the practitioners and did member checking of the data captured and analysed. I also needed their input for recommendations for a training programme framework for practitioners on how to develop pre-schoolers' agency. Two practitioners were able to provide feedback and input after I interviewed them individually upon completion of the data analysis. The third practitioner had left the early childhood centre where I collected some of the data and I was not able to locate her.

The aim of Chapter 4 is to present the results of the study that emerged following a thematic, inductive analysis of the data collected by the three practitioners and me, and to interpret the data findings. The following data collected were analysed and interpreted: transcribed recorded dialogue during the preliminary workshops I conducted with the practitioners; semi-structured individual and group interviews and focus group interviews between the practitioners and me; transcribed recorded individual and group conversations I undertook with the pre-schoolers; written notes I made of circle time discussions in my research journal; written notes made by the practitioners on open-ended questionnaires and on their self-designed fake Facebook pages; and the written notes made by the practitioners and me about the pre-schoolers' four art projects; and photographs taken by the practitioners and me of the four art projects. I used my aims and objectives (see 1.5) to steer my analysis through the huge amount of data that were captured. I took the themes from the aims and objectives in order not to become too overwhelmed by all the data collected.

Charmaz and McMullen (2011:249) state that intuitive researchers clarify the research topic via a creative process and reflect upon their own pre-understanding of the topic in the light of the related text and findings found in the literature. They also make use of their own preliminary understanding of the various topics prior to data collection and analysis. Thus, before I began my data analysis I looked again at my research questions and creatively imagined what I may discover. Without some conceptual idea, the process would have been too daunting. I was sensitive to not letting my aims and objectives inform

my analysis but only to enable me to use it as a thematic map towards discovering sub-themes and categories which could lead me to answer the research questions.

The objectives of my study were to investigate the following:

- a. To investigate how practitioners' roles manifest in terms of the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being in inner-city early childhood centres.
- b. To investigate which factors have an impact on the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being.
- c. To critically examine which knowledge and attitudes practitioners demonstrate in terms of the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being.
- d. To investigate how practitioners' practices impact the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being.
- e. To find indicators of pre-schoolers' expression of agency through learning for well-being in inner-city early childhood centres.
- f. To develop recommendations for a training programme framework for practitioners to develop pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being in inner-city early childhood centres.

I began the analysis by colour-coding the data and used abbreviations to simplify the process. Sub-themes and categories of transcribed recordings of conversations and interviews, written notes in my research journal, semi-structured questionnaires, written notes on fake Facebook pages were colour-coded (see Appendix 21). Thereafter I tabulated the themes, sub-themes and categories on large sheets of A2 papers (see Appendix 21). An explanation of the themes, sub-themes and categories are enriched by verbatim quotations, written notes and photographs collected during the data collection period.

#### **4.1.1 Abbreviations of quotations and narratives**

I used various abbreviations to guide the reader when reading the data analysis as set out in Table 4.1 below.



**Table 4.1: Abbreviations of quotations and vignettes**

<b>R</b>	<b>Researcher</b>
<b>T</b>	<b>Practitioner (Teacher)</b>
PP	School PP
PP1	PP Child 1
PP2	PP Child 2
PP3	PP Child 3
SS	School SS
SS1	SS Child 1
SS2	SS Child 2
SS3	SS Child 3
CH	School CH
CH1	CH Child 1
CH2	CH Child 2
CH3	CH Child 3
WS1	Workshop 1
WS2	Workshop 2
C	Individual conversations (pre-schoolers)
FC	Final conversation (pre-schoolers' group)
I	Interview (practitioner)
FI	Final individual interview
FBI	Feedback interview
FG1	Focus group 1
FG2	Focus group 2
FG3	Focus group 3
DPS	Documented project school
DPM	Documented project map
DPST	Documented project statues
OEQ	Open-ended questionnaires
FB	Written notes on fake Facebook pages
RJ	Research journal

Table 4.2 depicts a tabulation of the themes, sub-themes and categories which were captured.

**Table 4.2: Summary of themes, sub-themes and categories**

<b>THEME 1: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRACTITIONERS AND PRE-SCHOOLERS</b>	
<b>SUB-THEMES</b>	<b>CATEGORIES</b>
Sub-theme 1.1 Communication	Listening
	Non-verbal interaction
	Who is talking and what is being said?
Sub-theme 1.2 Roles of practitioners	"I am everything to the child"
	"When I was a child"
<b>THEME 2: KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES OF PRACTITIONERS ABOUT PRE-SCHOOLERS</b>	
Sub-theme 2.1 Practitioners' concepts of pre-schoolers	"Pre-schoolers have rights" (practitioners' voice)
	Pre-schoolers are researchers
	Innocence of pre-schoolers
	"Pre-schoolers are not like us" (practitioners' voice)



THEME 3: FACTORS WHICH IMPACT THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRE-SCHOOLERS' AGENCY	
Sub-theme 3.1 Methodology	Rote learning
	Focus on work and performance
Sub-theme 3.2 Classroom atmosphere	Discipline and power display
	A happy place
Sub-theme 3.3 Challenges in practice	Parents
	Work load and time constraints
	Limited resources
THEME 4: PRE-SCHOOLERS' EXPRESSIONS OF AGENCY	
Sub-theme 4.1 How pre-schoolers see their school and city	"I like my school" (pre-schoolers' voice)
	"What I see in the city" (pre-schoolers' voice)
Sub-theme 4.2 How pre-schoolers see themselves, others and the environment	Care for others
	Empathy
	Theories
	Awareness of nature and space
Sub-theme 4.3 Pre-schoolers' initiatives for change	A public opinion
	"What I can change!" (pre-schoolers' voice)
THEME 5: IMPROVEMENT OF PRACTICE	
Sub-theme 5.1 Doing things differently	Asking probing questions
	Practitioners' relationship with pre-schoolers
Sub-theme 5.2 New discoveries in terms of practice	Understanding pre-schoolers
	The value of using the tool of pedagogical documentation

Chapter 1 to 4 systematically link the data collected to theory, and address the objectives of the study, thus reflecting the main purpose of the study, which is to answer the research questions (see 1.6). A thorough description of the data analysis and interpretations follow in the sections below.

## 4.2 THEME 1: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRACTITIONERS AND PRE-SCHOOLERS

Theme 1 provides the answer to the first research question: *How do practitioners' roles manifest in terms of the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being?* From theme 1 emerged the following sub-themes: Communication; and roles of practitioners.

#### 4.2.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Communication

I was interested to discover how practitioners listened to pre-schoolers during circle time discussions and if their listening encouraged pre-schoolers to share their perspectives, ideas and theories about what was discussed (e.g. the theme or their own experiences). Furthermore, the interaction of practitioners with the pre-schoolers and the words used by practitioners and pre-schoolers during circle time was also of interest to me during my observations. I investigated whether non-verbal interaction of practitioners and pre-schoolers (e.g. body language, facial expressions, tone of voice) and dialogue used developed or discouraged pre-schoolers' agency.

The following three categories were noted: Listening; non-verbal interaction; and who is talking and what is being said?

##### 4.2.1.1 *Listening*

During my interviews with practitioners different viewpoints on listening were expressed. One practitioner indicated that listening was when pre-schoolers were obedient by explaining that:

*"They listen, they are very good to listening, because just like I said, for example if I read the story to them, they will just keep quiet, all of them, and listen. And then if you ask the question, they will all want to answer, yes. So they are good listeners."* (T/I/CH)

On her Facebook page she commented:

*"Children should listen to what I am saying and then they can say what they want to say or ask questions."* (FB/CH)

In the final interview she added that listening was also part of taking care of pre-schoolers and that practitioners always had to listen to what they had to say. She said *"Ja, to care for them, to listen to what they always tell you."* (T/FI/CH)

Another practitioner from PP, when asked in an interview about her understanding of listening, said:

*"And everything that the child says to you, it is important to hear, because if you don't listen to a child, it won't be easy for her or him to come to you and explain. Sometimes those things will be important but she will hold it even that the teacher doesn't listen. So*

*there are serious things and there are simple things, you just listen to the child ... they need somebody to listen to those ideas."* (T/I/PP)

A practitioner from SS took the idea of listening further by writing the following on her fake Facebook page:

*"I think there is a difference between listening and hearing. To listen is to understand what is being heard. In the classroom the child has to listen to the teacher and it is also the teacher's duty to listen to the child. When both parties listen to each other that is when we will get understanding of each other. If a teacher is listening to the child and the child listens to the teacher, there is going to be a conversation in that classroom and not a lecture."* (FB/SS)

The following excerpts further illustrate one practitioners' perspectives on listening:

*"A child's voice means listening to the child. Yes, the child's voice needs to be heard because if you know it, you don't know what you are missing, so the child's needs to voice out what they want. What they want to say, you don't know. Maybe the child has been abused, or whatever. Then if you are not listening to the child, it means you are stepping on the child's toes. Creating something for the child."* (T/I/PP)

Another practitioner commented that: *"A child's voice means a child's feelings, actions – whatever the child uses to get the message across to you, including voice itself as well."* (T/I/SS)

These statements on the issue of listening revealed that practitioners had various opinions about listening, but realised the value of listening in terms of their practices. The importance of listening as a pedagogical tool is underscored in the Reggio educational approach to education, which informed this study. Rinaldi (2012:235–236) explains that the pedagogy of listening is an attitude of life and contributes to the formation of children's identity from birth onwards. She further explains that listening means hearing what children have to say, even if their views differ from those of adults. Hua (2012:57) adds that listening in terms of education implies the creation of knowledge, reflection about and transcendence of current customs, and the development of children's agency. The Reggio educational approach values listening as one of its core foundations (see Table 2.3). It is through listening to pre-schoolers that practitioners can hear what they have to say. The tool of pedagogical documentation involves listening. When practitioners document what pre-schoolers are saying about their art projects, they make their thinking

visible (Rinaldi, 2012:238). I found in my study that practitioners understood that pre-schoolers' voice (agency) implies listening to what they had to say. Practitioners understood that the voice of children had to be heard, but at the beginning of the study I did not find that they listened to the pre-schoolers in such a way that their agency was expressed. It was only at the end of the study that practitioners realised the value of listening in terms of asking more probing questions to pre-schoolers about their opinions (see 4.6.1.1).

#### 4.2.1.2 Non-verbal interaction

The influence of non-verbal interaction on the relationship between practitioners and pre-schoolers and subsequent development of pre-schoolers' agency towards contributing to their well-being was illustrated in my research journal:

*“The practitioner was seated when she conversed with the pre-schoolers. Her body language portrayed a lecturing position as she sat and asked the pre-schoolers to recite the days of the week, seasons, numbers and letters of the alphabet. Her static, non-verbal body language could have contributed to the obedient and disciplined way in which the pre-schoolers sat around in the circle. She did not dramatise what she said with body movements. (R/RJ/p.1, 19 May 2017/SS)*

Photograph 4.1 complements my notes of non-verbal interaction in the relationship between practitioners and pre-schoolers.



**Photograph 4.1: Non-verbal interaction (SS)**

In photograph 4.1 the pre-schoolers sat on the floor in rows of three in front of the practitioner, while she sat on a chair. They had to put up their hands if they wanted to

answer her questions. There was no evidence of spontaneous exchange of ideas or perspectives from the side of the pre-schoolers.

I further noted in my research journal that:

*"The pre-schoolers were very obedient and focus was on revising days of the week, seasons, alphabet letter of the day and teaching the children about the theme ... They sat in a half moon with crossed legs."* (R/RJ/p.1, 19 May 2017/SS);

I further commented:

*"The circle time begin with the teacher standing in a circle with the children. They clap their hands as the teacher says a number. They need to listen to the teacher's command and copy what she is clapping or stamp their feet. They then sit in a circle with the teacher on the chair. They all chant 'Good morning, everyone.'" (RJ, p. 5, 8 June 2017/PP); and that "They had to put up their hands when they wanted to answer." (R/RJ/p.2, 26 May 2017/PP)*

At one point I joined the circle time discussion as a participant. I wanted to discover if a more interactive approach would lead to greater expression or spontaneity. I sat on the carpet with the pre-schoolers around me and used a variety of facial expressions and tones of voice to engage them. I asked permission from all three practitioners to join their circle time discussions and asked them if they could observe the activity. I noted the following in my research journal after the activity:

*"I then join the circle time and sit on the floor in front of the children. I portray energy and enthusiasm. Children become engaged ... They become less contained and put up their hands quickly. They seem to concentrate and give me their attention." (R/RJ/p. 5, 8 June 2017/PP)*

My eye-to-eye and expressive interaction during circle time indicated that active engagement is paramount to the development of pre-schoolers' agency and enhanced the relationship between the practitioner and the pre-schoolers. The value of circle time discussions was reflected upon by as follows:

*"To find out what the children know about a certain topic and also add information that they do not know. It also sets the tone of the day and makes the child think ... also I was focusing on mathematics, theme discussion, the knowledge they already have and promoting life skills." (OEQ/SS); and "It is also their chance to talk about the things they know and explore from their knowledge." (OEQ/PP)*

Practitioners' comments suggested to me that they understood that circle time is a valuable time to provide an opportunity to teach pre-schoolers new knowledge, but also a time to hear what they have to say. I thus found a dissonance between the restrictive atmosphere of the circle time discussions and the practitioners' perspectives about the value of circle time. During circle time discussions the practitioners did most of the talking. What I found correlates with a study done by Koran and Avci (2017:1048). They

concluded in their study that early childhood education practitioners see themselves as the only source of information, and that children are deemed passive recipients of knowledge. Findings from their study indicated that practitioners ignored the needs, desires and opinions of children and were more interested in teaching them about correct and acceptable ways of doing things. Such an attitude resonates more towards a modernist discourse which views the pre-schooler as a universalised subject that needs to be filled with knowledge by an outside expert (Dahlberg et al., 2013:46).

These findings are in direct contrast to the discourse of rights which encourages the right of pre-schoolers to express their opinions and viewpoints. From a rights-based perspective children are understood as individuals and citizens who have a right to be heard and considered in decisions affecting their lives as indicated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child:

State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own right to express those views freely in matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (Art.12)

Early childhood practitioners should adhere to the rights of pre-schoolers and afford them opportunities to express their ideas and opinions.

#### 4.2.1.3 *Who is talking and what is being said?*

I explained in my research journal during my observations of various circle time discussions the following: *"The practitioner did most of the talking and sat on a low chair in front of the children."* (R/RJ/p. 1, 19 May 2017/SS); and that:

*"Rather the practitioner asked questions which had fixed answers (e.g. names of the week, seasons, counting)."* (R/RJ/p. 2. 26 May 2017/PP); and that *"The teacher asks them questions and they answered. The questions are more focused on 'what' questions"* (R/RJ/p. 4, 7 June 2017/SS);

One practitioners commented that *"The teacher asks them about the theme and what they remember. More "WHAT" questions are asked during the theme discussion, i.e. What is this? What do you call it?"* (R/RJ/p. 5, 8 June 2017/PP); and another said *"Words often spoken are: 'finish up', 'homework' and 'do your work'."* (R/RJ/p. 3. 9 June 2017/CH)

These findings indicate that the type of questions asked were more focused on 'what is this' than 'why do you think' or 'how do you think' questions. In this regard, critical thinking or exploration of deeper thought was not part of the teaching methodology during circle time discussions. Furthermore, as noted in my research journal, there was a predominant focus on words such as 'work' and 'homework'.

Pre-schoolers themselves commented on doing homework as noted that *"I like to eat. I like doing my homework ..."* (C/SS1). Another pre-schooler mentioned that *"Do my homework ... we write in a book ... I also like writing ... I do my homework ... homework ..."* (C/CH3)

In my view, such spoken words belong to Foundation Phase teaching and should not be part of Grade R teaching. The emphasis on words such as 'work' and 'homework' strengthened my argument that a too strict approach to teaching led to limited exploration and discovery. A predominant focus on getting through the work hindered the development of pre-schoolers' agency. They were not afforded the time or opportunity to voice their own opinions about matters which interested them or concerned them. It led to a lack of play, a restrictive classroom atmosphere and an autocratic relational approach between practitioners and pre-schoolers. Research done by Hua (2012:62) found that a "lecturing pedagogy reduces learning to an oppressive and manipulative process and is not optimal to pre-schoolers learning." Such an attitude is not in line with Vygotsky's (1978) co-constructivist learning theory which is based on a co-constructivist learning partnership between pre-schoolers and practitioners. From this perspective the practitioner structures the learning activity, offers helpful hints or instructions according to the child's interest and current capabilities, but gradually allows the child to become more competent (Shaffer, 1996:276).

#### **4.2.2 Sub-theme 1.2: Roles of practitioners**

Practitioners explained that they perform multiple roles in their classrooms. The following two categories were noted: "I am everything to the child"; and "When I was a child".

##### **4.2.2.1 "I am everything to the child"**

During my interviews with the practitioners they held many views of themselves as practitioners. The characteristic of love was a predominant theme. One practitioner explained that pre-schoolers come to school to get love. She commented in the final



interview: *"Get love from the teachers and the parents, they have to socialise with other kids and to be, grow independently."* (T/FI/PP)

Along the same line of thinking, another practitioner stated that *"It is like we have to love each other. You know, maybe at home they are not showing kids their love, but when he comes to school we have to show them the love, that you are there for him ..."* (T/FI/CH)

The characteristic of care was also noted by a practitioner in her statement: *"... like my kids I show them I care before I discipline them."* (T/FI/SS)

Multiple roles were further indicated in the following excerpts:

*"To lay a strong foundation for the child that will build their future. To protect, love, supervise, to build their confidence, to let them explore, to listen, to respect, to teach, guide."* (FB/PP); and:

*"... make her feel safe around me. Provide love for that time I am with her and acknowledging that she is an individual who matters. To make sure that the child is developing emotionally well – emotionally, mentally and physically. This child must also get a balanced meal when it's needed because it is difficult to teach a hungry child. To be a role model that child can look up to and say I want to be like her."* (FB/SS)

The same teacher further elaborated:

*"I think my role is to be there for the child, as a counsellor, as a teacher, a caregiver. I am there to teach the child but then I cannot teach a hungry child. I must make sure that side of the food is sorted, I cannot teach an emotionally stressed child, so then before I start teaching I check, is everyone fine ... We are like caregivers, like protectors again ... teaching is there [at school] and the caregiving is there, and everything that the child needs at school, must be there." (T/I/SS)*

As seen in the two examples above, providing food to pre-schoolers was understood as being part of one practitioner's role. This was a surprising finding for me because I did not think that the issue of food was so relevant. Pre-schoolers also indicated the importance of food. One pre-schooler, in talking about her school picture, indicated:

*"We play, we do art, we learn, we eat ... she gives us some food and she gives us, she gives us some art, and after they give us some tea, we already eat, and now, after tea, they give us food, and after food, we sleep on the mattress." (CS/PP2)*

Another stated during the conversation that *"I like eating ... I like to write ... cut with the scissors ..."* (C/CH2)

The relevance of food in these examples might indicate the socioeconomic status of some of the pre-schoolers. It may further indicate that the early learning centre is important to some pre-schoolers in terms of a place where they are fed, as food may be scarce at home. This can be a future topic for research: pre-schoolers' views of the pre-school as a place of safety, emotional bonding and nutrition.

The comments by practitioners about their multiple roles indicated that they realised that their relationships with pre-schoolers were important and that they needed to give them love, care and support. Honwana and De Boeck (2005:1–2) state that children in a South African context may experience a sense of belonging and care but are still practically invisible and excluded in terms of not being afforded an opportunity to express agency and contribute to their own well-being. Fraser and Gestwicki (2000:51–53) states that the Reggio approach is grounded in the pedagogy of listening. The process of learning for well-being encourages practitioners to strengthen core capacities such as listening, reflection, empathy and critical thinking (O'Toole (2014:31) (see 2.5.2). The Framework of Indigenous well-being describes the development of the child as being holistic (Rountree & Smith, 2016:206). Practitioners should not only focus on the cognitive or

emotional development of pre-schoolers but should also encourage their social development. They learn to socialise and express their ideas and opinions when they learn in partnership with others (e.g. adults and peers). In such a way a classroom atmosphere of ubuntu can be created where everyone shares knowledge and gives input (Penn, 2009: 51).

In my study I found that even though pre-schoolers were loved and cared for, the teaching methodology did not involve listening to what they had to say about their own well-being.

#### 4.2.2.2 "When I was a child"

Practitioners emphasised that the way that they were brought up differed from the way children are conceptualised and treated in present times. One practitioner shared her experiences as a child during the final interview I held with her. She explained:

*"Now they got a lot of things to play with if they want to play. They've got a say in other things that they want to do. So when I was growing up, I didn't have that privilege to go to the pre-school at first and have to stay with my grandmother. Who just say play with whatever you saw. It was not that much and were not allowed to play, let's say outside, you have to play here. And there was also a time for that, it was not that much easy. You wish to play with other kids but you can't do." (T/FI/PP)*

Along the same lines, another practitioner during the final interview commented about growing up differently:

*"Yes, quite different. When we were young, we were disciplined and smacked a lot, but nowadays you have rights. Oh my, the children having, they will tell you 'If you beat me I will report you to the police, bla, bla'. So there you get a bit, I don't know, confused, because at the end of the day, when a child become a thief, who are they going to blame? So that becomes difficult for us to discipline a child, not to beat them." (T/FI/CH)*

One practitioner talked about the issue of rights in the final interview:

*"When I was growing up I didn't have rights so now they have got rights ... they've got lots of rights ... so when I was growing up, you were forced to live with the auntie. Even if you don't like that auntie or the auntie doesn't like you, but we were forced. We didn't have a right, even to go to school, if they don't want to take you to school. So now if you see a child who is not going to school, you can talk to the parent or go to the social worker and ask them." (T/FI/PP)*

The practitioner from SS added another viewpoint: that there is a paradigm shift taking place in society. When adults are educated they understand better that children should be heard and understood. The practitioner explained as follows:

*"It is a culture thing in a way, because they [adults] think by doing that [not giving children the opportunity to say what they want to say and not taking their feelings into account] I am instilling discipline. I am the parent, the father, I make all the decisions, they don't*

*involve the child ... so, as teachers, we are changing that because of the education we got, but some others don't have the information, so that child in a home setting is still somebody who is not heard, somebody who is not understood, somebody who doesn't matter, as long as they are provided with food, then that's it." (T/FI/SS)*

She further commented on the notion of a good childhood by adding:

*"It is very different. We had a lot of opportunities to play, but we also had a lot of 'Don't', without explanation. While the kids today, they have the opportunities to play with the 'Don'ts', but with explanation. So I think they are better in a way, but we understand them as well ... A good childhood is when you are a child we have someone who understands children. It is not like the way we were brought up, we are expected to behave in a certain way, for example if your parents tell you to do something, you don't ask why, you do it. But today's children we encourage them to ask questions. If I told them to do this, they have a right to ask me why, and I explain to them and they have to understand. So they have opportunity to be understood and to explore. We were told you don't go there, and you don't know why, you just don't go." (T/FI/SS)*

The comments made during the final interviews indicated that cultural influences do play a significant role in the way children are conceptualised and treated. These findings indicate a generational gap, but also a fear that too much freedom for children may lead to discipline problems. Educating parents about children's agency was suggested. Also suggested was that parents should listen to pre-schoolers as they have rights. Findings from a study done by Moses (2008:337) conclude that often children's rights to protection and participation are treated as oppositional and thus limit the scope and depth of opportunities for participation. Moses further states that research is necessary to discover the impact of socio-economic conditions, conceptions of childhood roles and competencies, power dynamics between adults and children, and race and class relations on children's participation. Goduka (1998:49) suggests that practitioner training should include the redefining of culture and the examination of the link between culture and power, and that emancipatory conditions under which to build children's cultural voice (own input) should exist in theory and practice. Knowledge about the effect of culture on pre-schoolers' participation is important if practitioners are to become "cultural awakeners and healers ... 'izangoma'".

In light of the above mentioned, it is again a matter of discourse. Background, culture and power can inform which discourse influences early childhood learning and teaching. The discourse of meaning-making deconstructs hegemonic discourses and decongest

prejudices, self-interest and biased assumptions through dialogue and interaction (Dahlberg et al., 2013:114). This discourse should be encouraged in early childhood learning contexts because it is transformative, co-constructivist and participatory.

