Promoting the Well-Being of Supervisors for Sustainable Early Childhood Development in an Informal Settlement[1]

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Abstract

Early childhood development (ECD) centres are strategically positioned to create quality early learning opportunities that prepare children for adulthood, providing the necessary holistic sustainable learning. However, many ECD facilities in the informal settlements in South Africa function under a variety of psychosocial and contextual challenges that impact directly on the well-being of supervisors and practitioners. This study explored the need to enable, and the ways to relationally promote, the well-being of supervisors. Underpinned by posthumanism, and consistent with participatory action learning and action research cycles, we recognised that the challenges facing humanity today require new understandings and responsive solutions, which include engagements and contributions with and by nonhuman relationalities for sustainable early childhood learning. In this paper, we argue that focus on the promotion of the well-being of ECD supervisors in informal settlements is crucial. Data generation was conducted with an action team of six participants, that is, three ECD supervisors and three researchers utilising reflective drawings and group meetings that provided opportunities for action and reflection. A critical thematic analysis of data concluded that innovative collaborative ways to solve own problems in own contexts utilising responsive solutions promotes social change. An adaption to the decentralisation of supervisors' power using interdisciplinary interventions makes communities feel responsible, valued, and accountable for the ECD centres—thus, relational interconnections are improved at human and nonhuman levels. This study has the potential to contribute to the well-being of supervisors, which may filter down to improved well-being for teachers and learners, resulting in sustainable ECD in informal settlements.

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Background

Early childhood development (ECD) has been recognised as the basis for success in future learning (Atmore et al., 2012; UNICEF, 2017). However, for many children around the world, the opportunity for development is missed due to a variety of reasons that are not limited to nutrition, health care, violence, poverty, pollution, and conflict (UNICEF, 2017). This is more so in informal settlements, which are often poorly regarded as being hotspots of social unrest, squalor, and crime (Nassar & Elsayed, 2018). On the contrary, the National Upgrading Support Programme (created by the National Department of Human Settlements to provide assistance to provinces and municipalities in their efforts to upgrade informal settlements) has indicated that informal settlements are highly organised with neighbours who know one another well; they often have formal residents' committee structures, rules, and networks or systems of support and community policing. As such, there are formal and functional ECD centres in these communities, which aid in advancing sustainable ECD. It is therefore ideal for ECD services to be provided holistically across different, relevant sectors within communities to enable children to achieve success (Richter et al., 2016). However, many ECD facilities, especially in South Africa in informal settlements and rural communities, function under challenges such as poor access to running water, electricity, suitable sanitation, with insufficient human resources, supervision, teaching (practitioner) skills, and psychosocial support (Atmore et al., 2012; Melariri et al., 2019; Visser et al., 2021). For ECD supervisors, working with limited resources can be stressful, which impacts directly on their well-being (Corr et al., 2014). Therefore, supervisors and ECD communities need to be resilient and find ways of overcoming obstacles such as social injustices and inequalities that hinder sustainable ECD (Friedlie, 2012).

Acknowledging that communities in informal settlements have a variety of skills—including those of building, connecting electricity, entrepreneurship (Chebelyon-Dilazu et al., 2010), development of day-care centres, sports projects, literacy projects, and shared kitchens, amongst many—has the possibility to become a strength for ECD supervisors. Thus, focusing on the well-being of ECD supervisors is crucial for the provision of quality programmes for children to advance their development and to advance sustainable ECD. Few studies have been conducted on the well-being of ECD supervisors, particularly on how to relationally improve this within their organisations and communities (Logan et al., 2020). Often, life in informal settlements compromises the health, well-being, and safety of the people, which in itself is a violation of human rights. In addition, ECD facilities in informal settlements function under a variety of psychosocial challenges that impact directly on the well-being of supervisors and practitioners. This has implications for the provision of quality early childhood education (ECE) programmes. Our study explored the need to enable, and ways to relationally promote, the well-being of supervisors by considering the following questions:

- Are there reasons for a need to promote supervisors' well-being for sustainable ECE in an informal settlement?
- How do we relationally promote supervisors' well-being for sustainable ECE in an informal settlement?

Literature Review

In order to explore the need for promoting ECD supervisors' well-being, the literature we present highlights a brief understanding of what ECD entails, what and how sustainable ECD draws on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 (SDG Compass, 2018), and finally, an understanding of the meaning and importance of well-being for sustainable ECD.

