

# **UNDERSTANDING BENEFICIARIES' EXPERIENCES OF QUALITY IN EARLY LEARNING CENTRES**

by

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**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree**

**PHILOSOPHIAE DOCTOR**

in

**LEARNING SUPPORT, GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING**

**Department of Educational Psychology**

**University of Pretoria**

**SOUTH AFRICA**

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**2011**

## ***Acknowledgements***

Studies at this level characteristically depend on the input of many people. Without the support of all of you, I could not have completed this journey. I would like to thank the following people sincerely for their different contributions in order to make this thesis a reality:

- My supervisor, Prof. Liesel Ebersöhn for her professional guidance and support. Her scholarly leadership, encouragement and valuable academic input are greatly appreciated.
- Sheyne Ball for the thorough way in which she did the language editing.
- All of my former students who contributed considerably to the study in their dual roles as participants and fieldworkers.
- All the teachers and mothers who shared their insights through interviews.
- All the different teaching assistants in the Department of Early Childhood Education who assisted me in various ways.
- The University of Pretoria for financial support in the form of a bursary.
- My current and former colleagues at the Department of Early Childhood Education for various conversations, encouragement and support.
- Sonja Delport who assisted me in finding relevant sources in the UP library.
- My parents, family and friends for ongoing emotional support and encouragement, and for believing in me.
- My former student and young friend Liesel Westhof for the scanning of all the documents and for her unselfish help and support on so many levels.
- My sister, Marietjie Schutte, who assisted me with the graphics and technical editing. I am very grateful for her moral support and expert advice.
- Last but not least, a very big word of thanks to my dear husband Willie van Heerden without whom I would not have been able to complete this long and challenging journey. I am grateful for his continuous support, advice and help with regard to many facets of this research project. Thank you so much for your patience, understanding and willingness to assist me, amidst your own busy schedule. You have always been a valuable conversation partner and advisor. I appreciate it all sincerely.

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## *Dedication*

I dedicate this study to my  
husband Willie,  
for his unconditional  
love and ongoing support

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## ***List of terminology and acronyms***

In order to clarify exactly what is meant when specific terminology is being used in this study, abbreviations, definitions and explanations of the key terms are provided.

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
BEd	Baccalaureus Educationis
Caregiver	Staff working directly with young children (employee)
CCCCF	Canadian Child Care Federation
CECDE	Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (Ireland)
Childcare	A service provided for children from birth to four or five years of age.
CIS	Caregiver Interaction Scale
CLASS	Classroom Assessment Scoring System (Virginia)
CPERS	Children's Physical Environments Rating Scale (Australia)
Crèche	Early childhood development facility, also called a preschool or ECD centre
Curriculum 2005	According to the Department of Education (2002: 61), Curriculum 2005 is the first version of the post-apartheid National Curriculum Statement.
DAP	Developmentally Appropriate Practice
Day care/child care	A service provided for children from birth to four or five years of age. Care of a child during the day by a person other than the child's parents or legal guardians, typically someone outside the child's immediate family.
DBSA	Development Bank of South Africa
DoBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education (South Africa)

ECD	Early Childhood Development is the process of emotional, mental, spiritual, moral, physical and social development of children from birth to nine years.
ECD Programmes	Early Childhood Development Programmes
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECE	Early Childhood Education ECE is a pedagogical approach to cover the education of children from the period from birth to six years of age. Other terms that are often used interchangeably with ECE are early childhood learning, early care and early education. Learning focus is on children learning through play.
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECERS	(Harms, Clifford and Cryer/Harms' <i>et al.</i> family of) Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales. Designed in 1998 to assess group programmes for children of preschool through kindergarten age, 2 ½ through 5 years.
ECERS-E	Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Extension: Four curricular subscales. This new instrument was developed in 2003 specifically for assessing the curricular aspects of quality, including pedagogy, in preschool centres subject to the English national Early Childhood Curriculum. The ECERS-E is an instrument used for assessing the educational aspects of process quality and is a significant predictor of children's cognitive/linguistic progress.
ECERS-R	Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Revised. Harms <i>et al.</i> (1998): A rating scale consisting of seven sub-scales which provide an overview of the preschool environment, covering aspects of the setting from furnishing to individuality of care and the quality of social interactions.
ELC	Early Learning Centre
EPPE	The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project (England)
ERS	Harms-Clifford Environmental Rating Scales
EU	European Union

FDCRS	The Family Day Care Rating Scale: defines quality of family day care comprehensively.
Foundation Phase	The first phase of the General Education and Training Band namely grades R, 1, 2 and 3. (South Africa)
Grade R	The Reception Year, the year before grade 1. Learners can be admitted to Grade R the year they turn 6, but Grade R is not compulsory. In some schools it is still known as grade O, but that term was replaced by the term Grade R when the RNCS was published in 2002 in South Africa. These learners can receive their education at an early learning centre (pre-primary school) or at a primary school. The way that they learn is through play and in an informal way.
Grade O	An alternative term for Grade R.
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus that attacks the immune system of the body.
ITERS	Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale: Designed to assess group programs for children from birth to 2 ½ years of age.
ISSA	The International Step by Step Association
Kindergarten	A form of education for young children which serves as a transition from home to the commencement of more formal schooling. In most countries kindergarten is part of the preschool system. In parts of the United States, Canada and Australia (NSW, TAS and the ACT) kindergarten is the word to describe the first year of compulsory education. Children usually attend kindergarten any time between the ages of three and seven, depending on the local system.
NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children
NCAC	National Childcare Accreditation Council (Australia)
NQS	National Quality Standard
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
ORCE	Observational record of the care giving environment

