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**Back to Basics in Early Years Teaching
and Learning in South Africa**

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Abstract

In this article the presenter will, form a Critical- Interpretive paradigm, reflect on developmental and pedagogical theories and role-players in ECE, starting from Jean Jacques Rousseau to Howard Gardner. By interpreting the literature, the researcher will reflect her experiences on the current situation in early years teaching and learning classes in South African mainstream schools. The article ends with recommendations made to improve early learning years teaching and learning in South Africa.

Keywords: Early childhood development (ECD), early childhood education (ECE), early learning theories, role players in early years learning, critically reflecting.

Introduction and Contextualising ECD in South Africa

The right to education is a fundamental right for without education, nobody can realize their full potential and shake of poverty. Despite year-on-year increased government budget allocations for education, the return is dismal. In South Africa (SA) we spend the largest portion of the budget out of education, yet we are ranked 146 out of 148 places by the World Economic Forum, in the Global Competiveness Report- below all our Bricks peers.

Nellutino, Scauion and Jaccard (2003) mention that the environment and teaching are basic reasons for learners' problems. A number of assessment studies in recent years indicate that the educational achievement of learners in South Africa is unacceptably poor. Observations in Grade R, 1, 2 and 3 classes show that learners sit at desks while teachers "teach" with their focus on the annual (ANA) and provincial (PNA) assessment. In these tests learners are assessed in first language and maths only. The approach is therefore rather a Behavioristic than a Constructivist approach. For this phase, the third subject in the national Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAPS) is called Life Skills. Life Sills consist out of 4 subareas namely Beginning Knowledge, Social and Personal Development, Movement and Creative Arts. All of the latter subareas could contribute to the holistic development of learners if taught properly, but this subject is left behind and therefore the learners in this phase are neglected in this regard.

We are all aware of the fact that Finland is one of the best education systems in the world. Early childhood education and development are the foundations for the educational process in Finland (Härkönen, 2006:104). Teachers in Finland who are trained for ECD study the appropriate theories and ideas of the early childhood educators and philosophers, since these are believed to have a significant impact on their perspective of education as well as their views of the link between education and society (Härkönen, 2006:104).

In this article the presenter will, form a Critical- Interpretive paradigm, reflect on developmental and pedagogical theories and role-players in ECE, starting from Jean Jacques Rousseau to Howard Gardner. By critically interpreting the literature, the researcher will reflect on her experiences on the current situation in early years teaching and learning classes in South African public schools.

Theoretical Foundations of Early Childhood

From the literature, the following developmental and pedagogical theories and role players in ECE and ECD are summarised.

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a French philosopher, is frequently cited as the father of Early Childhood Education (ECE) and of progressive education (Puckett & Diffily, 2003:41). He believed that children should be allowed to

unfold, like seeds which need the proper amount of nutrients from the soil and water along with sunlight to produce a wonderful apple (Brewer, 2007:7). He encouraged child-centred education that was sensory and practical, where the curriculum is based on the child's interest and nature. He also declared that education should be the single most important business of the government (Puckett & Diffily, 2003:42)

Individual freedom rather than dominance over children was very important to Rousseau (Follari, 2011:27). He believed that dominance and direct control over a child will lead to rebellion and anger and advocated that children should be given activities that are of interest to them, and not activities that are imposed by direct adult instruction. Unlike earlier theorists, he believed that children should not be pushed into executing academic instructions, but should rather be allowed to develop harmoniously and naturally.

Johan Heinrick Pestalozzi (1746-1827)

Pestalozzi, a Swiss educator, believed that early education was the best way to eliminate the evils of society and that school could play an important role in improving social conditions (Puckett & Diffily, 2003:42). He valued active involvement in the community and environment and he focused on the welfare of poor children (Follari, 2011:27; Brewer, 2007:40). He strove to install these values in his students. Unlike theorists before him, Pestalozzi worked directly with children and experimented with new methods. He followed some of Rousseau's ideas and designed schools and curricula, based on a holistic approach to teaching. Pestalozzi designed an original method to teach children who lived in poverty and this centred the following key beliefs according to Follari, 2011:27-28.

