Rethinking the Integral Education Approach: Ascertaining Curriculum Gaps in the Early Childhood Development Curriculum with Opportunities for Advancing Indigenous Knowledge Values within the South African Context

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Abstract

The current crisis confronting South Africa is the violence emanating from young people. The increasing evidence of youth violence relating to interpersonal violence and aggression can signal a misguided or ineffectual pedagogical approach. An engagement of literature over the past decade reveals a large proportion of children across the country have experienced some form of violence in school and classroom contexts. The current literature in the field demonstrates that preventive interventions for behaviour and attitude in Early Childhood Development (ECD) can lead to positive self-regulation for greater social responsibility and civic participation. Against this background, this paper highlights the gap(s) in the current ECD curriculum, with specific focus on incorporating the Indigenous Knowledge (IK) values of Ubuntu. In order to achieve the above aim, this paper employed focus group interviews with ECD staff (comprising supervisors and practitioners) and ECD communities (comprising parents of children, community members and elders) to determine, *inter alia*, their understanding of Integral Education (IE), values that are important for children and their views on the current ECD programme. Thematic analysis is used to engage with the research findings. The assumption is made that an IE approach which incorporates IK with emphasis on Ubuntu, simultaneously develops children's emotional, moral, physical, cognitive,

spiritual and cultural capacities and can promote self-regulation and pro-social behaviour. The paper comprises the following: (1) a contextualization of the current curriculum trends and problematising this for the South African context; (2) identifying and discussing the research approach; (3) unpacking the findings emanating from the research approach; (4) critical discussion of the findings, with the proposition of an integral education approach with the IK values of Ubuntu to address the current deficit.

Keywords: Early Childhood Development, curriculum, pedagogy, integral education, indigenous knowledge, *ubuntu*

Introduction

Violence and anti-social behaviour and attitudes are increasingly features of South African youth. A World Bank report (2012) indicated that for many young people in South Africa, violence is a part of life because it is a feature of their homes, schools and communities, and has become an accepted component of young people's social interactions. Further, that many poor children are growing up in home environments where they lack the developmental investment needed to become healthy, well-adjusted adults (Country assessment on youth violence, policy and programmes in South Africa 2012:1). A 2012 Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) national schools' survey conducted over a 12-month period, found that 22.2% of children had experienced a form of violence while at school (just over a million learners across the country). In this survey, classrooms were found to be the most common sites for violence and were identified as the place where victimisation most commonly occurred. Compared to the CJCP 2008 national schools' survey, these findings found little change in youth violence over the four year period (Leoschut 2013:1). The continued prevalence of deviant attitudes and behaviours amongst the youth indicates a crisis. Consequently, considered responses and preventive initiatives are urgently needed, the most viable being directed education programmes. Behaviour is established early in childhood and the experiences and learning of children in their formative years determine much of their later behaviour. Additionally, children of this age have been shown to model the behaviour around them and to which they are exposed, suggesting a need to target children at an early age in relevant early childhood development (ECD) programmes (Burton 2008:6). Studies have

shown that while interventions for behaviour and attitude changes are crucial and most sustainable at earlier levels of development, they are critical at the ECD stage for optimal learning opportunities (National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy 2015:18).

The national government's policy on ECD highlights the scientific evidence that points to the importance of the early years for human development and, consequently, the need for investment in resources to support and promote optimal child development from conception (Department of Social Development 2015:22). It also notes that ECD investments can result in reducing levels of violence in society and promote socially responsible conduct (*ibid*:22-23). In addition, the South African National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for children from birth to four, spells out that ECD programmes in South Africa, particularly, are driven by the urgent need to effect social transformation through integrated care and education. This is a consequence of socio-political and economic realities (such as the history of apartheid, the inequalities and conditions that place young children at risk, the status of children from birth to five) and the need to promote a new vision for citizens in democratic South Africa (Department of Social Development, 2015:1). Despite the National Integrated ECD Policy statement and the guiding principles of the ECD NCF acknowledging the benefits of ECD interventions and investments to effect social transformation, the translation of these into action appears to be inadequate or ineffectual. The evidence of this is in the levels of violence among youth in South Africa that remain extraordinarily high (Burton 2012:5; Meyer & Chetty 2017:122).

It would seem, therefore, that the vision of social responsibility, ethical conduct and civic participation amongst children is unlikely to be realised without a focused ECD programme. It requires a teaching and learning programme that prioritises or, at least, affords equal prominence to noncognitive (social and emotional) skills and values with that of cognitive skills (García and Weiss 2016:1). This being said, an Integral Education (IE) approach recognises that the child is collectively the body, instincts, heart, mind and consciousness, and that child development, therefore, must nourish the collaborative epistemic participation of all these human dimensions and cannot be directed exclusively by the mind (Ferrer, Romero & Albareda 2005:7-8). Hence, the assumption is made in the study of a gap in the ECD NCF in not adequately focusing on educating the whole child. It, therefore, proposes an alternative and holistic IE approach to ECD to develop social

responsibility and civic participation in preschool children.

According to Esbjörn-Hargens (2011), mainstream forms of education tend to focus on the acquisition of knowledge, development of cognitive skills and individual achievement, while holistic includes many aspects of an individual, such as emotional, moral, interpersonal, spiritual and cultural. IE is an approach that honours the strengths while recognising the limits of both mainstream and alternative educational approaches (Esbjörn-Hargens 2011: 2 - 4). This cooperative approach seems most suited to accommodate the holistic development of the child, in a 'best of two worlds' paradigm as opposed to the 'either or' approach between mainstream and alternative models.