### **4.3 THEME 2: KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES OF PRACTITIONERS ABOUT PRE-SCHOOLERS**

Theme 2 answered the third research question: *Which knowledge and attitudes do practitioners demonstrate in terms of pre-schoolers' ability to express agency towards learning for well-being?* From theme 2, emerged the following sub-theme: Practitioners' concepts of pre-schoolers.

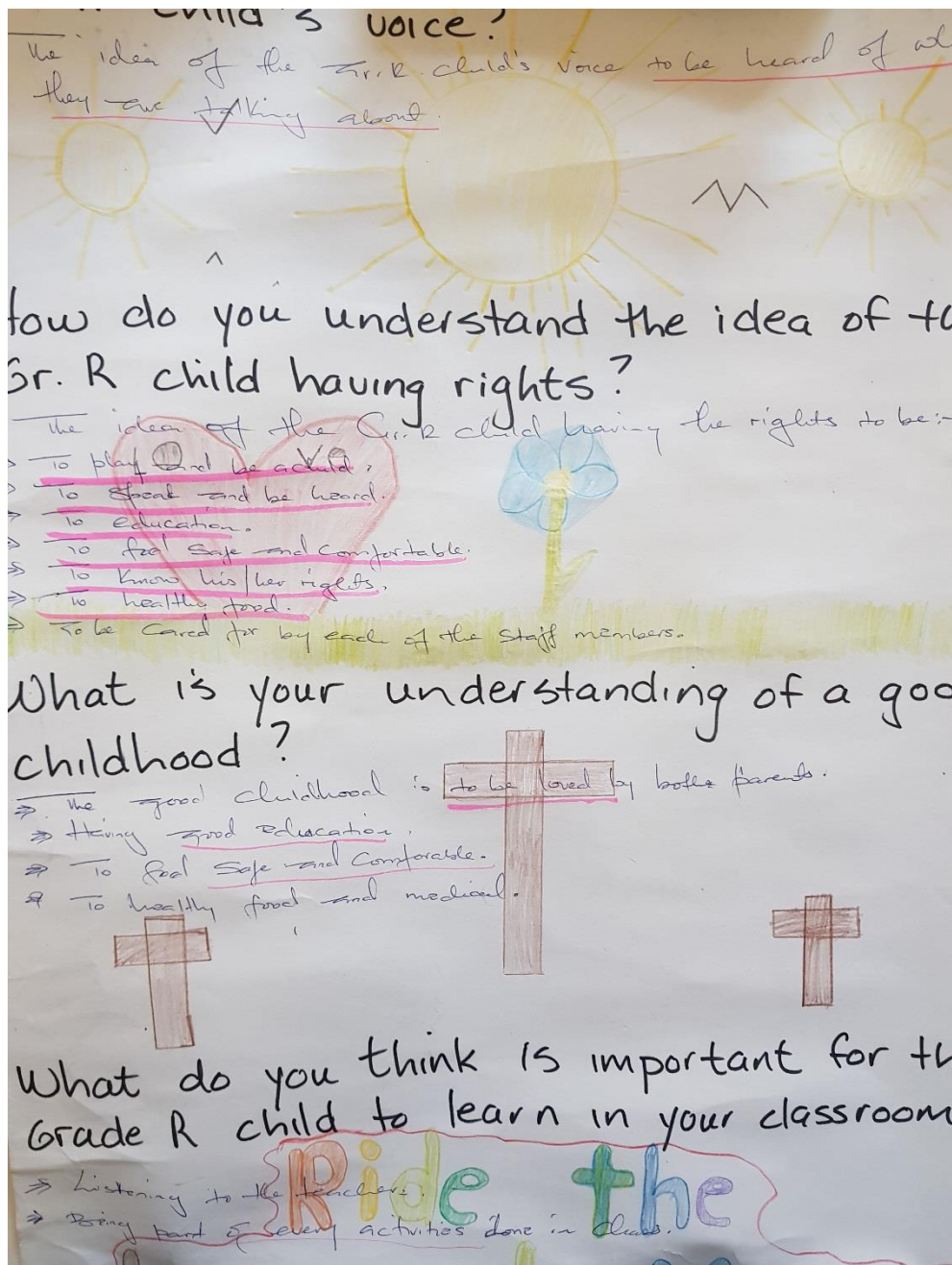
#### **4.3.1 Sub-Theme 2.1: Practitioners concepts of pre-schoolers**

Practitioners had various concepts of pre-schoolers which informed their relationships with them and their teaching practice. Their concepts of pre-schoolers underwent a paradigm shift towards the end of this research study, as noted in 4.6.1.2. The following categories were noted: "Pre-schoolers' have rights"; pre-schoolers' are researchers; innocence of pre-schoolers; and "pre-schoolers are not like us".

##### **4.3.3.1 "Pre-schoolers have rights"**

On their fake Facebook pages, practitioners reflected on the rights of pre-schoolers and noted that *"She [the pre-schooler] can be a great person in the world."* (FB/CH); and *"to be loved, cared, learn, listened and things, they might be children but they are human."* (FB/SS); and *"the right to be a child and not forced to grow up, e.g. being forced to look after themselves because of circumstances."* (FB/PP)

Photograph 4.2 complements the statements about pre-schoolers being rights-bearers. The practitioner noted the issue of rights on her fake Facebook page.



**Photograph 4.2: Fake Facebook (CH)**

#### 4.3.3.2 Pre-schoolers are researchers

Practitioners indicated that pre-schoolers are curious and inquisitive about their environment. One practitioner in the interview commented about pre-schoolers as follows: "A loving, carefree child. Explorer and a researcher. Creative child." (T/I/PP); and continued her thoughts on her fake Facebook page a pre-schooler is "a little researcher ... happy, carefree, loving and friendly ... playful, talented, creative." (FB/PP).

Another practitioner indicated that "I think the child is always ready to learn ... their minds can explore and learn more stuff every day ... Some are vocal, can tell you 'Teacher, I



*don't like this; teacher, you hurt my feelings ...', but then there are some children who would never voice it out. You just have to check their emotions."* (T/I/SS)

In the final interview, she concluded her thoughts by saying that *"they have the opportunity to be curious and they have us to guide them to discover the world and the life around them."* (T/FI/SS)

During the final interview, the practitioner from CH also highlighted pre-schoolers' curiosity and questioning approach to life by commenting that *"they also ask questions, ja, they are curious of what is happening in the kitchen, why are we eating here, so they got questions like that ... At least they know something is happening and they want to find out why it came to this stage."* (T/FI/CH)

The excerpts above indicate that practitioners conceptualised pre-schoolers as rights-bearers and explorers – curious, keen to ask questions and vocal. However, I found that pre-schoolers were not afforded much opportunity to express these qualities by sharing their perspectives or asking questions because adults want to protect them from being exposed to taking on too much responsibility (Lansdown, 2001:8).

#### 4.3.3.3 *Innocence of pre-schoolers*

I asked practitioners during the interviews I held with them how they understood the idea of a child being innocent. One practitioner explained:

*"A child is innocent because we cannot hold them accountable for, those children, most things that affect them, they are done with them, so we cannot hold them accountable because of the family they come from, because they did not have a choice."* (T/I/SS)

Another practitioner elaborated:

*"They [children] can get upset now, but later they are friends, so that is how I see innocence there ... they don't bore grudges. So the naughtiest things that they do in the class is not something that they think it will upset the teacher or another child. Then later they move on with their lives."* (T/I/CH)

Practitioners' perspectives of innocence indicated to me not so much that they thought that pre-schoolers needed to be protected from everything, but rather that they understood them to be 'gentle souls'. This thinking is in line with Rousseau's (1974)

romantic viewpoint of children as innocent (see 2.6.1.4). Practitioners need to understand that 'gentle souls' need adults who listen to what they have to say. My findings about pre-schoolers' innocence is echoed in Lansdown's (2001:8) viewpoint that children are perceived by adults as being passive and in need of protection and that affording them the right to be heard will take away their childhood.

#### 4.3.3.4 *"Pre-schoolers are not like us"*

Practitioners expressed an awareness of pre-schoolers' uniqueness and diversity. During the preliminary workshop, one practitioner stated that *"they vary greatly, they are not the same."* (WS/SS).

The practitioner from PP, in full agreement, explained:

*"the child is a human being like us. We are all different and we can't perform at the same rate, so that is why we have different kinds of kids in the classroom, the one absorb fast, and the one who read slow."* (WS/PP)

Two practitioners during the final interview took the idea of diversity further by stating that *"the child is somebody who got their own ideas, their own thinking and they also have their own way of expressing their thoughts"* 1, T/FI/PP); and

*"The child in front of me it is an individual, who have their own ideas. They are unique. if given the opportunity, the children they don't always copy each other ... each child have their own idea. So a child is an individual who have their own ideas. Given the opportunity to express it, they can show their ideas. They are very different."* (T/FI/SS)

She elaborated further:

*"So giving the children the right information and then giving them the opportunity to tell you what they think, and to ask a lot of the questions – the how? what do you think? why? – to ask a lot of questions, after you have given them the information they are now aware of what is expected and what you are talking about. You can now find the ideas they are asking, the questions and then after the questions we can now make that child's voice visible by doing a project maybe an art, a painting, a drawing, or a construction."* (T/FI/SS)

Along the same line of thought two practitioners during the final interview noted new discoveries about pre-schoolers being able to share their opinions in unique ways. This is indicated in the following excerpts:

*"It is not like the same that I was doing everything for them. Thinking what they can do, not they have got a voice that they want to say this, and they've got ideas about everything that they want to do ... They have got a say in other things that they want to do."* (T/FI/PP); and

*"but seriously children have a lot to teach and you have a lot to learn from a child. In the child's view because for us you just take it like, ag, she is just a child, she can't do anything, or something like that, but I have learnt that children are special in their own different ways. You see, they think in a different way, so it is not a set thing ... So it is good that you should give them the rights to talk what they think."* (T/FI/CH)

Perspectives of pre-schoolers' diversity and uniqueness is underscored by the Framework of Learning for Well-being. O'Toole and Kropf (2013:10,42) state that within this framework, children are diverse, unique, develop to their full potential, and have physical, mental, emotional and spiritual dimensions. They contribute to their daily lives, and to the lives of others and the environment. Practitioners' conceptualisations of pre-schoolers indicated a paradigm shift upon completion of the study. Practitioners in my study understood that pre-schoolers could make valuable, unique and diverse contributions to the learning environment, but their teaching methodology did not enhance their perspectives as became evident in the predominant focus on work and rote learning, as noted in the next section.

#### **4.4 THEME 3: FACTORS WHICH IMPACT THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRE-SCHOOLERS' AGENCY**

The third theme answered the second secondary research question: *What factors have an impact on practitioners' roles as developers of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being?* The data highlighted various factors which impacted the way in which practitioners afforded pre-schoolers the opportunity to express agency and how the development of their agency occurred in the inner-city early childhood centres. I identified the following sub-themes: Methodology; classroom atmosphere; and challenges in practice.



#### 4.4.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Methodology

During my observations of circle time discussions and conversations with pre-schoolers, I discovered evidence of a predominant focus on rote learning and daily repetition of the same activities such as repeating days of the week, numbers and shapes. The following categories were noted: Rote learning; and focus on work and performance.

##### 4.4.1.1 *Rote learning*

My reflections in my research journal indicated that the circle time discussions were mostly focused on rote learning activities. This left limited time for pre-schoolers to share their own perspectives or ideas. I did not see evidence of agency before the tool of pedagogical documentation was implemented in the early childhood centres. My observations at one circle time discussion were noted as follows:

*"The atmosphere was relaxed but rote learning and group chanting (e.g. 'Well done, well done, sharp') was evident. There was not much evidence of hearing the pre-schoolers' perspectives or voice. Rather, the practitioner asked questions which had fixed answers (e.g. names of the week, seasons, counting). The group time lasted for more than 40 minutes with the children sitting cross-legged all the time."* (R/RJ, p.2, 26 May 2017/PP)

During another circle time discussion I noted:

*"The teacher asks questions about the Bible story. Focus on the number of disciples. They then do weather and name the seasons ... The child who is the leader gets up and takes a stick. She points to the seasons and months of the year. The teacher makes eye contact with the children and compliments the children if they answer her questions. The children become more fidgety and begin to lose concentration. One child says: 'We did not do seven days'. Then they all do 'seven days'. The attendance register is read and each child stands up when his/her name is read. The leader child counts all the children by tapping them on their heads."* (R/RJ, p. 8 June 2017/PP); and

*"They sing at least seven songs ... The children stand and say their colours while the teacher points to the colours on the wall chart with a ruler. Then each child gets a chance to do the same. The teacher stands and watches. She does not say very much. Then they do numbers, all counting together, and then they do shapes."*(R/RJ, p. 6, 9 June 2017/CH); and

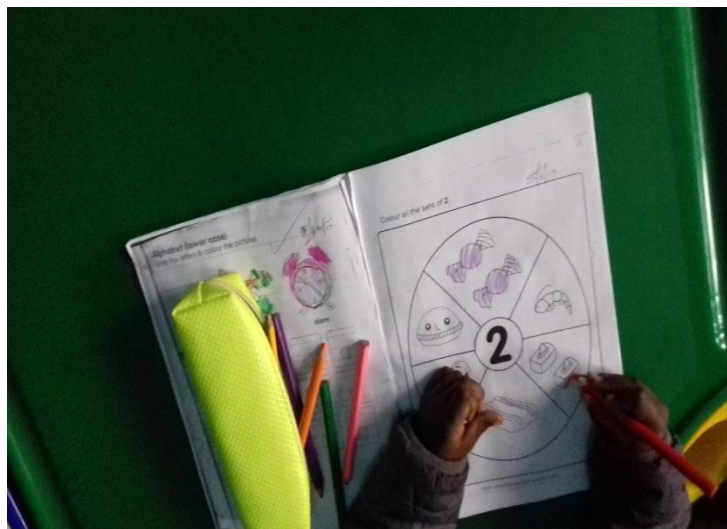
*"They [the pre-schoolers] begin the circle time with a song 'Jumping, jumping'. They sing a song 'Good morning'. The children all know the song and march around in a circle. They sing a few older songs which they know well ... Then they do numbers all counting together and then they do shapes. They then move to another room to do seasons. All of the above they do standing up. They then make a circle and sit down. ... They then begin revision activities of colours, counting, shapes, seasons, days of the week with cards."* (R/RJ, p. 6, 9 June 2017/CH); and

*"Circle time began with a Bible story and the children sat very quietly and listened. A child was asked to pray. The pre-schoolers were very obedient and focus was on revising the days of the week, seasons, alphabet letter of the day and teaching the children about the theme."* (R/RJ, p. 1, 19 May 2017/SS)

Furthermore, I noted in my research journal that the resources used in one pre-school were predominantly workbooks, pictures and objects; and little room was left for intuition, imagination and deeper thinking:

*"Upon [me] entering the classroom the children were sitting at their tables. Some were building puzzles, some were working in workbooks and some were playing with educational games."* (R/RJ, p. 3, 9 June 2017/CH)

Photograph 4.3 supports my findings in the comment above. Pre-schoolers are working in workbooks much like Grade 1 learners in a school learning context.



**Photograph 4.3: Worksheet work (CH)**

Christakis (2017:12) points out the mismatch between schooling and rote learning, and emphasises the role of practitioners as a coach and co-researcher with young children, rather than a mere conveyer of knowledge. She further explains that calendar work, where all children sit in a morning ring and robotically recite days of the week, make up 98% of early childhood experiences. She claims that such methodology does not lead to the development of young children's problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

My findings suggest that a modernist discourse (see 2.4) informs the methodology and that a rights-based (see 2.4.1) and meaning-making discourse (see 2.4.2) should guide teaching and learning methodology in early childhood centres.

#### *4.4.1.2 Focus on work and performance*

The use of certain words and phrases (also see theme 1: sub-theme 1.1) indicated to me a predominant focus on work and performance. Discourse was more on quality in terms of predetermined outcomes and focus on performance than on rights and meaning-making. Words such as *work*, *homework*, *writing* were often used by the practitioners and pre-schoolers, which indicated to me a predominant focus was on getting through the curriculum and upon performance. The use of words which indicated 'work' can be found in the following phrases used by practitioners: '*finish up*', '*homework*' and '*do your work*'. (R/RJ/p.3, 9 June 2017/CH); and in the same context: '*Well done, well done, clever boy*'. (RJ, p.4, 8 June 2017/CH); and in another context: '*Well done, well done, sharp*'. (R/RJ/p. 2, 26 May 2017/PP)

The focus on rote learning, repetition and performance indicated a lack of expression of agency and a predominant focus on getting through the work. My findings correlate with the findings of Shaik and Ebrahim (2015:6) who concluded that in Grade R the practitioners focus so much on discipline and getting through the CAPS curriculum, that they are unresponsive to pre-schoolers' agency.

Soler and Miller (2003:60) state that many countries which have adopted a national curriculum stress the homogenising of the curriculum and the need to compare one student with another. The use of the words '*Well done, well done, sharp*' and '*Clever boy*' in this study could indicate a similar focus. Soler and Miller (2003:60) propose a more progressive curriculum based on the Reggio educational approach which represents a localised, learner-centred method as an alternative to a national centralised curricula.

#### **4.4.2 Sub-theme 2.2: Classroom atmosphere**

A closer examination during circle time discussions indicated various aspects which influenced classroom atmosphere. I discovered classroom atmosphere through what I observed during circle times, but also through what the pre-schoolers explained about their schools during the conversations I held with them and through documenting their drawings of their schools (i.e. making written notes). I found that discipline and the display of power affected classroom atmosphere but that it was the school was also described as a happy place: The following two categories were noted: *Discipline and power display*, and *A happy place*.

I noted in my research journal the following discovery about classroom atmosphere:

*"The atmosphere in the classroom feels strict and tense. The teacher has a stern voice and there is very limited interaction between the practitioner and the children."* (R/RJ, p., 3, 9 June 2017/CH)

In another context I noted:

*"The pre-schoolers were very obedient and focus was on revising days of the week, seasons, alphabet letter of the day and teaching the children about the theme ... They sat in a half moon with crossed legs."* (R/RJ/p.1, 19 May 2017/SS)

In a third classroom, I described:

*"The circle time begins with the teacher standing in a circle with the children. They clap their hands as the teacher says a number. They need to listen to the teacher's command and copy what she is clapping or stamp their feet. They then sit in a circle with the teacher on the chair. They all chant 'Good morning, everyone'. (RJ, p. 5, 8 June 2017/PP)*

#### **4.4.2.1      Discipline and power display**

During my interviews with the practitioners, I noted various attitudes of authority and discipline. The practitioner from CH called attention again to children's rights and how this makes it difficult to discipline them. During the final interview she explained:

*Nowadays you have rights. Oh my, the children having, they will tell you 'If you beat me I will report you at the police, bla, bla'. So there you get a bit, I don't know, confused because at the end of the day, when a child become a thief, who are they going to blame? The mom, not the dad, but the mom, because as a mother you are supposed to be disciplining the children. So that becomes difficult for us to discipline a child. Not to beat them ... Yes that one [discipline] is a challenge. So the children can do what they want, so the teacher sometimes they just give up, they just leave it." (p. 2, T/FI/CH)*

During the final interview the practitioner from SS commented on discipline as follows:

*"... like my kids, I show them I care before I discipline them. They also get the discipline because so I think the environment that is well for the child is the environment that we have that is those aspects of caring, love and a decent meal and an opportunity to play and to learn all in one place." (p. 1, T/FI/SS)*

These examples of discipline issues indicated to me a fear on the part of the practitioners that things may get out of hand if they gave pre-schoolers too much freedom to have a say.

Another practitioner during the second focus group interview had a similar line of thought, indicating that discipline is a challenge. She stated:

*"Let me tell you about discipline. I have a child in my class who doesn't want to, she doesn't want to be taught. She want to be right all the time. You tell her to stop or you punish her, she starts crying. So discipline is also a challenge there ... They say what they want, they do what they want ... So with me, I think I am a bit firm. It is time to talk,*



*we talk; if it is time for me to talk to tell me you have to listen; if it is time for us to play, it is time for us to play. So I think it is a bit better, ja."* (FG2/SS)

#### **4.4.2.2 A happy place**

The practitioners explained that the early childhood centre is a place where pre-schoolers should receive love and care. In the final individual interview one practitioner from PP said:

*"Get love from the teachers and the parents, they have to socialise with other kids and to be, grow independently."* (T/FI/PP); and

*"It is like we have to love each other. You know, maybe at home they are not showing kids their love, but when he comes to school we have to show them the love that you are there for him ..."* (T/FI/CH); and

*"Well, a well environment for children is an environment like SS, for example, when they come in, they feel happy. Even from the way they greet us, they are happy. It is a relaxed environment, they feel comfort, they feel sad and they feel loved."* (T/FI/SS)

Methodology and classroom atmosphere play a significant role in the development of pre-schoolers' agency and well-being. Dahlberg et al., (2013:46), in researching the discourse of quality and meaning-making in early childhood education, warns that the discourse of quality views pre-schoolers as apart from relationships and contexts. I conclude that when the focus is predominantly on performance, getting through the work, and being obedient without taking pre-schoolers' views into account, the relationship between pre-schoolers and practitioners is compromised. When pre-schoolers experience fear of punishment, even though they experience the pre-school as a happy place, they will be reluctant to express their perspectives and share their opinions about what interests or concerns them. The chosen frameworks in this study values pre-schoolers as holistic beings and active participants with adults and peers in creating their own well-being and learning (see 2.3).

#### **4.4.3 Sub-theme 3.3: Challenges in practice**

Three predominant challenges were noted by the practitioners in affording the development of agency in the following categories: Parents; workload and time constraints; and limited resources.



#### 4.4.3.1 Parents

During the second focus group interview, practitioners indicated that parents put much pressure on them to get their children ready for school or knowledgeable. Their comments are seen in the following excerpts:

*"You are right and some of the parents they will say they don't see progress in that child, you don't know how you can help that child." (FG2/SS); and*

*"I do know, I make him stand in front of the class ... it tries to keep him awake ... ja, but it doesn't help because he is tired, he can't take in anything ... He is awake ... So the parents come up to us, 'Why is my child failing?' ... Some parents are very stubborn. I know it is not relevant, but some parents are very stubborn. They are not just cooperate. If one parent who is my friend, and now I don't know, because I have been complaining, complaining, and she said she told me, I can ask her to take the child out, and I feel for that child. I am also getting tired." (FG2/CH)*

These comments indicated to me a fear in practitioners that if they do not get through all the themes, numbers, letters, days of the week, etc. they would get into trouble with the parents. Such fear could hinder the development of pre-schoolers' agency because practitioners may feel that if they allow too much time for pre-schoolers' expressions they will not get through all the work. This could upset their relationship with parents. Another issue that came up during the focus group interviews was workload and time constraints.

#### 4.4.3.2 Workload and time constraints

During the workshop practitioners commented on their challenges about time:

*"For now I am struggling with time. My morning ring and art time, it is short and I've got a lot to do but according to the school routine, I have to do it this time ... so I will need more time." (WS/PP); and*

*"I was finding the time, to finish at a certain time, so the others would come when you are just done, the morning ring, maybe you are done ... the problem with the foreigners [immigrant parents], they don't have time to come to bring their children to school ... some will come at seven, some nine, some ten ... even others one." (T/WS/CH)*

During the study practitioners further explained the importance of getting through the programme of the day and revision of specific aspects such as days of the week, seasons and numbers. The practitioner of CH explained the following:

*"There are some things that we should do every day, like numbers. We use the e-tag approach, so during circle times, I can, as for me, I can do numbers like formally. Or maybe yesterday we did numbers, today we are talking about something else mathematical. So sometimes, I myself don't have to do the numbers like every day. Or the seasons or the days of the week every day, but by the end of the week, all will be done."* (FG2/CH)

The practitioner from SS elaborated during the second focus group interview on the importance of teaching mathematical concepts by stating:

*"If I skip them [maths] it is also not easy for them, especially those who are not coming to school. It is not easy for them to catch up. So they lose track of mathematics."* (FG2/SS)

Practitioners found the issue of time during the implementation of the tool of pedagogical documentation even more challenging. During the final interview with one practitioner, she stated that *"yes, if time was on our side, I think they will have to get a chance to explore more ... Time [is the main challenge]. According to the routine here, time is not on our side."* (T/FI/PP)

Another practitioner in terms of time and pedagogical documentation explained the following during the final interview with her:

*"My challenges were, it is time consuming. It means if you have little time, I think the only challenge for documentation was time because you need the time to be writing. There was many writing, so you need the time to say okay, now let me document, so it was only time."* (T/FI/SS)

Wagner et al., (2013: 53) states that occupational stress for early childhood educators is an important area of apparent understudy and should be explored. This study did not explore the impact on work load, time constraints or parental influences on practitioners' occupational stress. These aspects can be further researched. This study also did not explore the impact of parental involvement on practitioners' practice. In a study done by Ngwaru (2014:67–68) it was found that children from low-income families grow up in environments where parents do not show much involvement in what they do at school.