- Parents are the first teachers and teaching should begin at birth
- All children are capable of learning
- Activities should focus on the manipulation of real objects.
- Natural experiences every day are sources of learning.
- Physical and arts education are essential for comprehensive education.

Pestalozzi's principles included the following:

Education should be based on children's psychology. Children will develop mentally, physically and morally through experiences. Children should learn through being active, rather than through direct instruction with words. Their experiences should include thorough observation, clear understanding, and the application of the experiences in their everyday activities. Children should be free to pursue their own ideas and interests. Learning progresses from the simplest to the complex, from the concrete to the abstract, and from experiences to conclusions and rules. Teachers should respect and consider children's interests, their readiness for further learning, as well as their social and emotional needs. Discipline should be just and instructive when required,

not punishing. Pestalozzi argued that when children were active and interested in the work, harsh discipline will be unnecessary (Puckett & Diffily, 2003:43; Nutbrown, Clough & Selbie, 2008:27-28).

Pestalozzi's application of concrete objects is still visible today in preschool in South African classrooms, for example plastic and wooden blocks, puzzles and unit cubes.

Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852)

Froebel, a German, is considered the founder of kindergarten (Puckett & Diffily, 2003:45; Shukla, 2008:34). He explained the teacher's role as that of a careful gardener who nurtures children as if they were tender seedlings growing harmoniously and naturally (Follari, 2011:29). He regarded a teacher as a designer of activities and experiences, and further believed that teachers are facilitators of education.

Froebel studied for two years under Pestalozzi, and adopted many features of Pestalozzi's education system; but also attempted to improve it (Puckett & Diffily, 2003:45). His main contribution to education was in the areas of learning, curriculum, methodology and teacher training (Shukla, 2008:34).

He believed that self-activity is the foundation for learning and designed teaching materials called "gifts" and "occupations" (Puckett & Diffily, 2003:45): "*The gifts were materials that represented symbolic ideas in a concrete form*" (Brewer, 2007:41; Shukla, 2008:37). These were arranged in a sequence with clear directions on how to use them. Occupations include sequences of activities which aimed at developing different skills such as weaving, sewing, cutting, pasting and drawing. He encouraged physical activities, self-expression, drawing, dramatization and social development as essential elements for early education (Puckett & Diffily, 2003:45). He also argued that play and concrete objects enhance learning.

Froebel suggested 20 gifts and occupations and gave detailed instructions on how to prepare and use it with children:

Solid, three-dimensional geometric shapes fashioned of wool and wood flat shapes of wood, wire and other natural materials, handwork activities such as sewing weaving, paper folding, modelling and cutting, gardening, finger play, games and songs (Follari, 2011:31; Brewer, 2007:41).

Froebel's main educational ideas are:

Social education should take place through children's group activities. Education should focus on children's interests. According to Froebel, play is:

"The most pure, most spiritual activity of man at the stage, and at the same time, typical of human life as a whole of the inner hidden natural life in man and all things. It gives, therefore, joy, freedom, contentment, inner and outer rest, peace with the world. It holds the sources of all that is good. A child that plays thoroughly, with self-active determination, persevering until physical fatigue forbids, will surely be a thorough, determined man, capable of self-sacrifice for

the promotion of the welfare of himself and others.” (Shukla, 2008:36).

A child's growth and learning begin in his or her family and then extend into the school life. Children's inner worlds will be awakened by manipulating of objects through play, and they will have the opportunity for self-expression in this manner (Shukla, 2008:35-37; Brewer, 2007:41).

Uno Cygnaeus (1810-1888)

Uno Cygnaeus was one of the most influential educators in Finland's history and he is recognised as the “*Father of Finnish Folk School*” (Dugger, 2010:1). He emphasised balanced education and an intrinsic part of this was craft education (Rasinen & Rissanen, 2010:4). His work has driven Finland to be rated as one of the best in recent worldwide education studies (Dugger, 2010:5).

