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**UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI/UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN
CAPE**

FACULTY EXCHANGE SUMMARY REPORT

**AN INVESTIGATION OF PRACTITIONERS' EDUCATIONAL
PRACTICES AND KNOWLEDGE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD IN CHILDREN
BETWEEN THE AGES OF 3 MONTHS TO 2 YEARS**

UWC: FACULTY HOST

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DATES OF TRIP:

29 January 2022- 18 August 2022

Report submitted by Dr. Athena Pedro, 21 July 2022.

OVERVIEW OF PROJECT AND OBJECTIVES

Efforts by both international and local organisations surrounding early childhood development (ECD) have pushed the importance of early childhood into public awareness. According to UNICEF (2015) and the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 every child should have the opportunity to develop optimally through quality education, early learning, support, and care. By engaging in adequate educational curricula and environments, the child has a good basis on which to develop in other areas. South Africa's socio-economic context can, however, hamper early growth and development of children.

Such adversities are evident in the Cape Town region and include deprivation, low education, crime, maternal depression and restricted access to services with a high likelihood of risks to early development (CSSS, 2018; Maluleke, 2017). Moreover, many ECD programmes within South Africa face challenges of limited or inadequate infrastructure, resources and training, as well as health and safety requirements (DHET, 2017; CCT, 2015). As a result, these adversities may negatively influence the daily experiences and teaching methods of early childhood practitioners, and by extension, the children's developmental trajectories.

Aims and Objectives

This study takes on a multi-phase approach consisting of a needs assessment for Phase 1, as well as the development, implementation and evaluation of an educational curriculum for Phase 2 and 3. For the purpose of this project, the conceptualization of the first phase is discussed. The first phase is a Needs Assessment to investigate practitioners' educational practices and knowledge of early childhood in children between the ages of 3 months to 2 years. Phase 1 will inform the development of a curriculum and to train practitioners on the implementation of appropriate age- and- evidence-based education strategies for early childhood development. The intention is so that ECD practitioners may enhance the early learning and development of social and communication milestones in children between the ages 3 months to two years. The objectives of the study are to:

1. investigate the social validity of expected knowledge and practice training related to children's development from the ages of 3 months to 2 years among early childhood practitioners
2. explore the early childhood practitioners' awareness, knowledge and understanding about the development of children between the age of 3 months to 2 years in terms of general developmental milestones.
3. explore early childhood practitioners' awareness, knowledge and understandings of the social

and communication skills and/or abilities of children 3 months to 2 years.

4. identify the activities used by early childhood practitioners to engage with and provide for children 3 months to 2 years in the edu-care centre environment.

Research question

1. What knowledge and practical skills would early childhood practitioners like to gain with regards to child development and caring for children ages 3 months to 2 years?
2. What are early childhood practitioners' awareness and knowledge of the social and communication skills of children 3 months to 2 years?
3. What kind of activities do early childhood practitioners engage with and provide for children 3 months to 2 years in an edu-care centre environment?

Intended outcomes/objectives of the project

Overall, the goal of the project is to *investigate practitioners' educational practices and knowledge of early childhood in children between the ages of 3 months to 2 years*. With that goal, four intended outcomes/objectives emerge:

First, the proposed project will *advance our understanding* of the immediate environments and social agents that play a role in offering protective factors for young children to persevere despite socioeconomic adversities thereby *enhancing scholarship in both the United States and South Africa*. In the United States, scholars in developmental psychology (Hughes et al., 2006), early childhood and family strengthening (Afifi, 2017) have recently called for researchers to test and expand concepts and theories into diverse populations around the world. Doing so will broaden the scope and test the validity of psychology, family communication, and ECD programs, extending concepts by examining if they reflect the diversity of human experience. By learning from diverse families in South Africa, the proposed project will provide Prof De Souza with the tools to expand U.S. theorizing and connect it to the fascinating work in South Africa. The proposed project will also advance research in South Africa on ECD teaching and practice. Researchers have claimed that research on early childhood has been largely focused on school readiness and preparedness, behaviours and child outcomes (Roman et al., 2016). This limited focus on ECD social and communication programs for children 3 months to 2 years provide an opportunity for practitioners and scholars to investigate other important early education and care processes, including implementing programs to enhance early learning so that young children can not only acquire age-appropriate milestones but have a strong start and a solid foundation future learning.