The founder of IE, Sri Aurobindo, argues that the concurrent focus on the heart, spirit, body and mind in the integral approach is what encourages self-development and helps the child develop intellectual, moral, aesthetic and practical capacities. These, in turn, support the development and evolution of the self, within the collective, to engender a more interconnected, caring and compassionate society (Sri Aurobindo 1997:33). These values and attributes are key to socially responsible and civic minded behaviour and attitudes and essential to stem the violence amongst young people in our society. In addition, a *sine qua non* of IE is cultural affirmation and wellbeing. Despite the recognition of the cultural integrity of children as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, SA Report 2012:71), most local models and curriculum guidelines in ECD programming still privilege Western models (Biersteker 2012:2). In South Africa, especially, the domination of Western content and the marginali-sation and devaluation of African knowledge and values in the education system is unjust and educationally unsound. When children are denied meaningful education that is grounded in local realities, their ability to be productive adults in the local context is compromised (Marfo & Biersteker 2010:73). Similarly, Nsamenang argues that culture is integral to human ontogenesis and contours and sharpens the nature of many features of every developmental environment (Nsamenang 2008:73), inferring its essentiality in early education. Thus, the inclusion in the ECD programme of relevant and culturally appropriate values, consistent with the African Indigenous Knowledge (IK) values and principles of Ubuntu, has the potential to validate and affirm the cultural identities of most children in South Africa. These values which safeguard the conservation of the community as a whole and promote the harmonious existence of the individual within the community (Bonn 2007: 2), resonate with the overarch-

ing ones of social responsibility and civic participation.

In dealing with the growing violence and anti-social behaviour among the youth, a transformative pedagogic approach at the ECD level is proposed. Accordingly, an IE model underpinned by the IK values and principles of Ubuntu has the potential to 'educate for a new quality of consciousness and relationship with oneself, others, and the world and could ultimately generate a new formulation of humanity' (Adams 2006:159). This implies that the existing pedagogic model, limited to preparing early learners for mainstream education, is inadequate to develop a deep awareness and understanding of their eco-system for harmonious co-existence in children. Instead, an IE approach develops and nurtures all aspects of the child, and facilitates the unfurling of this consciousness towards the envisaged 'new formulation of humanity'.

The design of the study on which this paper is based, comprises four phases: exploratory, developmental, intervention and evaluation. The focus of this paper is the exploratory phase which has the following objective: to investigate the nature and extent to which the current ECD curriculum and application could benefit from IE with the Indigenous Knowledge values and principles of Ubuntu for social responsibility and civic participation. Focus group interviews were conducted with ECD staff (comprising supervisors and practitioners) and ECD communities (comprising parents of children, community members and elders) to determine, *inter alia*, their understanding of integral or holistic education; the nature of behavioural issues, if any, amongst preschool children; what values are important for preschool children; and their views on the current ECD programme. The findings of the focus group interviews are highlighted in this paper to show the gap/s in the current ECD curriculum and that Integral Education incorporating Ubuntu has a significant role to play in the socialization of preschool children towards their social and civic responsibilities.

Literature Review

According to the NCF (2015) for ECD, a key feature that makes ECD programmes in South Africa different from other countries is the urgent need to effect social transformation through integrated care and education for our youngest children (Departments of Basic Education, Social Development and Health 2015:1). In addition, the 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 ECD public investments in universal comprehensive ECD services yield lifetime development returns for the child, his or her family and society. Notably, ECD has the potential to contribute significantly to the reduction of key development challenges facing South Africa, particularly poverty and inequality. Still further, that ECD investments bring about higher levels of positive self-regulation which lead to significantly less crime and greater public safety,' reduced public violence' and greater social cohesion and civic participation (*ibid* 2015: 22-23). The National Integrated ECD Policy (2015) 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 in such expected outcomes as 'positive self-regulation', 'less crime', 'greater public safety', 'greater social cohesion' and 'civic participation' (*ibid* 2015:18).

Both the ECD NCF (2015) and the National Integrated ECD Policy (2015) make reference, *inter alia*, to three critical areas that informed the study: the impera-tive, through ECD programmes, to effect social transformation in post-apart-heid South Africa; the potential for timely interventions in the early years of a child's life; and the acknowledgement that investments in ECD can result in positive self-regulation in children (Departments of Basic Education, Social Development & Health 2015:1 and Department of Social Development 2015: 22-23). While these objectives address the core areas for the post-apartheid transformation of South African society, realisation of them seems unlikely. The current ECD curriculum is inadequate to effect such a turn-around without a whole child development pedagogic approach that weights equally noncogni-tive and cognitive skills. The rise in incidents of interpersonal violence, aggression and anti-social behaviour amongst South African youth, therefore, signals a misguided or ineffectual pedagogic model. Thus, an alternate education approach that promotes behaviour and attitude change through the holistic development of all aspects of the child, is fundamental to achieving social transformation. Such an approach acknowledges that the child is not constituted of discrete parts, but is collectively the body, instincts, heart, mind and consciousness. Consequently, the teaching and learning processes should nourish all these human dimensions and cannot be directed exclusively by the mind (Ferrer *et al.* 2005:7-8), which is the mainstream educational approach.