Cygnaeus was the first person to establish kindergarten in Finland, and his practices were related to Froebel's ideas (Rasinen & Rissanen, 2010:164). He based the kindergartens on Froebel's education theories and ideas. In 1963 he established an institute for small children attached to the teacher training school. It had two classes: one class for children from four to seven years of age, and another class for children from seven to ten years of age. This approach adopted Froebel's method, but was slightly different in character.

Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925)

“Our highest endeavour must be to develop free human beings who are able, out of their own initiative, to impart purpose and direction to their lives” (Rudolf Steiner as quoted by Follari, 2011:240).

Steiner developed the Waldorf educational approach at the beginning of the 20th century (Mays & Nordwall, 2010; Follari, 2011:241). Steiner's educational approach from preschool to high school is based on his view that human beings are beings of spirit, soul and body (Mays & Nordwall, 2010; Roopnarine & Johnson, 2009:312). Steiner believed that education should meet the developing needs of children as they developed emotionally, physically and mentally (Lewis, 2001). He believed in helping children to develop to their fullest potential. However, he did not believe in pushing children towards the aspirations of parents or towards what society desired. The Waldorf education's approach views children as complex, whole human beings and therefore the approach sets out to develop body, mind and spirit – or hands, head and heart (Follari, 2011:240). The education is based on a holistic approach and operates under the principle of education towards freedom.

The educational curriculum Steiner developed reflected his beliefs:

Children grow through three developmental phases namely early childhood (birth to seven years), middle childhood (seven-14 years) and adolescence (14-21 years). The pursuit of education should be to develop the

child holistically to become a creative and free thinker capable of self-actualisation (Follari, 2011:243; Roopnarine & Johnson, 2009:313).

According to Lewis (2001), Steiner's key principles towards education are the following:

Children under the age of seven should not be taught to read. Children up to the age of seven should be encouraged to draw pictures, play, and telling stories, be at home and do nature studies. Children should not be taught to write before they can read. One teacher must be allowed to teach a child for seven years and should concentrate on one subject at a time. Children must be encouraged to find links between science and art. A teacher should connect with the child and make sure that they enjoy the material they are learning and one should not work for exams and tests by leading children to learn just for the sake of it.

Lev Semynovich Vygotsky (1896-1934)

Vygotsky was a Russian psychologist whose ideas differed from Piaget's theory in the sense that he emphasised the importance of language development as a tool of cognitive development as he believed that language is the primary means by which children organise their thoughts. (Follari, 2011:42).

Vygotsky was opposed to a teacher-directed approach to education (Follari, 2011:42). He also believed that each child has a developmental range, and if assisted, the child could operate at a higher level than he or she could if not assisted.

According to Vygotsky, the social interaction between children that occurred through play is crucial for their development. He believed that play developed more than just a child's cognitive abilities (Shukla, 2008:16). He declared that dramatic or symbolic play fosters children's abstract thinking (Parker-Rees & Willan, 2006:18). Make-belief play helps children in their interpretation of objects because they describe their views in their dramatic play. Therefore, the initially correct and concrete representation of an object is critical. During the later stages of development the representation of the object becomes irrelevant. Vygotsky characterised play as children's creation of make-belief of real-life problems.

John Dewey (1859-1952)

John Dewey's theory of schooling is known as progressivism, and emphasises children's interests rather than the subject matter. Dewey was the most influential educational philosopher in the United States in the 1900s (Shukla, 2008:37; Brewer, 2007:42). His progressive education philosophy envisioned that school should be concerned with preparing children for the realities of the world rather than for some vague future time. He believed that the environment, especially a social environment, has a significant influence on the child (Follari, 2011:34). Therefore, he suggested that the classroom should mirror the society that children should develop as responsible citizens and that everyday realities should be the basis of all classroom activities. He also

believed that the primary aim of education should be to develop a love for learning in the children and the desire to continue learning.

