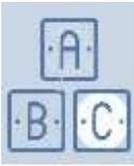


Kwa-Zulu Natal Early Childhood Development Community of Practice Meeting Highlights 02 June 2022

SCENE SETTING



Patsy Pillay, facilitator of the KZN Early Childhood Development (ECD) Community of Practice (CoP), welcomed participants to the second meeting of 2022. The meeting looked into two main items:

- 1) A showcase from an organisation Thanda
- 2) A presentation on a responsive training and development plan for ECD

She then handed over to Thandeka Rantsi, ECD Project Manager at BRIDGE to inform the CoP about the activities of the National ECD CoP:

BRIDGE/LEGO held a webinar on the 26th of April 2022 that looked at the 'Practice of Play in Different Contexts'. The meeting highlights can be found [here](#)

SmartStart contracted BRIDGE to help facilitate conversations around forming CoPs with community members in Dealesville and Soutpan in the Free State

As part of the Real Reform for ECD campaign steering committee, BRIDGE had an opportunity to facilitate a conversation on mobilising municipalities for ECD

The upcoming National ECD CoP will take place on the 30th of June 2022 and will look at human resource development in ECD

SHOWCASE: Angela Larkan - Thanda



Angela Larkan, the founder and executive director of Thanda, took participants through the different programmes of the organisation with the main focus being on their ECD programmes. Founded in 2007, Thanda works in the rural south west region of KZN.

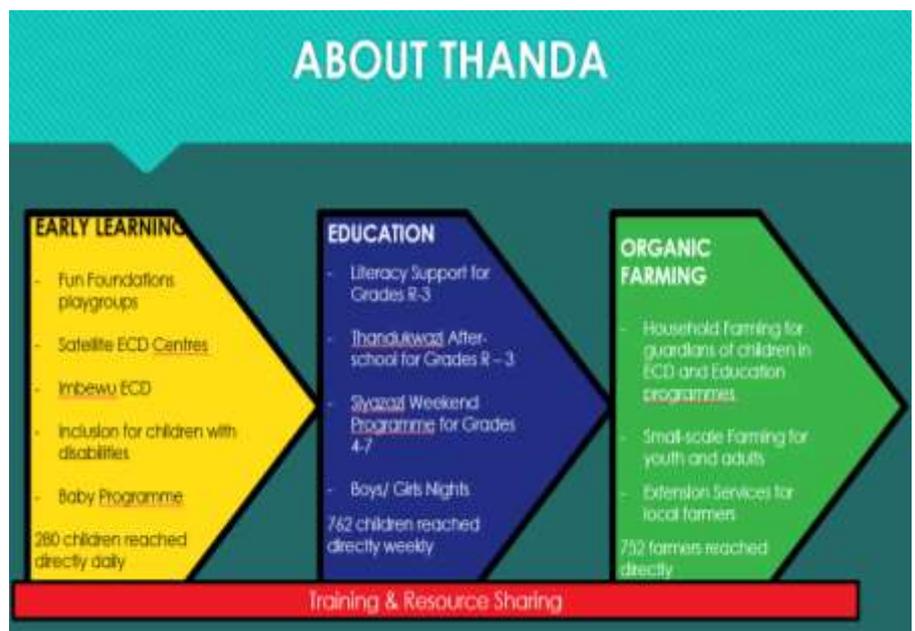
Thanda currently has three programmes on offer:

Early learning

Education which is mostly after school programmes

Organic farming consisting of a household farming programme and a small scale farmers programme

[Click here for Angela's full presentation](#)



Thanda’s early learning programme, that serves about 280 children offers the following:

