

Visual Daily Programme to implement the National Curriculum Framework: a case of rural early childhood care and education centres¹

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ABSTRACT

The daily programme outlines the sequence and time allocations for directing learning per curriculum expectancies in Early Childhood Care and Education. This article explores the adoption of a visual representation of activities in a daily programme to enhance young children's development. A qualitative case study of three rural centres that employed such envisioning of the daily programme is located within the critiques of communities of practice. Data collected from semi-structured interviews and document analysis revealed the innovative capacities of rural teachers to activate a collaborative learning endeavour. Examining collaborative efforts delves into the power dynamics that drove the underlying intentions within the integrated policy-practice dialogue. Whilst challenging the pedagogy beyond superficial policy compliance, the paper concludes with a commentary on breeding dependence within benevolent partnerships to question the goal of teachers as autonomous curriculum agents. The study recommends more teamwork for teachers to take a stronger role in the ownership of their professional growth.

Keywords: Visual representation, daily programme, rural centres, Early Childhood Care and Education, teachers

INTRODUCTION AND BACKROUNG

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) focuses on providing care and education to support early learning and the development of children from birth to four years (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, [UNESCO], 2015). In South Africa, providing ECCE has been associated with privileged populations and minimal support for low socioeconomic backgrounds. Young children and teachers from rural ECCE centres have suffered exclusion from the sector for many years. In 2012, the situation changed, and the early years of human life were declared an overall priority, highlighting ECCE's pivotal role in addressing inequalities that were identified (Department of Higher Education, 2017).

¹ Date of Submission: 23 May 2024
Date of Review Outcome: 11 February 2025
Date of Acceptance: 14 March 2025

Emphasis was placed on providing early education to support early learning and the development of babies, toddlers, and young children (Campbell-Barr & Bogatic, 2017).

In 2015, the Department of Social Development (DSD) crafted the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECD) to ensure a better start and a better future for all young children (Mbarathi et al., 2016). The policy included guidelines to reduce the inequality gap between rural and urban, rich and poor, and black and white people (UNESCO, 2015). It shows the potential to impact professional growth and acknowledges diverse settings that are relevant to children's development. However, the determination to overcome past dissimilarities was not executed credibly in practice (Ashley-Cooper et al., 2019). Implementing NIECD was punctuated by overwhelming challenges related to a lack of governmental support and sufficient funding to accomplish its goals. The policy guidance was more accessible to communities that were easier to reach compared to those in poor and rural areas. Therefore, the NIECD was compromised in its intentions to fight inequalities (Rudolph et al., 2019). Hence, young children in rural ECCE centres persistently entered primary school with a distinct disadvantage and without any benefits of quality learning foundations.

The South African government recognised ECCE as a critical area and made plans to improve the quality of education for the first 1000 days of life (Murriss, 2019). The government emphasised the importance of a curriculum that clarifies the essential qualities to accommodate all young children from different backgrounds. As a result, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the South African government funded the project for the development of an appropriate curriculum policy for children from birth to four years, which was confirmed and introduced as the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) in 2015 (Murriss, 2019). The main aim of the NCF was to fight inequality, provide quality basic education, and professionalise the ECCE sector.

THE VISION OF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

The NCF draws on the values of the South African Constitution to transform and democratise the ECCE sector. It was presented as a flexible guiding curriculum policy to explicitly provide appropriate teaching and learning needs for previously deprived communities (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2015). Its initiation became an exceptional achievement, and it provided care and education without compromising quality and equity in different settings (Campbell-Barr & Bogativ, 2017). Various backgrounds and settings where young children live are considered in the NCF (Rudolph, 2017). The NCF promotes the principle that young children prosper when attention is given to their needs and interests. Moreover, it accentuates young children's intentions to explore as they see and touch resources to learn (Murriss, 2019).

