

Community Based Participatory Research: Exploring the Value of Indigenous Knowledge for Early Childhood Development

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Abstract

This paper presents the preliminary findings on a current engaged research that aims to develop through Community Based Participatory Research a framework for Integral Education underpinned by indigenous knowledge in Early Childhood Development in South Africa. Indigenous Knowledge is a growing field of inquiry globally and at all levels, particularly for those interested in education innovation. In Early Childhood Development, the inclusion of local resources and positive cultural values and practices has the potential to contribute to significant goals, such as psychosocial and cognitive development towards building strong foundations for lifelong learning. The first stage of a larger study on Integral Education focuses on building values for Early Childhood Development through Indigenous Knowledge. This part of the exploratory phase - the study is still in progress - establishes a significant trend in favour of the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge in the Early Childhood Development programme.

Keywords: Community Based Participatory Research, Early Childhood Development, Integral Education, Indigenous Knowledge.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present the preliminary findings of part of a research that aims to determine the extent to which Integral Education promoting indigenous knowledge values is practised in early childhood development. Generally, mainstream education tends to focus on the acquisition of knowledge, the development of cognitive skills and individual achievement. In contrast, an Integral Education approach encourages the holistic development of a child by including the emotional, moral, interpersonal, physical, spiritual and cultural developmental

aspects. Thus, it provides for the inclusion of indigenous knowledge values that promote individual and collective development and within this development locates the individual within the collective.

Both the South African National Curriculum Framework for children from birth to four and the Government of the Republic of South Africa's draft policy on Early Childhood Development make reference, *inter alia*, to two critical areas that guide this study: the potential for timely interventions in the early years of a child's life and the historical inequities that continue - on a range of levels - to impact negatively the majority of children in South Africa which play themselves out in the cycle of poverty and deprivation and the attendant social ills which children confront, daily. To this end, the application of Integral Education offers an opportunity to concretely ameliorate past failings by including all human dimensions in the learning process, with a focus on the collective. This approach resonates with the philosophical underpinnings of the African Indigenous value system, Ubuntu, which emphasizes the human development of the individual through the well-being of others in the community. Thus, in cultivating social responsibility and civic mindedness, Integral Education and Ubuntu are critical components to be included in an Early Childhood Development programme.

Research problem

The assumption is made in the study that there is a significant gap in the current Early Childhood Development curriculum in South Africa as it does not apply an Integral Education approach that also promotes Indigenous Knowledge values. This education model, it is argued, can significantly improve the life chances of children, especially the most vulnerable, by developing the mind, body and spirit and creating the enabling environment to make responsible life choices. Therefore, the study will combine the African philosophy of Ubuntu in Indigenous Knowledge to develop, implement and evaluate an Integral Education programme for Early Childhood Development that inculcates sustainable social responsibility and civic mindedness in young children.

Literature Review

The Draft Early Childhood Development Policy (2015) affirms that the government has a responsibility to create the conditions for the realisation of the right of every child to develop optimally (Department of Social Development, 2015: 19). The policy states further that the social returns on Early Childhood Development's public investments in universal comprehensive Early Childhood Development services yield lifetime development returns for the child, his or her family and society. Notably, Early Childhood Development has the potential to contribute significantly to the reduction of key development challenges facing South Africa, particularly poverty and inequality. Still further, that Early Childhood Development investments bring about higher levels of positive self-regulation which lead to significantly less crime and greater public safety," reduced public violences" and greater social cohesion and civic participation (*Ibid*: 22-23). Thus the policy gives a clear indication of the causal link between adequate and quality provisioning for this phase of

children's development and the long term benefits to the fabric of society - "positive self-regulation", "less crime", "greater public safety", "greater social cohesion" and "civic participation" (*ibid*: 22-23).

This study is suggesting that such a turnaround strategy for South African society as that implied in the policy cannot be accomplished by upscaling material provisions and resources and not clearly identifying a behaviour and attitude change programme to support child development. Consequently, it proposes that such changes require the deliberate embedding of a set of core values into the Early Childhood Development programme that can lead to the holistic development of children. According to Wilson (2008:1) early childhood education should address the moral development of the child, especially the caring and compassionate aspects of morality. These cannot be relied on to be fostered only at home and in the communities because the behaviours and attitudes of many adults in South African society, are not exemplars of positive role modeling.