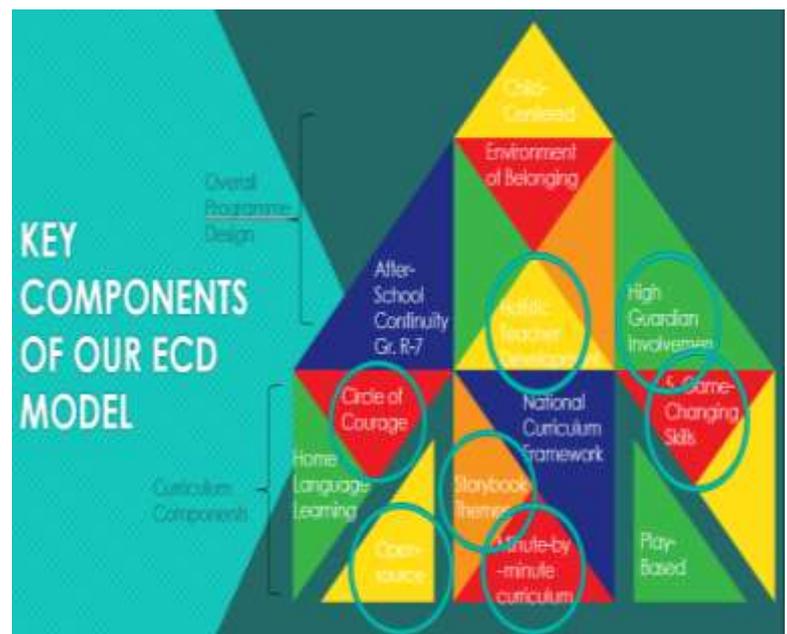
- Fun Foundation Playgroups which use of volunteers within the community to facilitate playgroups
- Satellite ECDs-Thanda renovates structures to use as ECD centres and provides formal training and resources to the facilitators. Thanda is currently working with two.
- Imbewu ECD is an ECD centre located at the organisations’ premises, discovered through M&E that the quality of foundation between the fun foundation playgroups and the Imbewu centres do not show that great of a difference in results considering the huge difference in resource, which is very telling.
- The Inclusion programme works with children living with disability. Children are supported by occupational therapists through quarterly visits at the Imbewu centre and at homes. Parents are provided with a therapy support plan, pictures and instructions to implement at home. Children have been doing well in the programme with a lot of them going into mainstream school and others really developing. Most importantly there is a change in relationship between the guardian and child, and of attitude regarding disability in communities.
- The Baby programme, which consists of about 60 babies, involves home visits twice a month There are activities to develop milestones with a benchmark in the beginning of the programme and an assessment at the end. Majority of parents cited the need for love as a crucial requirement to parenting by the end of the programme, as opposed to food, clothing etc. mentioned at the beginning.

Thanda conducted the Early Learning Outcomes Measure (ELOM) which is a South African pre-school child assessment tool from 2018 to 2020. The report showed that children from Thanda (yellow dot on slide 8 of the presentation) achieved comparable results with children from higher quintile ECD programmes.

See below the key components of Thanda’s ECD model:

The components that are unique about Thanda’s curriculum are the ones circled on the slide which are based on a native American theory of ‘use development’. The themes are namely, belonging, mastery, self-esteem, perspective, critical thinking, generosity, independence and empathy. Thanda feels that these are skills that are critical for success, with creativity being all around.

Thanda is working on a minute-by-minute version of this curriculum, after discovering that a lesson plan was not enough because they are not prescriptive enough, which is found to be more helpful and ensures quality work, by eliminating repetition.



The other interesting thing about the curriculum is that it is based around storybook themes that relate to an underlying concept e.g. transport. For example a theme around belonging, will be on books that are currently being read in class, spending 2-3 weeks on each theme, which is a more exciting way of getting children involved by asking them where they think the characters would live if they lived in their community, finding something that is the same colour as the shirt of that character etc, delving into that world for a few weeks, which is helpful for developing empathy ([Thanda's learning portal on storybook themes](#)).

The last programme under ECD is the guardian involvement programme which was rolled out during Covid-19, with home visits reaching every household once every 2 months for about an hour a month. The programme has learning from home packs sent every month to continue the relationship of learning between guardian and child with a book dashboard coupled with 6 guardian meetings that guardians are required to attend.