Yet findings do suggest that parents did all they could to enable a good education for their children. Findings from the practitioners in my study indicated parental involvement as seen in these examples, but parental attitudes were not further explored: Practitioners commented that *"so the parents come up to us and ask 'Why is my child failing?' ..."* (FG2/CH); and *"Some of the parents they will say, they don't see progress in that child."* (FG2/SS)

Limited resources were also a challenge experienced by practitioners.

The Framework of Learning for Well-being and the Reggio educational approach proposes that pre-schoolers learn in partnership with adults and thus it is imperative that parents and practitioners establish sound relationships. Fear of punishment or criticism by parents should not be a reason why practitioners do not encourage pre-schoolers to express agency.

#### 4.4.3.3 *Limited resources*

Practitioners found the use of technology (such as voice recorders and cameras) challenging to use during documentation. The practitioner from CH commented that the use of a laptop would have made the recording more advantageous. She proposed:

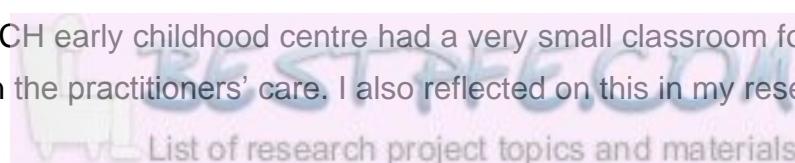
*"It was okay for me [to record] because I could pick out the key words, but now since I have not yet experienced like maybe I might have laptops or something that you could think was important, so I think recording was going to be more advantageous for you."* (T/FI/CH)

She also indicated that *"Ja, it is the recording [that was a challenge] ..."* (T/FI/CH)

Another practitioner complained that *"Sometimes ... I have a phone but sometimes the space is not enough."* (T/FI/PP)

In terms of materials, the following request was made: *"Ja, even the space we have to do it outside ... the materials we did but I needed more. That was a bit challenging."* (T/FI/CH)

I recalled that the CH early childhood centre had a very small classroom for the number of pre-schoolers in the practitioners' care. I also reflected on this in my research journal:



*"The resources in this pre-school are very limited. The teacher has no formal training. There are 13 children in a 3 x 3 room with limited light." (R/RJ, p.3, 9 June 2017/CH)*

During the individual feedback interviews after the data analysis, the practitioners confirmed that lack of technology posed a problem and also that if they had no assistant in the classroom it was difficult to document by taking photographs. The practitioner from SS described her situation as follows:

*"I want to be honest. If I am alone in the class, I don't plan to say let me take pictures of this activity, but then when I start teaching, I will think, wow, this is very nice, let me take, but then who is going to walk to the office? So if it is there in the class, if I didn't plan on taking pictures, you never how the day goes, you might find something interesting to take pictures of it." (FBI/SS); and*

*"With the technology it is not that challenging, but I don't have an assistant, so, as I told you, when I started I did not even document it, because sometimes I just go around, asking, talking without physically writing it down, but then after I heard what they were saying, I decided to write it down. So I was alone, I could not run to the office and take the camera, so I started to use my pen, writing on that paper." (FBI/SS).*

The practitioner from PP explained the value of taking photographs:

*"Because you have to take some pictures, sometimes you don't have time to write down everything. But if you take pictures, then later you can ask questions. It will also help and to record also, it is also giving a time to do it after by listening to the recordings." (FBI/PP)*

Comments about resources indicated that a lack of technological resources or limited creative material and not having an assistant could make the success of using the tool of pedagogical documentation problematic. Challenges faced by practitioners such as over-involvement or lack of understanding by parents, pressure to get through the CAPS curriculum, or limited resources to document pre-schoolers' thinking and make their voice visible hinders the development of their agency and well-being. Atmore (2013:156) reveals challenges around infrastructure, nutrition, programme options, Early childhood development practitioner training, institutional capacity and funding for early childhood education.

## 4.5 THEME 4: PRE-SCHOOLERS' EXPRESSIONS OF AGENCY

This theme answered the fifth research question: *What indicators are there of pre-schoolers' expression of agency in inner-city early childhood centres?* Evidence was found in pre-schoolers' comments about their school and the city, and about themselves. The following sub-themes emerged: How pre-schoolers see their school and city; how pre-schoolers see themselves, others and the environment; and pre-schoolers' initiatives for change.

### 4.5.1 Sub-theme 4.1: How pre-schoolers see their school and city

I held conversations with pre-schoolers to investigate their impressions about themselves, their school and their city. I wanted to discover in what ways they express and act upon their agency. I also collected data from their documented art projects (e.g. drawings of their schools, route maps, statues, and the project "What I can change!" The following categories were noted: "I like my school"; and "What I see in the city".

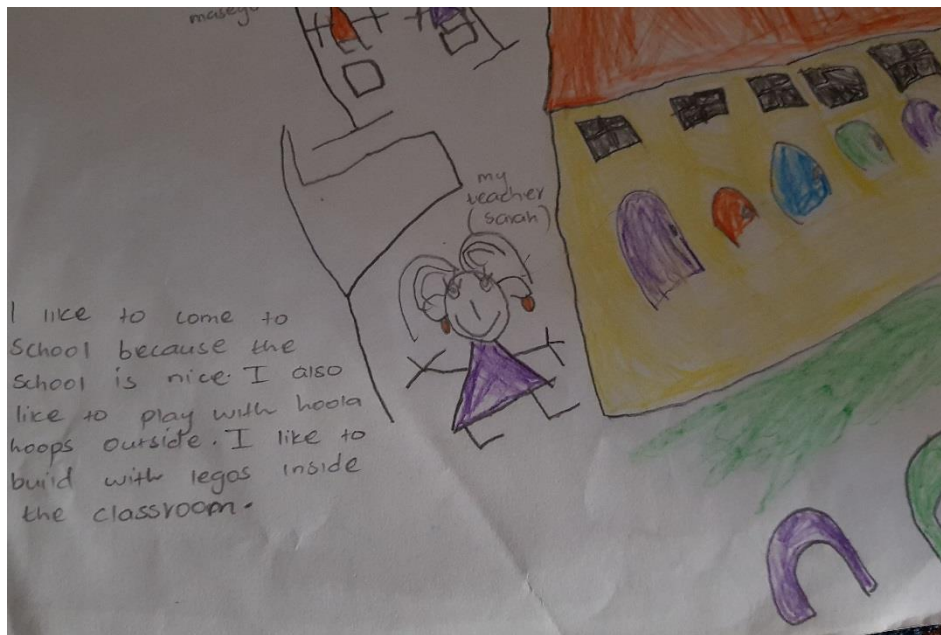
#### 4.5.1.1 "I like my school"

The centres were seen by the pre-schoolers as happy places which they liked and their perspectives indicated that the practitioners created a happy places for them to play and learn in. Their impressions about their environments were expressed as follows in conversations I held with them:

*"I like to eat, I like doing my homework ... We can eat, we play games ... I like to paint, to colour and play with my friends ... I like to play puzzles ... I like to write ... I like to play ... to count the numbers ... to bring work for the teacher ..."* (C/SS1); and

*"Okay, this school is nice ... because we do fun and work, and allow us to eat in the afternoon, they let us sleep, they let us do sport at Sun Sparrows, to go back at sunset, then we can rest ... I like to play ... play puzzles ... colour ... to gym ... I like to draw, colour ... we cut ... we paint ..."* (CS/SS3); and *"Do my homework ... we write in a book ... I also like writing ... I do my homework ... homework ..."* (C/CH3); and *"like eating ... I like to write ... cut with the scissors ..."* (C/CH2); and *"The school is nice, I like it here, it is the best school ... There is also friends to play, there is also swings, there is also teachers."* (C/PP1)

Photograph 4.4 depicts a pre-schoolers' feeling about her school and the environment.



**Photograph 4.4: School drawing (SS1)**

All the above-mentioned examples reinforced the fact that the early childhood centres were places where pre-schoolers enjoyed doing activities such as art, had friends to play with, had food to eat and also had teachers. Their perceptions indicated that these environments were happy places for them.

However, the issue of physical punishment was evident in conversations with pre-schoolers, and their perspectives call for further investigation in future research. In one specific centre in particular which is also the centre characterised by limited space, lack of practitioner training and socioeconomic deprivation, two pre-schoolers commented on beatings, as expressed in the following excerpts:

"Teacher is going to beat me." (C/CH2); and "If you don't do your homework, teacher hits you." (C/CH3)

One pre-schooler during my conversation with her expressed concern over the practitioner's sternness by stating that "*she* [practitioner] *must not fight with us. She must talk softly.*" (C/SS2). This concern was also voiced by another pre-schooler from the same centre. When asked when they are happy at the school, she explained that "*when she* [the practitioner] *doesn't beat us.*" (C/SS1)



Two pre-schoolers from PP drew attention to the interplay between obedience and authority. The power displays are noted in the conversations as follows:

*"She tells us, she tells us what to do and she tell us to do sounds, and she tells us to questions and we go to our table and to art."* (C/PP3); and *"I am listening to teacher and teacher ask me to do, I am doing it."* (C/PP2)

Comments of pre-schoolers about beatings and obedience (doing what they are told) indicate a hesitancy to express their agency and take the initiative for their own well-being. Wastell and Degotardi (2017:45) concluded that children from cultures where strong power differences exist may struggle more to establish a sense of belonging than in cultures with a more egalitarian paradigm. Their study documented a clear voice of pre-schoolers' experiences of belonging and it paves the way for further exploration of the influence of power on the development of pre-schoolers' agency and well-being. In support of their study, I again refer to a study done by Koran and Avci (2017:1053) who state that practitioners give children who are more obedient more opportunity to participate, and exhibit discriminatory behaviour against children who do not do as they are told. The comments made by pre-schoolers such as

*"Teacher is going to beat me"* (2. C/CH2) and *"She [teacher] must not fight with us. She must talk softly."* (C/SS2) indicates physical punishment is evident in early learning centres.

#### 4.5.1.2 *"What I see in the city"*

Pre-schoolers in answer to conversations I held with them stated that the city needed to be a nice place where there must be parks with a playground, music, trees and birds. Pre-schoolers indicated during my conversations I had with them an awareness of their surroundings as follows:

*"The city must be nice and then people must be kind, they must be happy."* (C/PP1); and *"Like in the city, must be like a playground ... I want a jungle gym ... I want to see slides, I must see that round slides, nice ... I wish the city were musicals ... by asking the people."* (C/SS3)

When I documented (recorded) what pre-schoolers explained about their map drawings, the following was noted by two pre-schoolers:

*"I draw the tree, I see the road, until here ... I draw the street ... The robot. The robot here ... My draw, this is my house ... My floor is number 1 ... I put a police station ... and a policeman ... I am drawing the grass ... You must draw a car ... Some people they are going to work, other peoples they are going to McDonald. Other peoples they are going, going to schools. Other peoples, they are going home ... This one is parking ... I draw the street, the city is nice ..."* (DPM/PP1/2)

Photograph 4.5 below illustrates pre-schoolers impressions of what they see on their way to school. This photograph supports my findings that pre-schoolers are able to voice their perspectives through a multimodal pedagogy such as drawings or clay statues.



**Photo 4.5: Route map to school (PP1/2)**

These comments made by pre-schoolers indicated to me that they were aware what happened around them and could talk about it, which suggests agency and expressing what they liked in terms of their well-being, such as *"The city must be nice and then people must be kind, they must be happy"* (C/PP1) and *"I wish the city were musicals ... by asking the people"* (C/SS3). My finding is supported by research done by Lansdown (2001:8), who indicated that young children have a great deal to say and want to contribute to making the world a better place.

#### 4.5.2 Sub-theme 4.2: How pre-schoolers see themselves, others and the environment

Pre-schoolers indicated various strengths and capabilities during my conversations with them. The following sub-themes were noted: Care for others; empathy; theories; and awareness of nature and space.

##### 4.5.2.1 Care for others

During my conversations with pre-schoolers, they indicated that they care for others by describing the following: *"I like to clean the house always, even in the morning even when it is in the night ... and give my mommy food and tea, make for my mommy tea, coffee."* (C/SS2); and *"I give her water."* (C/CH3); and

*"I help my mommy to do washing and washing clothes and cleaning the house. And cleaning the bedroom ... help my mommy to cook ... Teacher, I love my mommy because I clean my mommy's house and then I tell mommy I want to wash the dishes. I clean the space and I sweep, before I sweep I clean, then I fix the end and put the rubbish out there."* (C/CH1); and *"We help her [teacher] cut papers."* (C/CH3)

During the group conversation three pre-schoolers described their capabilities: *"I am also clever ... I am also want to go to school, pass and be bigger ..."* (FC/SS2); and *"I like to pass ... I am a bit clever."* (CF/SS1); and *"I like to play in a band ... I want to reach grandpa's age ... I know how to make shapes and numbers ... I can count from [and then the pre-schooler counted to 100]."* (CF / SS3)

During the conversations, pre-schoolers also commented on what they would do to better the lives of people in the city. These comments indicated to me that they were able to express how they could contribute to the well-being of others, as seen in the following excerpts: *"I want to give them [people of the city] homes ... new furniture ... I want to give them TVs and I also want them to have a sofa ..."* (C/PP2); and *"I want to give them [people outside] the new bag to go to work and new computer and a new phone and a new bags and also a TV, and also the TV and also the telephone and then the ironing board."* (C/PP3)

Along a similar line of thinking, a third pre-schooler explained in a drawing of the map how the people living on the street can be helped: *"By giving them food, even meat ... even a house. Buy them a house ... I will say God forgive them ... I will build them a house ... I will give them new clothes."* (DPM/PP1)

These above-mentioned comments by pre-schoolers about themselves as carers, and as clever or talented or charitable children indicated that they thought of themselves as competent and able to make contributions towards their own well-being, that of others, and the environment. These findings suggest that pre-schoolers can be viewed as agents who can inform their life-worlds. Such a line of thinking is in line with Dahlberg et al., (2013:79–80) who describes the early childhood institution (centre) as a forum in civil society when the stakeholders (i.e. practitioners, children, parents, community members) envision it as such.

#### 4.5.2.2 Empathy

Pre-schoolers also expressed empathy during my conversations with them in various ways: *"... we going to check other kids is happy."* (C/SS2); and *"I will then [help] them, by learning, walking and learning how to read ... by walking, or by seeing, or by opening the door, especially if they can't open the door, when it is too high."* (CS/PP1); and *"We are all kind."* (p.3, CF/SS1)

#### 4.5.2.3 Theories

Pre-schoolers also had theories about their understanding of the world around them. I recorded what they said about their drawings of their maps. They expressed the following theories: *"[Under the road in the city are] wires ... electricity."* (DPM/SS1); and *"[Underneath the roads are] wires"* (DPM/SS2)

They also presented theories about nature as noted in my recordings with them: *"God makes the sun shine ... He makes things right and clouds make shade."* (DPS / SS1); and *"[rain comes from] the clouds."* (DPS/SS3); and *"It is God and Jesus ... [and the clouds move] it is themselves."* (DPS/SS2); and *"In South Africa, it snowed ... People will be drowned."* (DPS/PP1); and *"When the rain was raining, the flowers grow up."* (p. 1, DPS, PP2)

It was important for me to note their theories as this strengthened my argument that pre-schoolers are not just empty vessels or *tabula rasa* to be filled with knowledge from

outside experts (Locke, 1894), but that they can make conclusions about things that happen in their lives. Such capabilities indicates agency. They also showed an interest in nature and space as discovered in the conversations I had with them about their drawings and clay statues.

#### 4.5.2.4 Awareness of nature and space

Pre-schoolers commented on their aesthetic awareness during the conversations I had with them about their drawings of their school and surroundings in the following excerpts:

*"Stars" (C/CH1); and "Flowers" (C/CH2); and "The clouds in the sky"(CS/CH2); and "The city is beautiful" (C/PP1); and "I am drawing the moon, I am drawing the moon in my building, so it can show that the moon into my building ... I am drawing lots of trees." (DPM/PP1)*

These comments indicated that they had an awareness of beauty and that things in space caught their attention.

### 4.5.3 Sub-theme 4.3: Pre-schoolers' initiatives for change

During my conversations I had with pre-schoolers, they held public opinions and indicated things that they wanted to change in their environment. The following categories were noted: A public opinion; and "What I can change!".

#### 4.5.3.1 A public opinion

Pre-schoolers were able to discuss with me how they perceived society around them. This is indicated in the following excerpts:

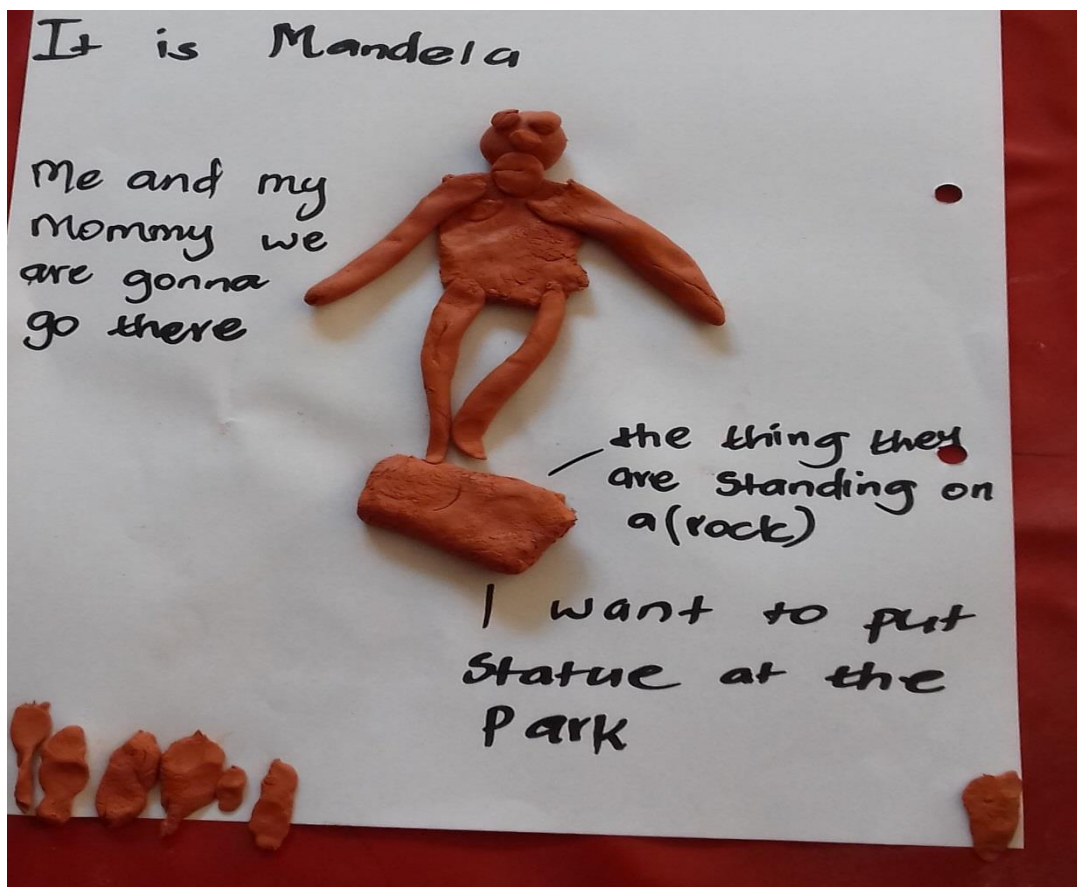
*"Yes, but they were striking for Zuma ... Zuma is not a good president ... [to tell Zuma] ... Zuma you must be happy ... He will do a letter of Zuma, there must be no more shouting ... It [letter] it will say Zuma, you must be good and tell them there is a new president calls Zuma, other soldiers they are like us. Our families like us too much." (C/SS2); and*

*"...I want people who are good, so they can't change the streets outside, some people want money ... I want to see God [in the city] ... the angels ... I even want to see a tree for fruit ... I want to see nice clean things ... the floors must not be dirty." (C/SS3)*

In commenting about the pre-schoolers' drawings during the conversations I had with them about their map drawings, they mentioned the following: "*Catch thieves ...he [the thief] try to steal money. Because they are upside down.*" (DPM/PP1); and "*Tsotsies ... they steal ... and they kill you. And there is a spray for us to spray them.*" (DPM/SS1)

Pre-schoolers impressions and comments about events and experiences indicated that they can hold public opinions, talk about their fears or matters which concern them. Such capabilities are evidence that they can express agency and can contribute to their well-being by sharing their perspectives and ideas. Their agency shows that they are not innocently unaware of what happens around them, but experience their surroundings. They have a voice and they want to express it as noted: "*I like to speak.*"(C/SS3); and "*I am going to give a city a cake ... it will say thank you.*" (C/SS2); and "*I want to say [to the city], thank you for the buildings.*" (PP2)

Evidence of agency is further made visible in the written notes (documentation) made by the practitioner about a pre-schoolers' comments about a clay statue as indicated in Photograph 4.6. He explains that he wants to "*put a statue at the park*".



Photograph 4.6: Statue (PP1)



#### 4.5.3.2 "What I can change!"

During the final art projects, pre-schoolers were asked to draw, make or build things which would indicate what they wanted to change in their city. In all three pre-schools various projects were undertaken between the practitioners and the pre-schoolers. The practitioners and pre-schoolers from SS built a city with Lego blocks, comprising, for example, apartments, swimming pool and park (see Appendix 18). When I held my final interview with the practitioner from SS she explained the project to me as follows:

*"I took the Lego, and I told them now, each one of you, you must build what you want to change [in your school]. So the swimming pool you will see, so I had to work through them like, okay, what does the swimming pool have? ... so I just talk through them but they actually did what they wanted."* (T/FI/SS)

Appendix 18 shows examples of pre-schoolers' agency expressed through their art projects which were documented by me and the practitioners.

In the SS inner-city early childhood centre pre-schoolers did a project with Legos in which the pre-schoolers built a park with an apartment building, a slide, a swimming pool (see Appendix 18).

An example is depicted in Photograph 4.7.



Photograph 4.7: A city park (SS)

List of research project topics and materials

In the PP inner-city early childhood centre, the pre-schoolers made a poster to give to the principal to tell her what they would like to change in the city and then they built a park for the city with cardboard boxes. Their comments of agency are evident in the practitioner's documentation on the posters (see Appendix 18).

On visiting the PP centre after the project, the practitioner explained to me during the final interview the box construction project as follows: *"The pre-schoolers built a new playground for their school with swings and a swimming pool."* (T/FI/PP)

An example of the playground that a pre-schooler built is depicted in Photograph 4.8.



**Photograph 4.8: A new playground with slides (PP)**

At CH centre the practitioner explained to me during the final interview that *"pre-schoolers painted a card board to serve as an example of their new school"* (T/FI/CH), as seen in Photograph 4.9.



**Photograph 4.9: Our new school (CH)**

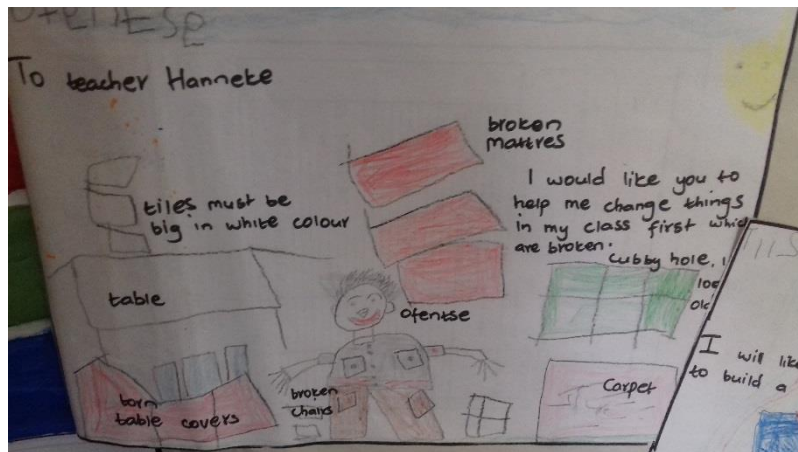


Pre-schoolers' awareness of their environment, their self-awareness and their initiatives for change indicate that they do have agency and are able to express it in multiple ways. Their agentic capabilities are confirmed by Henderson, Pendlebury and Tisdall (2011:2), who explain that multimodal pedagogies can represent the voice of young children through using many representational resources such as images, sound, music, gestures, space, colour, facial expressions, body movements and posture, which enable them to make meaning and interpret their world. The development of pre-schoolers' agency thus depends on their participation and collaboration with practitioners and the availability of multiple resources.