This problem of poor role models for children is further compounded in South Africa by the added socio-political realities of the high prevalence of family fragmentation (Callinicos, 2005:1) and child headed households (Department of Social Development, 2008:18). Thus, for many children the option of cultivating a set of values to guide their moral development may not exist. Pendlebury and Enslin (2007:238) also argue for a values education to mitigate the deleterious effects of apartheid. They maintain that post-apartheid South Africa is replete with widespread corruption at all levels of the public service and heinous crimes persist. Consequently, they argue that values education should be the starting point to overcome these ills.

According to Hawkes (2010:237), values education can positively influence the expansion of universal values, which have such a powerful effect on the culture of the school and on the development of the child and the fostering of a civil, caring and compassionate society. Studies have shown that early childhood interventions in a holistic and integrated manner generally result in pro-social behaviour and effects long term societal behavioural changes (Viviers, 2009: 5). Thus, values cultivated and promoted from the early years of a child's development are most likely to grow strong and sustainable roots to last into adulthood (Kaya, 2013).

Values education, however, falls outside the ambit of the "mainstream," "conventional," or "traditional" forms of education, which tend to focus on the acquisition of knowledge, development of cognitive skills and individual achievement. In contrast, "alternative," "holistic," and "transformative education" include many aspects of an individual (e.g., emotional, moral, interpersonal, and spiritual) and culture (ecological, global, etc.) and may be better suited to incorporate values. According to Esbjörn-Hargens (2011: 2-4) who argues for an approach that honours the strengths while recognising the limits of both mainstream and alternative educational approaches, Integral Education is best suited to accommodate the holistic development of the child and, for this study, especially,

the devalued and marginalised socio-cultural and spiritual aspects of indigenous knowledge. This view derives largely from Aurobindean philosophy on education which states that true education is integral as it includes all the aspects of the human being: physical, vital, mental, psychic, and spiritual. It is an education designed to foster the evolution of the individual, the nation, and humanity (Vengopal and Kumari, 2010: 59).

Biersteker (2012:2) contends that despite the growing international recognition that good quality Early Childhood Development programming should be sensitive to and build on the local and indigenous knowledge and practices, most local models and curriculum guidelines still privilege Western models. In addition, she notes that while local and global knowledge could exist side by side, there is a conspicuous absence in local curricula and programmes of local knowledge. Thus, the values and principles on which Western Early Childhood Development goals and interventions are based may be inappropriate to local conditions, clash with local values and result in misguided and unsuccessful implementation.

In promoting relevant and culturally appropriate values in young children, the study proposes that indigenous knowledge consistent with the African philosophy and principles of Ubuntu should be used. These values which emphasize that the individual realizes her/his humanness through the well-being of others and the community as a whole (Kaya and Padayachee, 2013) resonate with the overarching ones of social responsibility and civic mindedness. According to Bonn (2007: 2), Ubuntu encompasses compassion, tolerance, care, charity, understanding, empathy, equality, hospitality, honesty, trust, conformity, solidarity, mutual responsibility, taking care of everyone in one's community, respect, dignity and a concern for others' welfare. These moral values safeguard both the conservation of the group/community as a whole and promote the harmonious existence of the individual within the community. It would appear, therefore, that the essential values to cultivate social responsibility and civic mindedness – goals and targets identified in the draft Early Childhood Development Policy – resonate with those of Ubuntu and, to improve impact and sustainability, should be included in an Early Childhood Development values programme.

The dearth of literature on moral regeneration suggests a relatively uncharted field. The urgency, however, to intensify efforts to instill moral and ethical values at all levels, especially in the earliest years, is valid. According to Richardson (2003:5), the moral assault on the majority of South Africans demonstrates a society urgently in need of targeted and concrete efforts to find and sustain shared values for our society. It is in the early childhood period that children develop their basic values, attitudes, skills, behaviours and habits, which may be long lasting. As early childhood education is about laying a sound intellectual, psychological, emotional, social and physical foundation for development and lifelong learning, it has an enormous potential in fostering values, attitudes, skills and behaviours that support sustainable development (Samuelsson and Kaga, 2008:12).