PLENARY DISCUSSION

Q. From the programmes that Thanda is running, what advice would you give ECD centres on practical sustainable development ideas, around climate change and preserving our earth?

A. The minute-by-minute curriculum is open source and free to share, with M&E frameworks. A big part for Thanda is for children to understand that we are all interconnected, with ourselves and all types of people and the environment. The organisation acknowledges that this is a big concept to introduce at ECD level and does so through discovery walks, which children do almost every day. Discovery walks are where children get to interact with their surroundings and nature and talk about the things they see. The community centre building is a sustainable architecture design, with doors that open out for natural airflow and a double roof that naturally heats and cools the building with very thick insulation. The centre also incorporates toys made out of recycled materials, which are a good thing to incorporate but not necessarily sustainable.

During lockdown, the organisation developed resources using nature, like drawing on the ground with sticks, to show that you do not always need to have expensive toys and resources. It is more about knowing what to do.

Q. Regarding the discovery walks, what do they entail and how are they done?

A. The discovery walks are all written into the minute-by-minute curriculum, which is basically taking a concept that children are working on in the classroom and applying it to the outdoors, for example if they are working on the letter 'S' then children would be asked to go look for things of that shape or collect them in groups of three. It could be looking for a specific colour or drawing a shape in the dirt. It is about connecting learning concepts outdoors with application. It is to inspire that awe and wonder through real world application.

Q. Who exactly is involved in the agriculture programme, how do you recruit and who does it benefit and is there a benefit that you have seen in the community because of that particular programme?

A. The household gardens are for the guardians of children in the ECD and after school programmes, which is offered to all of them and if they want to participate then they get offered mentoring with Thanda providing seedlings. The seller programme, with about 400 farmers from the community

working together across 33 different farms, are groups that are farming who come to Thanda for support. Thanda provides them with infrastructure and ongoing training and mentoring, with inputs such as seedlings which they pay for. The benefits for the households is that it provides them with food, and for the seller programme the benefit is that the average production and profit are increasing meaning that they are able to produce for their households and also sell the excess, with a marketing team and system in place. They can then use that profit to buy other foods, work on their house or pay for school fees and medicine. The average monthly profits for the farmers is at the exact figure as a pension grant that most families receive from the government, essentially doubling their household monthly income.

COMMENTS

“Much needed work... ECD is an opportune moment to promote human interdependence on the environment and our responsibility toward the planet and our limited resources.”

“Always enjoy hearing about the incredible work you do at THANDA. Would love to see more of your kind of curriculum specially the discovery walks implemented in all ECDs.”



PRESENTATION: Ruby Motaung - TREE

Moving on to the second part of the session we had Ruby Motaung, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of TREE, a non-profit organisation that specialises in Early Childhood Development, resource and training present on what a responsive training and a development plan looks like in ECD. The aim of Ruby’s presentation was to know where the ECD sector is and where it is headed, especially regarding the not so transparent process of the function shift from DSD to DBE. Ruby noted her presentation will be a problematic one as it will reflect on exactly what the sector is doing and where it is struggling. She urged participants to continue to be concerned, committed and dedicated members of the sector, which might get it to where it needs to be. In preparing the presentation Ruby connected with the relevant stakeholders who inform the development of the sector.



To access
Ruby’s full
presentation
, [click here](#)

In responding to the question of responsive training and a development plan in ECD, Ruby started off by sharing some data from the Thrive By Five report. The “Thrive by five” study indicates that about 55% of 4-5 year olds are not on track with early learning (In KZN, the total is around 70% of 4-5 year olds that are not on track). About 50% of the workforce do not have a relevant qualification (22% are completely without whilst 27% are working towards one), this is not to say that quality teaching and learning cannot happen in a classroom without a qualification, but factors like commitment, dedication and understanding the child play a role in quality teaching.