The NCF provides examples of activities for babies, toddlers, and young children to explore the six Early Learning Developmental Areas (ELDAs), which include (i) Well-being, (ii) Identity and Belonging, (iii) Communication, (iv) Exploring Mathematics, (v) Creativity and Knowledge, and (vi) Understanding of the World (DBE, 2015). The ELDAs guided the activities that were created. Moreover, the activities of each ELDA are designed to promote emotional, moral, mental, social, and physical development to prepare young children for primary schooling (Visser et al., 2021). Learning through all the senses is considered to be the best strategy for young children's development. The NCF broke away from the tight controls of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for reception year class to grade 12 (Grade R-12) that imposed on teachers' daily work as the instruction of what to teach and assess on a term-

by-term basis (Maharajh et al., 2016). It challenges the restrictions of the traditional curriculum designed by department experts who seemed to have disregarded teachers' experiences, skills, and knowledge for productive teaching and learning.

The NCF emphasises teamwork for the teachers to share their experiences and deliver meaningful learning opportunities (Aubrey, 2017). Teachers are prioritised as autonomous thinkers and competent beings who can create interactive environments for young children to explore, discover, and construct their understanding of the world. All the essential tasks are assigned to them to render contextual realities and meaningful policy directives for the development of all children, irrespective of the context. However, society continues to undervalue rural teachers, and their experiences are disregarded in the development of young children. Literature continues to expose rural ECCE teachers' ineffectiveness in delivering quality young children's education (Aubrey, 2017; Visser et al., 2021). They are still deemed as poor planners without proper curriculum implementation skills (Tyilo et al., 2017). The provision of ECCE in rural areas still reflects a shallow level of transformation, and very little is known about the capabilities of rural teachers. Many with National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 4 and National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 5 struggle to translate their knowledge into practice (Wood & Neethling, 2023).

This study explored 'rural ECCE teachers' experiences in the development of a Visual Daily Programme to implement the National Curriculum Framework'. Therefore, the reviewed literature discusses misconceptions about ECCE in rural settings, clarifies the availability of support structures in rural areas, and outlines a daily programme for the ECCE sector. Furthermore, the importance of visual representations in ECCE daily programmes is discussed.

Early Childhood Care and Education in Rural Settings

According to Labuschagne (2015), ECCE centres in rural areas usually experience limited and poor delivery of early education, which contributes to fewer growth and development opportunities for teachers and children. Therefore, rural centres usually operate as creches that provide childcare services rather than care and basic education to lay a solid foundation for future learning (Aubrey, 2017). In such cases, teachers work as childminders and nannies who mostly struggle to maintain young children's learning needs. They also lack community engagement strategies and have limited or no access to professional development opportunities compared to their urban peers (Hannaway et al., 2018). Therefore, equitable learning opportunities for young children in rural areas are usually compromised.

The Availability of Support Structure in Rural Areas

ECCE services provided by the Department of Social Development (DSD) and the Department of Basic Education remain beyond the reach of many vulnerable communities (Harrison, 2020). ECCE teachers reported that this was the case as most of them struggled to meet the requirements and standards of the mentioned government departments (Harrison, 2020). To address this gap, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) became the support structure for many rural and impoverished communities. Therefore, in South Africa, NGOs have become the known training and resource providers of ECCE.

NGOs are more successful in understanding the cultural and social realities of the communities than the government (Ibrahim, 2017). As a result, they quickly build stronger relations with local communities and work with teachers in the ECCE sector. However, NGOs

are primarily accountable to their funders (Dhunpath & Paterson, 2003). They lack accountability practices and mechanisms regarding their responsibilities to beneficiaries. Their behaviour is sometimes prescriptive, highly politicised, and very controlling in meeting funder expectations. They regulate their own practices, and their services are primarily impermanent, which sometimes contrasts with the needs of the rural communities.

A Daily Programme in the ECCE Sector

A daily programme guides how different activities are accommodated in the ECCE (Meier & Marais, 2018). The impression is to present a typical day plan of an ECCE centre and provide a sense of order for young children to play and learn in an ECCE play world. Instead of a timetable comprising subjects to be taught daily as in formal schools, young children's learning opportunities are presented daily. A daily programme specifies everyday care and education activities and provides time blocks for satisfyingly fulfilling each task. Appropriate times are allocated for each activity and are usually kept in the same sequence so that young children know what to do next. Scheduling activities in the same order every day assists young children in developing a better understanding of the play world. Moreover, it enhances a feeling of safety, security, and confidence in knowing what to do.