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An IE approach is premised on the understanding that every child has an innate knowledge from which the creation of new knowledge is encouraged. According to Sri Aurobindo, 'each human being is a self-developing soul and the business of both parent and teacher is to enable and to help the child to educate her/himself, to develop her/his own intellectual, moral, aesthetic and practical capacities and to grow freely as an organic being, not to be kneaded and pressured into form like an inert plastic material' (Sri Aurobindo 1997:33). This de-emphasis on a didactic approach to child development is further illustrated in the basic principles of Integral Education:

(i)   nothing can be taught, since children are encouraged to want to seek new knowledge rather than being coerced into learning;

(ii)   the learner is an active participant whose mind is consulted and involved in its growth and learning in a participative culture;

(iii) the process of learning entails working from the near to the far, since children learn better when they meet the familiar and the knowable and when the learning is relevant (Partho 2007:165-174).

Implicit in this child-centred and co-creative approach to learning is that no child is a *tabula rasa* and, therefore, enters the formal education space with values and attributes that must be nourished and nurtured. Equally important is the child's agency in the teaching and learning process, making it a more sustainable method. Vengopal and Kumari (2010) point out that true education is integral and includes all the aspects of the human being - physical, vital, mental, psychic, and spiritual. Thus, the IE curriculum is designed to develop and to foster the harmony of these different aspects of the personality towards the evolution of the individual, the nation, and humanity. In this way, children learn that they are not only individuals but that they are interconnected, interdependent, and interrelated to everyone and everything in the cosmos. In addition, that all their actions have a ripple effect on everything around them (Vengopal & Kumari 2010:59). These developmental outcomes align with those of social responsibility and civic participation which are critical in the South African context to stem the growing violence and anti-social conduct amongst young people. Consequently, the implementation of an ECD IE approach which focuses on developing concentration, imagination and critical thinking simultaneously with deep rooted values like truthfulness, courage, compassion and self-acceptance, is a viable alternative to the current curriculum.

Indeed, the NCF for ECD in South Africa does identify several early learning and development areas for shaping the attitude and behaviour of young children. These areas, which include a strong sense of well-being, a positive sense of identity and belonging and a knowledge and understanding of the world, cover a wide range of early childhood developmental goals (Department of Social Development 2015:8). Although these are critical life skills to promote all-round development of children, its mainstream pedagogical approach tends to fragment into discrete learning and teaching areas and, therefore, does not include nor nurture, simultaneously, all aspects of the child's being in the learning and inquiry processes. Conversely, an IE approach, fosters the co-creative participation of all human dimensions for the total progress of the child.

In the wake of increasing and more heinous forms of violence and unethical patterns of behaviour in South Africa, the clarion call is to intensify efforts to instil moral and ethical values at all levels, especially in the earliest years. 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 (Richardson 2003:5; Letseka 2014:1-3). 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 & Kaga 2008:12). 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 & Padayachee 2013). Where such values, through an effective ECD pedagogical approach, promote social responsibility and civic participation, the turnaround envisioned in the National Integrated ECD Policy (2015: 22) may be realised.

In the South African context, the African value system of Ubuntu, which encompasses humaneness, personhood and morality, is analogous to the philosophical underpinnings of IE. Central to this African way of life is the interconnectedness of people, each one existing through the other, mutually and reciprocally (Mabovula 2011:42; Metz 2014:71). While it envelops the key values of group solidarity, compassion, respect, human dignity, conformity to the basic norms and collective unity, in its fundamental sense it denotes

humanity and morality (Makwanyane 1995 cited in Mabovula 2011:42). The points of congruity in IE and Ubuntu, are the development of a deep sense of humaneness, an interconnectedness with all beings and an innate moral code, notably the roots of social responsibility and civic participation. According to the NCF (2015), 'strong emphasis is laid on offering the programme design and activities for children and their families according to indigenous, local and traditional knowledge, skills and behaviours which enhance children's development and learning, and which enhance the inclusion of families in the ECD programme (Department of Social Development 2012:30). Notwithstanding this critical inclusion, in the absence of a pedagogic approach that seamlessly includes all dimensions of the child's being, the outcome of developing a positive value system through cultural affirmation may not be achieved. In this regard, one of the three basic principles of IE, 'the process of learning entails working from the near to the far, since children learn better when they meet the familiar and the knowable and when the learning is relevant' (Partho 2007:165-174), integrally reinforces a cultural identity.

Biersteker (2012) argues that most ECD local models and curriculum guidelines still privilege Western models. While local and global knowledge could exist side by side, there is a conspicuous absence in local curricula and programmes of local, indigenous knowledge. Thus, the values and principles on which Western ECD goals and interventions are based may be inappropriate to local conditions, clash with local values and result in misguided and unsuccessful implementation (Biersteker 2012:2). In promoting relevant and culturally appropriate values in young children, therefore, IK 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 & Padayachee 2013) align with the overarching ones of social responsibility and civic participation. It would appear, therefore, that the essential values to cultivate social responsibility and civic participation – goals and targets identified in the National Integrated ECD Policy (2015) are linked to those of Ubuntu and, to improve impact and sustainability, should be substantively included in an ECD programme. An integral education approach develops in unison children's emotional, moral, physical, cognitive, spiritual and cultural capacities to promote self-regulation and pro-social behaviour. It is a transformative 'whole child education' model and, in the South African context, should include the IK values of Ubuntu to reinforce collective humaneness.

