

# PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND THE PROCESS OF COLLECTING VOICES: THE CASE OF AN EDUCARE CENTRE IN BOKSBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

Participatory community development and the process of collecting voices

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the process of collecting voices from a participatory community development perspective and the theoretical framework from which the process was facilitated. The focus of the study was on building a viable and good organization that is responsive to the needs of its primary stakeholders. This is the operationalization of the principle of empowerment of men and women alike – aimed at enhancing the sustainability of the envisaged project beyond the time of the research-facilitator's departure. Through this participatory community development process participants were enabled to start a *Stokvel* project, the aim of which was to help augment the members' financial resources so as to sustain payment of their children's day care fees and to also materialize the spirit of *Ubuntu* (humaneness) among themselves as local community members. Given the lessons learnt this article concludes that after engaging people in capacity building as facilitators of participatory community development, it is important to give people a voice at grass-roots level, allowing them to make informed decisions and choices about their situations. This in turn helps them take control of their lives in a meaningful way. Besides this, the researcher is also intrigued by the task of documenting the process of collecting the latter voices and the attendant lessons learnt.

**Keywords:** participatory community development, person-centered approach, ubuntu, meaning-making, South Africa

## INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the process of collecting voices through a Participatory Community Development process facilitated by the researcher at an educare centre based in the Ekurhuleni Municipality of Gauteng Province, South Africa. Firstly, the purpose of this paper is to document the process of collecting voices and lessons learnt from the application of the Person-Centred Approach (PCA), and its adaptation to a Participatory

Community Development process geared at collecting voices from local educare centre stakeholders whose experiences were characterized by power-play dynamics. Secondly, the purpose is to contribute to a cumulative process of developing understandings of the Participatory Community Development and the process of collecting voices, using the educare centre under study as an example.

## BACKGROUND TO THE PROCESS

The researcher's observation is that informal settlements in the early nineties had become prevalent habitats mostly for African unemployed or low income earners in South Africa. However, they have attendant problems and constraints, for example, lack of sewerage, supply of clean water for individual households and education and care (educare) for children whose parents are gainfully employed. Again, it is the researcher's observation that most residents of such informal settlements would allocate themselves stands without the permission of the local municipality concerned and designate the areas concerned as residential areas. Along with this development of informal settlements, several educare facilities have mushroomed in such areas.

One such facility was established by Kagiso together with his wife Mosa (not their real names) who are residents at Ramaphosa and also work at the centre as owner-managers. This educare centre was established in 1995 by Kagiso, who later convinced Mosa, who was at the time unemployed, to help with the administration of the center. When the centre started they only had fourteen registered children and two teachers, Mosa being one of them.

Mosa is a qualified professional school teacher. She was also registered for a three-year educare programme facilitated by Gauteng Education Department under the auspices of Impilo Project. The aim of the Impilo Project was to provide industry-related skills training, the much needed motivation and an incentive for the day care centres graded as peri-urban (guided by a means test). In 1998 when the researcher terminated formal interaction with the centre, it had 69 registered children aged between six months and six years and employed four teachers on a full-time basis. The researcher continued to serve the educare centre until the end of 2006 on a voluntary or charitable basis.

## THE GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT OF THE EDUCARE CENTRE

This educare centre under study is situated within an environment characterized by shacks used as houses, shops, shebeens and other educare centres. The context is that of an informal settlement, which is divided into two phases. Phase one was developed in terms of infrastructure. For example, there are about 500 house stands, and in each yard there are hygienic toilet facilities and water taps. Phase two comprises about 600 shacks altogether, and the area is not yet developed in terms of the above mentioned infrastructure.

In phase two where the educare centre is based, at the time of the present research there were no hygienic toilet facilities but pits adapted to serve as toilets. There are also no water taps in individual yards (unlike in phase one). Taps are situated at the corner of each street, which means that each street uses one tap communally. There are no primary health care facilities in the entire community except for a mobile clinic facility offered once a week by the Boksburg Local Council (now part of Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Council) on Tuesdays from 09h00 to 15h00. There are no school facilities or buildings. Local community children attend school at a neighbouring community, which is about 500 meters away. There is also no police station, to name but a few amenities. The nearest towns are Germiston and Boksburg, which are about five to seven kilometers away, respectively.