When developing a daily programme, ECCE teachers usually work together and learn from one another to creatively achieve the curriculum goals (Murriss, 2019). Therefore, teachers teaching similar ages should develop a daily programme together. The idea is to share experiences and balance teacher-guided, routine and child-initiated activities at the appropriate level. The daily programme represents the backbone of well-planned teaching in the interest of young children (Murriss, 2019). Teachers adhere to the curriculum's expectations for young children to explore as they see and touch resources to learn. Therefore, visual representations guide young children in learning.

Visual Representations for Young Children's Development

In ECCE, young children learn through their senses (DBE, 2015). Therefore, visual representations are identified as sensory objects, pictures, or images that young children use to make learning decisions. Through practice, young children develop vigorous learning skills for their future life success. They scrutinise and interpret images and pictures through which they gain meaning. It is not about a beautiful picture; the learning process becomes more accessible when the visual representations are relevant and meaningful to the child. Thus, viewing images and pictures without knowing the intentions leads to a false interpretation of meaning (Parsa, 2012).

In the ECCE daily programme, visual images and pictures provide a predictable structure of the day (Meier & Marais, 2018). Pictures and images enhance instructions and guide young children on what they must do in the classroom (Shabiralyani et al., 2015). Moreover, it matches children's development needs and informs them about the sequence of all daily activities in a creative way. Young children learn to make connections between their experiences to understand the ideas conveyed and the visible action in the image.

When developing a visual daily programme, teachers work together to identify related activities and gather material to represent activities depending on a child's level (Bornman & Rose, 2017). Planning materials include charts, magazines, paper glue and scissors for

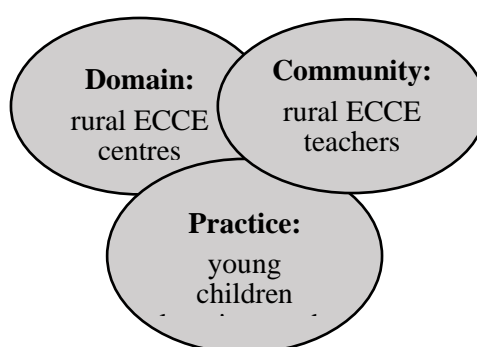
cutting. Thereafter, teachers collectively decide on the picture symbol associated with each activity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research study was underpinned by the Communities of Practice (CoP) theoretical framework to provide an understanding of the interactions that occurred in re-envisioning a daily programme for rural ECCE centres. CoPs are recognised as social bodies of individuals who share similar problems, concerns, or desires about a particular issue (Wenger, 1998). The community extends its knowledge by continuously interacting while particular skills in the related field are developed (Wenger et al., 2002). The developers of the theory, Wenger and Lave, shared their anthropological viewpoint that learning is not just a matter of receiving information but a continuous involvement in communities of practice relevant to the study (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The participants of this study engaged in an ongoing collective learning programme to develop themselves and the young children they teach. They worked together to develop a daily programme as the implementation of curriculum policy in the ECCE.

Wenger advanced the concept of CoP to a learning partnership among people who find it valuable to learn from and with each other about a particular domain (Wenger et al., 2011). Therefore, learning does not occur in an individual's mind (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Wenger identified 'domain' as the shared expertise that sets apart community members capable of collaborating and practising prepared methods to address recurring issues. Figure 1 depicted below showcases how teachers, united by a common goal of advancing equitable quality education in rural ECCE centres (domain), engage in collaborative learning practices (community) to enhance their learning and to meet the learning needs of young children (practice).

Figure 1
Community of Practice Model (Wenger, 1998)



In the rural communities, the DBE subject advisors introduced the NCF to the rural ECCE centres that the Department of Social Development (DSD) initially organised within a geographic cluster. All the teachers embraced the NCF as an opportunity to combat inequalities in the sector. However, only a small group of centres were committed to continuous learning (Wenger, 1998) for their growth and to follow the vision of the NCF. This study brought together teachers from the three centres. Despite the challenges, the group of

teachers connected to each other to learn the vision of the NCF, improve teaching practices and plan to meet the needs of young children. They engaged in meaningful discussions to achieve the objectives of the curriculum.