Research Methodology and Focus on the Exploratory Phase

The approach of the study is undertaken in four phases: exploratory, developmental, intervention and evaluation with qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. This mixed methods research approach is appropriate when either qualitative or quantitative research alone is insufficient for understanding a problem (Creswell 2015:14-15). The first phase, which is the exploratory phase and the focus of this paper, adopted qualitative research methods in an exploratory sequential design. The objective of this design is to first explore a problem through qualitative data collection and analysis, develop an instrument or intervention, and follow with a third quantitative phase of applying and testing the newly developed measures (*ibid* 2015:39). The exploratory phase used focus group interviews comprising open and closed ended questions to probe the existing ECD curriculum and activities by asking the following question: To what extent could IE based on IK values be applied in ECD for preschool children to develop social responsibility and civic participation? It further asked: To what extent does the ECD curriculum deal specifically with values education? How much of the learning/teaching content includes indigenous values? To what extent is integral (holistic) education practised? What benefits to the teaching/learning process accrue with the integral education approach? The interview schedules were relevant and appropriate to the specificity of each of the two focus groups – the ECD teaching staffs and the ECD communities.

Sample in the Exploratory Phase

The study location of Umbumbulu, an underserved township on the KwaZulu-Natal South Coast, forty kilometres away from Durban, was identified because the researcher was familiar with parts of the area, having worked with a range of ECD sites there. Permission for the research study was officially granted by the KZN Provincial Director of the Department of Social Development (DSD) and, with the assistance of the regional DSD office, six registered and funded ECD sites situated in urban, rural and semi-rural areas, equally, were selected. The inclusion of the urban/rural/semi-rural sample dynamic, it is assumed, 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 and parental and community structures. In conducting an

exploratory study, the researcher was not attempting to make conclusive analyses, and a small sample size sufficed. In addition, the use of a smaller sample was supported by the population homogeneity regarding the variables of interest (Daniel 2012:237). Moreover, given that the focus was to identify gap/s in the ECD National Curriculum Framework and its implementation in government managed or public preschools, the sample size for this purpose was adequate.

Stratified, purposive and nonprobability sampling was used with the two groups of samples in the Exploratory Phase. The inclusion criteria were well-managed sites with competent site supervisors, operational management committees and sound infrastructure. The teaching staff complement had to be a minimum of four for meaningful discussions during the interviews. Focus groups rely on the interaction within the focus group itself, benefitting from the sharing of views, experiences and stories among participants, and the insightful and rich data produced (O'Sullivan 2003:121). The participating practitioners (teachers) in the study had to have a minimum ECD qualification of a National Qualification Framework level 4 certificate and at least 2 years' ECD experience to contribute meaningfully to the development and management of the IE programme. Supervisors and practitioners in the identified sites were interviewed prior to the focus group sessions by the researcher for participation eligibility in the study, as well as, to gauge their knowledge of IE and IK. These interviews provided the framework for the respondents to express their own thoughts in their own words and to collect information about the research question/s (Leonard 2003:3). Interview schedules for the two sample groups were compiled and the mandatory ethical clearance for the research from the University with which the researcher is registered was obtained.

The focus groups were as follows:

Group 1: Early Childhood Development staff, comprising Early Childhood Development Supervisors and Practitioners of 2 urban groups, 2 rural groups and 2 semi-rural groups, a total of 42 participants.

Group 2: Parents of children, community members and elders, constituted of 2 urban groups, 2 rural groups and 2 semi-rural groups, comprising 218 participants in total.

Table 1: Participating ECD Sites and Communities

No.	Participants	Date	Spatial Location	No (Staff)	No (Community)
Preschool A			Urban		
	1. Staff	05/02/18		6	
	2. Community	24/05/18			58
Preschool B			Rural		
	1. Staff	16/02/18		5	
	2. Community	29/07/18			25
Preschool C			Urban		
	1. Staff	07/12/17		12	
	2. Community	31/05/18			32
Preschool D			Semi-Rural		
	1. Staff	09/02/18		9	
	2. Community	19/08/18			50
Preschool E			Rural		
	1. Staff	16/02/18		5	
	2. Community	10/06/18			39
Preschool F			Semi-Rural		
	1. Staff	20/02/18		5	
	2. Community	03/06/18			14
	Total			**42**	**218**

Research Process
Data Collection

Arrangements for the interviews were made by mutual consent between the researcher and the participants in the case of ECD staffs. The ECD community were invited by the site supervisors *via* letters to the parents/ grandparents/ caregivers. All potential participants were assured of voluntary participation and advised of the approximate number included in each group. In addition, they were urged to consider the broader benefits of participation which were sharing their knowledge and experiences toward contributing to a transformative education model for sustainable social responsibility and civic participation in preschool children. After agreement by all participants, a programme for the interviews was finalised.

Interviews began with the issuing to participants of information letters, in both English and isiZulu. The interviews and discussions, however, were in isiZulu, the preferred language of communication by almost all the participants. Following on introductions, a summary of the research study and its objectives, general questions and clarifications were invited before the questions from the interview schedule, in listed order, were posed.

All discussions in the focus group interviews, approximately 2 – 3 hours each in duration, were voice recorded – with the prior permission of the participants - so that the researcher had reference to them after the interviews. Transcripts were recorded in a question-by-question format. Focus group interviews allow participants to build on one another's ideas and comments and therefore provide an in-depth view not attainable from individual interviews (Nieuwenhuis 2012:90). The information was reported on for the group as a whole and no individuals were highlighted. Furthermore, there was no risk nor discomfort to the participants as no names, only participant numbers, were used in the study and research reports. The sessions also elicited from participants their own store of indigenous stories, rhymes, folk tales and songs from which relevant values around social responsibility and civic participation could be distilled for community-based curriculum content to create a 'generative curriculum model' (Pence & Schafer 2006:4).