Understanding Early Childhood Development

ECD includes the informal schooling of young children (early childhood care and education from birth to 4 years), and the formal schooling of children in the foundation phase, ranging from reception year (Grade R) to Grade 3. ECD spans a wide range of activities planned by parents, teachers, and caregivers aimed at children aged from birth to 9 years (Department of Education, 2001; Koen et al., 2021). These activities strive to develop children in all domains including physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally, and socially (Moodly, 2019; Ebrahim et al., 2019). The ECD sector is receiving increased attention at a global level because these formative years have been identified as a site for social transformation and the eradication of inequalities by the United Nations SDGs for 2030 (SDG Compass, 2018; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2000; 2018). In South Africa, the National Development Plan identified ECD as a tool to significantly reduce poverty in vulnerable communities (Republic of South Africa, 2011). Presently, the Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2022) is gearing itself for the introduction of two years compulsory schooling before young children enter Grade 1. Most important, is the current function shifting of responsibility for ECD from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Basic Education (Mahamba, 2022). Given that ECD is recognised as a foundation for sustainable development starting from (pre)conception, the support for supervisors should be multi-disciplinary and across populations and settings. Effective ways to maintain and promote sustainable learning in ECD centres, with access for all communities, should be a shared responsibility too.

Sustainable Learning in Early Childhood Development

SDG 4 (quality education) acknowledges that children's engagement in quality ECD can have positive outcomes on learning and development throughout the human lifespan (SDG Compass, 2018). This implies that sustainable learning instils ability for individuals to thrive in complicated, challenging, and ever-changing circumstances whilst contributing to making the world a better place (Hays & Reinders, 2020). In other words, individuals could be lifelong learners who are able to learn, unlearn, and relearn to adapt to a world constantly in flux (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2011). For sustainable learning to occur, teachers need to implement approaches and adapt curricula to foster critical, creative, and new world thinkers who navigate an ever-changing world (Hays, 2017). Thus, SDG 4 recognises early learning as a means for individuals to sustain their learning to adapt to a world that is constantly changing. In the context of ECD, quality education programmes provided for children, especially in the South African context, should lay a foundation that is safe for children to safely build relationships and explore their world, thereby enhancing sustainable ECE.

Promoting Supervisors' Sustainable Well-Being for ECD

There are varying definitions of well-being, and scholars have argued that the concept is problematic to define. However, most researchers concur that the quality of an individual's life is a representation of well-being (Sfeatcu et al., 2014). Dodge et al. (2012) also highlighted quality of life as a dimension

of well-being, rather than provide an absolute definition. Many attempts at formulating a definition for well-being have focused on multiple dimensions or constructs, rather than an overarching conceptualisation. Well-being is a feeling of contentment and balance, hope for the future, physical health, meaningful relationships, material resources, resilience, purposefulness, and providing support for others (Kun & Gadanecz, 2022).

Building on this concept, is the notion of *psychosocial well-being*. According to Eiroa-Orosa (2020), psychosocial well-being includes psychological and social well-being that comprises the emotional, social, and physical components of ECD stakeholders, including supervisors. Swarbrick and Yudon (2014) stated that emotional well-being encompasses resilience, ability to express feelings, enjoyment of life, and dealing with stress and traumatic life experiences. And this applies not only to children in ECD centres but to all stakeholders including supervisors, practitioners, parents, and community members. Keyes (1998) found it useful to consider well-being as a social construct consisting of various dimensions involving empathy for others, collaboration, teamwork, communication, social play, altruism, and embracing diversity and inclusion. However, Keyes and Lopez (2002) claimed that physical well-being entails healthy nutrition, hygiene, physical activity, prevention and care of disease, rest, and recovery—the basic needs of all human beings. The three facets of well-being (emotional, physical, and social) are also important for the supervisors in order to achieve sustainable ECD centres in informal settlements.

In developing countries, ECD centres' stakeholders are exposed to multiple intersecting risks that compromise their well-being (Ebrahim et al., 2019). In South Africa, the widening gap of inequalities continues to impair disadvantaged people (children, supervisors, teachers, and parents of children from poor communities) while the privileged continue to thrive with their basic needs in place (African Child Policy Forum, 2016; Ebrahim et al., 2021). Numerous factors impacting on the well-being and sustainability of ECD centres relate, among others, to poverty, inequality chronic illnesses, poor infrastructure, teenage mothers, and low levels of caregiver education—all hampering inclusive communities and innovative collaborative ways to solve own problems (Moodly, 2019). The South African National Curriculum Framework (DBE, 2015) identified well-being as a key early learning and development area. Although the importance of well-being is undisputed, a benchmark requirement for optimum child development (Melhuish, 2014), and the health and well-being of supervisors as leaders in ECD centres, are equally important.