Thus, the aim of this study is to develop an integral early childhood development programme based on indigenous knowledge and the philosophy of Ubuntu and its associated values for social responsibility and civic mindedness and to assess the impact of implementation to give concrete effect to the ideals of the draft Early Childhood Development policy.

Research Question

The aim of the research is to determine the extent to which Integral Education underpinned by Indigenous Knowledge Values in Early Childhood Development could contribute to the development of social responsibility and civic mindedness in children aged 3-4 years. It asks the following question: To what extent could Integral Education based on Indigenous Knowledge Values be applied to the Early Childhood Development programme for the age cohort of 3 - 4 to develop social responsibility and civic mindedness?

Research Objectives

The study comprises four phases: exploratory, developmental, intervention and evaluation phases. This paper presents the preliminary findings of the exploratory phase. The four phases and their objectives are presented to provide a comprehensive picture of the study.

The specific objectives in each phase are the following:

Exploratory Phase:

1. Investigate the nature and extent to which the current Early Childhood Development curriculum and practice could benefit from integral education which incorporates Indigenous Knowledge values and principles of Ubuntu for social responsibility and civic mindedness. Learnings from two international Integral Education organisations are considered to guide the study
2. Identify the theoretical and philosophical considerations that should guide the development of an integral education Early Childhood Development programme based on Indigenous Knowledge for social responsibility and civic mindedness

Developmental Phase:

3. Develop an integral education early childhood development programme based on the indigenous knowledge values of Ubuntu for social responsibility and civic mindedness
4. Develop a measuring instrument to evaluate the programme

Intervention Phase:

5. Implement the programme in the selected sample sites over a period of 8 - 10 months

Evaluation Phase:

6. Evaluate the programme by applying the measuring instrument prior to and after implementation

Method

Participants

Through stratified, purposive and nonprobability sampling, key informants and target groups were identified in the KwaZulu Natal province in South Africa. The

study also attempts to learn from Integral Education programmes in Early Childhood Development implemented in Delhi and in California. The sample groups are as follows:

Group 1: ECD staff, comprising Early Childhood Development Supervisors and Practitioners - total of 41 participants

Group 2: Parents of children, community members and elders, constituted of 2 urban groups, 2 rural groups and 2 semi-rural groups – total of 75 participants

Group 3: Key informants, comprising Early Childhood Development national representative bodies, Early Childhood Development research associations, provincial government Department of Social Development, 3 academics involved in Indigenous Knowledge Systems, 2 international Integral Education institutes and 2 Integral Education preschool principals in Delhi.

This paper presents the preliminary findings of data collected from sample group 1, that is, Early Childhood Development staff, comprising supervisors and practitioners - a total of 41 individuals.

Design

The research design is exploratory in nature as this is the first study based on integral education. The study uses a community based participatory research approach and consists of four phases: exploratory, developmental, intervention and evaluation with qualitative and quantitative research methodologies (Creswell, 2015:14-15). In this mixed methods research, the researcher gathers both qualitative and quantitative data, integrates the two and then draws interpretations based on the combined strengths of both sets of data to better understand the research question (*ibid*: 38).

The exploratory phase uses qualitative research methods of focus group and individual interviews as well as content analysis of practitioners' journals and participant observations of practitioners. The central focus of the exploratory phase is to probe the existing Early Childhood Development programme and activities to determine the extent to which Integral Education underpinned by Indigenous Knowledge values in Early Childhood Development could contribute to the development of social responsibility and civic mindedness in children aged 3-4 years.

During the developmental phase, data from the focus group interviews, individual interviews and participant observations will be integrated and collated to:

- i) inform the development of an integral education indigenous knowledge values programme in early childhood development
- ii) promote social responsibility and civic mindedness in children within the age cohort of 3 - 4 years
- iii) develop a measuring instrument to evaluate children's behaviours and attitudes prior to and after the implementation of the programme.

The programme will be first piloted in three (1 urban; 1 rural; 1 semi-rural) of the six sample sites which are 2 urban; 2 rural and 2 semi-rural, reviewed and revised where relevant, and then implemented in all six sites during the intervention phase. Thereafter, it will be evaluated to assess the outcomes.