Child-centred curricula originated from Dewey's progressivism (Shukla, 2008:37; Brewer, 2007:42). Dewey believed that education should emerge from the child's own development and interests instead of being imposed upon the child by the teacher. He emphasised the following key principles of education:

Experiences with actual materials and that the experiences should be meaningful to the individual child. Education should be based upon problem-solving activities (Follari, 2011:34).

The teacher's role is to integrate subjects, use the themes, and encourage problem-solving activities and critical thinking (Bredekamp, 2011:53; Shukla, 2008:39). He advocated more unstructured and open play and guidance with more structured activities such as dramatic play. Dewey believed that play activities contribute to children's social and intellectual development.

Maria Montessori (1870-1952)

Maria Montessori was born in 1870 in Italy into a wealthy family and became known for her superb intelligence (Follari, 2011:220; Brewer, 2007:50). In a time when women were not given the opportunity to have an education, she attended an all-boys technical school and while in school decided on pursuing medicine as a career. She was the first female doctor to graduate from the University of Rome.

As Montessori studies branched out to psychology, she began teaching at a psychiatric clinic (Follari, 2011:221; Brewer, 2007:50). There she became intrigued with so-called "insane" children, who will today be classified as "developmentally delayed". She was influenced by the work of Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel, and started her philosophy by working with the children who had learning difficulties (Nutbrown *et al.*, 2008:49).

Montessori believed that all children benefit from the freedom to learn, by engaging them in different materials at their own pace, even if they had disabilities (Grotewell & Burton, 2008:28). She held that children are motivated in themselves, because they learn directly from interacting and handling different materials. Montessori emphasised the use of sensory education (Follari, 2011:109).

She believed in creating classrooms that are very orderly, with space well utilised and materials organised and ready to use (Brewer, 2007:51; Grotewell & Burton, 2008:29). Montessori believed that children preferred to learn in an organised but supportive environment. She advocated that the classroom culture should permit control, a high degree of choice and self-direction. Her materials are designed to attract children's interests and teach them different concepts through repeated use.

Therefore, she was one of the first professionals who promoted child-sized furniture with shelving and materials positioned within the child's reach (Grotewell & Burton, 2008:29). She also advocated for a child-centred approach to learning. Her approach to the curriculum is to support children to

become independent thinkers, and that a mini-democracy should emerge in the classroom. Multi-aged groups of children study together in the classrooms.

Montessori said that through studying children, she learnt how to teach. Her eight principles of education are applicable to children world-wide:

- Cognition and movement have a close relationship. Movement can improve learning and thinking.
- Well-being and learning are improved when people have a sense that they are in control of their lives.
- Children learn better when they are interested in what they are learning.
- When the teacher ties an extrinsic reward to an activity, but withdraws the reward later, this will impact negatively on the child regarding his or her perception of that activity.
- Children working together are very productive.
- Learning situated in meaningful context is often deeper and richer than learning in abstract context.
- Particular forms of adult interaction are associated with more optimal child outcomes.
- Order in the environment is beneficial to children (Brewer, 2007:52; Grotewell & Burton, 2008:29).

Helen Parkhurst (1887-1973)

Helen Parkhurst designed her methods for high school. However, in Finland, her principles are used for early childhood and preschool education.

Parkhurst is the author of the Dalton Laboratory Plan, named after the town Dalton in Massachusetts (Asch, 2005:370). Her project was tried for the first time on a large scale in the High School in Dalton. When Parkhurst started working at a rural school with 40 learners, she had to abandon traditional teaching. She had to reconsider how she could organise her work and keep each student occupied.