The idea of CoP is prevalent in the ECCE sector, especially in low-resourced centres that are not formally supported by the DSD (Van der Vyver, 2012). Teachers from rural areas shared common challenges and opportunistic aspects of their everyday lives (Labuschagne, 2015). While CoP comprises the development of specific competencies, human actions cannot be understood in abstraction from their specific contexts of social practice (Wenger, 2009). Practices depend on social processes and learning through engagements (Wenger, 2009). In rural centres, adults who are teachers collaborate to respond to the challenges of their communities as per policy guidance. Beyond those organised teams, ECCE provision and support still heavily rely on NGOs.

While CoP is praised for collaborative learning, it is criticised for its limitations to power dynamics and intersectionality (Lorenzetti et al., 2023). Meanwhile, NGOs provide voluntary participation to achieve their desired goals. They are increasingly recognised as the providers of ECCE solutions in many poorly resourced communities. As presented in the introduction of the study, NGOs, as the providers of ECCE services, are very close to the communities. They act as an autonomous voice of civil society and offer an open platform for people to organise themselves around important issues.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research study that used an exploratory case study design was employed to explore teachers' learning that occurred in the re-envisioning of a daily programme in three rural ECCE centres. Qualitative researchers strive for openness, self-determination, and flexibility (Cohen et al., 2018). This means that qualitative researchers give credence to the participants' voices and the different ways they make sense of their reality. Moreover, an exploratory case study allows for an in-depth description of the phenomenon of the study as it involves a small number of participants so that the researcher could delve deeply into each case.

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Two teachers allocated to teaching young children (aged between three and four) from each centre agreed to participate in the research study. Therefore, six participants were purposefully sampled to provide the relevant data to answer the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2017). These rural teachers embraced the new curriculum policy and committed to learning together for the development of young children. They joined the Umbumbulu Area cluster team organised by the DSD for collaboration and knowledge sharing. After the DBE introduced the NCF at the cluster meeting, they learned to follow the NCF's guidance. All the participants indicated suitable times for the interviews and shared the formal (National Curriculum Framework) and informal (Daily Programme) planning documents they used. The study permitted the participants to create meaning and construct realism in their natural settings (Cohen et al., 2018). The official NCF document and the daily programme supplemented information from the semi-structured interviews. The NCF provided examples of teaching and learning activities to be included in a daily programme for young children. ECCE teachers re-envisioned the daily programme in the interest of young children.

Data analysis

After collecting data using semi-structured interviews and document analysis, the process of data analysis began. A data analysis spiral that follows procedures similar to the thematic analysis was used (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2018). The connected steps of data analysis formed a spiral of activities that started with managing and organising the data (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Data were organised into files to make the transcription process easy. As a researcher, I decided to read and transcribe the data to familiarise myself with it and to make sense of it. Some important notes were made for coding during the reading process, which is the next step of the spiral process. All the interviews that were recorded and the documents that were analysed were grouped data into codes to develop themes. After that, I started assessing all interpretations and arranged themes systematically for the findings to emerge.

Ethical considerations

This article originates from a PhD study that explored the integrated planning of activities for the development of young children in rural ECCE centres. To avoid unethical behaviours and inappropriate manipulation of information (Cohen et al., 2018), ethical approval was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Humanities, and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (No. HSS/1668/018D) and from the Department of Social Development (Ref. S6/2/1).

FINDINGS

Data collected from the semi-structured interviews and document analysis were transcribed into workable units and categorised into different themes. Six purposively selected participants, from the three rural ECCE centres that transformed into the NCF, shared their experiences. They presented a daily programme that included visual representations of activities to guide the learning process. In this study, participants were coded as T1-Centre 1, T2-Centre 1, T1-Centre 2, T2-Centre 2 and T1-Centre 3, T2-Centre 3; T1 stands for teacher 1, and T2 stands for teacher 2. Three themes that emerged from the data analysis are collaborative learning endeavour, policy practice dialogue, and power dynamics in the sector.

Collaborative Learning Endeavour

In the ECCE, the daily programme complies with national policies. Therefore, developing a daily programme is influenced by the teachers' understanding of the curriculum content (Meier & Marais, 2018). After the NCF was introduced, teachers committed to planning for its implementation. When responding to how they planned the daily programme, the participants expressed that it started as a collaborative learning endeavour to understand the content of the curriculum policy. T1 Centre 2 explained how they started planning to develop a daily programme.