## THEORETICAL CONTEXT OF THE CASE STUDY

The research is qualitative in nature and adopts a case study approach. The theoretical framework from which the participatory development process was facilitated is the Person Centred Approach (PCA) conceptualized by Rogers (1987). Broadly, PCA is based on the premise that the human being is basically a trustworthy organism, capable of understanding himself/herself in context, making constructive choices and acting upon those choices. Rogers (1987: 15) considers the attitude (non-judgmental, accepting) held by the facilitator as the most important tool in helping the person. Mainly, the basic conditions required for PCA are congruence, unconditional positive regard, empathy, personal power, respect, individualization, self-determination and confidentiality (Phiri 2008: 6–9).

PCA enabled the researcher to understand the community members and work with them in a humane and respectful way. Using Rogers (1987: 494) propositions, with particular reference to proposition number seven that states ‘the best vantage point from which to understand behavior is from the internal frame of reference of the individual himself’ enhanced the researcher’s ability to explore the different perspectives from which people can be understood. The perspectives referred to include people’s perceptions, needs, culture, belief systems, emotions, values and how different people within the same geographical environment interact with one another.

On the other hand, Swanepoel’s (1997) five-phase community development model was used as a point of reference in collecting voices from the primary stakeholders of the educare centre, namely, co-owners and fellow employees alike. Mainly, the latter describes a participatory community development process as comprising the following five phases: contact making, needs and resource identification, planning, implementation and evaluation. The researcher took cues from PCA to maximize the opportunities presented by collecting voices and learning lessons that could be adopted and adapted by community development practitioners, scholars and other stakeholders.

Additionally, a specific *Ubuntu* perspective was used to enhance understanding of the present process under discussion. Of this perspective, Phiri (2008: vii) asserts

that ‘*Ubuntu* is a social and local (South African) constructed concept for an expressed community inspired Spirit, coupled with appropriate corporate action, motivated by fundamental needs of individual members with an end to share what little resources there are.’

Grinnell (1981: 302) maintains that a case study is a strategy characterized by very flexible and open-ended techniques of data gathering and analysis. It focuses on the many aspects of the case situation under examination and as a result it is comprehensive in nature. All it provides is a description of what happens when one group of people is subjected to one treatment or experience (in this instance a facilitation process). Feuerstein (1986: 48) holds that a case study is a detailed description and analysis of a single event, situation, person, group, institution or programme within its own context to provide a deep look at something. Feuerstein comes from a development background and her description of a case study was elected because it is in line with the approach adopted by the researcher during the process of collecting voices at the educare centre. Rephrasing the same point, Feuerstein concludes that a case study is qualitative in nature and includes a method for describing the development process.

According to Rubin and Babbie (2001: 30), qualitative methods emphasize depth of understanding that attempts to tap the deeper meaning of human experience, and that intends to generate theoretically richer observations, which are not easily reduced to numbers. Qualitative methods may be more suitable when flexibility is required to study a new phenomenon about which we know very little. We also use the qualitative methods when we want to gain insight into the subjective meaning of complex phenomena in order to advance our conceptualization of them and to build theory that can be tested in future studies. An important use of the case study is to examine the behaviour of organizations or the structures of communities. It is used in these instances because it is well suited to observation and description of complex interrelationships among constituent parts of the social system.

The objective of this type of meaning-making process or systematic analysis is not to identify causal relationships between two or more distinct variables within a particular system but rather to understand the system as a whole or the pattern that exists among all the constituent elements, in this case, the primary stakeholders at the educare centre under study (cf. Fairclough 2006; Gubrium & Holstein 2001; Myer 1998). According to Fairclough (2006: 10), there are three analytically separable elements in the process of meaning-making: the production of the text, the text itself, and the reception of the text. Each of these three elements has been given a primary place at different points in the recent history of theories of meaning: first the intentions, identity, et cetera, of the author, then the text itself, then more recently the interpretative work of the reader or listener. But it seems clear that meanings are made through the interplay between them. Overall, the social effects of texts, as in the case of this case study, depend upon processes of meaning-making. ‘But one resource that is necessary for any account of meaning-making is the capacity to analyse texts in order to clarify their contribution to processes of meaning-making’ (Fairclough 2006:10).

Lastly, Robert Yin, cited in Rubin and Babbie (2001: 402), describes a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. According to him, case studies are distinguished by their exclusive focus on a particular case and their utilization of a full variety of evidence gathered by the use of qualitative methods. Sources of evidence might include existing documents, observations and interviews. Evidence might also be sought by surveying people about the case.