Theoretical Perspective

Posthumanism has broad and varying interpretations in different fields of study. However, the word itself simply translates to *beyond humanism.* Therefore, to better understand posthumanism, it is vital to specify the fundamentals of humanism. Humanist thinking emerged from the art forms and literature of the Renaissance period. It places the human at the centre of the universe as an exceptional being that is independent of, and superior to, others (Keeling & Lehman, 2018). In other words, humanism promoted anthropocentrism (Kopnina et al., 2018), a belief that the environment and other species may be used as a means to human ends. This superiority of the human race also extends to certain groups of human beings who are considered superior to the marginalised. Those marginalised include groups of people relegated in society, for example, females, people of colour, people without formal education, people from low-income areas, the disabled, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and more LBGQT+ groups.

Therefore, adopting a posthuman perspective in this study ensured transcending this dominance of certain groups of people by valuing the knowledge created by those who are marginalised and disadvantaged. In educational research, the ethics of humanism places the researcher at the centre of the research process. On the other hand, by using a participatory action research design, we aimed for epistemic democracy (McAteer & Wood, 2018) where the voices of the "researched" are heard and

valued. Adopting a posthuman perspective, we therefore aimed for the emancipation of a disadvantaged group of ECD Black female supervisors in an informal settlement. Coherent with the theory of posthumanism, our study aimed to enable participants to develop their own strategies to survive the stressful situations in their workplace and to further take charge in solving relevant problems in their own unique contexts (Cottam, 2018; Von Heimberg & Ness, 2021). Posthumanism implies doing research *with* people, rather than *on* people—research where knowledge is created and constructed collaboratively, thereby leading to action and creating sustainable social change within communities. Emanating from this, the methodology underpinning the study was participatory action learning and action research (PALAR), as described in the next section.

Methodology

Aligned with the collectivism of posthuman theories rather than with individualism, PALAR aims to enable the voices of groups of people working to solve problems within their unique contexts. The building of trust, collaboration, and team spirit are essential for the ongoing success and sustainability of a PALAR project, in which relationship building is an essential foundation (Zuber-Skerrit & Teare, 2013). In view of this, prior contact was made with the participants in an effort to establish their individual and collective goals, purposes, and expectations for the project. Wood (2020) stated that the essence of PALAR is building relationships among co-researchers and that, in the absence of democratic, trusting, and purposeful relationships, PALAR cannot truly take place.

PALAR is more than a research methodology given that it has a unique learning component. In fact, it can be regarded as a philosophy in which all people, irrespective of educational qualifications, can learn and contribute to knowledge production (Wood, 2019). The participants take on the role of co-researchers in an attempt to address complex contextual challenges (for example, well-being) with transparency throughout the research process. In opposition to traditional research, PALAR is a research design that enables co-researchers to share their knowledge and build collaboratively on each other's experiences (Martin et al., 2019). Thus, the process of PALAR highlights the democratisation of knowledge production among researchers and participants. This is done by collectively accelerating social change and ensuring participation as co-researchers (Ramírez et al., 2013). In the past, it was assumed that scientific knowledge was created by esteemed scholars and then applied by the field workers (McAteer & Wood, 2018). Hence, the underlying epistemological assumption in this investigation was that people working in the field are able to create knowledge based on their subjective realities; they have opportunity to both share and learn (MacDonald, 2012).

PALAR research occurs in iterative cycles, in which the results of one cycle inform subsequent cycles. This article reports on the research and learnings of two cycles of inquiry. The initial research cycle consisted of three university researchers and three supervisors from three selected ECD centres; they came to be known as the action learning group. This was later extended to other stakeholders involved with the centres. The participants were purposefully selected as able to inform the research objectives and provide relevant data. Data generation and learnings occurred during two physical meetings and subsequent communication on a WhatsApp group that was formed with the entire research team.

Data were generated using reflective drawings and audio recordings of the physical meetings, which provided opportunities for action and reflection (Calvo, 2017). Firstly, drawings require an emergence of both visual and kinaesthetic dimensions where participants are engaged in contributing to the *action* process. Secondly, drawings are used at the *reflection* stage to recall lived experiences after the observed activity, which helps to establish praxis—a bridge between theory and practice (Freire, 2000). Hence, the six participants used drawings both as means to act and reflect on their learnings—and to understand the complexity of well-being within three ECD centres in an informal settlement in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. When participants are involved in the interpretation of their intended

messages, their drawings become a compelling means of participatory research embedded in participant–researcher collaboration (MacDonald, 2012; Mitchell et al., 2011).