There are thus indicators of pre-schoolers' agency in inner-city early childhood centres. Indicators of pre-schoolers' agency contradict the arguments often used to challenge their participation. Examples of such arguments are that pre-schoolers lack competence to participate in matters which concern them; they must first become responsible before they can be afforded opportunities to participate; allowing them to participate takes away their innocence; and they will have less respect for authoritative figures (Lansdown, 2001:8).

Nsamenang (1995:730) states that developmental psychology with its Eurocentric theories has undermined and ignored cultural and localised African knowledge. I agree that in terms of early childhood education the cultural and localised contributions of Africa's young children should be acknowledged. When pre-schoolers are afforded an opportunity to share their perspectives and ideas and act upon what they want to contribute towards their well-being, their African voice is heard.

Photographs 4.10 and 4.11 exhibit findings of African pre-schoolers' perspectives about their school environment.



**Photograph 4.10: Poster indicating change (PP)**



**Photograph 4.11: Posters indicating change (PP)**

Evidence of the expression of pre-schoolers agency are supported by the Learning for Well-being framework. Pre-schoolers are understood as unique and diverse human beings who express themselves in partnership with others and who influence their environments (see 2.3.1). The Reggio educational approach deems pre-schoolers as co-constructivist learners who can create meaningful relationships with others and make meaning (see 2.3.2). The Framework of Indigenous Well-being (see 2.3.3) supports the findings that pre-schoolers are spiritual, emotional, physical and cognitive human beings. Findings indicate that they have the capacity to show empathy, care for others, express an opinion about their environment and appreciate nature's beauty.

#### 4.6 THEME 5: IMPROVEMENT OF PRACTICE

The fifth theme that I identified had to do with the fourth research question: *How do practitioners' practices impact the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being?* I identified the following two sub-themes: "Doing things differently" and "What I learnt in terms of practice?". These two sub themes explained the paradigm shift in practitioners' thinking about pre-schoolers, their relationships with them and their practice through using the tool of pedagogical documentation.

#### 4.6.1 Sub-theme 5.1: Doing things differently

During my interviews with practitioners they indicated that asking questions is an important aspect of developing pre-schoolers' agency and that their relationships with pre-schoolers were characterised by friendship. The following two categories were noted: Asking probing questions; and practitioners' relationship with pre-schoolers.

##### 4.6.1.1 *Asking probing questions*

Practitioners realised the importance of asking questions which lead to deeper critical thinking by pre-schoolers. The following comments were made during focus group interviews:

*"I think it [questions] is very valuable, because it makes them think, it makes their brain grow. Like that is the only way they can, okay let me use my brain, and think and that way, that is how they find new ideas, it help them also with problems, so because they are not prepared for that question. When I asked them, now they are stopping to think about that certain subject, now they find their own way that they think. It is 'how', it can be right or wrong, but at least their brain is working ... so I think the 'how' and 'why' question are stimulating their brain to think and it makes their brain to grow, because if I just come there and sit and talk and talk, their brain is just taking and it might not take that much."* (p.6, FG2/PP); and

*"... because when I was asking questions, they will come up with their own ideas and the other words that I didn't know that they exist..."* (FG2/SS)

Comments were also made during the final interviews I held with the practitioners. Examples are in the following excerpts:

*"So giving the children the right information and then giving them the opportunity to tell you what they think, and to ask a lot of the questions, the 'how?', 'what do you think?', 'why?'. To ask a lot of questions after you have given them the information, they are now aware of what is expected and what you are talking about. You can now find the ideas they are asking, the questions and then after the questions we can now make that child's 'voice' visible by doing a project maybe an art, a painting, a drawing, or a construction."* (T/FI/SS); and

*"It was exciting because they [pre-schoolers] have to look around themselves when they come to school, what is happening around them. At first they did not notice anything because I didn't ask them questions to look around when they come to school. So they started to look around at things, not only on the street, even here at school, even at home. So they come up with answers that they think this and this must be changed. They have reasons which I never thought that will happen, even with the school, we took a trip around the school, and they come with the ideas what do they want to change at school." (p., 3, T/FI/PP)*

The practitioner from SS commented that documentation enabled her to ask questions:

*"...so if the purpose of documentation taught me to ask questions, so when you ask questions, you also understand the child better. That is going to help me in the future and to understand what the child is thinking – the process instead of what the child did. Just the end result. (T/FI/SS)*

Practitioners shift in thinking from asking mere superficial “what is this?” questions to “how does this work?” or “what do you think?” or “why does this happen?” led them to understand that pre-schoolers can express opinions, share their perspectives and comment about matters which interest or concern them.

#### *4.6.1.2 Practitioners' relationship with pre-schoolers*

Practitioners indicated that their relationships with pre-schoolers changed from them being the only one who teaches, to allowing pre-schoolers to share their ideas. The relationship became characterised by friendship and participation, as seen in the following excerpts:

*"I am not strictly a teacher anymore, we are friends now ... At first, when I was teaching them, it was me, it was me who was teaching, so now I get to ask the questions a lot and they are the ones who is telling me and I also ask them if they get the ideas from them. What do they think about the things like this, or they can think anything and then we talk about those things." (T/FI/PP); and*

*"There is a difference because sometimes we teach, but we are not aware of what the children are capable of doing until you try something new. That is when you also see loop holes in your teaching, for example you when you give them the play dough, they had to do the statue, because every day they play with the dough, it is always flat on the table,*

*they never had to build something standing. That I noticed something, oh, there is another way of doing this ... so you also see where you can improve, where you are lacking, so that makes you grow as a teacher."*(T/FI/SS)

Bandura (2001:1) states that the role of human beings to make meaning of their world becomes active if they are "agents of experiences rather than simply under-goers of experiences". Practitioners discovered that by involving the pre-schoolers and listening to what they had to say, more meaningful relationships developed between them and their pre-schoolers.

#### **4.6.2 Sub-theme 5.2: New discoveries in terms of practice**

Various comments were made about the value of the tool of pedagogical documentation in terms of practitioners' conceptualisation of pre-schoolers, their relationship with them, and their teaching practice. Two categories were noted: Understanding pre-schoolers; and the value of using the tool of pedagogical documentation.

##### *4.6.2.1 Understanding pre-schoolers*

During the preliminary workshop I explored practitioners' prior knowledge about the concept of documentation by asking them questions and recording what they said. Their understanding was as follows:

*"I think it will be more meaningful when there is a picture or images that says what the child is saying. There is a picture, the parents are not always in the classroom, or our colleagues are not always in the classroom, and sometimes we forget what was happening at the time when the child was doing the activity. So if we make notes next to it or recording, it gives us accurate information, even though it is research. I think can help also with assessment, you can know how the child is thinking and how the child is working ... I think it encourage the child, that, wow, my chair is interesting, my picture is asking me all about it."* (WS2/SS); and

*"I think it was interesting because we found time to think about some of the things we never thought about, that we should have thought about ... my style of teaching and finding ways to improve ... this documentation of writing down about what each child is saying. We will also recognise that the kids are not the same. I must not expect it from everyone. Everyone is different and they have their own limits ... At first I need to never draw whatever and they will explain to me but I didn't write it down but now I take it,*

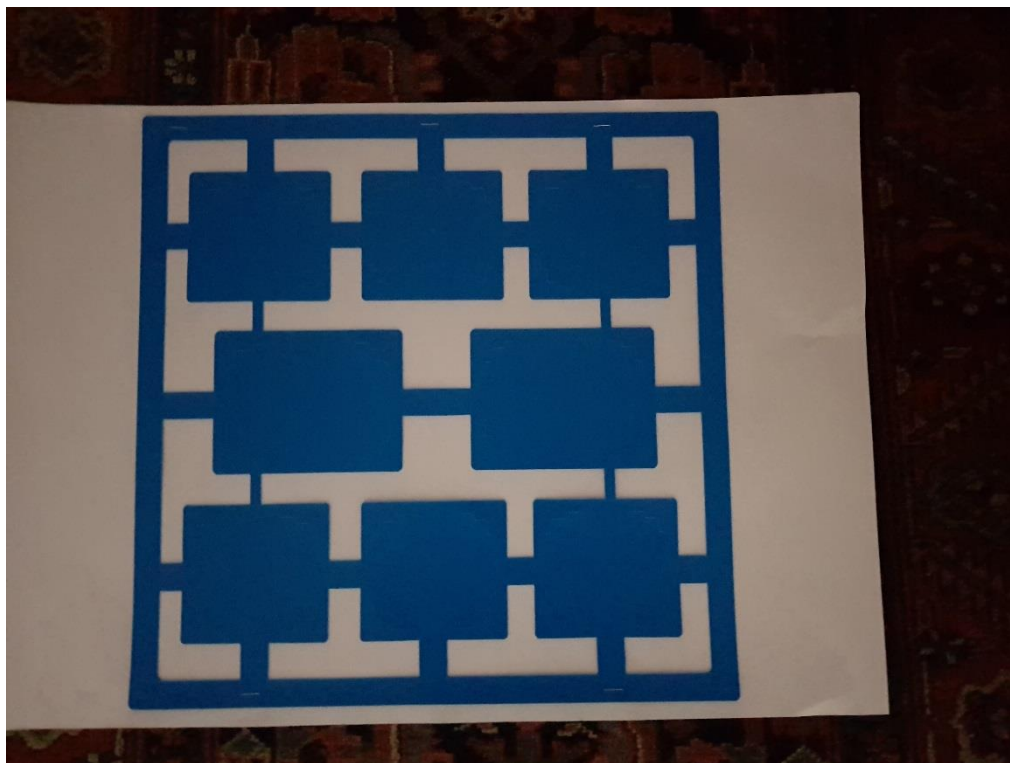
reporting or documenting it, and again my kids are not the same ... because I was seeing things in my own view not according to what kids can perform. They can perform differently." (WS2/PP)

Below is an example of a project of documentation done by a practitioner during the preliminary workshop to give practitioners an idea of how documentation can be done in their own classrooms. The practitioners were asked by me to use a 'mieliepit' (corn kernel) and plan and design their own interpretation of how the corn kernel grew. They did this through the resources I supplied to them. They then had to document (make written notes) about each other's projects. Photographs were taken of the documented art projects as seen in Photographs 4.12 and 4.13 below.



Photograph 4.12: Documentation (SS)





**Photograph 4.13: Template to build documentation on (Workshop)**

#### 4.6.2.2 *The value of using the tool of pedagogical documentation*

After having used the tool of pedagogical documentation, all three practitioners commented on their fake Facebook pages that they understood and valued the pedagogical tool of documentation. In the excerpt below these changes are noted:

*"The way I see a child's work and to understand that what they did is their own perception of the subject ... By listening to children's ideas while they are busy with an activity. Documenting the main points of what the child was thinking and how they can express their own thinking. Making their thoughts visible by adding words to a picture to show what the child was thinking and experiencing at that time. Displaying the child's work so that they can be proud while looking at it and say, 'I did that. That is my picture.' This can motivate them to participate more enthusiastically in the next project because they know it is not just going to be thrown away." (FB/SS); and*

*"Write down small notes on my children's art work." (FB/CH); and "My teaching method, document children's work. Learn from my children unlike them learning from me ... Let children come up with their own ideas concerning what they see. It shows that they see things differently. Do project with the children and document it and record." (FB/PP)*



During my feedback interviews with two of the practitioners, after the data analysis, they commented on ways in which documentation changed their relationship with pre-schoolers and their practice. They stated that:

*"it also added to my knowledge on how best to handle the children, it also added on. It made me be a better teacher than I was before ... We are like sort of friends, we are on the same level, they feel more at ease." (FBI/SS); and*

*"Because as a teacher personally before I teach them, like when I get new kids, I want to let them know that I love them, so that when I am disciplining, it is easier for them, so when you are doing documentation, they feel like, wow, I am very special, my teacher really loves me. So they agreed to behave, I think." (FBI/SS); and*

*"Only that you have to change how you ask questions and you don't be, don't always be the one who is in charge of everything. You just hear the ideas from the kids what they think about the theme. If the theme you ask them their ideas and what can we do about this. So you hear a lot from the kids." (FBI/PP)*

When the practitioner from PP was asked if the pre-schoolers contributed more through the use of the pedagogical tool of documentation and were asking probing questions, she confirmed that this was the case. She emphasised:

*"Yes. You have to ask questions and in a different way. Lots of questions. If you don't get what you want to hear, you must keep on asking questions." (FBI/PP)*

The practitioner from SS agreed as follows:

*"Like during morning, I am asking a lot of questions. I think it makes the morning very interesting and enjoyable because the children are much more involved than before and also when you ask them the 'why' questions, like why do you think this is like that. When you are listening to their answers, they feel special and also it is improving their thinking. You can see that the child is really trying to think why is that. Maybe a child can think of something, but they are not going deeper into it, but the moment you start asking questions, they are now thinking more and more deeper ... Questions are a big part of that, because you won't know what a child is thinking unless you ask them." (FBI/SS)*

What was interesting to note further was that the practitioner from SS concluded that using the tool of documentation can be used as a strategy for assessing pre-schoolers' development. She stated:

*"So maybe by the end of the year, if I want to compare, round their progress, I can also ask them to the same thing and I also document and I can compare to see each child has progressed. And also I have seen, I have two children who were not in a pre-school, they are very different from the children that were in the school. So even the way they were asking their questions, even the way they were describing their pictures. There is one who did not even tell me anything. That child didn't know what they were doing, they were just scribbling. So it also makes you know the children better ... it help me with my assessment. Because when we are teaching, you always assess yourself, you also assess the children. So with documentation it is, it makes it a bit easier." (FBI/SS)*

She further suggested that a workshop to train practitioners to use the tool of pedagogical documentation would be a good idea, as is evident in her answer to my question:

*Q: "So do you think one should start, like we want to take the idea of documentation now into Sun Sparrows, do you think one should start with the workshop that you train the teachers before?"*

*R: I think so, because I always put me as an example, before we – me and you – had this process together. I was not doing things the way I am doing now. So instead of just telling them 'document it', it is better to do it with them so that they know what the process is. It is not like you just told me do this, do this: we did some of the things together." (2FI/SS)*

Her suggestion aligns with the proposal by Koran and Avci (2017:1054) that there should be in-service training for practitioners that should include knowledge on child-centred approaches, democratic classroom management, effective communication techniques, and gender education and support for creativity in teaching children about their rights.

The practitioner from PP explained that colleagues were impressed to see what she was doing through documentation. She explained:

*"Yes, even some of the teachers they came to the class and they saw what I did ... And they was so impressed." (FBI/PP)*

The practitioner from SS added:

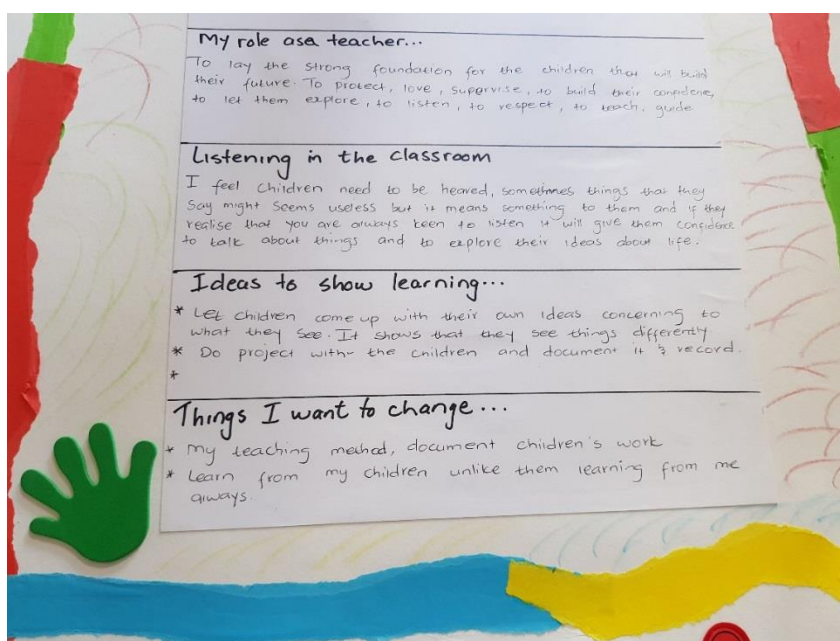
*"Yes, and they [pre-schoolers] do enjoy it. Even the parents they now [see] their child is happy." (FBI/SS)*

On completion of the research the practitioners reflected during the third focus group interviews about the value of the fake Facebook pages as follows:

*"For me the Facebook page was, I am a person who can sit down with a task, for example, let's say I have to write an essay. I can be blank, but the moment I start writing it flows, so I think that we are writing it gave me time to think more, the time you think of this idea, you think about another one deeper or another one ... it goes deeper and it gives me more meaning. So a lot comes out when I am writing than when I am talking, I think." (FG3/SS); and*

*"It take me back to think about why I am a teacher and to think why, how is a child ... I didn't think that much about it at first, but it take me back that I had to think about it and creating this page, it was only about the kids, my role as a teacher and that is why I put some pictures of the kids and myself." (FG3/PP)*

Depicted in Photograph 4.14 below is an example of a practitioner's fake Facebook page.



**Photograph 4.14: Fake Facebook page (T/PP)**

During this study, practitioners could reflect on their practices through the focus group and feedback interviews, as well as through their fake Facebook comments and semi-structured questionnaires. Reflection in practice, reflection after practice and reflection for practice took place during their research experiences (see 3.4.1). Valli (1997:68) states that reflection enables a person to think back on what they have experienced, through contemplation, deliberate thinking and careful consideration of what is important. It means being open to the voices, opinions and advice of others. This study encouraged the practice of reflection through the data collection tools used by me and the practitioners. Through reflection the practitioners developed a new understanding of pre-schoolers, became aware of the influence of their own cultural experiences on their practices, and could make paradigm shifts towards deeper, meaningful teaching and learning.

Furthermore, practitioners indicated that they needed to ask more probing questions to pre-schoolers. This is in line with the discourse of meaning-making which values asking questions such as: "What do we want for our children?" "What is a good childhood?" These findings also concur with the Reggio educational approach and its' pedagogical documentation which assists practitioners and pre-schoolers to think and reflect critically about their life-world experiences (Dahlberg et al., 2013:114). The statements by practitioners that pre-schoolers are unique and diverse resonates with the Framework of Learning for Well-being which highlights the capacities of pre-schoolers (see 2.3.1). At the end of the study practitioners indicated that pre-schoolers should be viewed from a strength and right-based perspective. This viewpoint is supported by the rights-based discourse (see 2.4.1).

## **4.7 SUMMARY**

In this Chapter I presented the results I obtained from my empirical investigation alongside the participants. I discussed the results in terms of five primary themes which emerged, referring to the related sub-themes and categories. Furthermore, I interpreted the findings in terms of the five research questions against the background of existing literature. I referred to findings correlating with and contradicting existing literature. I further highlighted gaps I found when I compared my results with the existing body of knowledge. In Chapter 5 I make recommendations for a training programme framework for practitioners on how to develop pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being, and in so doing answer the final research question.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUMMARY**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous chapter I presented the analysis, interpretations and findings of my study and related the results I obtained concerning the roles practitioners play in developing agency of pre-schoolers through learning for well-being. I also discussed how this study contributes to existing knowledge in terms of the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being in early childhood centres. The objectives in this study (see 1.5) were met by answering all of the six research questions:

- a. How do practitioners' roles manifest in terms of the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being in inner-city early childhood centres?
- b. Which factors have an impact on the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being?
- c. Which knowledge and attitudes do practitioners demonstrate in terms of the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being?
- d. How do practitioners' practices impact the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being?
- e. What indicators are there of pre-schoolers' expression of agency in inner-city early childhood centres?

What recommendations for a training programme framework can be put forward for practitioners to develop pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being in inner-city early childhood centres?

##### **5.1.1 Chapter overviews**

In chapter 1, I presented an overview of the study and explained the rationale for investigating the roles of practitioners in developing pre-schoolers' agency and well-being. I introduced key concepts (such as agency and well-being and my selected frameworks: Learning for Well-being, Reggio educational approach and Indigenous Well-being) which undergird this study. I then presented my research aims and formulated the related research questions, introduced the related post-modern paradigmatic

assumptions, and provided an overview of the research design and methodology. I concluded the chapter by clarifying key concepts in the study.

In Chapter 2, I discussed the related literature on agency, well-being and learning for well-being. I discussed the frameworks, an educational approach and some discourses which informed and steered this study. I explored various roles of practitioners as they manifest in early childhood contexts and how children have been conceptualised in past and present times. I concluded the chapter with a discussion on three learning approaches namely Vygotsky's co-constructivist theory, the tool of pedagogical documentation and the learning for well-being process which can be used to develop agency of pre-schoolers. I concluded Chapter 2 by briefly explaining two perspectives on the environment, namely the inner-city early childhood centre as a forum in civil society and the city as a child-friendly space.

In Chapter 3, I presented the methodological design which is participatory action research and discussed the meta-theoretical paradigms. I explained the selection of the research sites, that is three inner-city early childhood centres in Great Tshwane, and how I used convenience sampling to select the participants. The data collection process and the analysis procedure were discussed. I explained the data collection tools which I chose for the purpose of my study and concluded the chapter by discussing how I aimed to maintain rigour and adhered to the ethical standards required for this study.

Chapter 4 contained the analysis, interpretations and findings of my results which were presented according to themes, sub-themes and categories derived from the collected data. The main themes were: relationship between practitioners and pre-schoolers; knowledge and attitudes of practitioners about pre-schoolers; factors which have an impact on the development of pre-schoolers' agency; pre-schoolers' expressions of agency; and improvement of practice. My explanation of the themes, sub-themes and categories were enriched by verbatim quotations collected from transcribed conversations, interviews and focus group interviews. In addition, I used excerpts from my research journal, practitioners' open-ended questionnaires and fake Facebook page comments, and photographs of the art projects to support my findings.

## **5.2 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Various findings were made during the participatory action research study, which are supported in literature and also empirically.

### 5.2.1 Findings from the literature

The Framework of Learning for Well-being, the Reggio educational approach and the Framework for Indigenous Well-being (see 2.3.1, 2.3.2 and 2.3.3) conceptualised pre-schoolers as agents of their own well-being who need to develop holistically. These frameworks and educational approach underscored the reciprocal, loving and caring relationships which pre-schoolers need to have with practitioners in order to enable them to influence their own lives and to express themselves within their environments (e.g. families, schools, community and society). They are based on the perspective that learning takes place through co-constructivist approaches, which implies relational collaboration and partnership between pre-schoolers and practitioners. Within these frameworks and educational approach pre-schoolers are understood to be part of the environment (e.g. family, school, community or society) (2.6.2.4). Pre-schoolers are conceptualised as being capable of agency within their learning environments (e.g. expressing their opinions about people, things they see and spaces they experience) towards their well-being, those of others and the environment.

Referring back to Lundy's child participation model (see figure 2.2), the early childhood environment provides a conducive space to in which pre-schoolers can express agency in participation with practitioners. This model should be further explored in the context of early childhood education and can be included in training of practitioners to develop pre-schoolers agency.

Findings from this study that pre-schoolers can express agency are further supported by research done through the BRIC pilot project: Childhood, public spaces and democracy (November 2013 to February 2014) which involved the democratic engagement of young children in public spaces in their communities in England, Italy and Sweden (BRIC PROJECT 2017). My study supports research done in terms of the engagement of young children in public spaces and how it can be developed in early childhood contexts. It provides an African perspective to research done in European contexts.

In terms of various discourses in early childhood education, findings from my study are framed within the discourse of rights and meaning-making (see 2.4.1 and 2.4.2). Pre-schoolers have a right to be heard, express themselves and act upon their agency according to their age, development and experiences (Dahlberg et al., 2013:51) (see 2.6.2.2 and 2.6.2.3). In terms of the African notion of ubuntu pre-schoolers are perceived



as being capable, curious, autonomous and secure beings (Penn, 2009:53) (see 2.6.2.4) and who show empathy towards others.