Materials

Data was collected through focus groups interviews with staff from six Early Childhood Development sites in KwaZulu Natal in South Africa on the three areas of the research: Integral Education; Indigenous Knowledge and Early Childhood Development. An interview schedule for this sample group included the following questions:

1. What is your understanding of indigenous knowledge?
2. Does the learning/teaching content of the current Early Childhood Development programme include indigenous knowledge material and values?
3. Do you think children can benefit now from Indigenous Knowledge stories/rhymes/songs, etc.?
4. What methods will be best suited for gathering indigenous stories, rhymes, folk tales/lores, games, etc. to promote indigenous knowledge values?

Procedure

The study is located in 6 public Department of Social Development registered and funded Early Childhood Development sites, situated in urban, rural and semi-rural areas in Umbumbulu, south of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. It is assumed that the urban/rural/semi-rural sample dynamic could influence the findings as a result of such factors as, *inter alia*: lifestyle influences, value systems, cultural practices, quality of preschools, human and material resources, parental and community structures. It involves appropriately qualified Early Childhood Development practitioners teaching 3 - 4 year-old children, and site supervisors (managers of sites).

Results

The focus group data will be discussed in the following categories based on the interview guide (n = 41):

- Conceptualization of Indigenous Knowledge
- Extent of Indigenous Knowledge content in the current Early Childhood Development Programme
- Benefits of Indigenous Knowledge content to Early Childhood Development
- Methods for promoting Indigenous Knowledge Values for Early Childhood Development

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 - Summary of the categories and themes in ranking order:

Category	Conceptualization of IK	Extent of IK content in the ECD Programme	Benefits of IK content to ECD	Methods for promoting IK Values for ECD
Theme 1	IK has valuable moral and ethical teachings	No IK content because of the clash with modernity	IK can offer solutions to modern challenges	Wisdom of community elders
Theme 2	IK is associated with inter-generational values and behaviours	Opportunity to include IK content should be created	IK is associated with cultural wellbeing	Appropriate texts and books, etc
Theme 3	IK promotes cultural roots and identity	No IK content, therefore, lacking cultural relevance	IK can promote sound values and ethics	

Total number of participants was 41.

Findings and Discussion

1. Conceptualization of Indigenous Knowledge

In this category, three overarching themes emerged.

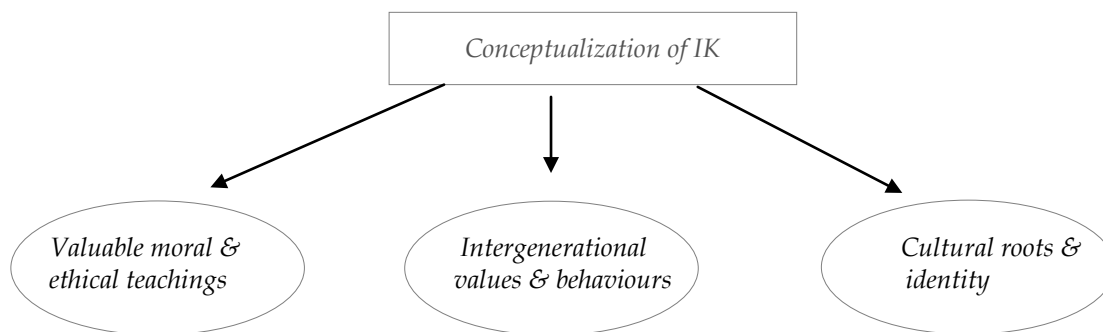


Figure 1: Schematic representation of Category 1: Conceptualisation of Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous Knowledge has valuable moral and ethical teachings

The majority of participants identified a clearly defined connection between Indigenous Knowledge and moral and ethical attitudes and behaviours. In the application of indigenous knowledge, honesty and integrity were never compromised and people lived by a strong, collective moral code. Even communally narrated stories could raise a conscience “unembeza” and always necessitated accepting the good and rejecting the bad. Some even spoke about the Indigenous Knowledge guidelines that kept people on a righteous path as opposed to the new South African democratic constitution which they felt was being violated and, as

such, failed in its main objective of promoting social responsibility. Conversely, Indigenous Knowledge, they maintained, could succeed where modern laws failed or were ineffectual. Phrases and comments about the moral aspect of Indigenous Knowledge included, “awareness of our surroundings”, “the value of respect, honesty and love”, “good teachings that prevented many current problems, like, teenage pregnancies and the high rate of violence” (the latter two social ills ascribed to the lack of local/community knowledge and western influences), and “groomed us”.