Significantly, in all the sessions, participants were enthusiastic to share their store of IK and many volunteered to participate in further sessions dedicated to the retrieval of IK artefacts.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used in this study. This involved working through text passages to form aggregated data units, first in codes, and then by collapsing the codes into themes (Creswell 2015:30). Additionally, the use of line-by-line coding was beneficial in respect of directing the researcher towards paying close attention to what the respondents actually said and, accordingly, to construct codes that reflected their experiences of the world, not that of the researcher or any theoretical presupposition held by the researcher (Gibbs 2012:15-16). This method is particularly relevant to the constructivist paradigm which includes multiple realities constructed by people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and interactions with others (Patton 2002 cited in Adams 2006:51).

Results and Discussion of the Exploratory Phase

The results of the two groups of the study sample are presented and discussed thematically under the categories representing selected questions (from the interview schedule) relevant to this paper.

Sample Group 1: ECD Staff (Supervisors and Practitioners)

The objective of this set of questions was to determine from the teaching constituent to what extent an IE approach incorporating IK values could be applied in ECD for preschool children to develop social responsibility and civic participation. As discussed below, responses to (A) what their understanding of IE was, (B) whether an IE approach was currently used and (C) what possible benefits could accrue from an IE approach, were categorized into three themes. Collectively, the questions sought to determine whether an IE approach in ECD could be transformative to serve the particular purpose of nurturing caring, compassionate and socially responsible children.

A. Understanding of IE
Analogous to Holistic Approaches

As an emerging and relatively unknown pedagogic approach that has mainly been theorised and applied in Higher Education, IE was unlikely to be

understood by ECD practitioners. As such, the more familiar, 'holistic education' descriptor was used to elicit responses from the group. Holistic and integral, when applied to education in their definitions and approaches, have often been used interchangeably because of their apparent epistemological similarities (promoting holistic, inclusive approaches) (Adams 2006:34).

Most respondents (*n=38*) could identify the characteristic elements of holistic education, such as, 'educating the whole person; integrating the multidimensional aspects of being human; educating the person as a whole as opposed to an assemblage of parts; educating the person within a whole (i.e., in the whole context of family, school, community, society, culture, and the universe)' (Miller 1991; 2001 cited in Adams 2006:35). The responses included an education that created connections with the community, the environment and humane values, all of which resonate with the fundamental principles of an IE approach. The responses also acknowledged the optimal and sustainable learning opportunities in the early years - *'taught to a child in an early stage… to live long with the child'* – which are significant indicators of lifelong learning for the creation of a transformative society through an alternate and effective education model. These critical early learning years are highlighted in the policy on National Integrated ECD with reference to scientific evidence in support of the importance of the early years for human development and, consequently, the need for investment in resources to support and promote optimal child development from conception (Department of Social Development 2015:12). While the policy is unequivocal about early learning opportunities, the implementation of an effective education programme is lacking. In addition, the correlation between a holistic/IE approach and children's spiritual development, encompassing the interconnectedness with life around them, endorses one of the primary goals of whole child or integral education. Responses such as,*' teachings related to their spiritual growth'* and *'includes the connection that we have as human beings with the environment'*, seem to suggest the need for children to embrace a deeper consciousness and a more grounded sense of self through spiritual development. Aurobindean integral education aims at the evolution of a spiritual individual, community and humanity. It seeks the fulfilment and spiritual transformation of the body, life and mind (Shinde 2016: 5-6). Spiritual values are central values and they must therefore govern and guide all the values and aspects of education. In the spiritual life there is no sense of the separate self (Ghose 1990 cited in Adams 2006:21) thereby, fostering the

connectedness to other humans and to all life forms. This sense of deep consciousness which is fundamental to the values of social responsibility and civic participation form one of the five aspects of IE.

The assumption of a gap in the NCF in not adequately focusing on whole child education and neglecting critical soft skills, was confirmed in the focus group responses. The clear differentiation between the holistic/IE approach and the current ECD model was pointed out with most (*n=30*) expressing a partiality towards the holistic/IE approach. Participants believed this alternate approach could more effectively contribute to positive self-regulation in children, especially since the existing approach was seen to be ineffective in this regard. Overall, there was clear understanding of the correlation between IE and a holistic pedagogic approach and a preference for this approach that could develop effectively and equally all aspects of the child for positive self-regulation and self-reliance.

B. IE in the current ECD Curriculum
Absence of Whole Child Education

Most respondents (*n=36*) agreed that a holistic/IE approach was not currently being used in ECD, and that there could be great value and worth if implemented. The relevant early learning developmental areas in the NCF - well-being; identity and belonging; knowledge and understanding of the world (NCF 2015:8) - are intended to develop positive life skills. The mainstream fragmented pedagogic approach and emphasis on cognitive development, however, are unlikely to achieve the outcomes of social responsibility and civic participation. Whereas, holistic education approaches include many aspects of an individual (e.g., emotional, moral, interpersonal, spiritual, and cultural), these are often contrasted with the more 'mainstream,' 'conventional,' or 'traditional' forms of education, which tend to focus on the acquisition of knowledge, development of cognitive skills and individual achievement (Esbjörn-Hargens 2011:2).