After the NCF, we organised ourselves into a learning group to discuss the vision of the NCF and the curriculum content. We started planning as a team with two other neighbouring ECCE centres that became interested.

The same idea was shared by T2 Centre 3, who indicated:

We wanted to share our experiences to achieve the curriculum's objectives. We read the document and started planning together.

T2 Centre 2 added:

We discussed the vision of the NCF so that we could plan accordingly.

Data revealed that the participants organised themselves into a learning community (Wenger et al., 2002) and started planning as a team to achieve the objectives of the curriculum policy. Therefore, teamwork and collaboration became a meaningful opportunity for the ECCE teachers to share their experiences and skills regarding the policy (Ebrahim & Irven, 2012; DBE, 2015). T1 Centre 3 explained further to highlight what they learned from the NCF and said:

We learned that NCF was not designed to be used in a prescriptive way. The teaching and learning activities included in the six Early Learning Developmental Areas used as subjects are just examples of activities. Each centre is allowed to teach activities that are related to its context and community. Because we are in the same area, we started talking about the activities relevant to us and our children and that we should include in the daily programme.

T1 Centre 1 added what they also learned from the curriculum framework and said:

Meeting the needs of young children when planning to teach in the ECCE was highlighted as important.

T2 Centre 2 also mentioned:

It is emphasised that young children learn better as they see and touch what they are learning.

From the views of T1 Centre 3, T1 Centre 1, and T2 Centre 2, the NCF was designed as a flexible curriculum policy that allowed all ECCE teachers to relate and think about context-related activities. The participants' responses showed the importance of understanding your context for planning for a child's interest (DBE, 2015; Murris, 2019). Therefore, in the ECCE, teachers have to meet the needs of young children to see and touch what they have to learn (Meier & Marais, 2018). After that, the participants shared all the gains they considered important when planning to teach young children. T1 Centre 2 mentioned the following:

It was surprising that the six ELDAs in the NCF are very similar to the three Foundation Phase subjects: Mathematics, Language, and Life Skills. The only difference is that in the NCF, Life Skills is divided into four ELDAs: Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Creativity and Knowledge, and Understanding the World. The ELDA's communication and exploring mathematics correspond closely to the traditional subjects of language and mathematics.

T2 Centre 2 added that

After reading all the activities from the ELDAs, it became very easy to discuss the activities to be included in the daily programme.

Data revealed that collaboration became very useful for the participants to understand NCF as it was user-friendly, and they could comprehend the document. They identified similarities between the normal subjects and the six ELDAs in the NCF. After understanding, the participants started thinking about the activities they wanted to include in a daily programme. T2 Centre 3 mentioned that after reading the NCF with understanding, they started policy

practice dialogue in groups to develop a daily programme that is relevant to each group of children and said:

While we all read the NCF together in one room, when planning a daily programme, we decided that teachers teaching similar levels of children (infants, toddlers, and young children) sit together to decide on the relevant activities. The six of us teaching young children discussed the activities and developed a daily programme as the implementation of the NCF.

Data showed that the development of a daily programme required the participants to plan according to the level of the child (Ebrahim & Irvine, 2012). Therefore, the developmental guidelines and the activities included in the NCF guided the development of a daily programme. ECCE teachers joined up policy practice dialogue to plan a daily programme for the development of young children.

Policy Practice Dialogue

The policy practice dialogues, the second theme of the study, started with a discussion of the successful implementation of the NCF. The participants mentioned sharing their experiences of what can be interesting to young children when planning a daily programme (Meier & Marais, 2018). Instead of a timetable comprising subjects, a daily programme includes activities. Therefore, all the participants indicated the importance of activities suitable for young children. T1 Centre 1 mentioned that:

Developing a daily programme became an opportunity to share ideas and experiences about how young children learn. After discussing the vision of the NCF, we decided to include pictures of the activities in a daily programme.

T1 Centre 3 added:

Because young children cannot correctly read the text, to make them interested in following the daily programme, we decided to present teaching and learning activities as visuals instead of words in a daily programme.