Rinaldi (2012:234) confirms that practitioners need to listen to the voice of pre-schoolers in order to remove them from anonymity, to legitimise them and to make their thinking visible. According to Rinaldi, listening is the basis for any learning relationship and involves action and reflection (see 2.5.1). The role of practitioners should thus be one of listener to the voice of pre-schoolers so that pre-schoolers' agency is supported and their well-being enhanced. Hua (2012:62) warns against a lecturing practice which can be oppressive for pre-schoolers and inhibit their expressiveness. O'Toole (2014:31) confirms that practitioners should strengthen core capacities of children such as listening, reflection, empathy and critical thinking in order to contribute to their well-being (see 2.5.2). Research by Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2003:432–433) emphasises an African traditional approach to learning which fosters pre-schoolers' agency in their communities (2.5.3).

James and Prout (1990:8) state that children are not just passive bystanders of social structures and processes but can be envisioned as constructors of their own lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. They thus have agency and can contribute towards their own well-being through learning for well-being. This post-modern paradigmatic shift around children (also pre-schoolers) from being empty vessels who need to be filled with expertly derived knowledge (see 2.6.1.3) to strong and capable beings able to determine their own lives (see 2.6.2.2) according to their age and development is confirmed by studies done by Skovdal et al., (2009:587), as well as Emberly and Davhula (2016:439) (see 2.1.1.1). Kickbusch et al., (2012:32) confirms the strengths and inner differences of children and encourages the cultivation of children's assets, beliefs, morals, behaviours and capacities. O'Toole and Kropf (2013:42) confirm that pre-schoolers are active in contributing to their own well-being, that of others, and society at large.

Laevers (1999:4) states that when we want to discover how well children are doing in an educational setting we have to explore the degree to which: they feel at ease and can be spontaneous; their physical needs are met; they experience tenderness and affection; they are safe and are recognised; they feel competent and experience meaning and moral value. In terms of Laevers' statement, I claim that agency plays a pivotal role in securing pre-schoolers' well-being in that – to be agents – they have to be involved, be

recognised, be seen as competent, and be meaningful and valuable within their relationships and learning environments.

Various learning approaches contribute to the development of agency (see 2.7, 2.7.2 and 2.7.3) because they frame the reciprocal relationship of teaching and learning which should occur between practitioners and pre-schoolers if agency and well-being is to develop. These approaches can inform practitioners' roles and practice in terms of the development of pre-schoolers' agency and well-being. Vygotsky's theory is based on the co-constructivist learning partnership between pre-schoolers and practitioners. The tool of pedagogical documentation makes pre-schoolers' thinking visible when practitioners document what pre-schoolers are saying and doing through their projects. The learning for well-being process highlights how practitioners and pre-schoolers influence each other's life worlds and how they express themselves within it and thus contribute to meaningful learning and well-being. Upon conclusion of this study, I also refer to the ten action points developed by Laevers (2011:53) that can be used as a way to raise the levels of well-being of pre-schoolers. He mentions that we should observe children; discover their interests and find activities that satisfy these interests; continuously support stimulating learning experiences and enriching interventions; provide them with initiatives of free expression and support them with sound rules and agreements; explore the relations of children with adults and peers and try to improve them; and introduce activities which help children explore their behaviour, feelings and values.

The early childhood context should provide opportunities for their agency and well-being to develop. When pre-schoolers are afforded an opportunity to make their wishes, desires and needs about their environments understood as democratic public spaces, cities can become child-friendly spaces (UNICEF 2009) (see 2.8.2). The development of their agency then creates opportunities for pre-schoolers to take part in democratic engagement with adults (e.g. practitioners, parents, community) in respect of their environments, as is also evident in the mentioned BRIC project ([www.bricproject.org](http://www.bricproject.org)).

Furthermore, Laevers (2005:8), in his research on deep-level learning and the experiential approach to early childhood education, mentions that involvement is a key indicator of the quality of the learning process. When children are involved in what they do, it leads to positive energy and synergy, enthusiastic responses from them, and is very empowering and satisfactory for both the child and the practitioner.

The above-mentioned findings in the literature confirm my argument that when pre-schoolers express agency through being involved in projects and activities, being listened to by practitioners and provided with the opportunity to share their ideas and opinions, they can contribute towards their own well-being, that of others, and the environment. Practitioners play a pivotal role through establishing caring and nurturing relationships with pre-schoolers and providing stimulating and participatory learning environments in order for them to express agency. Declercq (2011:76) state that, for teacher development, empowerment and satisfaction, well-being and involvement in early childhood contexts are valuable. When this is measured, immediate feedback is given about the quality of what takes place in the learning environments. I recommend that further research be done on agency understood as a process variable in early childhood contexts and its link to well-being and involvement.

### **5.2.2 Empirical findings**

During the participatory action research study, various empirical findings were made that led to the objectives being met. The contributions made by the practitioners, pre-schoolers and me were collected in the field of early childhood contexts. The empirical findings were made by answering the six research questions as shown in the following headings.

#### *5.2.2.1 Roles of practitioners in developing pre-schoolers' agency and well-being*

This study revealed that practitioners perform multiple roles in the inner-city early childhood centre and value love and care of pre-schoolers, but their roles are predominantly characterised by teaching new knowledge, disregarding pre-schoolers' agency and well-being. Elaborating on this aspect of love and care, practitioners commented that they are "everything to the child" and that they have to show pre-schoolers love and care. One practitioner explained that she has to lay a firm foundation for pre-schoolers to learn and to protect them, to supervise them, to build their confidence and to listen to them and to respect and guide them. Another practitioner described her role as a counsellor and yet another commented that one of her roles is to provide them with food. Practitioners' descriptions of their roles provided evidence that they understood that their roles were characterised by having loving and caring relationships with the

children. Findings about what they said about their roles suggested that they understood their roles as multitasking. During my observations of the circle time discussions, I did find that they were caring, but I found greater evidence of a lecturing approach where the practitioners did most of the talking and the pre-schoolers were expected to be quiet. I observed that they had to raise their hands when they wanted to say something and were not very spontaneous in their contributions. Pre-schoolers were mostly silenced and spoke when asked to do so.

In terms of listening, findings from interviews with practitioners suggested that they had different opinions about listening. One practitioner said that listening and hearing are not the same. Another explained that listening is when pre-schoolers listen without interruption and are able to answer questions posed to them. Practitioners understood the value of listening but, during my observations of circle time discussions, I found limited evidence of practitioners listening to the voice of pre-schoolers. To me, the focus seemed to be on teaching curriculum content (such as shapes, days of the week, numbers) and not on offering an opportunity to hear the views of pre-schoolers regarding the learning content.

Data collected through conversations with pre-schoolers further supported my findings that the relationship between them and practitioners was characterised by power imbalances which often can exist between adults and young children and disciplinary approaches by practitioners in early learning environments, even though the pre-schoolers described their school as a happy place. During my conversations with pre-schoolers they explained that the school was a happy place where they worked, played, did art and received food. However, findings from the conversations also indicated that they did not like it when practitioners beat them or fought with them. Pre-schoolers also explained that they did work and homework, which indicated to me a predominant focus on work and performance.

Findings thus indicate that practitioners see their roles as multitasking. Listening has various meanings for them and is equated to obedience. From my circle time observations I found the roles which practitioners performed indicated that of lecturing new knowledge or strengthening knowledge through a rote learning methodology (e.g. chanting numbers, shapes and letters during circle times). These findings proved to me that agency and well-being of pre-schoolers were not developed through the roles of

practitioners during circle time discussions. However, as the practitioners began to use the tool of pedagogical documentation, they indicated during my interviews with them and through their reflections on their fake Facebook pages and open-ended questionnaires that their perception of themselves as lecturers had changed to that of being open to hearing what pre-schoolers had to say and asking probing and more meaningful questions. They explained that their requirement of pre-schoolers had shifted from that of obedience to sharing their perspectives.

#### *5.2.2.2 Factors which impact the development of pre-schoolers' agency*

I found during my interviews with practitioners, conversations with pre-schoolers and observations of circle time discussions that a rote learning methodology, a predominant focus on work and performance, practitioners' power over pre-schoolers, and emphasis on pre-schoolers' obedience had restricted pre-schoolers from expressing their perspectives, ideas and theories. During my interviews with practitioners they indicated that school was a happy place for pre-schoolers but that they as practitioners had to get through the prescribed work and that they were afraid of parents' criticisms that their children might fail. They mentioned time constraints as an inhibiting factor in allowing pre-schoolers to have time to share their voices. During my circle time observations I found that in many instances the circle time discussions were very long, with practitioners doing most of the talking. Most of the content presented during circle time discussions focuses on the CAPS curriculum content (e.g. themes, numbers, days of the week, seasons). There was evidence of chanting, all clapping hands together, performing together. I observed that words often used were 'finish up', 'homework' and 'do your work'. Furthermore, during my conversations with pre-schoolers they talked about concepts of 'work' and 'homework' which indicated to me a predominant focus on 'working' rather than freedom of play and expression. The factors which thus restricted the development of agency and well-being were the methodology of rote learning, a predominant focus on work and performance, restrictive circle time discussions characterised by obedience, discipline and time layout.

#### *5.2.2.3 Knowledge and attitudes which practitioners demonstrated in terms of the development of pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being?*

Findings from the interviews, fake Facebook pages and open-ended questionnaires indicated that the knowledge and attitudes of practitioners about pre-schoolers were informed by their own cultural upbringing and their own conceptualisations of pre-schoolers as rights-bearers and researchers, who were innocent and diverse. Practitioners explained that the way they grew up was characterised by obedience and power relations with adults. The parental approach applied as they grew up was more autocratic and domineering. They were often not given a choice about what they could do, but had to obey their parents. One practitioner in my interview said: "*When we were young we were disciplined and smacked a lot.*" Another used the word "force". During my interviews with the practitioners the issue of children's rights came up and they stated that children have many rights which give them liberties. Upon reflection, I considered that practitioners may be fearful that if they give pre-schoolers too much scope to share their perspectives, the classroom would become unruly and they would not get through all the work.

However, apart from their explanation that pre-schoolers have rights, they did describe them as explorers and researchers, who were curious, vocal and questioning. In terms of their explanation of their concept of innocence of pre-schoolers, they stated that pre-schoolers cannot be held accountable for things which happen beyond their control. One practitioner coupled innocence with being kind and not holding grudges. From the interviews I held with them I found that their own upbringing and their new-found understanding of pre-schoolers gained through their experience of teaching them informed them how they conceptualised them. As the research developed and they became more involved with the pre-schoolers through documenting their art projects, they began to understand that pre-schoolers were diverse, had things to say and were able to contribute towards their own well-being, as revealed in the final interviews I held with them.

#### *5.2.2.4 The capability of pre-schoolers to express agency*

During my conversations with pre-schoolers and through documenting pre-schoolers' perspectives about their art projects, I found expressions of agency. Pre-schoolers talked about their experiences of their school and the city as happy places, beautiful places, social places and places where they obtained food to eat. They talked about how they cared for their families at home or helped their teacher. They explained how they would

help the people in the city. They were able to share their theories about their understanding of their environment and describe aspects of nature and space which interested them. They were also able to talk about their impression of the previous president of the country and fearful and unfortunate things such as thieves, guns and the beggars. Furthermore, their drawings of their school, route maps and statues, and their perspectives of them, provided evidence of their agency. I thus confirm my initial argument throughout this study that pre-schoolers could talk about matters which concerned them or interested them and act upon their agency by doing something about their concerns. During my conversations with them and documentation of their projects, I discovered further that they had aesthetic awareness of nature and beauty. These aspects provided evidence that pre-schoolers had agency and wanted to contribute to their own well-being, that of others and the environment. Furthermore, during the last project of documentation, 'What I can change!' project, they acted upon their agency by planning, making and implementing projects of change (e.g. the posters, the painted box representing their school, and the Lego construction of a new city).

#### *5.2.2.5 Empowering practitioners to transform their practices in developing pre-schoolers' agency and well-being through learning for well-being*

Findings from the interviews I had with practitioners indicated that they became aware of the value of having more of a participatory relationship with pre-schoolers, characterised by listening to what they have to say, providing them with opportunities to share their voice and asking them more meaningful questions. Practitioners commented on the value of documentation in terms of enabling them to look at pre-schoolers' capabilities through a new lens – the lens of pedagogical documentation. They explained that they saw them differently; that they realised that they must not be the only one that does all the talking; that they should teach in such a way that pre-schoolers' thinking becomes visible; and that they can learn from pre-schoolers. These transforming and emancipatory perspectives confirmed to me the value of action research and using the tool of pedagogical documentation.

During my interviews with practitioners they mentioned challenges they faced in using technology, while documenting the pre-schoolers' projects. Findings from their feedback provide evidence that they need training on the use of technology and that technology such as cameras and recorders should be available. Further challenges were time

constraints. I suggest that the predominant focus on getting through the CAPS curriculum be reassessed. There should be further research in the value of pedagogical documentation used in conjunction with the CAPS curriculum and assessment policy. Findings from the interviews with practitioners on the value of making their own fake Facebook pages and using the tool of pedagogical documentation suggest that they found both tools valuable for reflection and creativity. I thus conclude that practitioners should be trained in the use of pedagogical documentation and the value of reflecting on themselves and their practice. The models of Lansdown and Shier (see 2.2.1.2) can inform the development of reflective practice. By providing practitioners with activities such as making their own fake Facebook pages or projects of documentation, or encouraging them to keep a self-reflective journal can develop their skill of reflection.

#### *5.2.2.6 Recommendations towards developing pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being in inner-city early childhood centres - A training program framework for practitioners*

On concluding the research, when practitioners reflected upon their practice; discussed what they discovered with each other and with me during the focus group interviews; participated with pre-schoolers in documenting some of the art projects; planned, made and implemented their final art project 'What I can change!', I discovered that they needed training on how to listen to the voice of pre-schoolers and how to teach in such a way that their practices develop agency. Such training could enable them through self-reflection to deconstruct their culturally informed or self-determined concepts of pre-schoolers. They could become more open to the capabilities of pre-schoolers to act as agents of their own well-being by using the pedagogical tool of documentation.

Upon conclusion of this study and in answering the primary research question I found that practitioners' roles manifest in a myriad of ways that impact the development of pre-schoolers' agency in learning for well-being in inner-city early childhood centres (ICECCs). Factors such as their relationships with pre-schoolers, their knowledge of and attitudes towards pre-schoolers, their teaching methods used and their practices further inform ways in which pre-schoolers' make their opinions, ideas and perspectives known and act upon them towards contributing to their own well-being, those of others and the environment. This study succeeded in unpacking the various ways in which practitioners' roles manifest in inner-city early childhood centres (ICECCs) in terms of the development of pre-schoolers' agency.



Having answered the research questions, I claim that findings from this study proved to me that pre-schoolers do have the capability to express agency and that a pedagogy of listening is a valuable approach to enhance pre-schoolers' capabilities to act as agents. Furthermore, the tool of pedagogical documentation can make agency become more visible in inner-city early childhood centres through participatory action-based projects. Subsequently, the Framework of Learning for Well-being, the Reggio educational approach and the Framework of Indigenous Well-being can inform the development of pre-schoolers' agency in inner-city early childhood centres. I thus propose that practitioners need to be trained on how to develop pre-schoolers' agency through a learning for well-being process approach in early childhood contexts.

### 5.3 A TRAINING PROGRAMME FRAMEWORK FOR PRACTITIONERS

In order to answer the sixth and final research question: *What recommendations for a training programme framework can be put forward for practitioners to develop pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being in inner-city early childhood centres?* I present the following recommendations that should inform a training programme for practitioners to develop pre-schoolers' agency and well-being presented by teacher training institutions.

Such a framework consists of the following recommendations:

- A new theme in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS).
- A module for a certificate or diploma in Grade R teaching for students in early childhood education.
- Topics for research for researchers and students in terms of pre-schoolers' agency.
- A one-day workshop for practitioners on developing pre-schoolers' agency during circle time discussion.
- A Child Rights conference for children (*all ages*), adults, including early childhood practitioners.

#### 5.3.1 Recommendation 1: A new theme in the CAPS curriculum - Children's agency

The National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (Republic of South Africa, 2011) dictates that the Life skills curriculum includes the following themes:

- Knowledge of self
- Creative arts
- Physical education
- Personal and social development which include well-being

I recommend that a further theme be added in the CAPS curriculum namely Children's agency which can be linked to each of the four above-mentioned areas. This recommendation can be considered by programme developers and policy makers.

### **5.3.2 Recommendation 2: A module for a certificate or diploma in Grade R teaching for students in early childhood education**

I propose that a module can be added to the certificate or diploma in Grade R teaching which enables practitioners/students studying early childhood education to gain knowledge, practical experience and competency to develop pre-schoolers' agency in early childhood centres.

#### *5.3.2.1 The purpose of the module*

This module deals with the development of pre-schoolers' agency. Any discussion of agency includes numerous aspects such as pre-schoolers' social development and well-being, knowledge about their human rights, the importance of their relationships with others, their capacity to participate and act as agents of their own well-being, that of others and the environment. This module will equip qualifying students (full-time, part-time or in-service) with knowledge, skills and values related to the development of pre-schoolers' agency. This module can be added onto any early childhood education programme (e.g. Grade R diploma or a certificate in Early Childhood education). Its content links to modules such as History of Education, Sociology of Education, Life Skills: Personal and Social Well-being, and Psychology of Education and Work Integrated Learning (WIL).

#### *5.3.2.2 Outcomes of the module*

The outcomes of the module will enable qualifying students to deepen their knowledge and understanding of how to effectively nurture their relationships with pre-schoolers, parents, caregivers, families and various other stakeholders in the Grade R environment. They will be able to develop values and skills based on a pedagogy of listening, how to communicate effectively, take part in decision-making, and negotiation needed to establish effective partnerships in diverse Grade R contexts. They will be equipped through the practice of self-reflection to critically analyse how their perspectives, biases and cultural influences inform their relationships with multiple stakeholders. Furthermore, they will develop an understanding of their responsibility to young children and to their communities, which entails knowledge about children's rights to citizenship. Qualifying students will apply their knowledge in how to support pre-schoolers in knowing about their rights and acting upon them through developing pre-schoolers' agency, and through initiatives, projects and activities in diverse Grade R teaching and learning contexts. They

will be encouraged to envision early childhood contexts through a lens of agency, democracy and well-being.

Finally, they will be introduced to the methodology of pedagogical documentation in order to make pre-schoolers' agency visible through various projects, activities and initiatives in diverse Grade R contexts. They will learn how to use it in their classrooms as a tool for assessment and documentation of pre-schoolers' thoughts, perspectives and theories. They will be encouraged to reflect on their roles as teachers and researchers of their own practices through learning about the value and the skills of self-reflection.

### *5.3.2.3 A brief description of the topics of the module*

## **TOPIC 1: LEARNING FOR WELL-BEING**

### **Theme 1: The holistic development of the pre-schooler**

- Pre-schoolers' physical development
- Pre-schoolers' emotional development
- Pre-schoolers' cognitive development
- Pre-schoolers' social development
- Pre-schoolers' spiritual development

### **Theme 2: Children's rights and well-being**

- The definition of rights, agency and well-being
- Various policies, models and practices on children's rights
- Frameworks of rights and learning for well-being

### **Theme 3: Cultivating core capacities through learning for well-being**

- Various core capacities
- Implementing core capacities in early learning contexts
- The value of mindfulness in early childhood contexts
- Methods of mindfulness practice
- The value of self-reflection
- Compiling a self-reflective journal

## TOPIC 2: THE PRACTICE OF PARTICIPATION

### Theme 1: Agency or voice of pre-schoolers

- Definitions of voice and agency in early childhood education
- Various Western and African conceptualisations of children
- Developmental principles and processes of young children's agency
- Frameworks of agency
- Pre-schoolers as agents of their own socialisation and developmental learning
- Pre-schoolers' views on their early childhood settings
- Questions to ask yourself as practitioner in terms of children's voice and its meaning to you

### Theme 2: The concept and principles of participation

- Forms of children's participation in South Africa
- Principles of democratic participation
- Models of participation
  - Lansdown's model of participation
  - Shier's pathways to participation
- Participation through play
- Platforms of participation
- Practical examples of young children's participation
- Strategies to enhance young children's participation through multimodal pedagogies (e.g. art, dance, music, drama)

### Theme 3: Pre-schoolers and their rights

- The concept, development and importance of human rights
- Children's rights and their application in terms of the pre-schooler
- Children-focused human rights acts, policies and platforms
- Applying children's rights in the Grade R phase through participatory initiatives, projects and activities

## **TOPIC 3: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CONTEXTS**

### **Theme 1: A pedagogy of listening**

- The Reggio educational approach to early childhood education
- The pedagogy of listening
- Self-reflection
- The value of listening in early childhood education
- Various roles of the early childhood practitioner regarding listening to pre-schoolers in early childhood environments
- Skills on how to listen to young children in early childhood environments
- Various questions to ask yourself as practitioner in terms of listening to pre-schoolers
- Questions to ask yourself as practitioner in terms of power imbalances in your practice

### **Theme 2: Diverse approaches to early childhood contexts**

- The influence of diverse contexts (urban, rural, refugee contexts) on the establishment of partnerships with parents, families and communities
- The early childhood centre as a forum in public society
  - An example from Reggio Emilia, Italy
- Various discourses in early childhood education
  - Modernism
  - Postmodernism
  - Africanism
- Childhood environments as child-friendly spaces
  - A brief history of child-friendly spaces
  - Practical guidelines for designing child-friendly spaces in the early childhood centre or classroom
  - Questions to ask yourself as practitioner in terms of place (environments)
  - Questions to ask yourself as practitioner in terms of inclusivity

## **TOPIC 4: THE METHODOLOGY OF PEDAGOGICAL DOCUMENTATION**

### **Theme 1: Pedagogical documentation**

- The Reggio educational approach to pedagogical documentation
- The concept of pedagogical documentation
- The value of pedagogical documentation
- The characteristics of pedagogical documentation
- The process of pedagogical documentation
- Pedagogical documentation as an alternative to assessment in pre-school

### **Theme 2: Implementing pedagogical documentation**

- Ways to capture pre-schoolers' thinking
- Important questions to ask pre-schoolers
- Using technology (e.g. recorders, cameras, video recordings)
- Planning, making and implementing a project of pedagogical documentation in a pre-school classroom through multimodal pedagogies

### **Theme 3: Pedagogical documentation as a research tool**

- Practitioners as researchers of their practices
- Ethics and doing research with young children
- Using PAR as a research methodology in pre-school
- The value and skill of self-reflection in practice

#### **5.3.3 Recommendation 3: Topics for research for researchers and students in terms of pre-schoolers' agency**

Students studying in the field of early childhood education can research the following topics:

##### *5.3.3.1 Research into a participatory action research methodology which uses the tool of pedagogical documentation*

Researchers can use the tool of pedagogical documentation as a data-gathering tool in early childhood research. This methodology will make the voice of pre-schoolers in terms

of their thinking and learning more evident. The way various multimedia technologies are used in early childhood contexts can further be explored in terms of gathering data.

See Appendix 20 for examples of PowerPoint slides to inform the implementation of pedagogical documentation as a research tool by researchers in early childhood contexts. These slides can be used during reconnaissance workshops prior to data collection.

#### *5.3.3.2 Research into practitioners' or parents' attitudes and understanding about the value of listening to young children*

The concept of listening can be further explored by researchers in early childhood contexts (e.g. how do practitioners or parents listen to young children's perspectives, ideas or theories?) by asking various questions:

- How is listening to young children manifested in early childhood environments?
- What do practitioners understand about listening to young children in early childhood contexts?
- How does culture impact listening to young children in early childhood contexts?
- What factors impact the pedagogy of listening in early childhood contexts?
- How is silence listened to?
- Do practitioners value some voices more than others?
- Do we as adults marginalise some voices?

#### *5.3.3.3 Research into pre-schoolers' aesthetic awareness, their theories about the environment and engagement with intimate (pre-school) or public (e.g. city) spaces*

Researchers can investigate what pre-schoolers see in their environments such as public spaces, home or school environments by asking the following research questions:

- How do pre-schoolers view various places or spaces in their pre-school or surrounding areas? (e.g. the pre-school playground, the park near the pre-school, the street in which the pre-school is situated)?
- What stories do pre-schoolers tell of their familiar environments?
- How does the community contribute to making pre-schoolers' engagement with the environment possible?