Evidence suggests that the social environments of a community impacts individuals'

health and well-being (Barnes, Katz, Korbin & O'Brien, 2006; Edwards & Bromfield, 2009), and therefore, the social and communication needs of children during their early school years are one of the most crucial areas for holistic development to occur. Combining Dr. Pedro and Prof De Souza's theoretical and practical knowledge will likely create a fruitful study that will advance theorizing and research in the context of South African families and ECD. Advancing research in the field of Early Childhood in both the U.S. and South Africa will be mutually beneficial for both countries and both UM and UWC. This upholds the mission of the UM-UWC Faculty Exchange Program.

Second, the proposed project will ***inform future efforts to support and educate early childhood practitioners and principals about how to enhance early learning for young children.*** Findings from this study may inform South African ECD practitioners on best practices of how to enhance the developmental milestones such as social and communication skills for children 3 months to 2 years. The National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECDP) states that qualified, proficient ECD practitioners are essential to reaching the goals of the NIECDP, as they are "responsible for promoting and facilitating the optimum care, development and education of young children from birth to school-going age, through a holistic approach to the well-being and development of young children" (South Africa, 2015, p. 108). Thus, ECD practitioners are critical to uplifting South Africa's youth and the country as a whole. According to Lally (2000), ECD practitioners and their learners can be best supported by responsive curriculum planning, which focuses on finding strategies to help infant-toddler teachers search for, support, and keep alive children's internal motivation to learn. This study seeks to provide practitioners with a repertoire of possible approaches on how to practically implement activities to develop children's age-appropriate milestones. Findings from this study may also inform future intervention efforts that seek to teach practitioners how to engage and develop practical tasks and activities within the classroom environment but further expand these to other environments such as the home environment.

Third, the proposed project will result in a ***conference presentation and journal publication.*** Given the theoretical and practical significance of this project, both Prof De Souza and I will submit and present the resulting manuscript to International conference platforms. We will submit the manuscript to a peer reviewed journal for publication. Prof De Souza and I as well as other collaborators will be listed as authors on this conference presentation and publication.

Fourth, an intended outcome of the proposed project will be to ***foster these collaborations and continue this line of research.*** As part of my and Prof De Souza's research

on early childhood practitioners and principals and implementing a teaching curriculum at education centres and preschools, they will continue to investigate and explore the needs and training requirements and provide training to capacitate these practitioners in diverse families and populations, including those in South Africa. The collaborations and relationships I hope to establish in the United States may be essential to securing funding for future research in this important area.

REPORT ON STUDY DATA

Prof Andresa and I partnered through UMSAPE to conduct a study to explore the practitioners' educational practices and knowledge of early childhood in children between the ages of 3 months to 2 years. The project proposal was developed and refined in 2021, we also submitted our proposal to MU's Institutional Review Boards (IRB) and UWC's research ethics committees for approval. We also invited Prof Guiherme Bracarense Filgueiras, based at the Department of General Psychology and Behaviour Analysis, University of Estadual de Londrina, Brazil to collaborate on this project. He is an expert with quantitative data analysis and we thought he would be a valuable fit to our team.

Between February the 16th 2021 to the 9th of March 2022, we conducted the online survey of which 251 people participated. With the qualitative study, 45 individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with ECD practitioners and principals who teach children between the age of 3 months to 2 years of age. This sample consisted of 2 male practitioners and 43 female practitioners, 42 % of participants were working in a low-income area and 57% in a middle-income area. Participants' age were at average 38 years old (Max: 51 and Min: 20 years old), and also had an average of 6,96 years of experience (Max: 38 year and Min: 6 Months). Within each classroom, teachers had an average of 10.9 children (Max: 26 and Min: 2 babies). Due to the COVID 19 regulations and people's discomfort with social contact, telephonic interviews were conducted. The duration of the interview were approximately 30 to 40 minutes and were transcribed verbatim.