PALAR adopts an ontological assumption of multiple realities and collective knowledge acquisition that is coherent with qualitative approaches. To gain a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon in qualitative research, the use of multiple data sources is recommended because this contributes to the convergence of information, resulting in data triangulation (Carter et al., 2014), and enhancing the credibility of research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Thus, credibility was ensured by utilising reflective drawings and group discussions. The team was familiar with the study phenomenon thus the quality of questions allowed for full expression of their views, confirming transferability of findings. The provision of enough information on the research design and methodology is consistent with PALAR principles. The findings of participants as co-researchers were confirmed through related literature, the reflexive approach, and theoretical framework (Neethling, 2015). Ethical clearance was sought and granted prior to the research, and learning processes from gatekeepers and considerations including voluntary participation and confidentiality were adhered to. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms (S1, S2, S3, RA, RB, and RC) were used when presenting the findings.

In Cycle 1, the participants reflected on experiences of challenges that led to their greater need for well-being. Of their general experiences of various challenges, the psychosocial challenges they had experienced in the previous year (effects of the 2021 floods in KwaZulu-Natal) became the focus. In Cycle 2, using reflective drawings, participants produced captions related to how an action learning group could move forward and promote the well-being of the supervisors. Data were analysed utilising critical content analysis. The drawings and captions were then presented to the action learning team, which observed and made valuable contributions (Lochmiller & Lester, 2015) resulting in collective meaning-making.

Findings and Discussion

Often, the link between well-being and social change is overlooked. In understanding how to promote well-being and a sense of connectedness to self (individual), others (collective), and nature (planetary), supervisors from the selected ECD centres presented the following themed views:

- The challenges experienced while promoting the well-being of supervisors.
- The value of decentralisation of our power.
- Building relational connections for further collaborations.

The findings of the study brought to the fore the notion that interventions to transform the situation in informal settlements are a responsibility for all stakeholders, whether human or nonhuman. The ECD supervisors identified the experienced challenges as reasons that lead to the hampering of the promotion of their well-being.

The Challenges Experienced While Promoting the Well-Being of Supervisors

This section highlights the challenges supervisors experienced in their quest for promotion of well-being in informal settlements and the reasons for them. The findings suggested that the ECD supervisors experienced significant personal and contextual challenges but some are often peculiar to informal settlements only, with direct impact on their well-being. The discussions between the supervisors and researchers highlighted concerns raised as being contextual challenges and cases of criminal behaviour in and around their centres. These included incidents of frequent burglary in the centres, theft of centres' resources (like water and electricity) by community members, and the non-

payment of fees by parents. One participant confirmed this, citing poverty as a larger societal cause of their challenges in ECD centres that could not be ignored:

> *Most parents are unemployed and depend on child support grant, which is what the centre also survives on, plus limited subsidy from the government and other stakeholders . . . this has never been enough. We are overstretched on a daily basis ensuring that all our stakeholders' needs are accommodated, i.e., our young children, practitioners and parents and non-teaching staff. To be responsible "alone" for all these tasks, is overwhelming, but we have to thrive. (S1)*

This above is confirmed by Nassar and Elsayed's (2018) notion that informal settlements often attract a poor reputation as being hotspots of social unrest, squalor, crime, with high rates of unemployment and poverty. It became clear that experienced vulnerabilities and the complexity of the challenges did not only negatively impact on the supervisors' well-being, but also on all the ECD centres' stakeholders including practitioners, young children, parents, and the community members. Participants S2 and RB explained how the difficulty of funding for ECD centres affected the health and well-being of supervisors as well as sustainable learning:

> *Our practitioners are not paid decent salaries . . . and this is devastating knowing the effort they put in their work; we depend and survive on fees from parents to support and care for our children. (S2)*

> *In general, ECD centres and practitioners are not recognised in these communities, we feel invisible . . . we are all here because of the greatest love for our young children and belief in education for all in this country—no matter where one comes from. (RB)*

The frustration demonstrated by the above three participants indicates that supervisors were sometimes left with very few opportunities to navigate alternatives to access adequate resources to address needs to enhance health and well-being in the ECD centres. Although supervisors and practitioners are aware that they have a legal function to contribute to the well-being of learners, parents, and each other, from the group meeting, it was evident that there were "incorrect perceptions" and a "lack of education about ECD," which participants felt isolated ECD centres from the community. S1 added: "Some community members believe that the ECD centres are our own businesses, hence the lack of their support."