Rubin and Babbie (2001: 403) go on to say that as with single-subject designs (and even with many group experiments, for that matter) the logical focus in case studies is not on statistical generalization to other cases (or external validity). Instead, the focus is on what Yin calls analytical generalization, which involves connecting case study findings to a particular theory. This is done by showing how the weight of the various sources of evidence gathered in the case study is consistent with theory. Moreover, the rationale for using the case study method typically is the availability of a specific case that seems to merit intensive investigation.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THEORY IN THE PROCESS OF COLLECTING VOICES

The researcher maintains that the application of theory guided the thinking and actions and made her accountable for the facilitation of the Participatory Community Development process and the attendant process of collecting voices. Meaning, theory gives an explanation of certain phenomena and it is able to direct the actions of the facilitator. Furthermore, a consistent theory enables the worker to facilitate development and change instead of just being an ‘assistance agency or worker’. Thus, without a consistent theory the agency or worker runs the risk of strengthening the very forces responsible for the conditions of suffering and injustice (Korten 1991: 113–114).

## DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPATION AND PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT

It is noted that development cannot take place in isolation from participation. It is almost as if the two concepts are mutually exclusive for the successful operationalization of the principle of empowerment of men and women alike – aimed at enhancing the sustainability of the envisaged project beyond the departure of the research-facilitator.

### Participation

According to Burkey (1993: 59), participation is ‘an organized effort to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control’. In this context, participation is perceived as an essential part of human growth, namely, the

development of self-confidence, pride, initiative, creativity, responsibility and co-operation. Additionally, using ‘promoting healthcare in the community’ as an example, Lebeso and Phiri (2012: 66) contend that the methodology that the facilitators of Ubuntu-Centred knowledge systems choose to employ in health care contexts, should acknowledge that in Participatory Sustainable Community Development, the means (process) justifies the end (product). Thus, in promoting health care in the community, the process of educating local people should be perceived as being equally important as the end product in the day-to-day professional practice approaches.

Also, the research-facilitator views and understands this process as the essence of social development because people learn to take charge of their own lives and solve their own problems. Participation affirms the belief in the dignity and capabilities of people. People come together and collectively learn by ‘doing’. They plan and act together. No participation can take place without trust and belief in people. In this way they acquire knowledge and awareness that enable them to understand the causes of their problem and they are in a better position to mobilize the resources available in order to improve their situation. Participation is a ‘learn by doing exercise where plans are made, action is taken, results studied, lessons learnt and then new actions and plans take place’ (Korten 1980: 480).

Genuine participation depends on the ability of participants to ‘embrace errors’. This means that where there is participation, progress will be made as well as mistakes. Burkey (1993: 57) argues that the first step in achieving real participation is realized when the poor themselves become more aware of their situation, of the socio-economic reality around them, of their real problems and what measures they themselves can take to begin changing their situation. This process of increasing the levels of consciousness or conscientisation constitutes a process of self-transformation through which people grow and mature as human beings. In this sense participation becomes a basic human need.

From the above description participation may be summarized as follows:

- Participation is a learning process that involves action and reflection.
- Participation is also about decision-making and control.
- Participation enhances human growth by developing self-confidence, initiative, creativity, co-operation and responsibility. Furthermore, it raises awareness as well as critical thinking in people.

## Participatory development

According to Burkey (1993: 75), participatory development activities rarely arise within poor groups without any form of outside stimulus. Self-reliant participatory development is concerned with people and social relationships. The participatory

development process cannot be generated spontaneously but requires a catalyst. For Burkey (1993:75), the catalyst is a change agent. The primary role of change agents (facilitators) is to release the creative energies in people. A change agent is a person who initiates a process of change. 'The direction in which this change will take place should be decided through interaction with the people with whom the change agent is working, rather than unilaterally by the change agent acting alone on behalf of outside interests' (Burkey 1993:76).

It is therefore noted that the latter discussion by Burkey emphasizes the participation of people in the development process, which is in harmony with the research-facilitator's philosophy of empowerment of men and women alike. Moreover, the research-facilitator's view of participatory development is that it is a process of development that emphasizes self-reliance, the creative ability of man, the use of available resources and man's initiative and involvement throughout the process. Involvement means making decisions and taking charge. Furthermore, participatory development is based on a belief and trust in people, and its overarching characteristic is that it is progressive and ongoing.

## RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS AND DATA COLLECTION

Recorded process notes (or texts) were taken down of the entire weekly visits the researcher made and meetings attended in 1997 and 1998, respectively (cf. Fairclough 2006; Gubrium and Holstein 2001; Myers 1998). In this context, and shedding more light on issues of texts, meanings and interpretations, Fairclough (2006: 10) maintains that what is implied in approaching texts as elements of social events is that we are not only concerned with texts as such, but also with the interactive processes of meaning-making. In the case of a face-to-face conversation (as with the weekly visits the researcher made, including the meetings and the attendant process notes and texts), the text is a transcript of what is said, and to a degree one can see meaning-making going on by looking at how participants respond to one another's conversational turns. Taking cue from the latter, during the respective meetings brainstorming was done and ideas were captured and recorded by way of process notes and text and used as reference by the facilitator both during the degree programme weekly project supervision sessions with fellow classmates and the lecturer – including contacts with participants of the process, for example:

- Dialogues, interviews, discussions (formal and informal) were used as a method of data collection. Recording of predominant themes emerging out of the discussion was done and captured in the above-mentioned process notes.
- The Constitution of Pull-together *Stokvel* co-authored with the researcher on 15 August 1998.
- The following statistical information from Gauteng Department of Education:

1. Gauteng Department of Education – ECD and Primary Education Policy Unit: ‘Letter to the Impilo Sites’, dated 15 July 1998.
  2. Educare Centres’ Learner/ Practitioner Information, compiled by Gauteng Department of Education, Central Region, Boksburg/Germiston District C6, dated 17 August 1998.
  3. Educare Centres’ ECD Head-Count Survey 1998–1999 by Gauteng Department of Education, Central Region, Boksburg/Germiston District C6, dated 17 August 1998.
- Photos of educare centre premises (see attached Appendix).

## THE RESEARCHER’S CONTACT MAKING PHASE WITH THE EDUCARE CENTRE

The researcher’s first contact with the educare centre was in the middle of 1996. It was by way of an invitation by the head office (through its president) of an educare consortium called South African Children in Informal Settlement (SACHISA). The brief of the invitation was for the researcher to help develop their organizational policies, including their fundraising initiatives.

Broadly, SACHISA concerns itself with the educare needs and general welfare of children in informal settlements and rural areas through a membership system, which is renewable annually, and the educare centre under study is an affiliate member. Canvassing for SACHISA members is done through the media, mainly local community radio stations. At the time the invitation was made, the researcher was pursuing a master’s degree in Social Science (Mental Health: Community Development) and facilitating a community development initiative was the requirement of that degree programme.

The researcher first met the principal/owner of Themeli Educare (Kagiso) at an affiliate members’ meeting at the SACHISA office in Johannesburg. It was during that encounter that Kagiso gave the researcher an introductory talk about his centre and an invitation to visit. This marked the beginning of a professional working relationship, the outcome of which is the case described in this paper.

## CONTACT MAKING IN TERMS OF SWANEPOEL’S COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT MODEL

This phase forms the core of the Participatory Development process, which the researcher facilitated among educare primary stakeholders. This phase was somewhat prolonged prior to the establishment of the action group, and building a relationship of trust with the members.

Contact making was done by means of a series of meetings held between the facilitator and the general parent body of Themeli Day Care Centre, the teachers, Kagiso and Mosa. According to Swanepoel (1997: 33–34), during this phase the community



worker/researcher endeavours to know the people and their prevailing circumstances, and the people get to know her. The research-facilitator entered the local community first and then proceeded to the educare centre through her involvement with SACHISA head office in Johannesburg at the invitation of its president.

While I continued to occasionally work with SACHISA office, my relationship with the educare centre took precedence as a result of an invitation extended to me by Kagiso. However, equally important was the requirement of the Community Development Master's Programme that the researcher facilitates a project of this nature, where she could demonstrate the application of the Person Centred Approach in dealing with power issues in a community setting and context such as the educare centre under study. In the process of accomplishing the latter, the empowerment of all parties involved remained important and the facilitator used this opportunity to enter the community because often it is difficult to gain access into a community without a clear reason approved by the community members themselves.