- How do practitioners make the environment of the pre-school (outside or inside) a place of experimentation and exploration for pre-schoolers?
- How is pre-schoolers' well-being through agency promoted in the early childhood classroom?
- How does space or place influence the expression of agency?
- How do practitioners support aesthetic expression and creativity?
- How do practitioners allow for the unexpected to happen in the classroom?

#### 5.3.3.4 *Research into practitioners' professional development*

In this study practitioners commented on the pressure they were under to get through the curriculum. They mentioned parental opinions, time constraints and the necessity to teach knowledge to pre-schoolers. These factors impacted the development of pre-schoolers' agency. In terms of practitioners' professional development, various related topics can be researched:

- How do practitioners feel about the impact of the CAPS curriculum on their teaching practice?
- How do practitioners assess pre-schoolers and evaluate their learning?
- How is the partnership between parents and practitioners manifested in early childhood contexts?
- What are pre-school practitioners' beliefs and self-perception about professionalism and well-being?
- How do pre-school practitioners understand children's human rights and how is their understanding manifested in their teaching?

#### **5.3.4 Recommendation 4: A one-day workshop for practitioners on developing pre-schoolers' agency during circle time discussion**

A workshop can be facilitated by researchers or trainers in the field of early childhood education to practitioners on ways to conduct circle time discussions. The following ways in which circle times can be conducted can be discussed: Practitioners sit on a big bounce ball in the middle of the circle and turn around frequently so that all pre-schoolers can see her. Practitioners can also do circle time discussions outside under a tree on a large blanket. Circle time discussions can involve less rote learning and greater participation of pre-schoolers by allowing them to choose the activities or themes that they would like to explore in greater depth. Practitioners can do role play

exercises based on the Reggio educational approach to listening (see Table 2.3) and indicate how they will engage pre-schoolers during circle time discussions, how they will listen to them or ask them questions. The models referred to in this study (see 2.2.1.2) can be used as a guideline towards developing practitioners' knowledge and expertise in order to develop pre-schoolers' agency.

#### 5.3.4.1 *Examples of circle time activities*

Examples of circle time activities can be provided in the training manual such as:

- Putting a basket in the middle of the circle with objects in it that encourage pre-schoolers to talk about the environment (e.g. objects from the kitchen of the pre-school, pictures of shops in the city, objects from nature).
- Asking questions to pre-schoolers about what they like or don't like in their environment.
- Taking pre-schoolers into public spaces (a pavement, a city park, a shopping mall) and then discussing with them during circle times what they had seen.
- Making recordings of various sounds in the environment and discussing these sounds with pre-schoolers during circle times.

These examples can be used for discussion and practical learning.

#### **5.3.5 Recommendation 5: A Child Rights Conference for children (*all ages*) and adults, including early childhood practitioners**

I advocate for a conference to be held annually to enable adults, young people and children to come together and engage with one another around a specific theme in order to create change. Such a proposed conference can be facilitated by a conference committee and attended by children (aged 5 to 18 years), parents, practitioners, community members, NGO's and government officials on an annual basis. I was inspired by the conference model for Children as Actors Transforming Society (CATS) Conference in Caux, Switzerland in 2017. The following example can be used by conference planners as an outline of the content included in a conference pamphlet or booklet. I propose that such an annual conference attended by multiple stakeholders,


children and adults, including early childhood practitioners can enhance the development of pre-schoolers' agency in early childhood contexts.

#### 5.3.5.1 *Example of an outline for a Child Rights conference pamphlet/booklet.*

When participants attend a conference of child rights in which children can express agency they would need a pamphlet or booklet to explain to them the events taking place.

An program outline for a Child Rights conference is illustrated below:

## SOUTH AFRICA



This Child Right conference is where children and adults together can work on ways in which children's agency can be expressed and they can have a say in decisions that affect their well-being locally and globally.

**Programme outline:**

- General presentation of a Child Rights Conference
- The theme of the conference (new theme chosen annually and inspired by relevant global events such as inclusivity or violence in the world).
- The place of the conference / brief history, map, photographs
- A team: The executive team / the core team / a facilitation team
- The Little one's team - adult facilitators for children (ages 2 to 6 years)
- Meet the team (photographs and profiles)
- Main speakers of the conference
- Outline of the conference program

**Conference activities:**

➤ **Activity 1:** Discussion times (where adults, young people and children come together to listen to each other, share ideas and get to know one another; and a human library activity (where children and adults 'become books' and share

stories from their own lives about making a difference to their own lives, the lives of others, and the environment)

- **Activity 2:** Learning times (workshops where adults, young people and children learn about, experience and explore the theme of the conference together through various activities (e.g. art projects, storytelling, book readings, dramatic presentations))
- **Activity 3:** Play times (outdoor or indoor games and activities shared by adults, young people and children around the theme). Such participatory activities can enhance the relationship between adults and children and make children feel more confident to express their ideas and perspectives.
- **Activity 4:** Discovery times (e.g. a field trip where all conference attendees visit places of significance related to the theme of the conference or explore the environment where the conference is held). An example can be visiting various statues in the city or town and talking about their significance during the conference.
- **Activity 5:** Reflection times and evening programme (e.g. mindfulness activities, listening to music, meditation time). Such activities can lead to children's aesthetic appreciation of the environment, empathy towards others and inner awareness and consciousness development.

#### **The conference daily newsletter:**

A daily newsletter summarising the daily events of the conference based on the concepts of How did we engage? / What was reinforced? / How were we inspired? / What did we share? Such a newsletter can provide rich data for research and feedback of the experience of children and adults during the conference.

#### **The 90-day IMPACT**

The 90-day IMPACT is a project during which all conference attendees plan projects of change to enhance well-being in their school or community. At the end the conference all participants form groups and decide on a project that they want to implement over a 90-day period after the conference that brings about transformation and impactful change in their homes, schools or communities.

An example is to set up a 'kindness voice box' in the pre-school into which pre-schoolers can post drawings for friends. Another example is to install a buddy bench in the school grounds for someone who feels lonely. This buddy bench then encourages other children to go and sit next to the child who is lonely.

### Figure 5.1 A program outline for a Child Rights conference

A purpose of the conference is to provide children a space to express agency from a child rights perspective and to further provide data for research that can inform policies and practice. The conference will provide multiple opportunities for adults, young people and children to make their voice heard through collaboration, dialogue and democratic engagement. An objective of the conference is to contribute to the development of pre-schoolers' agency and well-being in early childhood contexts.

#### 5.4. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

I experienced various limitations to this study. One limitation was the work pressure of the practitioners and the lack of assistants to help them when I needed their attention to do some of the data collection. I addressed this challenge by informing them ahead of time via cell phone text messaging that I would be visiting them so that they could be prepared to spend time with me. I continually asked for input about their availability and time constraints so as not to inconvenience them.

Another challenge was to get the three practitioners together for the focus group interviews as they did not all work at the same centre. I also addressed this by asking them when and where it would be convenient to meet. I offered to transport them to an agreed location for the focus group interviews. Documenting work by recording what the pre-schoolers said also posed a challenge. The centres did not have their own digital recorders which made it difficult for practitioners to do recordings after I had left the research site. Time constraints were also an issue as the practitioners could not record and watch over the rest of the class who were not involved in the documentation. I thus ended up doing most of the recordings.

Another challenge was language barriers of pre-schoolers. One of my criteria for participation was that participants should be able to understand and speak English. The fact that English was not their mother tongue presented communication difficulties. Pre-schoolers did not always understand what I asked them and I often had to rephrase my questions or ask them if I had understood them correctly. The same applied to questions asked to the practitioners as English was their second language. Furthermore, as a result of pre-schoolers' ages (5 and 6 years), their attention span was limited and I had to be flexible in my approach towards them. I needed to keep their attention by making the questions and activities interesting. I did this by using various voice tones and facial

expressions and by employing a variety of materials such as clay and pictures and by active engagement like doing art activities. I was also not familiar to them initially, so I had to spend a prolonged time in the field to build a rapport with them.

Another limitation was sample size. I began my data collection with twelve pre-schoolers, but in the first two weeks in the field four of the pre-schoolers had left the centres. For this reason I ended up with only nine pre-schoolers. A larger number of participants would have provided more data to show absence or presence of agency. At the end of the data collection period when I wanted to conduct a final interview with all three practitioners, one practitioner had left the centre. I therefore could not do a final interview with her. This was not an insurmountable challenge, however, as I had collected a vast amount of data prior to her leaving. The nine pre-schoolers were able to provide me with adequate information to answer the related research questions.

The findings of the study are limited as they cannot be generalised to other contexts and participants. The co-constructivist lens used led to hearing the unique and diverse perspectives and viewpoints of each research participant in each specific centre. In my effort to present their views accurately, I did member checking during the focus group interviews and final interviews with each practitioner. As a result of time constraints and because this focus was not on researching agency of pre-schoolers per se, but rather on the roles of practitioners in terms of developing pre-schoolers' agency, I did not hold final focus group interviews with the pre-schoolers on their experience of the research project. I see this as a limitation, however, because it would have added richness to the findings and conclusions. It could further have shed light on pre-schoolers' perspectives on their agency and well-being. It would have been informative if they had provided feedback on how they experienced planning and making and implementing their art projects. The final project, "What I can change!", was not implemented on a large scale, but it would have supported my argument that pre-schoolers can make a valuable contribution towards their well-being if their projects could have been taken further (e.g. planning, designing and installing a large banner in the city that expresses the change they are calling for).

Another challenge was the fact that I entered the research field as a researcher from academia. It was important for me to not come from a position of being an expert and making the practitioners feel that I have all the knowledge. I thus assured them that I was a co-researcher along with them and that there would be no correct or wrong answers – everyone's voice was valid and important. I thus gave ample time during the focus group interviews for all to speak and I made sure that I listened carefully to what they said

without interrupting. I relied on my reflections in my research journal to make sure that I had heard what they said and observed without bias.

Collecting and analysing the data was a further challenge as a result of the large amount of data collected. I allowed myself ample time to do the data analysis by spending 10 days secluded from my home environment where I could work undisturbed. Finally, in ensuring that the findings captured what the participants had said, I did member-checking, reflected back to the participants what I had heard and did frequent checking with my supervisor that I was on the right track.

## **5.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In conducting my study, I gained insight into several issues related to the development of pre-schoolers' agency in inner-city early childhood centres. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) has put children's participation and subsequent agency on the global agenda. The paradigm shift of viewing pre-schoolers as agents of change added impetus to my study. The findings of my study revealed that practitioners' roles, their relationship with pre-schoolers and their practice will not serve to enhance the development of pre-schoolers' agency if practitioners are not provided with support and training on how to develop agency in their classrooms and beyond its walls. As such, the negative effects of autocratic power relations, a lecturing methodology with its focus on rote learning, and misunderstandings of pre-schoolers' agency can be reduced if training is provided to practitioners of early learning centres. Therefore proper efforts should be made to provide the necessary knowledge, skills and expertise for all stakeholders to support pre-schoolers in becoming agents of change in their homes, early childhood centres, communities and society in general. It should be a national and international endeavour that pre-schoolers' agency and well-being should be developed according to their human rights. This study has provided evidence that pre-schoolers can actively participate in their environments by sharing their ideas, opinions and theories which can create change. It has further provided evidence that practitioners and pre-schoolers can actively collaborate and work together to create change in various teaching and learning contexts.

Embarking on this study has taught me to deconstruct my own Western perspectives and also embrace African perspectives, and thus become a more open-minded researcher. I deconstructed my perception that quality in early childhood education should only be viewed from a structural and outcomes-based perspective. I now accept that it should be seen as a process of meaning-making, agency and transformation. The framework of

indigenous well-being further informed my paradigm shift towards the importance of having a holistic perspective on pre-schoolers and their engagement with the environment. I have been enriched by the relationships that I formed with the participants from a different culture to my own. This study has taught me to think creatively and 'out of the box'. I have learnt to reflect upon my own sense of agency, my weaknesses and my strengths. I have developed the capacity to persevere when I wanted to give up and to manage my time well. My perspective that pre-schoolers are strong and capable of being agents of change has been confirmed in this study. I am inspired to carry the proverbial torch forward and begin discussions with relevant stakeholders to create a platform in South Africa to bring all children's voices together.

I end this study with a final question for the reader to answer: Throughout the ages the art form of graffiti has been used by people in various ways to express their voice in public. Should pre-schoolers not be provided with the opportunity to express legally what they feel and think in public spaces which are safe to access in order to make their agency visible? I leave you as reader with an open space to reflect on how you can contribute to making the voice of young children heard. I provide this space in order to engage you as reader into the world of young children and draw a picture of a pre-schooler as agent of change.



**Your reflection on young children's voice...**



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## APPENDIX 1: ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



### UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2017/02/15

Ref: 2017/02/15/05297699/34/MC

Dear Mrs Vlok,

Name: Mrs M Vlok

Student no: 05297699

**Decision:** Ethics Approval from  
2017/02/15 to 2019/02/15

#### Researcher:

Name: Mrs M Vlok

Email: 05297699@mylife.unisa.ac.za

Telephone: +27 12 361 2701

#### Supervisor:

Name: Prof NM Nel

Email: tnelnm@unisa.ac.za

Telephone: +27 12 429 6994

#### Title of research:

**Pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being in inner-city early childhood centres: The role of the practitioner**

**Qualification:** D Ed in Early Childhood Education

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2017/02/15 to 2019/02/15.

*The medium risk application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2017/02/15 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and



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SAPS 365

BQ NO: 201739655

## South African Police Service

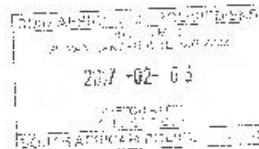
## Clearance Certificate

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT NO CONVICTIONS HAVE BEEN RECORDED FOR ANY CRIME IN 1948-1949 IN K' OF SOUTH AFRICA AGAINST:

TRANSACTION NO	: 3070/251
DATE OF BIRTH	: 1960-05-31
PLACE OF BIRTH	: SOUTH AFRICA
TITLE	: MS
SURNAME/S	: VLOK ,
MAIDEN NAME/S	:
NAME/S	: MILANDRE ,

F/16 National Commissioner of the South African Police Service

**Lt Col S.J. SETSIBA**



**Note:**  
 Researcher(s) should be the subject  
 of research or the study must be published, since by law and by agreement

84-18 General Social Science Survey, 1990-1991, Indiana, 875  
 p. incl. abstract, 0-100 Journal of Experimental  
 Soc. Sci., 427-12, 1990, 216  
 Soc. Sci., 427-12, 1990, 100

## APPENDIX 3: DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING



TAALSENTRUM  
LANGUAGE CENTRE  
IZIKO LEBLWIMI



UNIVERSITEIT  
STELLENBOSCH  
UNIVERSITY

28 November 2018

To Whom It May Concern

We hereby confirm that the thesis *PRE-SCHOOLERS' AGENCY THROUGH LEARNING. FOR WELL-BEING IN INNER-CITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES: THE ROLE OF THE PRACTITIONER* by Milandré Vlok has been edited by the Stellenbosch University Language Centre.

The document has been delivered electronically on 27 November 2018.

Please contact me should you have any enquiries.

Régards

*MvdWaal*

---

Marguerite van der Waal  
Head: Language Services  
Stellenbosch University Language Centre  
Tel: 021 808 3096  
Fax: 021 808 2863  
E-mail: mvdwaal@sun.ac.za

## APPENDIX 4: DECLARATION OF TECHNICAL EDITING



Date: October 2018

### TECHNICAL EDITING DECLARATION

This is to confirm that I, Sharon Baxter, declare that I worked on the dissertation, **PRE-SCHOOLERS AGENCY AND WELL-BEING TOWARDS LEARNING FOR WELL-BEING IN INNER-CITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES; THE ROLE OF THE PRACTITIONER** and that it has been technically edited to ensure correctness of layout and uniform presentation for **MILANDRE VLOK**, student number **05297699**.

Sincerely,

**S Baxter**  
Menlo Park, Pretoria  
072 250 2075  
Email: [nbaxter@iantic.net](mailto:nbaxter@iantic.net)

## APPENDIX 5: APPLICATION LETTER TO THE DIRECTOR OF A NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATION



Dear Sir/Madam

### REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT YOUR SELECTED EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES

I am currently enrolled at the University of South Africa for a Doctorate in Education. My research study is entitled: Pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being in inner-city early childhood centres: The role of the practitioner. The purpose of the study is to explore how Grade R practitioners conceptualise Grade R pre-schoolers in inner-city early childhood institution in terms of their voice, and how pre-schoolers together with their Grade R practitioners can take part in projects and activities which develop and enhance the pre-schoolers' agency. The study is supervised by Prof NM Nel and joint supervisor Prof. S. Krog from the University of South Africa.

I kindly request permission for me to do my research at three of your inner-city early childhood centres. The research entails medium risk. One Grade R practitioner and three Grade R pre-schoolers will form part of this study. However all the pre-schoolers in the Grade R classrooms will take part in the art projects and be observed in their classrooms. It is only the selected three pre-schoolers who will be interviewed, asked to comment on their art projects and whose dialogue between researcher, the practitioner and pre-schoolers will be audio-taped and transcribed. Data captured from the interviews, conversations, observations and written notes of the researcher, the practitioners and pre-schoolers will be used for this study.


Data collection will take place as follows: Two initial workshops will be facilitated by myself as researcher to introduce practitioners to the research study. Photographs will be taken of the activities during the workshops but the identity of the practitioners will not be provided. Interviews (x 3) with the practitioner will be conducted by me for about 30-35 minutes and audio-taped to facilitate collection of accurate information. Focus group interviews will be held on a weekly basis between myself and all three the practitioners (two also from two other inner-city early childhood centres). I will hold conversations with the pre-schoolers and ask them straightforward questions about their impressions of their school and the city. I will audio-tape these conversations with pre-schoolers. They will then do four art projects (drawings, clay and a medium of choice) which expresses their opinions and what they want to change or contribute to their school or city. I will audio-record their impressions. The art projects will further be documented (written notes and photographs) by myself and the practitioners. My observations in the classrooms during circle time discussions will be captured in my research journal. Practitioners will be asked to provide their own impressions of the research project using open ended questionnaires and self-reflective journals.

Anonymity and confidentiality will be adhered to at all times. All faces of the participants (practitioners and pre-schoolers) will be blacked out so that they are not identified. All participation is voluntary and participants in the study may withdraw from the study at any time without penalties. Any information obtained in the collection of this study will only be used for my D.Ed degree and excerpts of the interviews, field notes and audio recordings and documentation may be made part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will the schools' names or individuals be included in the report.

A copy of the formal findings of the research project can be made available to you upon your request. Participants also have the right to request that any data can be withdrawn from the study after having provided it. I look forward to your positive response. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about this

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Yours sincerely



Milandre Vlok  
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## **APPENDIX 6: APPLICATION LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL OF AN INNER-CITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRE**



The Principal

Date: -----

Dear Sir/Madam

### **REQUEST FOR CONSENT TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT YOUR EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES**

I am currently enrolled at the University of South Africa for a Doctorate in Education. Your early childhood centres have been selected to participate in my research study which is entitled: Pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being in inner-city early childhood centres: The role of the practitioner. The purpose of the study is to explore how Grade R practitioners conceptualise Grade R pre-schoolers in inner-city early childhood institution in terms of their voice, and how pre-schoolers together with their practitioners can take part in projects and activities which develop and enhance pre-schoolers' agency. The study is supervised by Prof NM Nel and joint supervisor Prof S. Krog from the University of South Africa.

I kindly request permission for me to do my research at your inner-city early childhood centre. The research entails medium risk. One Grade R practitioners and three Grade R pre-schoolers will form part of this study. However all the pre-schoolers in the Grade R classrooms will take part in the art projects and be observed in their classrooms. It is only the selected three pre-schoolers who will be interviewed, asked to comment on their art projects and whose dialogue between researcher, the practitioner and pre-schoolers will be audio-taped and transcribed. Data captured from the interviews, conversations, observations and written notes of the researcher, the practitioners and pre-schoolers will be used for this study.

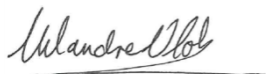
Data collection will take place as follows: Two initial workshop will be facilitated by myself as researcher to introduce practitioners to the research study. Photographs will be taken of the activities during the workshops but the identity of the practitioners will not be provided. Interviews (x 3) with the practitioner will be conducted by me for about 30-35 minutes and audio-taped to facilitate collection of accurate information. Focus group interviews will be held on a weekly basis between myself and all three the practitioners (two also from two other inner-city early childhood centres). I will hold conversations with the pre-schoolers and ask them straightforward questions about their impressions of their school and the city. I will audio-tape these conversations with pre-schoolers. They will then do four art projects (drawings, clay and a medium of choice) which expresses their opinions and what they want to change or contribute to their school or city. I will audio-record their comments about their art projects. Their art projects will further be documented (written notes and photographs) by myself and the practitioners. My observations in the classrooms during circle time discussions will be captured in my research journal. Practitioners will be asked to provide their own impressions of the research project using open ended questionnaires and self-reflective journals.

Anonymity and confidentiality will be adhered to at all times. All faces of the participants (practitioners and pre-schoolers) will be blacked out so that they are not identified. All participation is voluntary and participants in the study may withdraw from the study at any time without penalties. Any information

obtained in the collection of this study will only be used for my D.Ed degree and excerpts of the interviews, field notes and audio recordings and documentation may be made part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will the schools' names or individuals be included in the report.

A copy of the formal findings of the research project can be made available to you upon your request. Participants also have the right to request that any data can be withdrawn from the study after having provided it. I look forward to your positive response. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about this

Yours sincerely



Milandre Vlok  
Researcher (D.ED STUDENT)  
Cell: 083 2635835

Supervisor: Prof NM Nel                      Email: [tnelnm@unisa.ac.za](mailto:tnelnm@unisa.ac.za)  
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Cell No.: 082 4414444

## CONSENT TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH AT OUR INNER-CITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRE

I,-----Principal of -----

hereby give permission for my school to take part in the research being conducted.

PRINCIPAL-----DATE-----

## APPENDIX 7: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER TO PRACTITIONERS



The Practitioners

-----

Dear Practitioner

My name is Milandre Vlok. I am currently enrolled at the University of South Africa for a Doctorate in Education. You have been selected to participate in my research study which is entitled: Pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being in inner-city early childhood centres: The role of the practitioner. The purpose of the study is to explore how Grade R practitioners conceptualise Grade R pre-schoolers in inner-city early childhood institution in terms of their voice, and how pre-schoolers together with their practitioners can take part in projects and activities which develop and enhance pre-schoolers' agency. The study is supervised by Prof NM Nel and joint supervisor Prof S. Krog from the University of South Africa.

I kindly request permission from you to take part in my research study. The research entails medium risk. Three Grade R practitioners and nine Grade R pre-schoolers will form part of this study. However all the pre-schoolers in the Grade R classrooms will take part in the making of the art projects and be observed in their classrooms. It is only the selected nine pre-schoolers (three from your classroom) with whom conversations will be held about their impressions of their school, city and their art projects. Data captured from the interviews, conversations, observations and all written notes will be used for this study.

Data collection will take place as follows: Two initial workshop will be facilitated by me to introduce you to the research study. Photographs will be taken of the activities during the workshops but the identities of the practitioners will not be provided. Interviews (x 3) with the practitioners will be conducted for about 30-35 minutes, audio-audio-taped to facilitate collection of accurate information. Focus group interviews will be held on a weekly basis between myself and all three the practitioners (two also from two other inner-city early childhood centres). I will ask the pre-schoolers straightforward questions about their impressions of their school and the city. I will audio-tape these conversations. They will then do four art projects (drawings, clay and a medium of choice) which expresses their opinions and what they want to change or contribute to their school or city. I will audio-record their comments about their art projects. Their art projects will further be documented (written notes and photographs) by myself and the practitioners. My observations in the classrooms during circle time discussions will be captured in my research journal. Practitioners will be asked to provide their own impressions of the research projects using open ended questionnaires and self-reflective journals.

Anonymity and confidentiality will be adhered to at all times. All faces of the participants (practitioners and pre-schoolers) will be blacked out so that they are not identified. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalties. Any information obtained in the collection of this study will only be used for my D.Ed degree and excerpts of the interviews, field notes and audio recordings and documentation may be made part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will the schools' names or individuals be included in the report.