In 1908, Parkhurst was influenced by Swift after reading his book *Mind in the Making* (Asch, 2005:370). He wrote that: “*The didactic method belongs to the Middle Ages. It still dominates our schools, though the conditions that made it serviceable have long since passed. Mental expansion of the teachers themselves is the first step towards removing this medieval debris. They will then investigate their pupils, the classroom will become an educational laboratory, and activity will not be limited to the manual training department*” (Swift as quoted by Asch, 2005:370). Parkhurst drafted a plan in 1911 to be carried out in an educational laboratory and not in a traditional classroom. In 1914 she also visited Italy to study the Montessori Method (Asch, 2005:371).

The main principles of the Dalton Plan are co-operation and freedom (Asch, 2005:371). Learners are free to work uninterrupted by time-tables. Each child is given a written statement of the work to be done and is then given the freedom to do the work at his own rate. The years’ work of each subject is divided into monthly assignments, and is then divided further into daily units

of work. Each classroom is seen as a laboratory for a subject and a specialised teacher presides over the laboratory. In a small school, one classroom can be used for two or more subjects. Thus, each learner is free to tackle his assignments in his or her own ways.

Parkhurst's educational theory and main ideas can also be applied to early childhood and preschool education. The main ideas of freedom and co-operation are very important in schools. A child should have the freedom to choose which play activity he/she wants to participate in; however it is important that the teacher should ensure that the child tries all the activities in a week and not simply repeats the same activity each day.

Celestin Freinet (1896-1966)

Celestin Freinet served in the First World War and started his teaching career thereafter in 1921 (Carnie, 2003:103). Freinet's goal was to improve the social conditions for children who came from labourer families. He believed the social conditions of children could be improved through education.

Freinet introduced the Learning Printing Technique where children were encouraged to write down their experiences (Carnie, 2003:103). These texts were then discussed by the whole class, and edited to be put together in a class journal and a school newspaper. Children were also encouraged to study their local community and natural environment (Carnie, 2003:104). These investigations were also compiled into journals. Freinet believed in an active approach to learning where children constructed their own plan of work which they discussed and evaluated together with their teacher.

Freinet's educational ideas can also be applied to early years teaching and learning in South Africa. Children should be encouraged to be active in their community and learn to observe and investigate. Preschool children are not able to write down their experiences, but should have the opportunity to communicate their experiences to their teacher and friends.

Vasily Sukhomlinsky (1918-1970)

Sukhomlinsky was a well-known educator whose work attracts growing interest in the scientific field of pedagogy (Papadopoulou, 2008:2). He contributed towards the humanitarian pedagogical beliefs developed during the 20th century. Sukhomlinsky worked for 29 years as the director of a school in the village Pavlish in the Ukraine, and wrote more than 40 books and 100 articles which were translated into 40 languages.

The essence of Sukhomlinsky's educational method is that one should see an individual in every school child (Smith, 1981:1). Sukhomlinsky argued that children should not be separated into groups of intelligent and less intelligent. He believed that any healthy child could get into secondary education in public schools. Even though this was no new discovery, Sukhomlinsky's main goal was to awaken children's desire to learn and to develop self-discipline and self-education. Sukhomlinsky propounded that if a teacher wanted to teach children, he/she had to like them (Smith, 1981:1). Only if teachers like the learners in front of them then only teachers could help children discover the joy

of working, humanity and friendship. The foundation of Sukhomlinsky's work was finding one's way into a child's heart.

His main principle in terms of the pedagogic system is that only a person who did not know punishment as a child could build a humanitarian society (Papadopoulou, 2008:3). He declared that the fear of punishment oppresses the psychology of the child and weakens the child's good qualities. Punishment leads to the creation of brutality and cruelty. He also believed that the right education should not include punishment tactics.

Sukhomlinsky also believed that the greatest evil of punishment is not that it offends children's dignity, but that the child will no longer make an effort to improve morally and intellectually (Papadopoulou, 2008:3).