Significantly, most (*n=36*) referred to the holistic approach as one that is different from the existing curriculum, and with the potential to develop the emotional and moral aspects of the child. This was demonstrated in such comments as, '*teachings of today they don't really concentrate to the heart*' and '*our curriculum only looks after the needs of the mind and body, but*

nothing about the heart and the morals of the complete human being'. Thus, the respondents understood the need for an approach that will comprehensively and concurrently include all aspects of the child's being for social well-being. The two remaining and smaller thematic responses which ranged between '*No specific use*' (*n=6)* and 'Used to some extent' (*n=6*) were unable to identify clearly the existence of an IE approach, but were not excluding its potential benefits. In this theme, the comments included, '*should get it from their background'* and '*not in our curriculum*', which seemed to confirm what the study avers, that the existing ECD programme does not purposefully use a holistic approach for whole child development. The respondents were equally vague on the issue of an IE approach, as indicated above. This was evidenced in comments such as, *'in the curriculum there is no specific thing that really specifically teaches them those aspects'*, referring to a lack of a dedicated programme on values, ethics, morals, etc. The 'nonexistent' IE approach in the existing ECD curriculum, despite its clearly articulated advantages noted in the majority responses, seems to reinforce the assumption of the significant gap in the ECD NCF in not applying an IE/holistic approach with the indigenous knowledge values of local communities that are critical for developing sustainable social responsibility and civic participation in preschool children.

C. Possible Benefits of IE
Promotes Educational Wholeness
In this category that seeks to establish the classroom benefits of an IE approach which is central to the study, the two themes identified clearly endorsed such an approach. The majority (*n=36*) were wholly in support of an IE approach because of the obvious benefits in holistic and all-round child development and expressed this in, *'children will be able to grow spiritually'* and *'children will respect nature and its productions'*. Importantly, the emphasis of the value of such an approach in the preschool phase was captured in, *'in their future'* and *'in the coming years'*. An integral and unitive education addresses the head, the heart, the body and the spirit, an education of the whole person (Partho 2007: 19), which captures the respondents' affirming views on IE in, *'the indigenous and integral will form this good concrete foundation for children'*.

The second theme adds to the benefits of an IE approach by drawing

on its capacity to include indigenous knowledge values for optimal and lifelong education, which is the primary focus of this study. Comments in this regard, included, *'as teachers we are the ones that know what is good for our children so we should try to fit in the IE and maybe combine it with IK and also modern education'* and *'the implementation of IE will also teach children the way of living not to only know the western education'*. In particular, the distinction was drawn between this culturally sensitive approach and the existing western-centric one, which appears inadequate to deal with the specificities of local classrooms and communities.

As a whole, the responses suggested that an IE or holistic approach could add great value in the preschool classroom and better equip children to develop a positive self-image and identity towards respecting the space they share with others. These values are critical to countering the violence and anti-social behaviour and attitudes that are increasingly features of South African youth, especially in schools.

Sample Group 2: ECD Community (Parents of children, community members and elders)

The objective of this set of questions was to determine from the parent/community constituent to what extent the ECD curriculum deals specifically with values education and the possible benefits to the teaching/learning process with the integral education approach. As discussed below, responses to (A) what values are critical for children's affirmative development, (B) whether there are behavioural issues amongst children**,** and (C) how effective is the current ECD programme in the holistic development of children, were categorized into three themes. The overarching intent here was to determine how effectively the current ECD programme is equipping children with affirming and socially responsible values to guide their behaviours and attitudes.

A. Critical Values for Children
Social Benefits of Ubuntu

In this category, most respondents ($n=160$) identified the values which resonate with Ubuntu as those they would want to be cultivated in children.

This acknowledgement from the parents and the larger community of the affirming values of Ubuntu is a significant finding for two reasons: firstly, it indicates that IK is not currently included in ECD programme despite being listed as one of the aims of the NCF to, 'recognise the importance of the local context and indigenous resources for early learning' (Department of Social Development 2015:4); and, secondly, it confirms that parents and communities believe that a revival (from its marginalised and devalued status) and application in the classroom can add value. While the first substantiates further the gap in the NCF of not using a holistic approach which would include cultural wholeness, the second supports the claim made in the study of the social benefits of the IK values of Ubuntu for inclusion in an ECD programme. 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 (Bonn 2007:864). It would appear, therefore, that the essential values to cultivate pro social behaviour and self-regulation – goals and targets identified in the National Integrated ECD Policy (Department of Social Development 2015:18) – are consonant with those of Ubuntu.

In responding to this question, the more prevalent values identified as important for children to develop were '*respect*', *'love'*, and '*responsibility*', which correspond with the values of Ubuntu. The comments, '*You can't have values without even knowing how to take responsibility*' and '*it's important for our children to learn more about respect and the spreading of love throughout the community and everyone at large*' encapsulated the fundamental principles of Ubuntu, especially with regard to communal well-being founded on individual and collective respect and love.

The philosophy of Ubuntu espouses a fundamental respect in the rights of others as well as a deep allegiance to the collective identity (Mabovula 2011:40). Additionally, references to the negative community influences were made to demonstrate the impact on children and, by implication, the restoration of indigenous knowledge values of Ubuntu to mitigate these risks.

This theme was followed closely by one where values for personal and individual attributes were important (*n*=25). While, values for personal development are critical to foster community welfare, there is also the tendency

to focus on individual security, mainly to cope with contextual and environmental factors. Schools and classrooms across the country are frequent sites of violence and victimisation (Leoschut 2013:1). Values education, according to Hawkes (2010), 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 (2010:237), the expected outcomes of the proposed education model. Some of the responses captured here, '*to protect themselves from any harm ... at school, at home or in the community ... not allow themselves to be victims of bullying*' validate a focus on the welfare of the individual. and reinforce the external threats, both of which reinforce the imperative for a different pedagogic approach.