A copy of the formal findings of the research project can be made available to you upon your request. You have the right to request that any data can be withdrawn from the study after having provided it. I look forward to your positive response. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about this

Yours sincerely



Milandre Vlok  
Researcher (D.ED STUDENT)  
Cell: 083 2635835

Supervisor:

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Cell no.: 083 6609219

Co-supervisor:

Prof S Krog  
Email: [Krogs@unisa.ac.za](mailto:Krogs@unisa.ac.za)  
Cell No.: 082 4414444

**Signed informed consent**

Name of practitioner	
Name of inner-city early childhood centre	
Contact number	
Address	
Email	

By signing this form I hereby agree to the following:

1. To allow the pre-schoolers in my class to participate in the above mentioned activities of the research study
2. To allow the researcher to observe my dialogue with the pre-schoolers.
3. To protect the confidentiality and privacy of research participants, once research results have been disclosed to me.
4. To reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time.
5. I agree that no compensation will be offered to take part in the research project

Signature of the practitioner:-----

Signature of the researcher:-----

Date: -----

## APPENDIX 8: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER TO PARENTS



Dear Parent(s)/Guardian

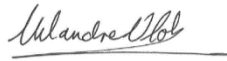
My name is Milandre Vlok. I am currently enrolled at the University of South Africa for a Doctorate in Education. Your child has been selected to participate in my research study which is entitled: Pre-schoolers' agency through learning for well-being in inner-city early childhood centres: The role of the practitioner. The purpose of the study is to explore how Grade R practitioners conceptualise pre-schoolers in inner-city early childhood institution in terms of their voice, and how pre-schoolers together with their practitioners can take part in projects and activities which develop and enhance pre-schoolers' agency. The study is supervised by Prof NM Nel and joint supervisor Prof S Krog from the University of South Africa.

I kindly request permission from you that your child takes part in the research study. The research entails medium risk. Three Grade R practitioners and nine Grade R pre-schoolers will form part of this study. Upon your consent your child together with eight other pre-schoolers from three inner-city early childhood centres will take part in the study. Data collection will take place as follows: I will hold conversations with your child about his/her impressions of the school and city which I will audio tape. Your child will then be asked to make four art projects about the school and the city. All other participants in the study will do the same. I will record your child's comments about his/her art project. Your child's art project will further be documented (written notes and photographs) by myself and the practitioner. My observations in the classrooms during circle time discussions and during the art projects, proposed by the practitioners and the pre-schoolers, will be captured in my research journal.

Anonymity and confidentiality will be adhered to at all times. All participation of your child in the study is voluntary and your child may withdraw from the study at any time without penalties. Any information obtained in the collection of this study will only be used for the researcher's D.Ed degree and excerpts of the interviews, field notes and audio recordings and documentation may be made part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will the schools' names or individuals be included in the report.

A copy of the formal findings of the research project can be made available to you upon your request. You have the right to request that any data can be withdrawn from the study after having provided it. I look forward to your positive response. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about this

Yours sincerely



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Email: [Krogs@unisa.ac.za](mailto:Krogs@unisa.ac.za)  
Cell No.: 082 4414444

**Signed informed consent**

Name of parent/guardian	
Name of child	
Contact number of parent	
Address	
Email	

By signing this form I hereby agree to the following:

1. To allow my child to participate in the above mentioned activities of the research study.
2. I agree to explain the aim of the research to my child in understandable language.
3. To allow the researcher to interview, audio tape, observe my child and document his/her work in the classroom.
4. To protect the confidentiality and privacy of my child once research results have been disclosed to me
5. To reserve the right to withdraw my child from the study at any time.
6. To accept that no compensation will be offered for my child's participation

Signature of the parent: -----

Signature of the researcher: -----

Date: -----



## APPENDIX 9: CHILD ASSENT LETTER

### INVITATION FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH PROJECT

Date:

Dear Child

My name is Milandre and I would like to ask you if I can come and watch you learn and talk to me in your classroom. I also want to know if you will tell me what you like about your school and your city. I would also like you to do some fun arts project with me and your friends and your teacher. I am trying to learn more about your ideas of your school and city. I will not ask you to do anything that might hurt you or that you don't want to do.

I will also ask your parents to give their permission for you to take part in the study. If you do not want to take part, you do not have to participate. Remember, it is up to you if you want to be part of this study and no one will be angry with you if you don't want to participate or even if you change your mind and want to stop. You can ask me questions any time about the study. If you have a questions later that you think you can't think of now, ask me next time when I visit your school.



Please ask your mommy or daddy about what it means to participate in a study before you sign the letter. Signing the letter means that you can draw me a picture of yourself on the bottom of this letter which then means that you agree to be part of this study. A copy of this letter will be given to your parents.



Kind regards

Practitioner Milandre

#### Signed informed consent

Your Name	Yes I will take part 	No I don't want to take part 
Name of the researcher		
Date		
Witness		

## **APPENDIX 10: CONVERSATION SHEET (PRE-SCHOOLERS)**

### **CONVERSATION QUESTIONS:**

- Where do you live?
- How many brothers and sisters do you have?
- Tell me something about yourself? family? home?
- Tell me something about your school?
- Tell me something about the city?
- What can you do on the playground, classroom, during art activities?
- What is difficult for you to do in the school?
- What do you like to do in the school, with your friends, in the classroom, doing art?
- What does your practitioner do in the classroom?
- What do you like about your practitioner?
- What makes you happy in the school, classroom?
- What makes you sad in the school, classroom?
- Why does it make you sad?
- Do you like to do art?
- What do you like the most to do when you do art?
- What don't you like to do during art time?
- How do you feel when you do art?
- Draw a picture of school

## **APPENDIX 11: INTERVIEW SHEET (PRACTITIONER)**

### **SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:**

#### **General conceptualisation of the term 'active agency':**

1. What does the concept of a child's voice mean to you?
2. Briefly describe your understanding of Grade R pre-schoolers?
3. In what way do you think do Grade R pre-schoolers express themselves?
4. What is your understanding of an 'innocent' child'?
5. What do you understand by the term 'a child is a clean sheet of paper'?
6. What do you understand of the idea that a pre-schoolers should be protected?
7. What roles do you think can pre-schoolers fulfil in the preschool?

#### **General conceptualisations of the term "listening pedagogy":**

8. What is your understanding of the concept of 'listening' in terms of pre-schoolers
9. How do you listen to pre-schoolers in the school?
10. What are the challenges in listening to pre-schoolers?
11. What is your role in the life of pre-schoolers?
12. What do you think happens when you listen to pre-schoolers?

#### **General conceptualisations of making pre-schoolers's active agency visible**

13. How do you express what pre-schoolers are thinking?
14. What activities do you do to enable pre-schoolers to express their ideas and perspectives?
15. Explain the ways you assess pre-schoolers's learning?
16. What do you want to change about your teaching practice?
17. What recommendations will you advance in making pre-schoolers's voice visible?
18. What do you think Grade R pre-schoolers want to say?

## **APPENDIX 12: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### **The child:**

- Discuss what do you want for a Grade R child?
- Discuss your understanding/conceptualisation of a Grade R child? Who is the Grade R child?
- What do you think about the ability of the child to express his/her opinion, perspectives, theories?
- Discuss your idea of the Grade R child as someone who has a 'voice, opinion, value'.
- What is the role of a Grade R child in the preschool?
- What are the rights of a Grade R child?
- What is your understanding of a good childhood. How must a childhood be for pre-schoolers? What is the ideal childhood for pre-schoolers?

### **Listening:**

- Discuss your role as a practitioner.
- What do you think is important to focus on in teaching the Grade R child?
- What do you want the Grade R child to learn in the classroom?
- Discuss the importance of listening to the pre-schoolers in your classroom.
- Discuss your understanding of listening to the Grade R child.
- What are the challenges, difficulties you experience during circle times?
- What did you learn during your circle time presentations about your teaching?
- What did you learn during my circle time presentations in your classroom?

### **Making the child's voice visible:**

- What did you learn about the child through documenting what the child is drawing or constructing?
- How did documentation influence or change your ideas about pre-schoolers?
- How do you think does documentation change/ influence the way you teach pre-schoolers?
- What were the challenges and difficulties you experienced during documentation?
- How will you use the tool of documentation in the future?
- What is the meaning of the early childhood institution?

**General questions:**

- Does the way you teach contribute to creating a specific child?
- Does the focus on rote learning influence the child's ability to express his/her opinion? Diversity?
- Does your communication with the child express power relations in the classroom?
- Does writing down and recording what the child is saying changing the way you understand the child?
- Does using the tool of documentation change your relationship with the child?
- Does interacting with the child by documenting what the child is saying, changing the way you feel about your teaching?

## **APPENDIX 13: OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRES**

- Who is the Grade R child?
- What do you think about the ability of the child to express his/her opinion, perspectives, theories?
- Discuss the importance of listening to the children in your classroom.
- How do you think does documentation change/ influence the way you teach children?
- What were the challenges and difficulties you experienced during documentation?

## APPENDIX 14: OBSERVATION GUIDELINES OF THE TEACHER DURING CIRCLE TIMES

1. The display of a listening pedagogy between the teacher and the pre-schooler will be observed during **the circle time** discussion in the classroom.
  - Acknowledgement of the children's active agency
  - Relationship between the practitioner and pre-schoolers in the classroom
  - Non-verbal interaction
  - Verbal interaction
  - Structure of circle time discussion
2. The following points will be observed closely:
  - Evidence of the teacher listening attentively to the child's input (facial expression, body language, attitude of attention and care).
  - Evidence of the teacher's own ideas dominating the conversation.
  - New questions posed to the children to wonder about ("provocation").
  - Feedback to the children about their comments through repeating or clarifying what the children said.

## OBSERVATION GUIDELINES OF THE CHILDREN

- The display of a listening pedagogy between the teacher and the pre-schooler will be observed during **the circle time** discussion in the classroom.
  - Expression of pre-schoolers' agency
  - Relationship between pre-schoolers and the practitioner in the classroom
  - Non-verbal interaction
  - Verbal interaction
  - Structure of circle time discussion
- The following points will be observed closely:
  - Pre-schoolers listening with eagerness and not out of fear
  - Willingness/eagerness of pre-schoolers to share their ideas, perspectives or theories (are they very quiet and passive during the circle time?).
  - Asking questions to practitioners
  - Active engagement of pre-schoolers during circle time

## APPENDIX 15: EXAMPLES FROM MY SELF-REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

### 26/4/2017 - WORKSHOP 1

At first I had to introduce myself and inform the participants of the reasons for my study and why they were selected. I am an outsider-researcher and so it was important to tell them who I am and put them at ease. One participant commented: *"I hope this workshop will not be difficult"*. The atmosphere in the first workshop was initially more tense and we needed to get to know each other. That is why I decided to begin the research with a workshop and did an ice breaker. I used a humorous activity for this - we had to stare into each other's eyes for a few minutes. We all laughed. I then asked them to draw for me a memory from their childhood (I did the same) and we shared it amongst each other. They were free not to share if they did not want to share it. Before they shared it they had to interpret each other's drawings and then tell each other what their own drawings meant. I did this to introduce the concept of documentation which stands on the ability to interpret what a child is doing or thinking. I shared with them the idea that interpretation is never right or wrong. I then showed them the power point about what RESEARCH involves and we discussed the importance of research in early childhood education.

During this workshop I wanted to find out how they understood the child. I encouraged them to design a Facebook page on a big sheet of paper. They had to create a Facebook profile by cutting out pictures from magazines that represented who they were, a cover page and a status update. They enjoyed making their Facebook pages. I played African music whilst they were doing this activity.

#### Interviews:

I interviewed each of the three practitioners individually to find out how they conceptualised the pre-school child and saw the child in terms of agency and general well-being and relation to the world. These interviews were transcribed.

#### Reflection on the workshop:

I was very cautious to lessen the tension between me as an outside researcher and the practitioners in the field. I made them feel at ease by being friendly, emphatic, listening to their comments and not interrupting. I wanted to hear their opinions, ideas and not share my pre-conceived ideas and perspectives. I kept the flow of the workshop humorous and creative through the ice breaker activities, the creative exercises and the power point which explained research in a clear way. I was enriched by their contributions



and realised that they have firsthand experience of working with pre-schoolers in the field. They seemed eager to learn about the tool of documentation and what it entailed. It was rewarding for me to share with them some new ideas and their enthusiasm inspired me!

### **3/5/2017 - WORKSHOP 2**

The first workshop was followed by a second workshop where I discussed via another power point the concept of listening to young children and the tool of documentation. I began this workshop by asking them to share how they experienced the first workshop. They then had to write their ideas about listening on their Facebook pages. We then discussed the way in which children's thinking is made visible through documentation. I then gave them an activity to do to demonstrate the tool of documentation. I gave them a "mieliepit" (corn kernel) and they had to discuss and create an create project to explain to me and each other what they think happens to the corn kernel. They then had to interpret each other's "seed factory" as a way to enable them to understand how documentation works. At the end of the activity they had to reflect on the experience of the workshop. I then asked them to think about a proposal which they could take to their classroom and which could be used as a project of documentation in order to discover pre-schoolers' agency. They suggested the following:

- Birds
- Route to school
- A happy place in school

When the research began in the field the happy place in the school, route to school and how I see the city was created through projects. These projects were documented and photographed. The practitioners took initiative and I facilitated the process.

### **Self-reflection:**

I experienced that the practitioners were excited to take the idea of documentation into the classroom. I was inspired about their ideas of listening and how they felt that it enhanced their relationship with the children. I was also inspired about their understanding of the value of documentation.

## **CONVERSATIONS AND INTERVIEW**

### **18/5/2017 - Sun Sparrows - first conversations**

I held individual conversations with the four pre-schoolers. I showed them a picture as a way to capture their ideas. They seemed eager to talk to me but I had to rephrase my questions a few times so that they understood what I asked.

### **19/5/2017 - Sun Sparrows - Circle time 1: A happy place in the school / Second conversations**

I observed the circle time that the practitioner held with the children and made field notes. Circle time began with a Bible story and the children sat quietly and listened. A child was asked to pray. The pre-schoolers were very obedient and focus was then on revising the days of the week, seasons, alphabet letter of the day and teaching the children about the theme. The practitioner did most of the talking and sat on a low chair in front of the children. They sat in a half moon circle with crossed legs. I then joined the circle time and sat on the floor in front of the pre-schoolers. I made them do some stretching exercises and make funny faces to create a relaxed atmosphere. They laughed and were very interactive. I then said to them that they had to go outside and look at all the places in the school that they like going to and where they feel happy. I accompanied them with their teacher on a tour around the school. The pre-schoolers enjoyed doing this and were very active talking about what they saw as they walked along. When they were back in the classroom they were asked by me to draw pictures of what they saw. The teacher then wrote notes on what the pre-schoolers were saying about their drawings. I held conversations with the children to discover how they thought about themselves, their teacher and their school.

#### **Self-reflection:**

During circle time I found the teacher warm and caring. She focused on the children and made eye contact with them. Her tone of voice was not strict but instructive. The focus was on getting through the program: Bible story, days of the week, seasons, alphabet and telling them about the them. She asked WHAT questions but I did not see evidence of "WHAT do you think" or "HOW do you think" or "WHY" questions. She used resources (pictures and a book) to discuss the theme and her teaching was more instructional. The pre-schoolers were quiet subdued and some became a bit restless. When I interacted with them by sitting on the floor and using a more dramatic tone of voice, being funny and creative they seemed to shift from being subdued to opening up more. The practitioner

observed me and also enjoyed the experience by laughing with the children and seeming more relaxed.

### **23/5/2017 Pennies - First conversations.**

I held conversations with the four pre-school participants to discover how they thought about themselves, their teacher and their school. I had to rephrase some of the questions.

### **26/5/2017 - Pennies - Circle time 1: A happy place in school / Second conversations**

The circle sat in a circle around the teacher who sat on a chair. The atmosphere was relaxed but rote learning and group chanting (e.g. "well done, well done, sharp") was evident. There was not much evidence of hearing the pre-schoolers' perspectives - "voice". Rather the practitioner asked questions which had fixed answers (e.g. names of the week, seasons, counting). The group time lasted more than 40 minutes with the children sitting cross legged all the time. They had to put their hand up when they wanted to answer. I then joined the circle time and as during my visit to Sun Sparrows I made sure that I engaged the children by asking them some questions about their happy place in school. We did not walk around as I did at Sun Sparrows as time was constrained. I asked the pre-schoolers to draw for me pictures of their school and documented what the children drew with the teacher. I documented what they said by recording their feedback. I then held second conversations with the pre-school participants to find out more about how they think about themselves, their teacher, learning and their school. I wanted to get to know them better and make them feel comfortable with me. They enjoyed talking to me but I had to rephrase some my questions a few times as they did not always understand what I was asking.

### **Self-reflection:**

I thought that the circle time was very long and saw that the pre-schoolers began to lose interest. The chanting expressed to me that there was not much focus on diversity and uniqueness of pre-schoolers contributions. I seemed to me that there was not much thinking about the capability of children and what they can add to the learning situation. There was not much evidence of creative expression and hearing what the pre-schoolers had to say. I experienced the learning encounter as more static than dynamic.

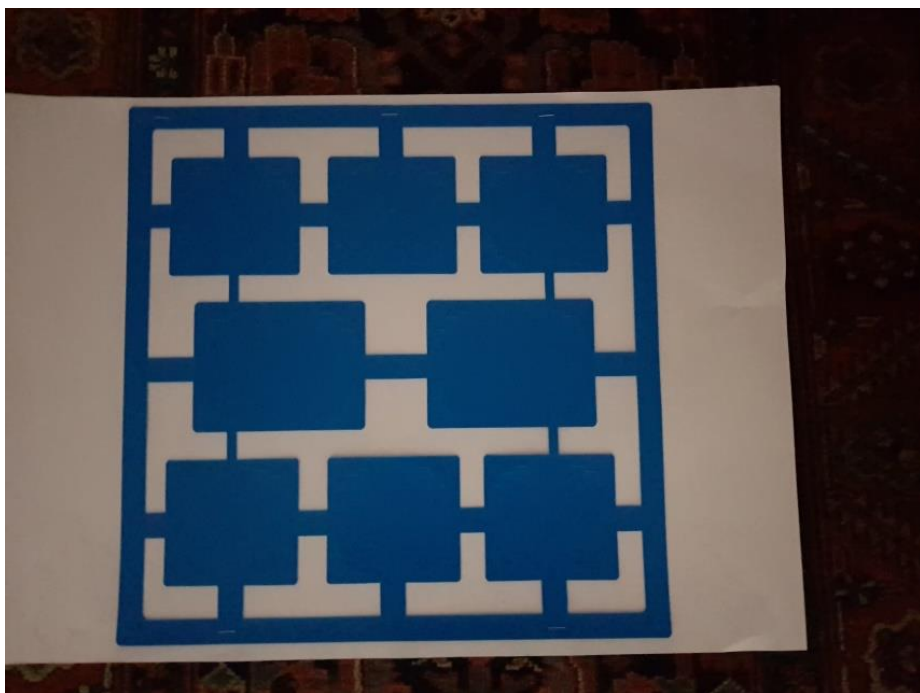
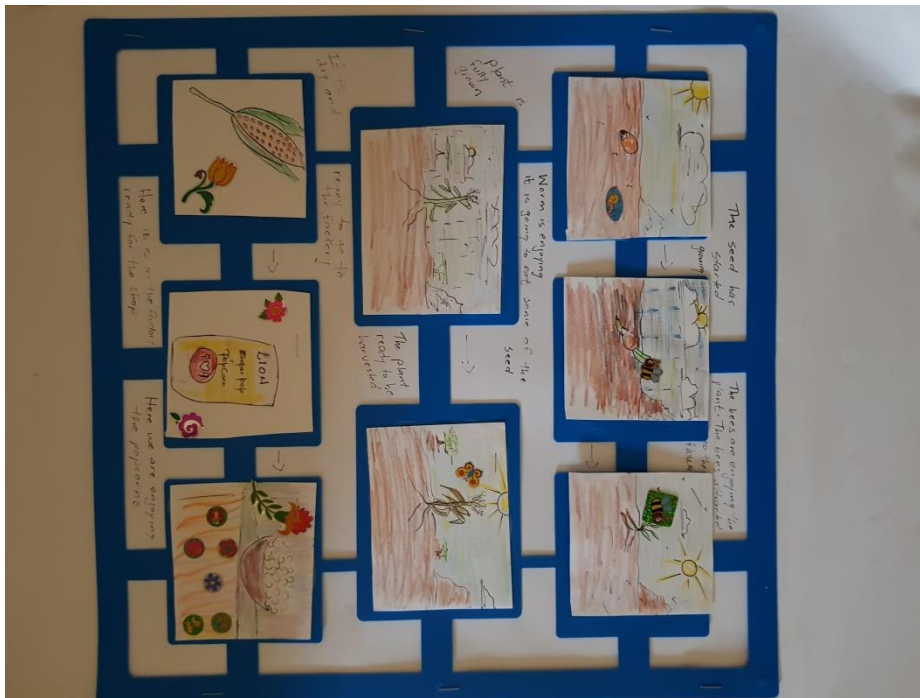
## **9/6/2017 - Christ Home - Circle time 1: A happy place at school / second conversation**

Upon entering the classroom the children were sitting at their tables. Somewhere building puzzles, some were working in workbooks and some were playing with educational games. The resources of this school is very limited. The teacher has no formal training. There are 13 children in a 3 x 3 room with limited light. The atmosphere in the classroom feels strict and tense. The teacher has a stern voice and there is very limited interaction between the practitioner and the children. There is a sense of passivity and lethargy. Words are often spoken "finish up", "homework", "do your work". The children are very quiet and don't really interact with each other. As time progresses the teacher sits next to the children at their tables and shows them number cards and allows them to count the cards. The teaching is very structured and controlled. When the children laugh about something together the teacher quiets them: "hey, guys!". They pack away their puzzles and educational cards. Circle time begins at 10h00 when everyone is there. The teacher moves the tables and chairs so that there is space for the children to sit down. I took part in the circle time interacting with the children as the teacher observed. They were slightly more confident to interact with me, but still seemed very subdued. I asked them about their happy place in school but the feedback was limited. Language barriers could be a subsequent result of their hesitancy to interact with me. I asked them to draw a picture of their happy place but the activity was not clearly understood as a result of language barriers. I documented what they said about their pictures by recording it. I held second conversations with the pre-schoolers to discover how they thought about themselves, their teacher and their school. There was a challenge with language barriers and I had to rephrase some of my questions.