Examining the Early Learning in the context of South Africa

- The Thrive by Five Index is the biggest survey of preschool child development ever attempted in South Africa. The study was released after a joint collaboration by First National Bank (FNB) and Innovation Edge, and supported by the Department of Basic Education (DBE).
- Project leaders surveyed over 5000 young children attending Early Learning Programmes in all 9 provinces, and measured three key indicators in development, which are early learning, physical growth and social and emotional functioning.
- The study explores the data around learning, health, and social-emotional functioning, this data paints a dire picture of Early Childhood Development in South Africa.



TREE
a package of services



TREE
a commitment to excellence

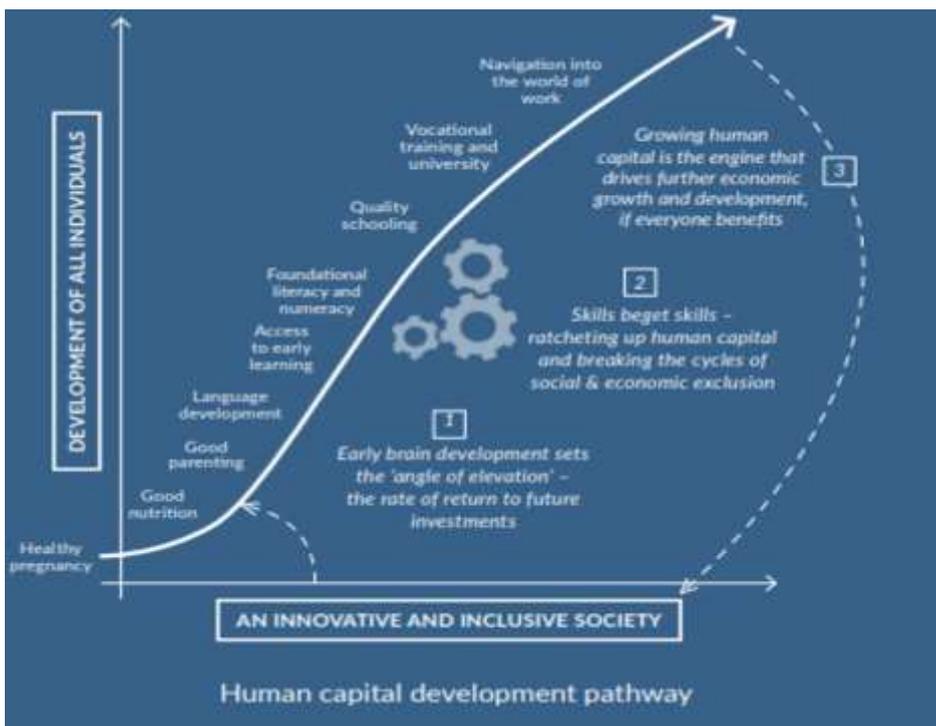


TREE
a heart for young children



TREE
an evidence-based plan

The Thrive By Five Index was needed in order for the DBE to understand where the sector is in order to plan adequate for the function shift.



How do we make sure that there is an innovative and inclusive society, and that we are at the same level of understanding when it comes to the development of a child?

Talking about good nutrition and the holistic development of a child, which is why most of our conversations are now looking at the child from a developmental

perspective because it is important that when you look at a child you do so from inception where we talk about a healthy pregnancy and good nutrition, good parenting as a component and language development to name but a few (refer to slide extract above for more). This also looks at the type of teacher that will be responsible for the educational development of the child.

In South Africa ECD is a priority and is supported by legislation, national policies and strategies, but unfortunately the reality is that they are not as implementable as they are supposed to be and are not as supported and monitored to make sure that they are relevant to the needs relating to ECD.

A SOCIAL COMPACT FOR ECD STUDY: The National Development Plan (NDP) recognises that this goal will only be possible with innovative public-private partnerships. While some goals in the NDP might seem unlikely to be reached, this one can be achieved.