Jean Piaget (1896-1980)

Jean Piaget (1896-1980), a well-known Swiss psychologist and educationist, is considered to be one of the most influential researchers in developmental psychology (Huitt & Hummel, 2003). For many years, it was assumed that children think like adults but however that children simply are not as good at thinking as adults are. Piaget was the first to suggest that children of different ages think in different ways (Taylor, 2005:10). Children want to acquire knowledge in order for the acquired knowledge to give meaning to their lives. The way in which a preschool child gives meaning to his life is different from that of an older child (Sigelman & Rider, 2008:189).

Cognitive development refers to the complex interaction between psychological, environmental and genetic factors (Du Toit & Kruger, 1994:78). Piaget emphasised the role of the child's own effort to solve problems and acquire knowledge (Sigelman & Rider, 2008:213). Children's adaptation to the environment (to process new information) is biologically driven to obtain balance through equilibration (Huitt & Hummel, 2003). Equilibration is the process of balancing assimilation and accommodation. The concepts that children form from their own environments are schemes or schemata's (Sigelman & Rider, 2008:188). Through assimilation children try to incorporate new events and ideas into existing schemes. When it is not possible to fit a new idea into existing schemes, the child will accommodate the new idea, by adapting the existing scheme.

According to Piaget, children's intelligence develops in consecutive stages (Du Toit & Kruger, 1994:77; Swift, 2007). He divided children's processes of development into certain age groups and ascribed certain characteristics to each stage of cognitive development. The stages follow one another and each stage is dependent on the development during the previous stage (Swift, 2007). Piaget distinguishes four phases in the cognitive development of the child:

Sensor motor phase: From birth to two years.

Pre-operational phase: From two to seven years.

Concrete operational phase: From seven to 11 years.

Formal operational phase: From 11 years and older (Swift, 2007).

The educational principles (applications) of Piaget's theory are:

Children should be provided with concrete material which they can explore through seeing, taste, touch, smell, classification, discussion and manipulation. Children should participate in outdoor and indoor activities every day. Children's environment should be visually rich to stimulate their interests and their development of literacy and language. It takes time for children to become involved in fantasy and imaginative play, thus, they should be allowed uninterrupted time for self-chosen tasks (Shukla, 2008:44).

Loris Malaguzzi (1920-1994) and Reggio Emilia schools

In a city in northern Italy, Reggio Emilia, a group of educators, parents and children came together with a shared vision for a new kind of school (Grotewell & Burton, 2008:33). The Reggio Emilia schools were established under the leadership of Loris Malaguzzi, who was influenced by the theorists Vygotsky, Piaget and Dewey.

The basic foundation of this approach involved that children should be viewed in a positive perspective. Children are believed to be curious, competent, active constructors, capable, creative thinker and researchers. The focus is not on the child in isolation, but the child's relationship with other children, teachers, parents, families, school, the environment and the community.

“Each child is unique and the protagonist of his or her own growth. Children desire to acquire knowledge and have much capacity for curiosity and amazement, and yearns to create relationships with others and communicate” (Loris Malaguzzi as quoted by Follari, 2011:194).

Children have the opportunity to experience the world with all their senses (Follari, 2011:159). Teachers give children the tools and opportunities to explore the world and to be the captains of their own learning. Their classrooms are busy places where groups first engage in discussions, debate and then embark on doing a task of exploring the topic they have discussed. Though the children's exploration, the teacher carefully documents their progress, so that all the teachers and parents can observe the child's learning and reflect on the process (Follari, 2011:160). The Reggio schools and centres are therefore filled with children's own work, photographs of the children and living plants (Grotewell & Burton, 2008:33). This is a way to communicate the children's accomplishments to the parents. There are no written curricula; instead, a curriculum materialises from the children's curiosities and interests. This approach can be applied universally, because all children can thrive and grow in environments where they are engaged in active meaningful learning.

Howard Gardner (1943-)

The theory of multiple intelligences, developed by psychologist Howard Gardner in the late 1970's and early 1980's, posits that individuals possess eight or more relatively autonomous intelligences. Learners draw on these

intelligences, individually and in groups, to create products and solve problems that are relevant to the societies in which they live (Gardner, 2006).

