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### Book Review

#### **Critical issues in professional development: Situated knowledges from South Africa, edited by Hasina Banu Ebrahim and Vitallis**

**Chikoko**

**UNISA Press, 2022.**

**151 pp.**

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The editors of the book, *Critical Issues in Professional Development: Situated Knowledges from South Africa* (Ebrahim & Chikoko, 2022) have many years of local, national, and international experience in early childhood development (ECD), early childhood education (ECE), and early childhood care and education (ECCE). The content of their book provides insight into the challenges and opportunities of this marginalised and fragmented field with specific reference to professional learning and development in the South African context. The various chapters serve as a catalyst for thinking about and debating professional development in order to advance action. They present dialogue and debate from different academics in the fields of ECD, ECE, and ECCE around constructs of professional development, pedagogy, sources of teacher knowledge, child participation, multigrade teaching, teacher identity, and curriculum change. These chapters show similarities and differences in a call for change in the way professional development is viewed in the South African context.

Chapter 1 discusses the conceptual framing of situated knowledge, and that knowledge comes from *somewhere*. Reference is made to communities of practice (CoPs) that emphasise the need for collective ownership and approaches to professional development and learning. The conceptual framework of situated learning should also be viewed from a bottom-up approach to professional development in the field of ECD.

Chapter 2 presents the valuable lessons learnt from a CoP with the common goal of raising the status of early childhood. Collaboration in the Project for Inclusive Early Childhood Care and Education involved participants from a number of different South African higher education institutes and nonprofit organisations, which afforded opportunities for cross-sectorial collaborations, research, writing of knowledge and practice standards, and striving towards harmonised professional development systems for the field of ECD. This kind of collaboration has helped strengthen the status of early childhood teacher education at national level.

Chapter 3 problematises key issues around changing early childhood pedagogy that is linked to the dominance of fundamental pedagogies, and the overuse of transmissive pedagogies embedded in

narrow school readiness approaches. The author foregrounds play-based learning approaches as alternative pedagogy in ECD. These approaches stimulate child agency in learning and development. Critical questions are posed regarding which pedagogies are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate for the South African context.

Chapter 4 explores different sources of practitioners' knowledge. It reveals how practitioners used their childhood memories and community-based and context knowledge to shape better practices for and with young children in a disadvantaged community. The concept of *funds of knowledge*, premised on an asset-based approach, is used to highlight personal and informal knowledge that help to direct responsive actions for and with children. It is through understanding the agency of practitioners in vulnerable contexts that a new cadre of professionals in ECCE can be realised.

The participatory rights of Grade R learners are foregrounded in Chapter 5. The positionality of teachers as experts doing transmissive teaching for curriculum coverage shows how child participation has been framed. Narrow views of children's rights to active participation are undermined by adult domination and control. This author calls on professional learning and development to advance reflection and critical thinking amongst practitioners. In addition, the author interrogates teacher beliefs and pedagogical practice with children in context—rather than on them.

Chapter 6 examines teacher professional development and its influence on their preparation for multigrade teaching. The chapter provides insight into the challenges faced by teachers working in a multigrade environment in terms of opportunities afforded to attend professional development workshops from the Department of Basic Education. Chapter 7 looks at crucial aspects of mentorship to unpack context-based professional development in early childhood. This author discusses the positive shifts and new ways of planning and using resources after the implementation of a mentorship programme. Some short-term empowerment for practice was achieved through individual practice-based mentorship.

Chapters 8 and 9 focus on teacher identity and influences on the formation of teacher identity. Chapter 8 commences with Bourdieu's classical habitus theory and Wenger's community of practice theory. These theoretical lenses were used to provide a fresh perspective of the role individuals play in making sense of what constitutes professional teaching. Pre-service teachers' experiences related to differences in teaching experience, geographical origin, gender, religion, and spirituality had bearing on their habitus when commencing a teacher programme at university. Their experiences during school visits allowed the pre-service teachers to witness mentor teachers enact care, love, and compassion and this, in turn, influenced their professional identity formation. The author of Chapter 9 reveals how discourses of child development, neuroscience research, school readiness, and lifelong learning are accessed for early childhood work.

In conclusion, Chapter 10 discloses 12 teachers' experiences of professional development in relation to curriculum change and their feelings of fear, anxiety, and confusion that came with the change. The teachers felt they were given huge responsibility to effect practice that requires sophisticated knowledge and skills.

This book succeeds in showing readers how issues in professional development are thought of, enacted, and researched in the fields of ECD, ECE, and ECCE from a South African perspective. The authors endorse the view that knowledge is situated at different micro and macro levels for approaches to professional development, pedagogy, child participation, multigrade teaching, mentorship, teacher identity, and curriculum change. The book makes a powerful contribution

towards building contextually relevant and responsive professional development opportunities for practitioners, teachers, managers, mentors, and other stakeholders involved in ECD field.

## **Reference**

Ebrahim, H. B., & Chikoko, V. (Eds.). (2022). *Critical issues in professional development: Situated knowledges from South Africa*. UNISA Press.