Participants (*n=68*), mentioned values that promote religious adherence, mainly in the form of, '*to respect God and also teach them the importance of religion*'. This spiritual dimension is consistent with what Bonn (2007) refers to in Mqhayi's essays to the newspaper, Umteteli Wabantu: 'Any person who adheres to the Ubuntu code of conduct will not of necessity receive any compensation from society, but will be rewarded by the Maker' (Saule,1998 cited in Bonn, 2007:865). This powerful spiritual dimension to Ubuntu is reinforced in the claim that this indigenous way of life 'constitutes the spiritual cradle of African religion and culture' (Khoza cited in Mabovula 2011:40). Although a relatively small number (*n=68*) valued the spiritual benefits of Ubuntu, the finding is a significant indicator of the need to refocus on spirituality toward an affirming and ethical value system. Significantly, an IE approach fosters the development of the spiritual aspect of the child in equal proportion to the physical, vital, mental and psychic and encourages the harmony of these different aspects of the personality. Thus, children learn about interconnectedness and interdependence and the causality of their actions on everyone and everything around them.

B. Prevalence of Behavioural Issues
Increasing Behavioural Challenges
The responses clearly depict a range of children's behavioural problems that currently confront parents and, therefore, support the rationale of the increase in incidences of violence and indecent conduct amongst children. Their concerns included the adverse influences around them in the wider

communities as possible contributory factors to the increase in anti-social behaviour. A 2012 Department of Women, Children & People with Disabilities report, Violence against children in South Africa, claims that '*...children who inhabit violent spaces across a range of settings may begin to experience violence as a norm and may be socialised into accepting and tolerating violent behaviour unless there are countervailing sources of socialisation that counteract these forces*' (DSD, DWCPD and UNICEF. 2012:5). A holistic ECD programme that develops sustainably all aspects of the child has the potential to mitigate perverse influences. Almost all the respondents (*n=165*) confirm children's deviant behaviour and the majority (*n=133*) ascribe this to the negative influence of the environment on children. This latter point is reflected in both direct comments and their general confusion about the source of this bad behaviour, '*you will see a child pretending to smoke where there is no one here at home who smokes, but maybe seeing this from the environment, the people we live with in the community*; '*children adapt to everything around them and tend to take the 'wrong things' than the 'right things'*'; and '*children are so aggressive and express a lot of anger towards each other in such a way that we even parents don't know what to do'*.

The collective concern of the respondents here seems to point to the failure of the current ECD programme in developing socially responsible children and preparing them for positive citizenship. This finding, therefore, serves to bolster the argument about the inadequacy of the NCF, in this regard.

Respondents, to a lesser degree, (*n=46*) admitted that the antisocial behaviour could be the result of parental neglect or irresponsibility. This is revealed in, '*our children differs from time to time due to the fact that parents work and have to get a caregiver*' and '*leaving our children behind when we are going to church, whereas church is very important to them as they are growing, getting good teachings from Sunday School sessions*'.

According to the Bronfenbrenner ecological theory, where the relationships in children's immediate microsystem - family, school, community or childcare environment - break down, they will not have the tools to explore other parts of their environment. Children looking for the affirmations that should be present in the child/parent relationship look for attention in inappropriate places. These deficiencies show up, especially in adolescence, as anti-social behaviour, lack of self-discipline, and inability to provide self-direction (Addison 1992 cited in Ryan 2001:3). In South Africa,

particularly, amongst the persistent consequences of colonialism and apartheid is the fragmentation of the family structure through the migrant labour system (Callinicos 2005:1). In addition, HIV/AIDS, poverty, violence and crime have increased the rate of orphan hood and destitution among children (Department of Social Development 2008:18). In 2017, there were 2.8 million orphans in South Africa, including children without a living biological mother, father or both parents, and is equivalent to 14% of all children in South Africa (Hall & Sambu 2018:134). Consequently, in many cases, the traditional role of parents and the family unit to inculcate and support a moral and ethical value system in children is challenged. This study, therefore, proposes that the State's responsibility to redress through effective education programmes becomes imperative and urgent as all manner of social ills, developmental and psychological problems take root in young children's lives.

The negative influence of technology on the behaviour of children was also indicated in, '*as parents we need to be careful of these TV, TV games, etc. children end up modelling what they see on TV*'.

While respondents here all agree that the negative behaviours and attitudes of children are showing worrying signs of increase, the sources may vary and, often, may be immutable. This factor seems to make the argument for a holistic and integral approach more compelling, as it aims to develop in children a positive self-image and self-esteem for appropriate life choices, despite adverse influences.

C. Current ECD Education
Values & Ethics Gaps

In this category, the respondents were expected to assess the extent to which their children's education was meeting the standards of a well-rounded and holistic programme where the learning extended beyond that of cognitive development. Unlike in the case of the ECD staff who, from a professional perspective, could respond directly to the question on an IE approach, the respondents in this sample group may not necessarily have specialised knowledge. Their responses, based on the outcomes they observed, ranged between the current programme instilling sound values and, alternatively, impeding holistic development.