The eight identified intelligences include linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, musical intelligence, bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence, naturalistic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and intrapersonal intelligence (Gardner, 1999).

Linguistic intelligence refers to the use of words, whether it is orally or in written form. It includes the effective manipulation of syntax, phonology and semantics of languages (Armstrong, 2009, 6-7).

Logical-mathematical refers to the effective manipulation, categorising, classifying and generalisation of numbers. A learner who is logic-mathematically intelligent has the ability to recognise logical patterns, relationships and functions within numbers and statistics (Armstrong, 2009, 6-7).

Spatial intelligent are seen in society as the artists. They are sensitive to colour, line, form, space and the relationships between elements. Spatially intelligent people have the ability to visualise and graphically represent their visualisations by orientating themselves in the visual-spatial worlds around them (Armstrong, 2009, 6-7).

Musical intelligent learners pay great attention to rhythm, pitch, melody and the colour of music. They are able to perceive, discriminate, transform and express musical forms, either from the bottom-up (part to whole) or top-down (from whole to parts).

Bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence allows learners to use their body to express feelings and their hands to make transformations (e.g. craft smiths). They have excellent skills in coordination, balance, strength, flexibility and speed (Armstrong, 2009, 6-7).

Naturalists are sensitive to the environment around them. As adults they are able to accurately classify species of both flora and fauna as they occur in nature and are sensitive to natural phenomena's like different weather patterns (Armstrong, 2009, 6-7). Learners are interested in things related to nature.

Gardner also identified two types of social intelligences. Interpersonal intelligence refers to the people we normally see as emotionally intelligent as they are able to recognise moods, intensions, motivation and feelings in people around them. They are sensitive to pragmatic cues and respond appropriately to these cues (Armstrong, 2009, 6-7). Intrapersonal intelligence requires excellent self-reflecting strategies. Intrapersonal intelligent people have a high level of self-discipline, self-understanding and high self-esteem. They are strongly aware of their own strengths and limitations, moods, intentions, motivation and their desires (Armstrong, 2009, 6-7).

Analyses of Theoretical Foundations of ECD and ECE

From the above mentioned theories and role-players the following themes were identified by the researcher and should be attended to by teachers in early year's classes in SA:

The Classroom, Curriculum and Learning Activities

The curriculum must be based on children's interest and nature. Subjects should be integrated into themes. Classrooms should be laboratories where activities are child centred and enjoyable to children. Children must be able to handle material (concrete experiences) and it is important that activities are practical and include sensory experiences. The local community and natural environment should be studied and adults should refine cultural and language knowledge. Children should be allowed to make independent choices to enhance independent thinkers. Problem solving and critical thinking is tools for cognitive development. Play is considered critical for cognitive development. There must be a balance in education. Physical education and arts education is essentials. Cognition and movement have a close relation. The focus must not be on tests and exams.

Children and Teachers

Teachers must like children. Their main aim should be to see each child as an individual enhancing their holistic development for his/her to reach his/her full potential. Social conditions of children could be improved through education. Social interaction and cooperation is crucial for development and children should be prepared for the realities of life and the world.

Parents and the Community

Parents are the first teachers and education should start at birth. Education could eliminate evils of society. Adults should refine cultural and language knowledge and see to it that the local community and natural environment be studied.

Conclusion

To provide the best quality teaching and learning in ECD for children, teachers could benefit from studying theories that laid the foundation for ECD (Hendrick & Weissman, 2010:9). These theories have been tried and tested for decades and could help teachers to understand how to teach. The earliest philosophies and theories emphasized core elements of how children develop and learn. These core elements should form part of any countries foundations. This does not happen in SA's teacher training anymore.

By reflecting on literature, the researcher found that the early years teaching and learning in South African public schools described in paragraph1, totally contradicts her core findings. The current school system is regarded by teachers as a "one size fits all" system. By going back to basics in the early years teaching and learning, based on these core findings, children, teachers, parents, the society and the whole of South Africa could benefit.

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