Swanepoel (1997: 31) argues that the community worker enters the community with the knowledge that not all people will participate in a single community development project and that she must identify an action group. Mindful of the latter caution at the educare centre under study, and after much deliberation, the general parent body's preferred choice was that the existing parents' committee acts as an action group. It is important to mention that the research-facilitator was invited to attend a number of general meetings of the parents' committee at the educare centre during this contact making phase and much time was spent with Kagiso and Mosa as the owners of the centre.

Overall, on the subject of contact making, Swanepoel (1997: 32) maintains that the entrance of a community worker should not disturb the rhythm of the community, that is, the first contact should be informal, rather than through formal public meetings. The latter is in harmony with the researcher's participatory community development belief system because this would allow anyone facilitating the process sufficient time to establish a relationship of trust with community members.

## Participants and collaborators in the process

Kagiso and Mosa (as educare co-owners) together with five parent-members of Pull-together *Stokvel* (an initiative birthed by the Participatory Community Development process facilitated by the researcher at the same educare centre), two of whom are parents employed as teachers at the centre.

On the subject of collaborators, Small (1995: 942) holds that 'action researchers value collaboration with non-researcher participants. While the action researcher brings to the research process theoretical knowledge, experience and the skill of conducting social science research, the participant collaborators bring practical knowledge and experience about the situation that is being studied. Both researcher and collaborator are seen as possessing expertise and knowledge critical for carrying out the research

processes.’ This means that, although the knowledge each possesses is different, it is complementary and essential to the process of collecting voices being documented by the researcher in this article.

### Clarification of researcher’s role as facilitator

Clarification of the researcher’s role in the community was considered critical from the beginning of the process. Burkey (1993: 55) maintains that it is not always possible for facilitation to occur spontaneously. The facilitator should conscientise the people rather than wait passively for action to take place on its own. Burkey (1993: 66) says that conscientisation is the ‘stimulation of self-reflected critical awareness on the part of the oppressed on their social reality and their ability to transform reality by their own conscious action’. The latter is complemented by Freire (1972: 76) who contends that this process of conscientisation leads to investigation of ‘generative themes’, namely, the felt need regarding the issues about which people feel strongly. This implies that the people themselves have to think critically about the problems surrounding them.

Thus, as far as possible, the current research-facilitator tried to explain, in simple terms, how participatory community development process works. Emphasis was placed on the participation of all members in terms of contributing ideas, however simple or trivial they may sound. Although clarification of the researcher’s role as facilitator was done at the beginning of the contact making phase, reiteration of this was regarded as important in all subsequent phases to eliminate possible confusion for participants during the entire process of feedback – it was envisaged that this would foster empowerment as the process gathered momentum.

For the most part, some participants appeared to understand the explanation which the researcher offered and expressed this by way of nodding their heads, while others gave a passive stare that was difficult for the researcher to interpret. However, the researcher resolved to read the passiveness as an indication that participants would have to tolerate the fact that some people learn faster than others and that in the process as participants we had to be patient with those who were not moving at the same pace as the others.

### THE FIRST EDUCARE PARENTS-TEACHERS MEETING: RESEARCHER’S REFLECTIONS

The purpose of the meeting of 5 January 1996, which was chaired by Kagiso, was to welcome new parents and the discussion that followed revolved around the different problems encountered by Kagiso and Mosa as well as the teachers in the course of discharging their duties. The interactions during the meeting and between the chairman and the parents were active, with questions asked by both old and new parents. Answers were provided by Kagiso and Mosa, with teachers occasionally asked by the chairman

to respond to some questions. Announcements about forthcoming events at the centre were also read.

## Themes and concerns raised by the chairman

This included the following:

- *Late payment of school fees* – the parents concerned were reminded to pay by the 7<sup>th</sup> of every month;
- *Poor participation by the parents* – during the previous year’s educational tours and activities;
- *Parents’ attendance of meetings* – was reported to be not as good as it could be; and
- *Kagiso’s expression of appreciation to the parents* – who attended the meeting and to those who participated and contributed valuable ideas that made the success of the educare centre a reality during the previous year of 1995.

By the end of the meeting, consensus had been reached that the researcher may attend subsequent general meetings of the parents’ body, which were held quarterly at the educare centre. The researcher would also be introduced to other parents (new and old) who were absent so that the research-facilitator role could be explained and clarified further throughout the entire process.