This appeared to be a very concerning perception, contributing to the lack of support and inaccessibility of basic services. The two group meetings saw supervisors complaining mainly about the current crisis, which had left them struggling and having a ripple effect on inequalities and injustices experienced in informal settlements. As mentioned previously, many ECD facilities in South Africa in informal settlements and rural communities, function under very challenging conditions including supervision and teaching (practitioner) skills (Atmore et al., 2012; Melariri et al., 2019; Visser et al., 2021), which affect the well-being in the centres. These general challenges led to participants reflecting on the recent past three years, stressing the devastating effects of the Covid-19 pandemic (2020–2022) and the floods in KwaZulu-Natal (April–May, 2022), which crippled progress in their centres and the whole community. S1 recalled this about floods:

> *The recent floods left us in our centre and community devasted after losing everything. Community lost their shacks [homes], clothing, food, legal documents, etc. . . . We had to be pro-active and find responsive solutions. Some families and children are still residing in community halls and churches—but bring their children which adds to the usual challenges we experienced daily . . . we still have to find other ways of survival.*

The above indicates how various psychosocial challenges including natural disasters are part of communities and affect their well-being. We recognised that leadership in ECD requires the practice of responsive interdisciplinary approaches in addressing personal and contextual challenges including small children without homes or the sudden death of their parents. The National Department of Social Development Guidelines for ECD services (2006) suggested that developing resilience for ECD supervisors should not only be about theoretical, practical knowledge and experience in managing ECD centres, but that possession of leadership skills is also a requirement. Adequate leadership skills can enable supervisors tackle the various daily responsibilities in and outside their centres, including unexpected crises. In the context of the challenges described in this section, it appears that supervisors' experiences are complex and thus, greater emotional stability is imperative. Although, in some cases, outside influences affected the centres negatively, it was interesting to learn what S1 reflected on as being a good relationship and connection with neighbours of their centre:

> *We have an excellent relationship with our neighbours. We have become their extended family as a centre. Even the taxi drivers that rank in the parking by the gate, ensure that security is maintained. Any suspicious individuals or action, they are there—you answer to them first. We feel protected and we've developed a trusting relationship. Even at night, the neighbours do night rounds checking suspicious and strange noises then they will call me. The centre has benefitted from these connections and community involvement. I do not stress at night.*

This kind of relationship as described by S1 above was an eye-opener, and gave other supervisors hope that with effective education in their communities about well-being in ECD centres, individual and social change—no matter how small—could happen. This confirms that even though life in informal settlements is known to often be complex and volatile, some informal settlements are organised with neighbours who know each other well and have formal residents' committee structures and systems of support. All participants believed that there was still hope to forge relationships and connections within communities and beyond.

The Value of Decentralisation of Our Power

The participants used reflective drawings and captions (Figures 1–6) relating to how they could move forward and promote the well-being of ECD supervisors in an informal settlement. Explaining the meaning of their drawings in a discussion meeting enhanced the credibility of research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Participants S1 and S3 used figure drawings (Figure 1 and Figure 2, respectively) to represent their explanations of how the well-being of the supervisors could be promoted by practising delegation of their power.

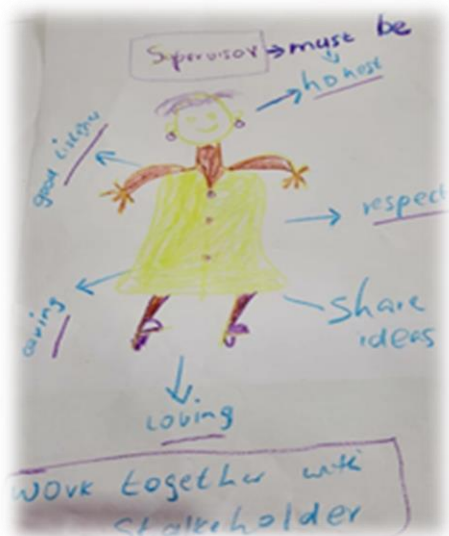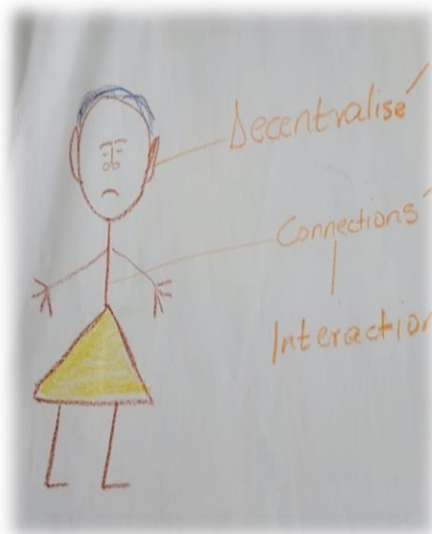**Figure 1: Parts of the Body: Working Together**