It is important to also look at how far we are from strengthening our expertise, resources and experience in making sure that we master the space that we are in without competing with government. ECD activists need to challenge the quality of programmes that are on offer.

Children often depend on ECD facilities for essential services and resources and the risks facing children with disabilities who may be excluded from these services are substantial.

It has been observed that providing appropriate ECD services at an early age makes it possible for children to attain their full potential.

It is simply not enough for children to attend any pre-school establishment, such as day-care centres, crèches, playgroups and nursery schools where the minimum requirement for a preschool teacher is an (NQF) Level 1 (grade 9), because this space demands more, it demands specialisation. The difference between children

who attended Registered ECD centres with trained teachers versus untrained teachers or children who are unable to attend or have no access to Early Childhood Development facilities or Pre-Primary Schooling at all, tends to be quite self-evident.

Children who are placed in the care of trained and qualified ECD staff, have shown to have greater cognitive acuity, emotional development and interpersonal skills. This allows the learners to perform better in a formal educational environment and boosts their confidence.

The importance of having well trained and certified teachers is crucial from ECD level to Pre-Primary level as these levels feed into each other and subsequently learners feed into the foundation phase of formal schooling.



'when you pay attention to the beginning of the story, you can change the whole story' Raffi Cavoukian, singer and founder of Canada's Centre for Child Honouring

Who is the Early Childhood Workforce?

The Early Childhood Workforce

Table 1: Roles within the early childhood workforce

Primary sector	Roles
HEALTH AND NUTRITION ⁵¹	Roles may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Auxiliary nurses & auxiliary midwives • Community health workers • Home visitors • Nurses & midwives • Medical doctors • Nutritionists • Health educators & trainers • Health service directors, managers, and supervisors
EDUCATION	Roles may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child care workers • Early childhood teachers • Primary school teachers • Social pedagogy professionals • Teacher assistants • Teacher coaches • Teacher trainers • Supervisors • Education service directors/managers
SOCIAL AND CHILD PROTECTION	Roles may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social service workers • Community child protection officers and workers • Psychologists • Mental health professionals/specialists • Residential care staff • Social service educators & trainers • Community child protection officers and workers • Social service managers

Chapter 10 of the National Integrated ECD Policy clearly outlines who the ECD workforce is and their roles and responsibilities. It is important to note that the practitioner is not the only critical ECD component of the ECD workforce but we rather need to have a holistic view of components making up the ECD workforce.

Preconditions:

While having trained and qualified ECD Teachers/Practitioners,

with a minimum of NQF Level 4 In Early Childhood Education is desirable, it is important to note and have a clear outlook as to what exactly is meant by ECD as mentioned in the slide on the right.

The Early Childhood workforce is vast and diverse, spanning health and nutrition, education, social and child protection sectors. This diverse workforce ideally ought to be supported by a broad ecosystem of actors, including both frontline workers who deliver services to young children and families as well as those who directly train, supervise, and manage these practitioners.

A way forward:

In order for ECD to be more effective in South Africa, there is a need for those who form education policies, and other stakeholders to review the early childhood teacher preparation curriculum. The curriculum should include the provision of early childhood exceptional education. Not exempting the challenge that the level 4 graduates are struggling with getting access into higher institutions of learning because of the lack of collaboration and partnership caused by stakeholders choosing to work in isolation.

There is a need to infuse culturally relevant and culturally responsive curricula at the pre-service teacher preparation stage in order to produce ECD teachers who are self-sufficient and are able to improvise depending on the cultural context and the way to do this is to share experiences in support of each other.

There is a need for continuous ECD professional development through workshops to enhance the skills of those who are already working as ECD teachers without a relevant teaching qualification. The government is lacking in making sure that the product of teachers that are coming from universities

and in the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) space are being supported as teaching is a continuous development.