## Reflections of the first meeting

While listening to the experiences and perceptions of the parents, teachers, Kagiso and Mosa about their working relationship during the meeting, the researcher realized that there was a need to make more time available to listen to more of the participants’ stories and experiences individually and collectively during subsequent scheduled weekly visits to the centre.

During the meeting, the facilitator took the time to acknowledge the determination of all participants as primary stakeholders to find a lasting solution to their common needs and problems regarding their children’s welfare through dialogue during and in between meetings. The predominant theme in that meeting was a strong sense of determination and motivation on the part of all primary stakeholders to go on, coupled with enthusiasm to find a workable solution to whatever problems they encountered. Overall, the researcher managed to establish a relationship before and after the meeting with parents and teachers with a view to encouraging their continued active participation and to building on the positive working relationship envisaged at the centre. To accomplish the latter, the researcher used respect, empathy, warmth and acceptance.

## The first meeting to discharge the business of the educare centre

During this first meeting of the general parent body, which included the teachers, the researcher thanked Kagiso and Mosa for the invitation and the parents' warm reception was appreciated. This was done after Kagiso had introduced the researcher and had asked her to say a few words to the parents and teachers. During the brief period of time offered to speak, the researcher took the liberty to clarify her role as a facilitator. After that brief talk the researcher was shown appreciation by way of applause as she took her seat. The researcher understood the applause to be a gesture of appreciation for attending that particular meeting and a well-wisher for the rest of her stay in that community.

Again, the meeting was chaired by Kagiso and the discussion that followed thereafter revolved around the different problems encountered by Kagiso and Mosa, as well as the teachers in the course of discharging their duties. The observation made was that there was active participation between the chairman and the parents, with questions asked by both old and new parents. Answers were provided by Kagiso and Mosa, with teachers occasionally asked by the chairman to respond to some questions. Announcements about forthcoming events at the centre were also read.

## SUBSEQUENT CONTACTS

The meetings were still an endeavour on the part of the facilitator to get to know Mosa and Kagiso better and to get a broad angle scan of the community (Henderson and Thomas 1989: 71).

The objectives of these meetings were:

- To build a relationship and foster feelings of acceptance of one another;
- To create a common understanding of the facilitator's role and the duration of her involvement with the educare centre as a standing item in all meetings. This was considered as significant in terms of managing expectations from all primary stakeholders;
- To encourage the sharing of experiences between and among parents as a healthy institutional culture and good administrative practice in all meetings; and
- To request Kagiso to walk the researcher through the entire community with a view to have her introduced to the local leaders and opinion makers through what Swanepoel (1997:35) calls a 'community walk'.

Swanepoel (1997: 35) argues that community workers must obtain knowledge about 'leaders and figures of authority, opinion makers, the socio-economic stratification in the area, the gap between the better-off and the poor and the relationship between them, all the various institutions in the area, the prevailing norms and traditions even the history of the area and its people'.

During the discussion Kagiso explained that he was one of the people who helped with the establishment of a Civic Association in their local community, and as such, community members acknowledge him as one of their leaders. During the tour of both phase 1 and phase 2 he introduced the researcher to a few other Civic Association members who were available on that day, local African National Congress (ANC) members, shop owners and members of the broader community. On that same day, the researcher was also taken on a site visit of two separate pieces of land that had been earmarked by the government for the building of a school and a church, respectively.

Contacts were made with teachers on different days and times (with Kagiso's permission) in an effort to build a relationship with them and to also foster feelings of acceptance for one another as co-workers. During one of the meetings with teachers, it surfaced that two of the teachers had their own children registered at the day care centre as well. Therefore, in our discussion and sharing of experiences they were talking both as teachers and as parents. Kagiso's generous efforts to take the researcher on a 'community walk' are acknowledged with much appreciation by the researcher. Moreover, it is noted that that 'community walk' went a long way in terms of socializing the researcher into the local community, fostering her acceptance by the broader members of the local community in ways that would never have been possible without Kagiso's keen interest and his practical support.