In the case of the ECD programme and implementation of socially relevant values, many (*n=65)* of the comments suggested that individual or

'good' schools tended to address more roundly the educational needs of the children. Implicit in this is the acknowledgement that the holistic development of children is selectively, rather than universally, practised. This further suggests the inadequacy of the NCF ECD programme/curriculum for children's holistic/integral development. For instance, respondents alluded to the steady changes in children's behaviour and attitude through preschool intervention in, '*a child is an aggressive child but the time they start ECD, they happen to start changing their behaviour because they are taught to learn to live with others and allow others to share the space with them*'.

These responses referred to the individual preschools, reinforcing the view that the ECD programme may not necessarily be the source of instilling sound values in children. Thus, an approach that universally embeds values of social responsibility and civic participation in children is strongly recommended as the norm in ECD. The integral educator does not educate discrete parts of the child, unlike the educator in a mechanistic education system whose focus is mainly on the head. Instead, the child is 'integrally the head, heart, the senses and the body, and more (Partho 2007:19), suggesting the aptness of integral education for development of pro social behaviour and self-regulation in children.

Conversely, the second and equal finding maintains that the ECD curriculum/programme fails to develop children holistically. Comments here included, '*not to develop them holistically which is obvious that is the reason why our children are like this*' and '*I think our education needs its own improvement because it is too poor*'.

These responses reinforce the argument that the current ECD programme does not promote holistic development of children as evidenced in the poor all round educational outcomes.

The minority view (*n*=36) was that the current ECD programme develops critical thinking as demonstrated in, '*they grow cognitively and physically and even solving problems that are on their level*' and '*ECD support the growth of our children's minds*'. Significantly, these responses reinforce one of the primary arguments in the study about the current emphasis on mental and cognitive development for school readiness and the consequent de-emphasis on 'soft skills', which include values, morals and ethics. Accordingly, the comprehensive result from this sample was strong support for the development of an IE ECD programme underpinned by IK values to redress the indicated shortcomings of the existing ECD NCF.

Table 2: Summary of the Main Results & Findings

Sample Group 1 (*n*=42) ECD Staff (Supervisors and Practitioners)	Sample Group 2 (*n*=218) ECD Community (Parents, community members and elders)

A. Understanding of IE	A. Critical values for children
Analogous to Holistic Approaches	Social Benefits of Ubuntu

B. IE in the current ECD Curriculum	B. Prevalence of behavioural issues
Absence of Whole Child Education	Increasing Behavioural Challenges

C. Possible benefits of IE	C. Current ECD education
Promotes Educational Wholeness	Values & Ethics Gaps

Conclusion

The National Integrated ECD Policy statement acknowledges and responds to the critical importance of ECD as a significant contributor to the reduction of key development challenges facing South Africa, particularly poverty and inequality. Also, that investments in ECD result in higher levels of positive self-regulation which lead to significantly lower levels of anti-social conduct, less public violence and greater social cohesion and civic participation (Department of Social Development 2015: 18). As such, the ECD learning and teaching programme, spelt out in the NCF (2015), has a crucial role to play in realising these objectives. The assumption made in the study, however, of a gap in the NCF in not adequately promoting whole child education and in applying a misguided pedagogic approach suggests its inability to achieve these ends. It posits, instead, an IE approach with IK values for ECD to purposefully support the evolution of the self within the collective. Thus, to engender a more interconnected, caring and compassionate society for social responsibility and civic participation in South Africa.

The aim of this exploratory phase was to probe the existing ECD curriculum by questioning the extent to which an IE approach with IK values could be effective in developing socially responsible and civic minded preschoolers. Research related to values that promote active citizenship in young children is lacking, despite growing evidence that these early years are pivotal for promoting tolerant and cohesive societies (Howe & Covell 2009; Invernizzi & Williams 2008 cited in Brownlee, *et al* 2016).

The findings of Sample Group 1, the teaching staff, indicated a very clear correlation between IE and their knowledge of a holistic approach which develops equally and simultaneously all aspects of the child. Their understanding of the distinction between this approach and the NCF ECD one which is currently applied was also evident and revealed the exclusion in this model of whole child development. Thus, the benefits of the holistic/IE pedagogic approach were not experienced which suggested the inadequacy of the current model to mitigate the increasing incidences of school violence and anti-social behaviour and attitudes amongst the youth. An evaluation of the consolidated responses from this group suggested a notable recommendation in favour of developing an IE/holistic programme to embed pro-social and self-regulated behaviour amongst preschool children for long-term positive social transformation.

Similarly, the findings of Sample Group 2, the parents and community members, showed an interest in reviving the IK values of Ubuntu for individual and communal well-being. They believed that children should be exposed to and experience the wholesome values derived from this cultural way of life as a corrective measure in the wake of immoral and unethical conduct in society. The exclusion of African values and practices and the concomitant domination of western systems were factors in the cultural insecurity of children. The findings also confirmed the adverse behaviour and attitude issues amongst children, which carried the risk of escalating into the primary phase and beyond, if not averted at the preschool stage. This further suggested the gap in the ECD programme in not engaging children in affirming values and ethics. Collectively, the findings from this group confirmed the inadequacy of the current ECD programme and indicated agreement that a holistic IE programme with the IK values of Ubuntu should be developed to counter the deviant behaviour and attitude patterns amongst the youth.

Finally, the cumulative findings of both groups established the current gap in the ECD NCF in its ineffectual pedagogic approach since it excludes

whole child education and supported the development of an ECD holistic IE model undergirded by the IK values of Ubuntu for preschool application to develop social responsibility and civic participation.

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