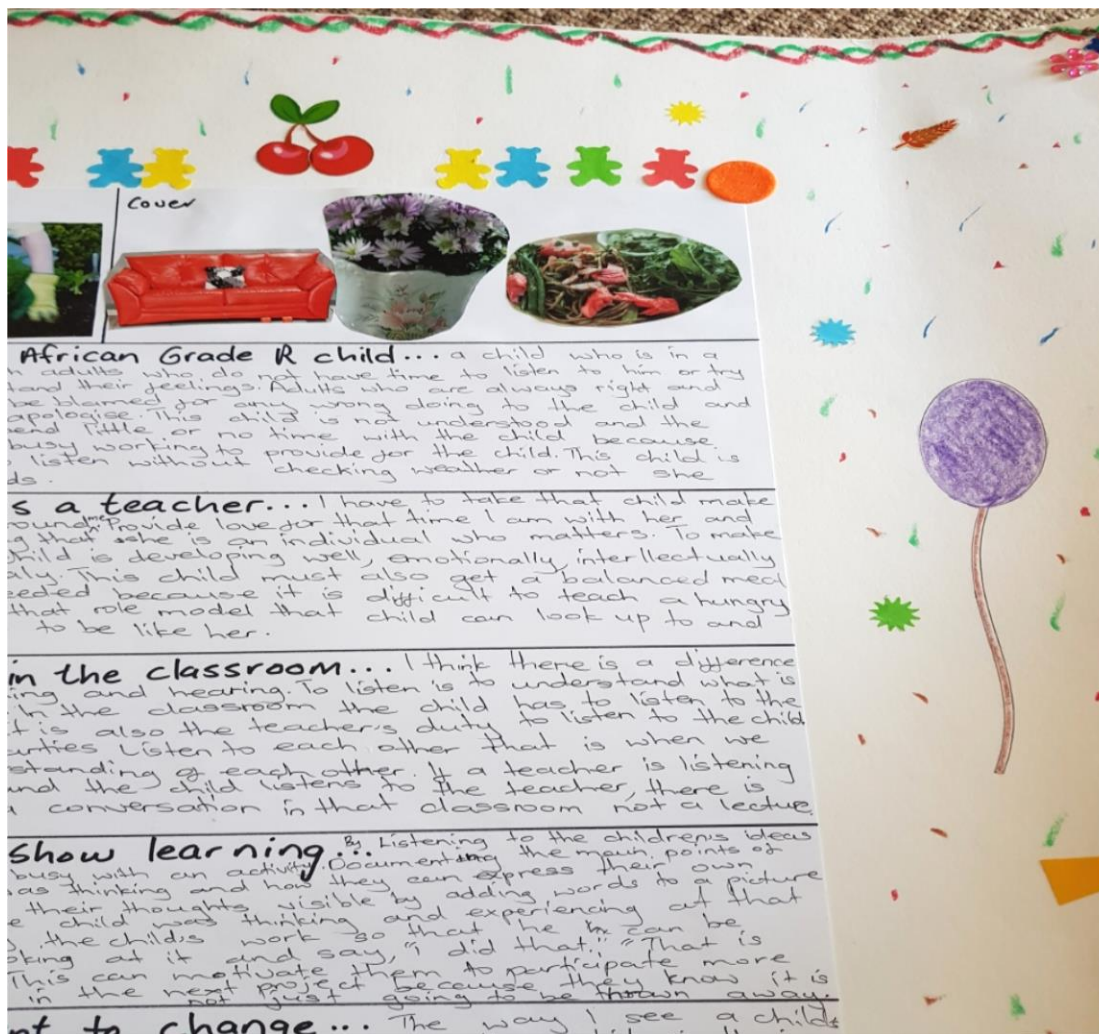
### **Self-reflection:**

I experienced the environment as very tense and controlled. The resources were limited, the light in the classroom was not adequate and there were too many children in a small space. The teacher seemed tired and frustrated. I saw no evidence of children's input or inclination to share their views and perspectives. They did what they were told and there was limited interaction between them and the teacher on a verbal and non-verbal level. Focus was on rote learning and revision. Very limited evidence of active learning.

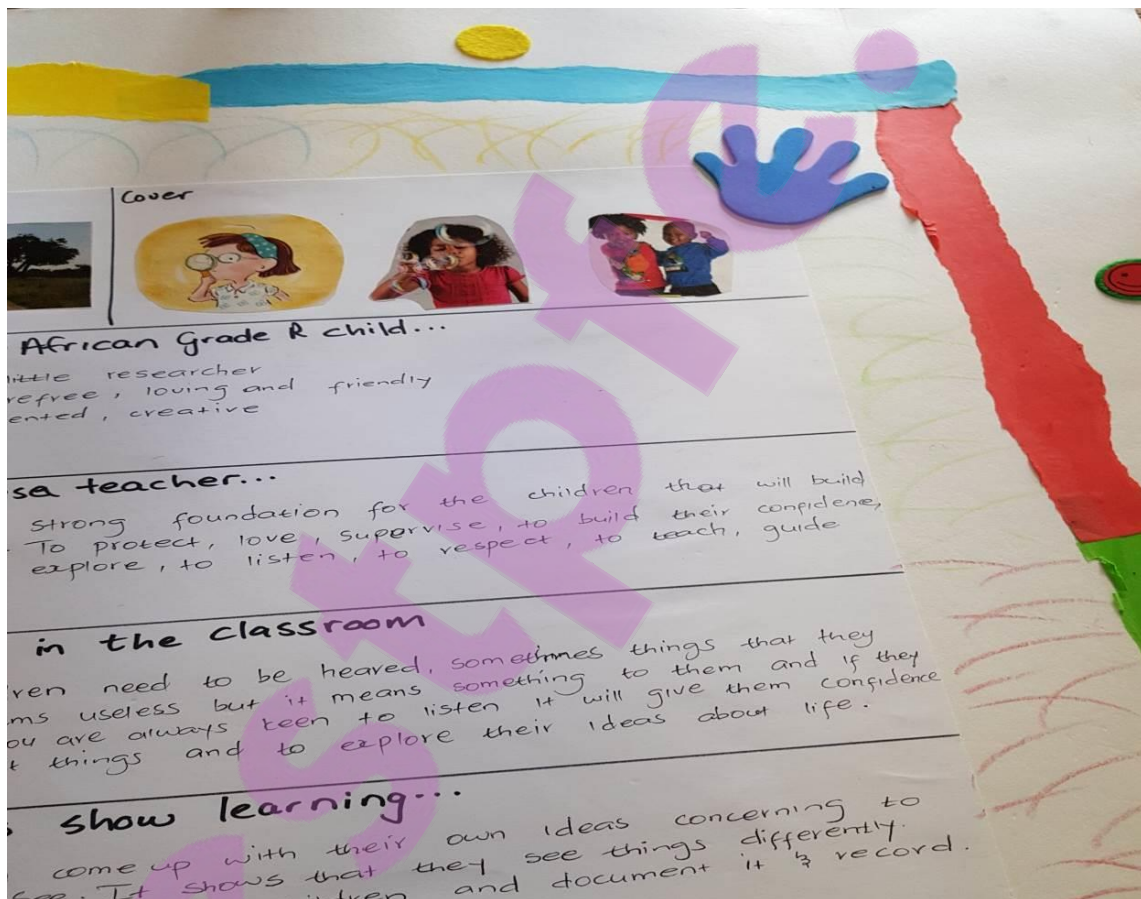
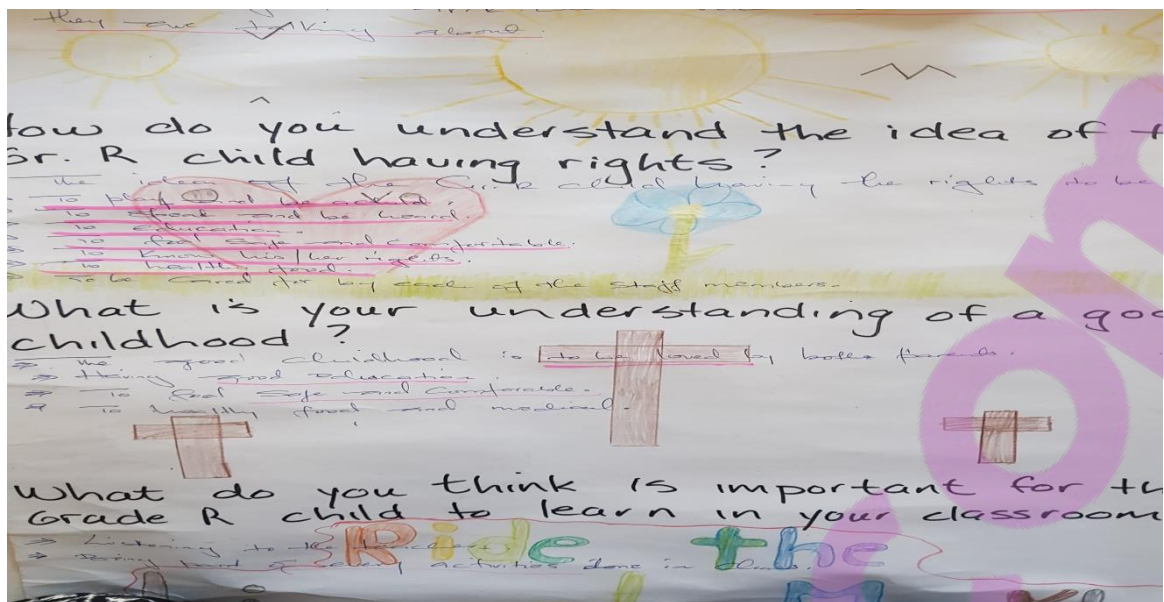
## APPENDIX 16: EXAMPLES OF PRACTITIONERS' DOCUMENTATION PROJECTS



## APPENDIX 17: EXAMPLES OF PRACTITIONERS' FAKE FACEBOOK PAGES





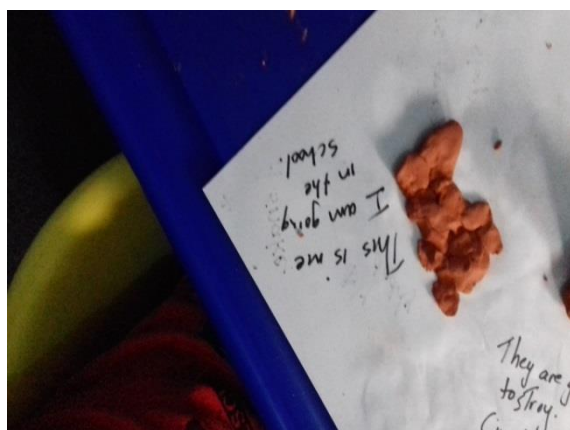
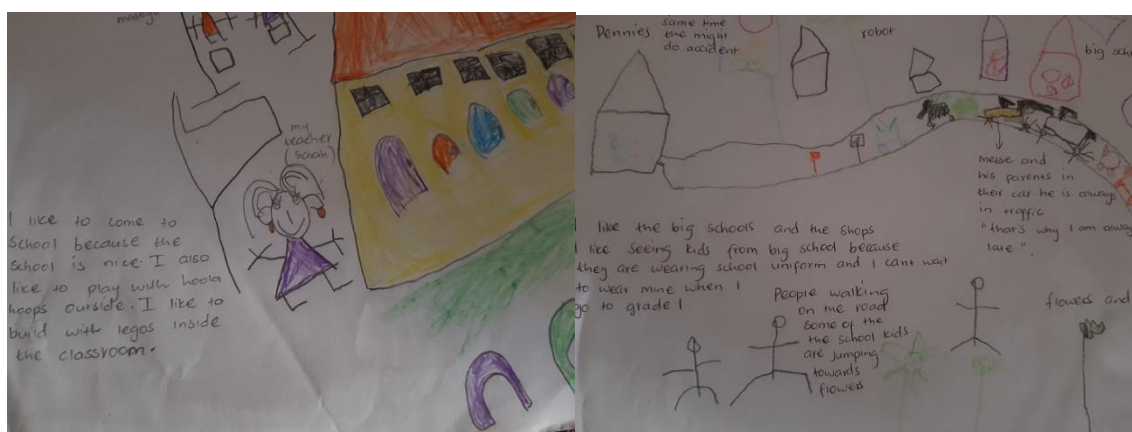


## APPENDIX 18: EXAMPLES OF PRE-SCHOOLERS' DOCUMENTED ART PROJECTS

### SCHOOL DRAWINGS, ROUTE MAPS, CLAY STATUES AND PROJECTS "WHAT I CAN CHANGE"



Drawings of school



Clay statues





"What I can change" project

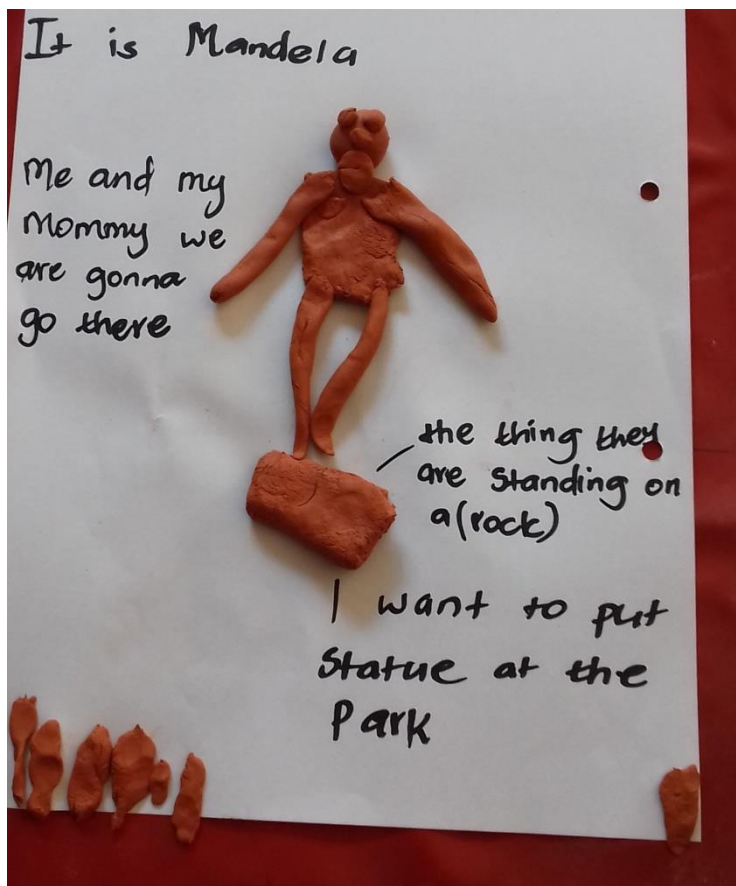


Route map to school

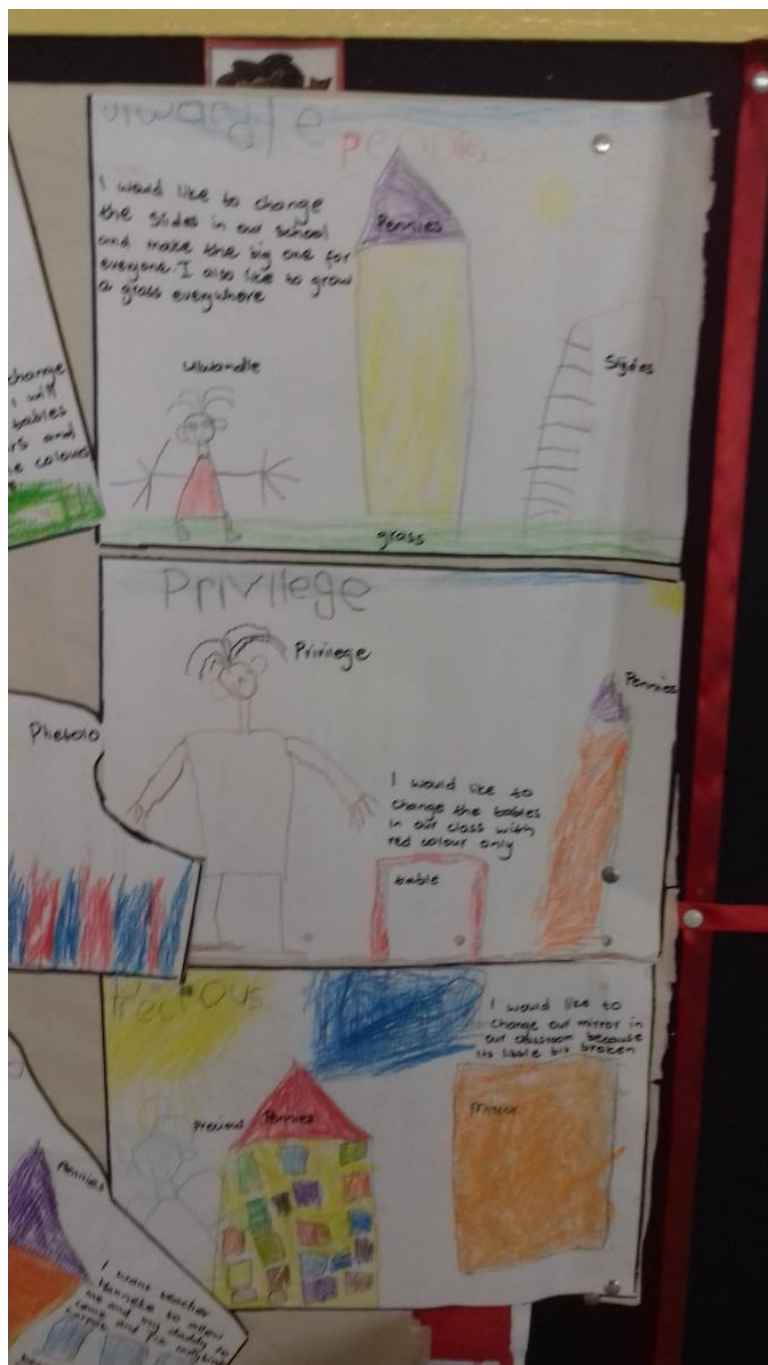


BESTPFE.COM  
List of research project topics and materials

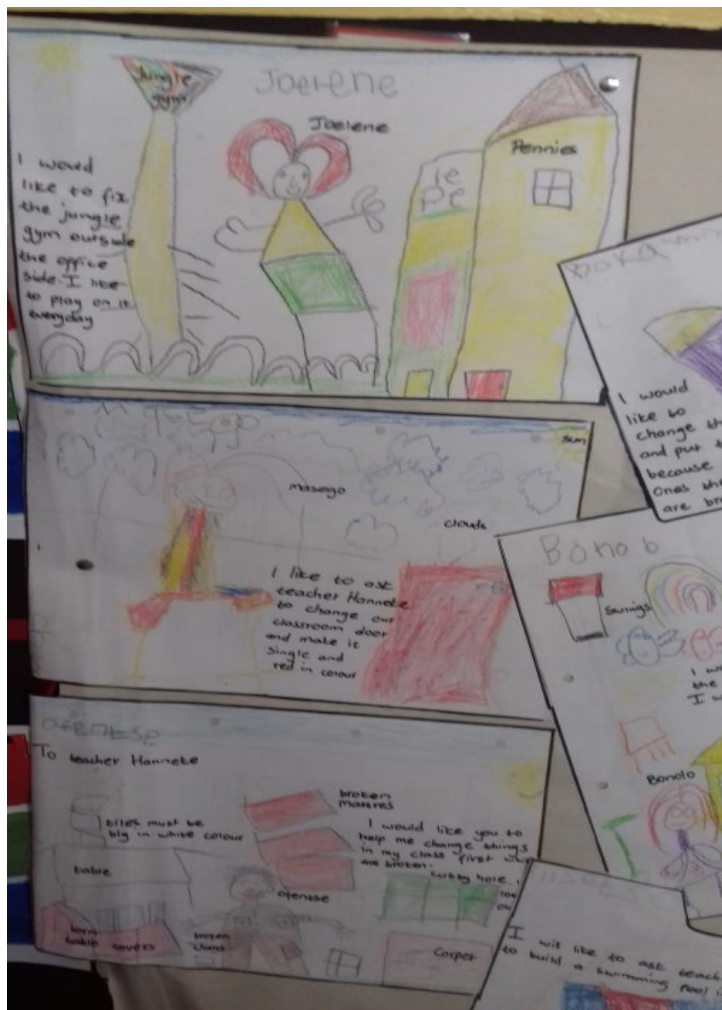
Working on a route map to school



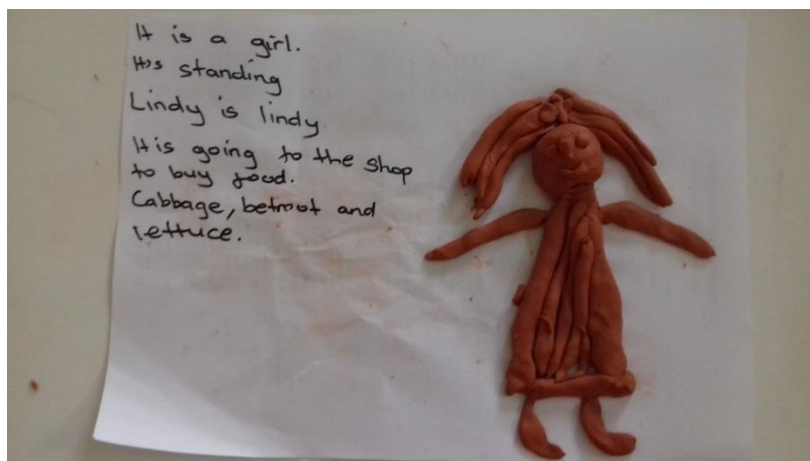
Clay statue



"What I can change" project



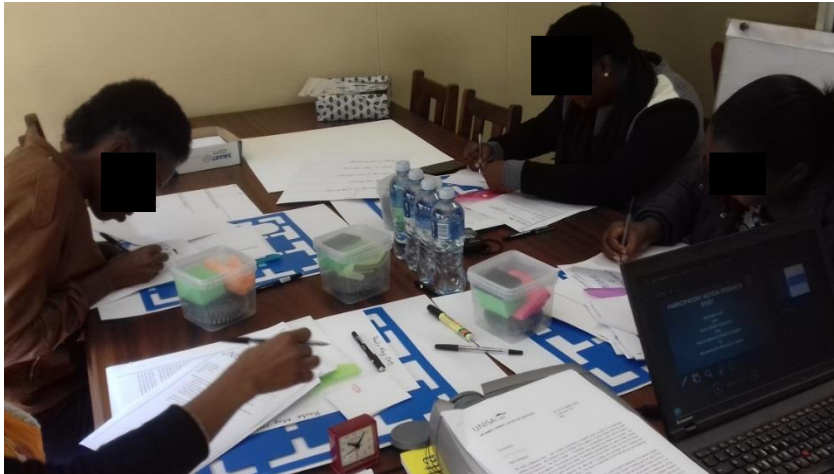




"What I can change" project



## APPENDIX 19: PHOTOS OF WORKSHOPS



## APPENDIX 20: EXAMPLES OF POWERPOINT SLIDES

### Listening in the classroom...

- ▶ Teacher observes, documents and interpret what the children are saying and doing
- ▶ Teacher produces documentation of children's way of seeing things
- ▶ Teachers give focused attention to what children are saying
- ▶ Teacher listens to her whole heart and mind

### What documentation is NOT...

- ▶ Not child observation
- ▶ Not to assess children's psychological development according to biological stages
- ▶ Not categorising and classifying children to a general pattern
- ▶ Not about saying that the child is clever or dumb, obedient or disobedient
- ▶ Not about saying you know everything about the child
- ▶ Not like a developmental chart or check list

## APPENDIX 21: EXAMPLES OF THEMATIC ANALYSIS

PP  
P CON 1

Q: Offense if you look at the picture?  
R: Ja.  
Q: what are they doing in the picture?  
R: They are, had this child.  
Q: And what else are they doing?  
R: This child, is saying give paper.  
Q: Okay. And what do you think are the rest of the children doing?  
R: This one, is one being happy, this one is surprised.  
Q: He looked surprised, okay. Now let's say maybe they are writing a message and they want to tell something to the school teacher, or to the principal, or maybe they want to write letter to the people of the city. Like everyone walking outside, maybe the children want to say something to the people outside. So what do you think is the message they want to give to the people? If you want to write a message to the principal of the school, you want to write something and you want to say something to the principal what do you want to say to the principal?  
R: The school is nice, I like it here, it is the best school.  
Q: Okay, and why do you say it is the best school? What do you like about the school?  
R: There is also friends to play, there is also swings, there is also teachers.  
Q: And something else?  
R: No.  
Q: No, and if you think of the city outside, what do you want to tell the people of the city?  
R: The city is beautiful.  
Q: And why do you say the city is beautiful? Do you know what the city is, it is everything outside? Like the school is in the city. So it is everything outside there, so what do you think about the city outside, it is beautiful you say, what else?  
R: There is also people passing and there is also police and there is also soldiers. There is also people working, I also see parks, cars, and also cars. There is shops, and taxi rank, and also ..... Children shouting and screaming ..... And a train.  
People, people at the robot, they are looking for money.  
Q: Lots of things, schools?  
R: schools.

1

P PHOTO PICTURE 1C  
Ppp 1C

Q: Okay you must draw. Think, what do you see?  
R: I draw tree, I see road, until here.  
Q: Turn the page then.  
R: I draw street.  
R: Okay, Okay, no.  
R: I didn't go, you are going to draw.  
R: you are going to get into so much trouble.  
R: Run, you are supposed to go here.  
R: See.  
R: Here, up to here.  
R: That is nice.  
R: Here, When we come back, okay let us draw.  
R: Wait, wait.  
R: I do.  
R: I know  
R: The robot. The robot here.  
R: Okay, wait.  
R: Let's start with the house before the road.  
R: This is my house. I am going to draw a house here. My draw, this is my house.  
R: First I start with the ground room.  
R: This is the road.  
R: The road.  
R: So okay my floor is one, My floor is number 1.  
R: Okay.  
R: Let me draw the house.  
R: I want to put a car in the garage.  
R: Draw a garage.  
R: And this is where I keep my  
R: that is fine, we don't have colour green to make a grass.

*CI*

*computer words*

*relativity*

*impression*

*PPCI*

*U*

*CP/PP1*

*number*

*colour*



## APPENDIX 22 - PHOTOS OF RESEARCH SETTINGS