Indigenous Knowledge is associated with intergenerational values and behaviours

The second theme was that which related Indigenous Knowledge to their ancestors and forebears and drew a clear link between inheriting a positive value system and the imperative to pass this knowledge on to future generations. Words and phrases included, “respect for nature”, “natural and organic remedies”, “good foundation”, “unbroken chain”, “respect for every human being” and “spiritual growth”. Some of the older respondents spoke about “still living by the rules of Indigenous Knowledge because they taught us so much of the good”. Many recalled the indigenous games their parents taught them and the resultant wholesome lifestyles, which they feared would be lost to the current generation.

Indigenous Knowledge promotes cultural roots and identity

The third theme was the connection between Indigenous Knowledge and its link with cultural roots and a sense of identity. Most spoke about the growing disintegration of community and the collective and the resultant individualism that now characterises their lives. The often repeated, “It takes a village to raise a child” African phrase featured in this discussion, with reference to the loss of cultural roots. The belief that a people’s history is tied to local and indigenous knowledge was also expressed and reiterated in, “If only we could go back to indigenous knowledge, maybe these new generations growing up will have concrete foundations”.

2. Extent of Indigenous Knowledge content in the current ECD Programme

Three main themes were identified in this second category.

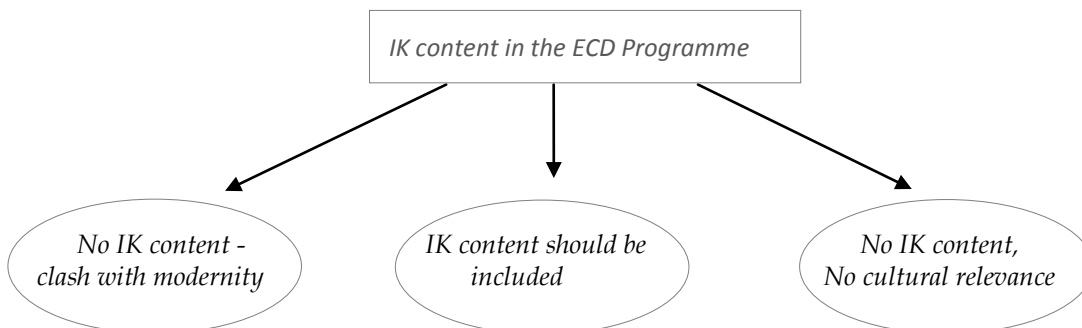


Figure 2: Schematic representation of category 2: Indigenous Knowledge content in the ECD programme

No Indigenous Knowledge content because of the clash with modernity

This dominant theme in the second category was that there may not be a place for Indigenous Knowledge in the modern classroom, mainly because of the possible misfit. These doubts were expressed as not “involving those things in the past”, because, for instance, “Indigenous Knowledge games are no longer relevant, technology has taken over” and “children are moving away from the old stuff (injula)”. Some expressed the view that parents, who had adopted a western culture, were generally against teaching children the roots of Ubuntu.

Opportunity to include Indigenous Knowledge content should be created

The second theme identified two possibilities, one where opportunities in the existing programme could be used to include Indigenous Knowledge and the second where there was a need for programme developers to create opportunities for Indigenous Knowledge content. In both instances, however, the need for the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge was clear. For instance, some referred to a topic like, “My Family” which could include family history and identity. Others, said that there was no local, indigenous content, only “Western adopted teachings” , and reinforced this claim by calling for the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge in Early Childhood Development, “Ligotshwa lisemanzi” meaning “if you want to teach a child, teach them at an early age”. Many more voiced the need for Indigenous Knowledge in the curriculum but said, “there is so much we have to do to put it in, especially finding people who have this knowledge”.

No Indigenous Knowledge content, therefore, lacking cultural relevance

This theme in the second category highlighted the absence of Indigenous Knowledge content in the Early Childhood Development programme and the resultant cultural irrelevance to, in this sample, African children. The participants indicated that the teaching/learning content still favoured Western/Eurocentric pedagogy and materials and, as such, excluded the children’s own cultural world. They expressed fear of the possibility of the “wiping out” of a whole culture, if “the current older generation doesn’t pass the knowledge on”. Many spoke about “lost games” (“amagende”) or (“amatshe”) which “used to sharpen our minds, sight (hand-eye coordination) and motor skills”.

