

Early Childhood Provisioning for Children Between 3 and 5 Years Within Rural Eastern Cape Communities: The Untold Stories of the Physical Environment

N. Sotuku, C.I.O. Okeke and J. Mathwasa

Faculty of Education, University of Fort Hare, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa

KEYWORDS Childhood Development. Preschool Centres. Physical Environment. Rural Communities. Third Educator

ABSTRACT The state of the physical infrastructure at various early childhood development (ECD) centres in a rural area in one Eastern Cape Education District is the focus of discussion in this paper. Data were collected through photo-voice and observations during an introductory visit to the centres. The paper explores the status of the physical environments of the ECD centres and raises doubts over their potential for enhancing child development and early learning. Thematic analysis of the findings reveals that no evidence suggests that the communities visited had benefitted from the vast attention and publicity ECD has gained in South Africa. An overwhelming infrastructural neglect and/or decay were observed. There seems to be no evidence that ECD practitioners and architects of the centres visited neither considered nor understood the most suitable design and reorganise spaces to augment desired ECD learning outcomes. This paper concludes that poorly designed ECD physical environments not only present the health and security hazards to little children learning in such amenities but also affect the learning and freedom children should be enjoying. The paper recommends that particular care and attention should be given to the settings in which children learn as early as the design phase of such settings. Other recommendations have been highlighted in the paper.