Most NGOs have new knowledge from working in other countries where they have established ECDs. Policy makers and stakeholders should be willing to embrace new ideas. It is encouraged to analyse trends in early childhood education globally (including efforts in other developing countries not only from Africa but Asia and The Pacific, Latin America, etc., so that it can help us understand ECD more broadly.

Where are we as a country?

Higher Education Qualifications for ECD (Birth-Four), emphasise the issue of specialisation in the area. In other words, someone who has an ECCE birth-to -four qualification would not ideally teach Gr R because Gr R has its own specialisation.

In 2017 a policy on Minimum Requirements for Qualifications for Early Childhood Development Educators (MRQECDE) was gazetted, with a focus on birth to four. The policy marks the first time in the history of ECD in South Africa that a formal set of professional and post-professional qualifications

for birth to 4 have been formulated as national policy.

ECD Qualifications Structure			
NQF Exit Level	Certificates	Degrees	Diplomas
10		Doctorate	
9		Professional Doctorate	
8		Master's	
7		Professional Master's	
8		Bachelor of Education Honours	Postgraduate Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education
7		Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Care and Education	Advanced Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education
6	Advanced Certificate in Early Childhood Care and Education		Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education
5	Higher Certificate in Early Childhood Care and Education		

From a higher education point of level, we have never had a standardised qualification that is set as a qualification for the birth to 4 phase. As seen on the slide extract on the right these are the qualifications that are available which start from as low as a higher certificate in ECCE, the level 5 referred to here is at a further education

and training level, which is different from the one NGOs and TVET colleges offer. Unfortunately, these are the only qualifications that can lead to recognition by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and DBE.

A key principle that must inform recognition of prior learning (RPL) practice is that learning outcomes must not be compromised as a result of RPL. This means that RPL must take place on an individual, student-by-student basis and must involve an assessment/professional judgment of prior learning.

This is where we are mostly challenged because NGOs have their own understanding of RPL and the higher learning institutions also have their own. To the sector RPL means having been in the ECD space as a teacher for more than 5 years, for the higher institutions it talks to the student as an individual, looking at assessment and professional judgement. The higher institutions are also noting the issue of how expensive the RPL practice is-it requires the accumulation of a comprehensive portfolio of evidence and in many cases is not seen to completion. That is why there is no serious commitment to the RPL.

Policy Implementation relating to qualifications in the FET level:

The last date for entry for ECD educators to non-HEQSF aligned programmes was 2019. With effect from the 2020 academic year, all students wishing to obtain higher education qualifications in ECD should be admitted to accredited, and approved new programmes aligned to MRQECDE (2017). Holders of historic and currently approved qualifications for ECD educators will continue to receive full recognition of their approved, completed qualifications. The Teacher Education for Early Childhood Care & Education Project (TEECCEP) was then formed to support 10 universities to work with the Project for Inclusive Early Childhood Care and Education (PIECCE). The aim was to develop a standardised programme framework for B Ed ECCE and Dip ECCE and support materials for selected modules.

Universities funded under TEECCEP:

University	Qualification	Est. 1 st enrolment
CPUT	Dip ECCE	2023
UFH	Dip ECCE & B Ed ECCE	2023
WSU	Dip ECCE	2023
UFS	Dip ECCE	2023
NWU	B Ed ECCE	2022
UKZN	B Ed ECCE	2023
UP	B Ed ECCE	2022
WITS	B Ed ECCE	2023
UNISA	Dip ECCE	2023
UWC	Higher Cert ECCE	2024

The University of the Western Cape joined the project at a later stage and was given funding by DHET as the only university that would develop the level 5 qualification- none of the other institutions were willing to do so. Universities referred to here are government (public) universities. There are private universities that

have gone ahead in implementing this policy. It is important to note that it is still a challenge to confirm a university that is fully ready to offer this qualification. The University of Pretoria has received accreditation from CHE, but is still busy applying to SAQA for the identity of the programme

before it can be offered, the process no longer happens all at once. That is the only university that is ahead in terms of accreditation by the CHE.