3. Benefits of Indigenous Knowledge content to ECD

In this third category, the three themes are as follows.

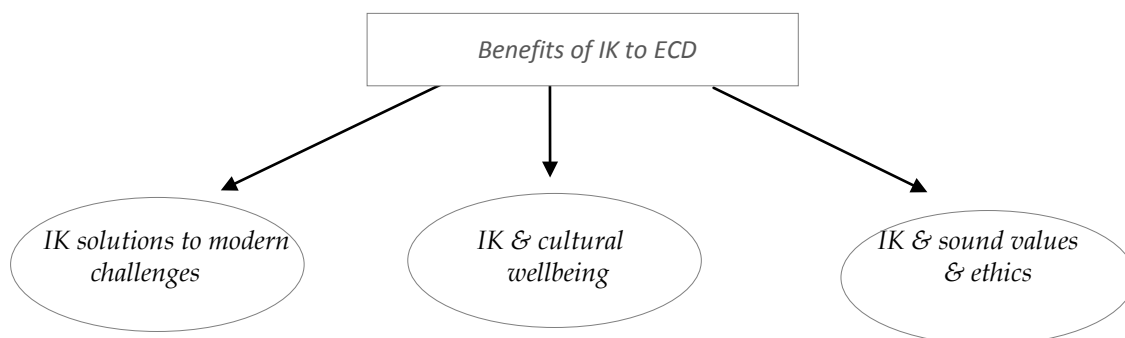


Figure 3: Schematic representation of category 3: Benefits of Indigenous Knowledge to ECD

Indigenous Knowledge can offer solutions to modern challenges

The dominant theme in this category was the potential value of Indigenous Knowledge to solve modern challenges. Participants here based this mainly on the indolence of young children and the associated problems. The issue of technology replacing wholesome and natural lifestyle choices featured strongly. They also spoke about the lack of values in children and that a return to the African philosophy and way of life, of Ubuntu, could possibly bring about changes in behaviour and attitude. Here the urban-rural binary was raised in light of the township influences on children as compared to the more natural conditions in which rural children are raised.

Indigenous Knowledge is associated with cultural wellbeing

The next dominant theme was that of the association between Indigenous Knowledge and cultural wellness. Most indicated that children needed to have a strong sense of their culture, which they said would contribute to firm foundations in life, especially for the growing child. Indigenous Knowledge stories are important “to give them a sense of history and where they come from and, as human beings, you should know where you come from as a whole”. Many expressed the view that unless children were affirmed in their own culture, there was limited scope for them to learn about and appreciate the different cultures, especially in a multi-cultural country like South Africa.

Indigenous Knowledge can promote sound values and ethics

Given the current moral and ethical deficit in South Africa, this dominant theme resonated with most of the practitioners who made the link between Indigenous Knowledge and a sound value system which was needed to ground the children in the early years. Many held the view that telling stories which promote values and ethics from their own culture with their identity was important because children adapt more naturally to what is familiar to them and their worlds. In this regard, they referred to stories like “Unogwaja no chakijana” and also books like “injula” which have values-based stories, rhymes and songs of local knowledge.

4. Indigenous Knowledge collection methods

This category identified two themes.

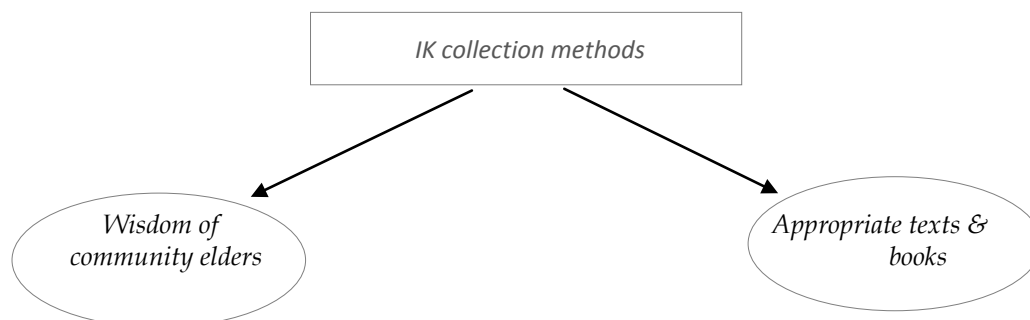


Figure 4: Schematic representation of category 4: Indigenous Knowledge collection methods