Figure 2: Small Body With an "Ear" and a "Heart"

Both S1 and S3 reflected on the importance of building relationships and working together. A human figure drawing represented how each part of the body depends on the support of the others to function properly. They felt that no matter whether one is big or small, rich or poor, all should begin with oneself—know who you are and then recognise the other as a human being like you. Both participants stressed that this should begin with a person (them as supervisors, in this case) and thereafter, the need to decentralise their power—which is a process of sharing and valuing other stakeholders. By addressing the challenges of lived experiences at the ECD centres, it became evident that supervisors and centres cannot operate in isolation, but must operate collaboratively with all stakeholders. For the body to function optimally, all its parts should connect with others and this is a shared responsibility. Good connection for a common goal leads to collaboration and the creation of further opportunities for social change.

From the participants' reflections and descriptions of the content of drawings, the characteristics that they should possess were represented in words like, "an ear" (S1), meaning to "listen, learn and act" and "the heart" (S3), meaning "love and caring, trust, support," and were stressed and explained in detailed with reference to parts of the body. SI explained:

> As the head of the centre, it is crucial to demonstrate love, care, and support to everyone equally. To be trusted and confidential with your stakeholders' matters that they entrust you with is key in building healthy relationships. This has a possibility to earn you love and respect back—an encouragement to do more for and with your other stakeholders within the centre communities.

Relationships are fundamental to well-being, and the experiences that contribute to well-being are often amplified through relationships (Melhuish, 2014). All participants demonstrated creativity and authenticity in their interpretations of reflective drawings showing how the health and well-being of supervisors as leaders and as human beings in ECD centres are equally important. The intersection between human and non-human relationships (posthumanisim), and the understanding of the complexity of well-being, became evident through sharing ways in which supervisors could decentralise their power in ECD centres beyond human relationalities, as explained in Kopnina et al. (2018). This led to participants suggesting various strategies consistent with posthumanistic

perspectives and PALAR principles (theoretical and methodological approaches) as examples of the ways of improving the promotion of supervisors' well-being:

> *The importance of recognising and identifying strengths and talent of our practitioners, caregivers and parents, so that their knowledge and technological skills—including using social media like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and computer skills—should be developed and improved to connect locally and internationally and finding space to showcase our work in our communities. (RC)*

> *Collaborate with parents, nearby formal schools, local arts, culture and recreation centres and local business people. Parents' workplaces could become our assets as some work in shops and factories where they are allowed to purchase on discounted prices/rates. This can be beneficial to the centres and can connect the centre with wider community like businesses through parents. (S2)*

> *Developing communities of practice with practitioners from other ECD centres. Communicating using social media and learning from each other, improves one's practice and supervision skills. Using technology like phones improves communication—reaching to others in times of distress. Technological advancement (internet) is also an empowering learning tool. Going for a cup of tea can be stress relieving and could enhance friendships. (RA)*

> *Networking and collaborations with the local universities to learn theoretical and pedagogical knowledge, and how to further academic qualifications to be relevant. (RB)*

The above were some of the actions that the group felt might enhance their well-being. However, the willingness to learn, unlearn, and re-learn new ways and processes of interconnection and co-construction of knowledge for sustainable ECD in an informal settlement was also cited as a requirement. The consensus was that inclusive and interdisciplinary approaches to finding solutions should not be centred on humans only but should be extended beyond human rationalities, knowing that informal settlements are resilient—they often do things for themselves as members of communities.

As a result of adapting to decentralisation of power, and interconnection at human and nonhuman levels, the supervisors became aware of the strengths of inclusive communities for solving unique problems in own contexts (Cottam, 2018; Von Heimberg & Ness, 2021). In this way, the importance of practising respecting our own culture, preserving nature, developing friendships and, most of all, forming solidarity and valuing each other as human beings, became a source of well-being and social change.