REPORT OF VISIT

Prof Andresa arrived in Cape Town the 29th of January 2022 (Saturday) and we worked together for a duration of three weeks on this project. For these first few days we sketched out a plan for data analysis. At this stage both the qualitative and quantitative data collection was complete. One of the goals for her time in Cape Town was to work on the qualitative data analysis as well start with the

quantitative data analysis. Since this was an explanatory sequential mixed methods design study consisting of two distinct interactive phases, namely, an initial quantitative phase and the follow-up qualitative phase, we thought we would use this time to complete at least the qualitative analysis. A total of 301 participants was recruited. Approximately 251 participants completed the online survey using stratified sampling from across four suburbs in Cape Town, namely the Northern, Southern, Western and Eastern suburbs. Approximately 45-50 (including the pilot study) participants was purposively selected to partake in semi-structured individual interviews. We managed to complete the qualitative data analysis. The quantitative data was cleaned and checked but at this point still needs to be analysed.

In addition to completing the qualitative analysis, Prof Andresa's attended two training workshops that my interns and I facilitated for the Department of Social Development. These workshops were conducted with the ECD practitioners and she engaged very well with the workshop participants who expressed that her



Figure 1: Dr Pedro and Prof Andresa in the Psychology Department of UWC

and information shared was valuable. Prof Andresa also presented on Applied Behaviour Analysis to our postgraduate Masters students and they really enjoyed the workshop, her interaction with them and learning about this new field which stimulated a lot of interest. Beyond the classroom, my colleague, Mr Daniels and I took Prof Andresa on a walking tour of the campus. She was very excited to learn about our rich history and asked a lot of interesting questions that my colleague Mr Daniels thoroughly entertained.

input



Figure 2: Dr Pedro, Prof Andresa and Mr Daniels in the Psychology Department of UWC

PROGRESS TOWARD OUTCOMES & TIMELINE

After Prof Andresa's visit to Cape Town, we met several times to plan manuscripts and next steps for the project. Currently, we are analyzing the quantitative data for a manuscript. The qualitative data has been analysed and a draft manuscript has been written up.

At this point we are reviewing the quantitative data and will need to decide if we will be producing one manuscript presenting a mixed methods study or if we will be producing two separate manuscripts. A potential journal we could consider to publish in is the Journal of Psychology in Africa (JPA). The focus of our paper/s will be to investigate practitioners' educational practices and knowledge of early childhood in children between the ages of 3 months to 2 years. Phase 1 of our study will inform the development of a curriculum and to train practitioners on the implementation of appropriate age- and- evidence-based education strategies for early childhood development. The intention is so that practitioners may enhance the early learning and development of social and communication milestones in children between the ages 3 months to two years.

Should we decide on the option of writing up two manuscripts, we could consider submitting the second manuscript to the Early Childhood Education Journal. These papers will fulfill the first two stated objectives of the project – submitting our work to national and international conferences and journals in order to advance work in early childhood development theorizing in the United States and South Africa. By investigating and exploring

our research questions, conducting data collection, writing up the manuscripts, submitting our manuscripts to journals and disseminating our findings of our project at conferences, we are addressing the first three outcomes/objectives of our project.

Regarding our fourth objective, we successfully established and continue to foster a collaborative and mutually beneficial relationship between researchers and students at MU and UWC. Prof Andresa and I are continuing to work on the current data while planning for future projects, including those that will send me to the United States and Prof Andresa back to South Africa. Prof Andresa is also collaborating on another research study with Prof Roman. We will continue looking into other external funding for collaborative projects with UM and UWC scholars.

Thank you for the financial support to undertake this project.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Athena Pedro', with a stylized initial 'A'.

Dr Athena Pedro

Department of Psychology