Wisdom of community elders

In light of the oral nature of African Indigenous Knowledge, and its subsequent devaluing and marginalisation (colonialization and white minority rule in South Africa), Indigenous Knowledge holders are the community elders and the written word is scarce. Consequently, this category identified two themes. The dominant one, was the true knowledge holders, the community elders. Participants showed much reverence when referring to the elders as the main repositories of Indigenous Knowledge. They offered suggestions like “bringing elders to school to teach children their values and benefit from their rich and varied experience. This could also help children “learn more about their history, know what happened in specific locations and keep this knowledge to pass to their children” thus, keeping their culture alive.

Appropriate texts and books, etc.

In this lesser theme, participants – mainly older - referred to books from their youth, which were introduced to them by their parents. Many were unsure of where to source the books but spoke about these books being expensive in earlier years ('70s – '80s), but have since lost their currency and are sold cheaply. They suggested books such as, “Injula”, “Inqolobane yesizwe (the roots of the nation)” “Umasihambisane” and “Sikleza ogwansile”.

All respondents displayed a clear understanding of the conceptualisation of indigenous knowledge and most were able to recall many of the cultural artefacts – songs, poems, stories, proverbs, rhymes, etc. – from their own childhoods and the positive and affirming values they derived from these, which have stayed with them. Significantly, this reinforces one of the primary claims made in the study that behaviour and attitude interventions are crucial and most sustainable at earlier levels, but critical at the Early Childhood Development level for optimal and lifelong learning opportunities. In response to the question on the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge content in the current Early Childhood Development programme, there was unanimous agreement that there was none, but opportunities to include do exist.

Many were uncertain and unsure about the current relevance of Indigenous Knowledge material, which they believed may be incongruous in the modern classroom. This notion stems from the fallacious argument that indigenous knowledge is primitive and backward and therefore irrelevant and, further, contradicts the holistic and integrated nature of a people’s culture. In the wake of this dominant trend, however, all of them agreed that there was opportunity to include Indigenous Knowledge content and they were enthusiastic about the prospect of participating in this study towards the development and implementation of an Early Childhood Development programme using an integral education approach with Indigenous Knowledge values and, in so doing, promote cultural relevance.

The affirmation of Indigenous Knowledge content was echoed in the third category in their responses to the benefits of the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge in the Early Childhood Development phase. They all confirmed that these advantages would include the promotion of sound values, morals and ethics, which had the potential to resolve many modern-day problems such as disrespect, irresponsibility, teenage pregnancies, obesity, etc. It could also restore the cultural wellbeing of communities that have been subjected to ongoing western acculturation and devaluing of African ways of being.

Finally, in acknowledging that indigenous knowledge holders are mainly community elders, although some stories, songs and rhymes, etc. have been documented, they looked forward to this study's community focus group sessions that could generate rich material.

This study plans to develop an Integral Education Early Childhood Development programme underpinned by Indigenous Knowledge to redress the indicated shortcomings of the existing Early Childhood Development curriculum. According to Partho (2007), an integral and unitive education addresses the head, the heart, the body and the spirit, an education of the whole person (Partho, 2007: 19). This model, it would seem, could contribute effectively to cultivating sustainable social responsibility and civic mindedness in young children.

Conclusion

The above preliminary research findings make a strong case for the inclusion of relevant and culturally appropriate indigenous/local knowledge in the Early Childhood Development curriculum and they support the assumption made in this study that there is a significant gap in this curriculum as it does not apply an Integral Education approach, for the holistic development of the child by addressing the head, the heart, the body and the spirit, nor does it include Indigenous Knowledge, for social responsibility through spiritual and moral values and for the preservation of a cultural identity. Such an approach, it is argued, makes allowance for the development and evolution of the self within the collective and, as such, would be more suitable to the purpose of promoting a socially responsible society. Finally, these findings confirm the value placed on Indigenous Knowledge by communities, the sense of loss experienced as a result of the destruction of a well-grounded and innate system and the expectation that its inclusion in the Early Childhood Development programme could auger well for the moral and ethical development of the child from the earliest years.

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