## GENERAL ISSUES AND CONCERNS DISCUSSED DURING SUBSEQUENT MEETINGS

These included the following:

- *Unemployment* – it was reported that most people in the community were without jobs, and this apparently caused them a lot of stress and the resultant feelings of inadequacy as they were unable to provide the basic necessities of life for their families and households. Community members went on to say that they know of some parents in their community who would like their children to benefit from their educare centre's daily programme, but could not afford it financially because of their state of unemployment;
- *Lack of schooling facilities in the local area* – there were no schools in the local community (in neither one of the phases). As a result the local children were compelled to attend school at a neighboring community, which is about half a kilometer away.

- *Clean and running water supply* – it was reported that the community members still use communal water taps, which were situated at the end of each street corner;
- *Employment conditions at the day care centre* – their opinion was that everything is relatively in order considering the fact that the unemployment rate was so high, especially in that particular community. They also reported that there were two other educare centres in their community, but as far as they were concerned, theirs was offering the best educare programme and meals, which accounted for the large numbers of children registered at the centre. According to them (Kagiso confirmed this information), theirs had more children than the other two centres, and therefore rated the best in terms of their local standards.
- *Late payment of school fees* – this issue was raised almost as an afterthought. The reasons behind this are not clear. Perhaps the assumption was that it is a recurring item. Overall, it was reported that parents do try their best to pay school fees on time (which is the first of every month) as determined by the contract with the educare centre. However, mention was made of some parents who either made payments long after the seventh of every month or skipped a month or two before monthly payment was continued.

## THEORY

Throughout the deliberations the researcher was guided by Rogers' (1987) theory of the Person Centered Approach (PCA), which promotes the need to understand the community's 'frame of reference', their perceptions and experiences. Specific reference was made to proposition number seven of his nineteen propositions, which states 'the best vantage point of understanding behavior is from the internal frame of reference of the individual himself' (Rogers 1987: 492).

Furthermore, the researcher used the principles of warmth, empathy and congruence to enhance the inter- and intra-relationships in her dealings with the primary stakeholders at the educare centre and the broader community members alike. In this regard, Rogers (1987: 494) maintains that the creation of a warm climate by the facilitator promotes growth and development at both the individual and the community member levels.

The communication skills of probing, empathy, attending and listening as described by Egan (1994) were used and the community members were encouraged to talk. Moreover, Swanepoel (1997: 70) argues that 'contact making' is the most important process of community development. He goes on to say that the community worker's initial contact with a community will make or break a development effort and it is important that it be done correctly.

Swanepoel (1997: 37) asserts that the attitude of the community worker is of prime importance: 'The correct attitude opens doors while the wrong one locks them.' It is for this reason that the researcher focused mainly on fostering respect and the dignity of

people, relations, values and attitudes throughout interaction with the educare primary stakeholders and the broader community members alike.

## REFLECTION ON THE CONTACT MAKING PHASE

It is important to note that the core elements identified in the contact making phase were:

### Participation

This was demonstrated firstly by Kagiso and later on by Mosa who brought the plight of their educare centre and the parents' struggles with payment of school fees and other related issues to the attention of the facilitator by way of an informal discussion, which culminated in a formal invitation to the educare centre itself, which the researcher gladly accepted and honoured. It was an interesting observation that during the researcher's interaction with community members, it surfaced that two of the teachers were parents whose children were also registered at the same center. In the researcher's notes this was taken to signify the confidence of these parents in the administration of the centre and its management. Overall, the general parent body and the teachers responded positively to Kagiso's invitation for the researcher to attend their general meetings. This meant that the reception was warm and the level of participation by members was high, and from the researcher's notes it is evident how impressed she was. The reasons for the latter are not obvious to the researcher, save to say that it could be because Kagiso had mentioned in his introductory remarks that the research-facilitator is a professional social worker. Maybe they subconsciously anticipated some kind of intervention to put an end to or at least alleviate what they considered as stumbling blocks or constraints to them enjoying a good quality life at the educare centre in terms of working conditions and the quality of health and life for the broader members of their local community.

According to Swanepoel (1997: 3), 'There is no other stage for people to begin to participate than right at the start of the project.' The researcher could not agree more with this statement as it resonates with the principles of Ubuntu held in high esteem by the researcher in her practice of Participatory Community Development and the attendant process of collecting voices, which constitutes the subject of this article.