The demand for ECD programmes continues to grow rapidly, however challenges remain around ensuring their quality to support a child's healthy development. While a number of factors influence the quality of programmes, training and professional development for those delivering key services plays an important role. Thus policy and legislation in the area of ECD needs to be clearly defined, knowing exactly who the role players involved are and who makes up the ECD Workforce. By doing this it will effectively make it easier to identify who needs training for what and where they fit in, in the broader ECD sector.

Moreover, recent case studies of ECD Centres and Pre-Schools in ten countries identified that children who attended schools with teachers who possessed more educational qualifications, were more likely to have higher language scores by the time they reach age 7 and Grade 1.



PLENARY DISCUSSION

Q. If we are moving the workforce forward what would be our university requirements for those that are coming from occupational and vocational training, with the current level 5 not satisfying university requirements?

A. Universities said that even though the level 4 was equivalent to a grade 12, they are looking at what has been offered in that package of level 4. In most cases, level 4 students do not make it up to end of the university qualification because of a lack of alignment, with no special attention given in terms of language. This causes them to drop out or fail. Each university is however different in how they see this.

Q. What is the solution, do we need a minimum qualification for everyone in ECD, if so, what is it and who should offer it?

A. DBE said there is a task team that is being set up to get a deeper understanding into a qualification in relation to the function shift and part of the work is to determine a final position on the level 4. A special meeting with the team of UKZN has been initiated, as they are busy developing a B Ed in ECCE with a number of RTO's in KZN. The group is unpacking the benefits of a B Ed and a Diploma as more of the students can get in if it is a diploma than a B Ed, going with a credit accumulation approach.

COMMENTS

"If we know that other than experience, qualifications and moving into the academic space is important for ECD, there is a need for RTOs to engage the higher education on how we can promote the career path of students that are being trained on NQF level 4 and 5, be it the legacy or occupational qualification. RTO's themselves can go back to reassess the quality of the current qualifications which might need to be readdressed. There are a lot of opportunities available to get through this bridge."

"There needs to be some kind of collaboration happening, as there is an urgent need for it, and can only happen when we sit down and ensure that these programmes are in line with each other. A lot of the admission requirements at universities are actually out of our hands, however certain conditions can be flexible as well. In terms of RPL, we need to come up with something that works for

all practitioners and people who are interested, noting that there is knowledge out there that does not come from academia.”

“We cannot afford to work in silos. There is a need to come together and collaborate to make a difference because at the end of the day it is about the children in KZN and South Africa. Statistics serve as evidence that there is such a dire need for the sector to be lifted and we can only do this if we come together as one.”

“The ECD workforce is more than just the practitioner, let us be creative and learn to think outside the box in order to look at ECD as the holistic development of a child which has different components to make sure that we cater for a child holistically.”



UPDATES FROM THE FLOOR

- KZN Relief is a project supported by LEGO, UNICEF, and coordinated by NECDA with seven participating organisations focusing on the wellness of teachers and practitioners, as well as providing educational toys made of recycled materials for practitioners. The project is accompanied by parent meetings in ten areas of KZN focusing on play and the importance of reading, as well as parents receiving resources in these areas.



CLOSE OUT

In closing, Patsy inquired about the possibility of using the BRIDGE forum to delve into training issues that will include RTOs, specialists and representatives from the higher education institutions so that the sector can collaborate on matters that interest them in moving ECD forward in KZN and the country. She went on to thank Angela and Ruby for their presentations before handing over to Thandeka who emphasised that BRIDGE as a convener is always open to collaborations and opportunities to advance the work of CoP members.

The CoP is reminded of BRIDGE’s knowledge management role. All meetings, presentations and discussions are captured and shared on BRIDGE’s Knowledge Hub, as are any other specific knowledge products relevant to ECD. [Here](#) is the link to this.