Figure 3: A Tree: My Source of Life

Figure 3 represents the life and personal growth of the supervisors from resourceful ECD centres where all stakeholders are welcome to participate and contribute to sustainable ECE. A well-nourished, deep-rooted tree stands firm on the ground, feeding all its parts with nutrients to bear fruits to be shared by everyone. S2 further explained that, as human beings, we are all resourceful like the parts of the tree; we all possess strengths, talents, and capabilities. Development of self-awareness and willingness to adapt to change and to engage in introspective reflection are important skills to be learnt. S2 further explained as follows:

> All parts of the "tree" work together, but most importantly, the roots which feed nutrients and water to all parts of tree, are most important—just the same as the heart from the previous figure drawings. As a supervisor, one has to know and respect their co-workers, then neighbours, parents, and community members. We should be trusted and be friendly towards all. When people know and understand you, it is easy to connect and interact at a relational level. (S2)

The above participant's relationship with neighbours of the centre was not healthy; participants felt that if were supervisors practiced openness, were firm in their decision-making, were supportive and cared for all stakeholders involved, genuine interconnectedness would be possible and the centre would become integrated into the community. Engaging in reflective drawings and dialogue provided participants opportunities for reflection and learning (Calvo, 2017). They began to realise that some introspection and new ways of doing things needed to be adopted for the benefit of their ECD centres and for sustainable social change within their communities. Limited visibility and less participation in community projects and activities were cited as some of the negative practices and behaviour that supervisors felt they needed to change.

When collaboration is practised, leadership in the centres can become stress free because all stakeholders would be engaged in decision-making and feel valued, heard, trusted, and appreciated. Thus, as Cottam (2018) and Von Heimberg and Ness (2021) posited, in order to resolve stressful situations in the ECD centres, supervisors should take charge of and develop sustainable strategies through shared responsibility.

Building Relational Connections for Further Collaborations

Although the reflective drawings highlighted the importance of connecting with stakeholders from communities, some ECD centres were still experiencing challenges in getting total commitment, responsibility, and accountability from parents and community members. The findings indicated that communities with no education about ECD have an uninformed perception of these centres, viewing

them as separate entities that make a lot of money for supervisors and practitioners. Thus, issues of vandalism and theft were highlighted as prime.

Figures 4 and 5 demonstrate how the process of making relational connections could be achieved, especially if the strengths of the communities in informal settlements were recognised. Connections in relationships require vulnerability, openness, and trust.

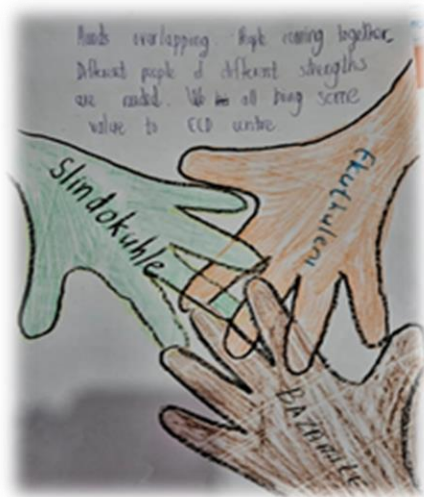**Figure 4: Hold Hands: In Support for Each Other**

Figure 5: Connected by Hearts

Figure 4 represents three opened hands—but joined together. Figure 5 represents joined hearts, meaning that the supervisors were willing to open themselves to other possibilities of working together for sustainable learning in ECD and for their well-being.

In these drawings, the emphasis is on warmth because both the heart and hands are emotive and can promote relational well-being. When engaging in reflexive practice and action, a strong belief was that holding each other's hands (support) and feeling connected from the heart could move us forward in the quest for greater well-being. A good heart is warm and welcoming to all without discrimination. Navigating the ever-changing world requires that we show each other mutual respect, trust, authenticity, love, and caring in order to become new world thinkers (Hays, 2017). Relational connections with stakeholders, objects, or events dispel the superiority of the human race and extend to those groups of humans who are marginalised. Thus, enhancing a relational connection culture in a workplace (ECD centres) would mean that people communicated more and collaborated for social transformation as well.