T2 Centre 2 also elucidated on the discussions and said:

Because young children cannot associate with text and time, we wanted them to see the picture of the activity on the daily programme to understand what they must do every day in the classroom. This is because the NCF highlighted that they learn as they see the object.

The participant's responses indicated they tried to work beyond merely following NCF as they engaged deeper to identify the daily programme as a learning opportunity for young children. When analysing data from the semi-structured interviews and documents, it became evident that incorporating pictures into the daily programme was an effective visual guide to achieving the educational outcomes outlined in the NCF. Teaching and learning activities, such as pictures, were used in a daily programme for young children to know what they must do in the classroom daily (Shabiralyani et al., 2015). Pictures inform young children about the sequence of the day in a creative way. The aim is to meet young children's needs to explore and learn (DBE, 2015).

T1 Centre 2 clarified their decision further and said:

After realising that we were not good at drawing, we collected magazines to cut pictures related to the activities we wanted to include in a daily programme.

T2 Centre 2 added that

We also organised other needed materials such as charts, glue, and scissors. We started by writing the activities on the chart and decided on the relevant pictures. After that, we wrote the time for the activities and pasted pictures next to the activities.

Data showed that the participants brought together some ideas and organised all the material that they needed to develop a daily programme. They also worked as a team to find relevant pictures for the activities from magazines as they identified their weakness in drawing. That is engaging in critical thinking to solve the problem. After that, they wrote the activities on charts, pasted pictures, and wrote time. The participants further explained how the pictures were related to the activities.

T2 Centre 3 said:

For the arrival time, we included pictures of children and their parents and pictures of children playing to learn in different classroom areas. A picture of a child and a teacher reading represented the reading time.

T1 Centre1 added:

The numbers represented time to explore mathematics, letters of the alphabet for communication, different colour blocks for free play activities indoors, scissors for creativity and arts. Pictures mainly show all the activities that we wanted children to learn.

T2 Centre 1 added that

We used pictures of children playing in groups outside the classroom for free play outside. They socialise and develop fine and gross motor skills while jumping and playing to learn. It is the time to explore and identify friends. Where there are children with their bags, we wanted to show home time while children sleeping indicated sleeping time. As you can see, there is another picture of a bus and children going home, which also shows home time.

T1 Centre 3 also added:

The pictures of children washing their hands after using the toilet before snack time guide children to know that they have to wash their hands after using the toilet every day. Those are toilet routine activities. Although time is included in a daily programme, we tell children when it is toilet time.

The data collected through interviews was supported by a daily programme that the participants developed, as presented by T1 Centre 1. The daily programme included pictures, activities, and the time to do the activity.

Figure 2
Centre 1 Daily Programme



Analysis of the semi-structured interviews and documents indicated that incorporating pictures into the daily programme was an effective visual guide to help achieve the educational outcomes outlined in the NCF. It became evident that young children's needs were considered when planning a daily programme, and the participants reflected on the NCF so that young children could explore and learn (DBE, 2015). Therefore, the participants innovated visuals to enhance instructions for young children to know what they must do daily (Shabiralyani et al., 2015). Visuals matched young children's development needs and informed them about the sequence of all daily activities. Therefore, pictures from magazines related to the teaching and learning activities in a daily programme. Although the participants indicated they were not good at drawing, they presented creative thinking as the identification of pictures that related to the activities they wanted to teach. The findings showed that teachers were creative enough to identify pictures related to the magazine's activities. However, some challenges affected the visual daily programme's development as the NCF implementation.

Power dynamics in the ECCE Sector

Data revealed that while ECCE teachers invented visuals in the daily programme, NGOs in the area became very influential to them. The data collected revealed that power dynamics influenced rural ECCE centres. The participants could not acknowledge their professional judgment and creativity as they relied on NGOs for good-looking resources. While all the participants identified the importance of daily programmes in the interest of a child, two participants could not effectively communicate the daily programme they developed with the young children. When further asked about the issue of support when developing a daily programme, T1 Centre 2 said:

After working together as ECCE teachers to develop a daily programme that included pictures from magazines, a Non-Governmental Organisation that used to visit us in our area supported our ideas and provided a daily programme with good-looking

pictures that we now use in our centre. But, the copies are very small (A5 size) to keep in our files. We cannot hang it in the classroom for young children to see. In support of what T1 Centre 2 highlighted T2 Centre 2 said:

We shared our daily programme with a particular NGO that supported us by providing an elegant daily programme with clear pictures we decided to use in our centre. They promised to share that daily programme with all the centres in the area.