### Control

The action group comprised a volunteer parent, two teachers, Mosa and Kagiso demonstrated their willingness to act on the concerns raised during the first meeting by committing themselves to a follow-up meeting where a detailed discussion on the issues raised would take place. The researcher acknowledges with much appreciation this act as a demonstration of willingness on the part of the local community members to invest in the community and to take control of issues related to their own empowerment and building a viable community. According to the researcher, this is the operationalization

of the principle of empowerment of men and women alike – aimed at enhancing the sustainability of the envisaged initiative or project beyond the time of departure of the research-facilitator.

Through this Participatory Community Development process participants were enabled to start a *Stokvel* project, the aim of which was to help augment the parent members' financial resources so as to sustain payment of their children's day care fees and to also materialize the spirit of *Ubuntu* (humanness) among themselves as local community members also. Given the lessons learnt by the research-facilitator, this article concludes that after engaging people in capacity-building as facilitators of Participatory Community Development, it is important to give people a voice at grass-roots level, allowing them to make informed decisions and choices about their situations, for example, the *Stokvel* initiative. This in turn helps them take control of their lives in a meaningful way. This seems to reiterate the overarching lesson learnt by the researcher, namely, 'facilitators of the Person Centered Approach and Participatory Community Development need to sit down, ask questions and listen to the concerns and issues of the people as a starting point because they are the ones who know their traditions, culture and values best, and as such they are experts in their own rights'.

## Unanticipated events

As discussed in the researcher's contact making section, in Kagiso's interview with the researcher on 17 June 1996, the latter was requested to help with fundraising initiatives for the centre. In response, an application for funding was made to the Gauteng Department of Education – Early Childhood Development and Primary Education Policy Unit under the auspices of Impilo Educare Project. Before a decision was made to award the grant to the centre, compliance for the grant application process required a project (educare centre) site visit by the project coordinator, which was organized and accomplished. The site visit was subsequently followed by yet another visit by the then Gauteng Education MEC (Member of Executive Committee), Mary Metcalfe, together with *The Star* newspaper education reporter, Jacqui Reeves, on 5 May 1998. A photo of this event is included as appendix in the last page of this paper. The result of this unanticipated event was that the centre was granted an amount of R4 000 renewable annually for the next three years, reviewable in three-year cycles. These series of event happened between Planning and Implementation phases as outlined in Swanepoel's (1997) five-phase Participatory Community Development model. Fukuyama (2013: 5) adequately sums up what Participatory Community Development can do; in this case, when the researcher and the educare centre purposefully forge a viable time-framed strategic partnership, 'Big changes in the quality of governance are possible.' The same could be said about the governance or administration of the educare centre during the period under review.



## LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE ENTIRE PROCESS AND THE STUDY

This section summarizes the lessons learnt by the facilitator.

- Facilitators of the Person Centered Approach and Participatory Community Development need to sit down, ask questions and listen to the concerns and issues of the people as a starting point because they are the ones who know their traditions, culture and values best, and as such they are experts in their own rights;
- Facilitators of the Person Centered Approach and Participatory Community Development would do well to use the participants' 'frame of reference' as a point of departure in their interaction with the community members because it makes the process and the envisaged community development initiative (project) meaningful. In the researcher's notes this is seen as one way of communicating respect for the local people;
- It is important for the facilitator to engage the people in capacity building during the course of the process as it enables them to make informed decisions, which in both the short and long term enhances the sustainability of the envisaged community development initiative or project;
- Communicating trust, respect and belief in people, and acknowledging their inherent potential and existing skills, when expressed through interaction with all participants and/or all stakeholders, enhances the facilitation process, in this case, the process of collecting voices as documented in this article. The principle expressed being, in Participatory Community Development, the means (process) justifies the end (the envisaged initiative) – in this particular case, the *Stokvel* project that was birthed during the process.
- Building a good organization is important for the sustainability of the project. On observation, sustainability could be perceived as a test of community development projects in the long-term (especially after the facilitator's formal termination with the community in question).

## CONCLUSION

This article has illustrated the significance of involving people at grass-roots level to participate in making informed decisions and choices about their situations and to take control of their lives in a meaningful way. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to a cumulative process of developing meanings and understandings of facilitating Participatory Community Development and the process of collecting voices, using the educate centre under review as an example. 'But one resource that is necessary for any account of meaning-making is the capacity to analyse texts in order to clarify their

contribution to processes of meaning-making' (Fairclough 2006:10). In the context of this article, this would refer to the researcher's fieldwork process notes.

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## APPENDIX



Source: *The Star* 5 May 1998