Figure 6: Turning Wheels Bring About Change
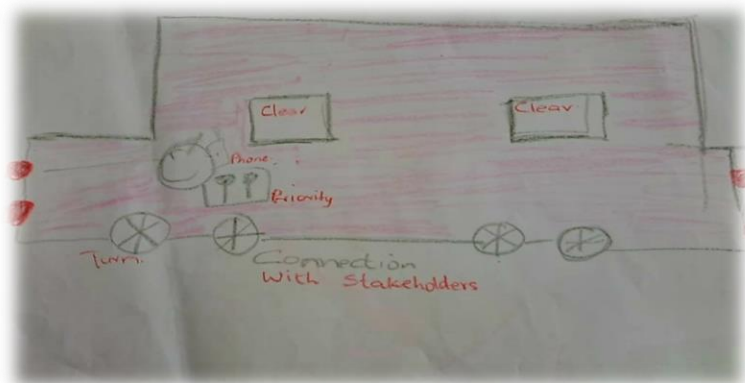
R1's drawing (Figure 6) represents the life of an ECD centre in which all stakeholders are open to change. It is one structure with many parts that work together for any movement to occur. The car performs different roles including being transport for the healthy and sick, carrying groceries, transport for living and dead, and sending messages from house to house, locally and internationally. However, any movement requires planning and taking stock by prioritising needs and sourcing alternatives. The windows of the vehicle indicate that, for all stakeholders' well-being to be promoted, a clear vision and mission for future developments at the centre is critical. Success brings some light to harness interdisciplinary processes to reach one's destination. R2 explained the meaning of car and its relevance to the promotion of well-being:

> *Our future is unpredictable; globally, our circumstances change like the turning wheels, resulting in tiny movements—which means that supervisors in informal settlements should re-think their responsibilities, have a direction and drive on their lane and know that they are "not alone."*

The findings suggest that to achieve greater emotional stability, supervisors, practitioners, parents, and other ECD stakeholders need to understand that there is no one-size-fits-all strategy when addressing psychosocial challenges that impact on health and well-being. Therefore, becoming a responsive supervisor would mean that you learn to identify and draw on the strengths of all interested and capable people as your reserves—like a spare wheel or reserve fuel tank. RB and S3 suggested activities (nonhuman) and people (human) in the community that ECD centres could connect with to forge collaborative work, for example, creating community, school, and home food gardens. Identifying participation in national and international celebrations is one way to relieve stress and bring about happiness, and is consistent with posthuman approaches. Through such projects, ECD stakeholders could learn about and from each other, and about the community in general, which results in the education of those engaged.

Conclusions

This study reflected on ECD supervisors' challenges that were reasons for their great need for well-being. This resulted in the action team finding ways they could promote well-being and reflexive learning for sustainable ECE in informal settlements. We acknowledge that some South African communities still grapple with inequalities, leading to ECD centres in informal settlements experiencing multiple vulnerabilities and inadequate resources that impact on the supervisors' well-being (Corr et al., 2014). However, consistent with the theoretical (posthumanism) and methodological (PALAR) perspectives, an opportunity to reflect and learn collaboratively became emancipatory and raised awareness of the value of all stakeholders' capabilities and strengths to contribute to sustainable social change in ECD centre communities. Therefore, if psychosocial challenges in ECD

centres are to be solved with people—and not on or for people—interventions to transform stressful situations in supervisors' workplaces and in informal settlements becomes a responsibility not for supervisors only but for all stakeholders. Strengthening collaborative practice encourages communities to become responsible, accountable, and committed to the promotion of well-being and sustainable ECE.

Although informal settlements are marginalised as low-income areas with people relegated from society and without formal education, it is important to understand that these are sometimes resilient and resourceful communities who believe in collaborative work. Thus, for supervisors' well-being to be promoted, innovative collaborative ways to solve own problems in own contexts utilising responsive solutions can be a useful tool. Decentralisation of supervisors' power and using interdisciplinary interventions can serve as an invitation to communities to feel responsible and accountable for the ECE—thus, relational interconnections can be improved and all stakeholders feel valued. This study has potential to contribute to the well-being of supervisors, which could filter down to greater well-being for teachers and learners, resulting in sustainable ECD in informal settlements. Promotion of the value of each and every human being, and engaging collaboratively with respect and authenticity, encourages solidarity.

Recommendations

Based on the findings presented in this study, we suggest that individuals' strengths and capabilities should be identified to revolutionise the development of transformed knowledge to adapt to an ever-changing world. For ECD supervisors to promote their well-being depends on how they identify human and nonhuman ways to relationally connect with all stakeholders interested in the education of young children from marginalised communities and, further, to find ways to engage the ECD communities on social injustice and inequalities, resulting in sustainable ECD centres and transformed inclusive communities.

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