The findings revealed that ECCE teachers initially had creative ideas for developing a daily programme with visuals to benefit young children, but upon receiving a visually appealing daily programme from the NGO, they shifted their focus away from the children's learning needs. They praised the NGO for the attractive pictures without considering whether they effectively served the educational purpose as planned. Evidently, NGOs often have their own objectives and priorities to fulfil (Dhunpath & Paterson, 2003), which may sometimes differ from the teachers' specific goals. The findings contrast with Parsa (2012) that a daily programme is not about beautiful pictures, but visual representations have to be relevant and meaningful to the child. The participants also contrasted the CoP, saying that social bodies share similar concerns about a particular issue (Wenger, 1998).

DISCUSSION

Rural ECCE teachers organised a community-based knowledge-sharing development group (Hannaway et al., 2018). As Ebrahim and Irven (2012) pointed out, rural ECCE teachers intentionally learned to follow the vision of the NCF for the development of young children. Even though the participants used different words, they confirmed Raikou's (2018) suggestion that collaboration among teachers significantly impacts learning, growth, and development.

The findings from the study revealed that a small group of teachers were eager to learn and committed to developing a daily programme for young children. They formed a CoP to engage in a collective learning process (Wenger, 1998). As Raikou (2018) pointed out, the opportunity became a meaning-making effort to achieve the objectives of the curriculum policy. Therefore, developing a daily program became a collaborative learning endeavour for ECCE teachers to collectively reflect on how young children learn. They planned a daily visual programme as part of the implementation of the National Curriculum Framework for young children to see pictures and learn.

While policy implementation is usually challenging in rural ECCE centres (Tyilo et al., 2017), rural teachers identified an excellent strategy to share ideas and experiences to learn from each other (DBE, 2015). They read teaching and learning activities from the six ELDAs of the NCF and then discussed activities they wanted to teach. This article suggests that teachers join policy practice dialogue to learn from each other. During the discussions, it was decided to use pictures of the activities instead of words in a daily programme. All the participants agreed that pictures supported with words in a daily programme assist young children in knowing what they have to do in the classroom daily. Therefore, rural ECCE teachers collectively re-envisioned a daily programme to meet the needs of the young children as per policy guidance. As proposed by Meier and Marais (2018), young children were involved and accommodated in the ECCE to know what daily activities must be done while the objectives of the curriculum are considered.

The findings displayed confusion when the ECCE teachers' vision was supported by an NGO, which later presented an attractive and well-designed daily programme. That showed evidence of power dynamics in ECCE, as the NGO's involvement influenced the final teacher's vision to develop young children's interests as they saw the pictures to understand the daily programme. The NGO influenced two ECCE teachers from one centre that participated in the research study. They opted for a visually appealing daily program, which unfortunately turned out to be too small to be easily visible to young children in the classroom. This finding concurs with Dhunpath and Paterson (2003) that NGOs influence teachers when they have their priorities to fulfil.

CONCLUSION

The NCF enabled rural ECCE teachers to re-envision the daily programme as a visual representation of the teaching and learning activities in the interest of young children (Zama & Mashiya, 2022). These findings suggest that rural teachers are autonomous thinkers who find it valuable to learn from and with each other about the development of young children (Wenger et al., 2011). Without the contribution of NGOs, rural ECCE teachers comprise the Community of Practice. While NGOs refined the daily programme and came up with better-looking pictures, the researcher looked at the NGOs as intruders who are always considered proficient.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Whilst challenging the pedagogy beyond superficial policy compliance, the paper concludes with a commentary on breeding dependence within benevolent partnerships to question the goal of teachers as autonomous curriculum agents. This research study contributes to the body of knowledge as the teachers' effort to meet the needs of a rural child. It unearths teacher competencies to meet the objectives of the curriculum policy (Ntumi, 2016). Moreover, it recommends more collaboration for the teachers to share their creative skills.

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