Preschool	It is defined as “center-based programmes” for four-year olds that are fully or partially funded by state education agencies and that are operated in schools or under the direction of state and local agencies. Preschool, both private and school sponsored, are available for children aged three to five. Many of these programmes follow similar curriculum as pre-kindergarten.
Preschool child	A child under six years of age not yet attending formal school.
Preschool playgroup	In everyday usage just called a playgroup, is an organised group providing care and socialisation for children under five.
Pre-reception year	Programmes for children from birth to four years of age.
QIAS	Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (NCAC, Adelaide, Australia)
QUAL	Qualitative
QUAN	Quantitative
RNCS	The Revised National Curriculum Statement (South Africa). The RNCS is aimed at promoting commitment as well as competence among teachers, who will be responsible for the development of their own learning programmes.
SACERS	The school-age care and environment rating scale. Designed to assess group-care programs for children aged five to twelve.
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund, formerly (1946-53) United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund.
UP	University of Pretoria
USA	United States of America

## ***Addenda (Provided on cd)***

Appendix A: Declaration of language editing

Appendix B: Letters of consent from participants and students

Appendix C: Ethical clearance certificate

Appendix D: Assignment

Appendix E: Questionnaire

Appendix F: Examples of data analysis (questionnaires, closed-end questions) - calculating responses.

Appendix G: Examples of data analysis (questionnaires, closed-end questions) - captured in spreadsheets

Appendix H: Examples of data analysis (questionnaires, open-ended questions) - grouped responses

Appendix I: Interview schedule (Questions in assignments that were used for data collection)

Appendix J: Examples of field notes of interviews

Appendix K: Examples of data analysis (interviews with teachers) manual, themes & topics

Appendix L: Examples of data analysis (interviews with teachers) electronically broad categories, themes and topics

Appendix M: Examples of data analysis (interviews with mothers) manual, themes & topics

Appendix N: Examples of data analysis (interviews with mothers) electronically broad categories, themes and topics

Appendix O: Guidelines for observation for field notes in reflective journals

Appendix P: Examples of field notes of reflective journals

Appendix Q: Examples of data analysis (reflective journals) manual

Appendix R: Examples of data analysis (reflective journals) electronically

## ***Abstract***

The purpose of this study was to explore the concept of quality in early learning centres which could serve as the groundwork for the development of an early learning quality assurance framework in South Africa. The data used reflects different beneficiaries' experiences of quality in early learning centres. The unique contexts of, and situations at early learning centres were considered. A theoretical framework, based on Woodhead's model on quality development, informed the study. The framework consists of input (structural), process and outcome quality indicators.

In this explanatory instrumental case study framed within social constructionism, the researcher partnered with 235 teachers, 235 mothers and 235 teacher students from a middle income group, to generate mixed method data using surveys, as well as interviews and reflective journals in a statistical and thematic analysis.

Beneficiaries' conceptualisations of quality mirrored accepted norms of quality in early learning centres. Beneficiaries indicated the following as indicative of quality: children's social-emotional well-being and holistic development, a normative foundation for values and respect, effective infrastructure and accountable learning. Aspects regarded as quality indicators by beneficiaries were available at early learning centres. In this regard early learning centres provided more indoor than outdoor facilities. The latter were mostly static outdoor structures which could negatively impact on sensory- and motor development. The promovenda developed a draft quality assurance framework based on the following criteria: school climate, infrastructure, curriculum, communication, teacher competence, learning environment, and support services.

The findings show that aspects perceived by beneficiaries as quality indicators in an early learning centre are predominantly process indicators and hard to 'measure' in a quantitative way. A quality school climate enables emotional and social well-being. In this regard, the findings suggest that for the beneficiaries quality concerns were not about that which early learning centres have provided in terms of facilities (input indicators), but rather about centres that promote children's holistic well-being.

## ***Key concepts***

Accreditation

Beneficiaries

Beneficiaries' experiences of quality in early learning centres

Early childhood education

Early learning centres

Quality in early learning centres

Environmental rating scale

Quality rating system

Quality assurance

Quality assurance frameworks

Teachers

Parents



## Certificate of ethical clearance



UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

**CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

**CLEARANCE NUMBER :**

EP 09/11/12

**DEGREE AND PROJECT**

PhD  
Understanding beneficiaries' experiences of quality in early learning centres

**INVESTIGATOR(S)**

Judith Cornelia van Heerden

**DEPARTMENT**

Educational Psychology

**DATE CONSIDERED**

27 October 2011

**DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE**

APPROVED

Please note:

*For Masters applications, ethical clearance is valid for 2 years*

*For PhD applications, ethical clearance is valid for 3 years.*

**CHAIRPERSON OF ETHICS  
COMMITTEE**

Prof L Ebersohn

**DATE**

27 October 2011

**CC**

Prof. L. Ebersöhn  
Jeannie Beukes

This ethical clearance certificate is issued subject to the following conditions:

1. A signed personal declaration of responsibility
2. If the research question changes significantly so as to alter the nature of the study, a new application for ethical clearance must be submitted
3. It remains the students' responsibility to ensure that all the necessary forms for informed consent are kept for future queries.

Please quote the clearance number in all enquiries.



## ***Certificate of language editing***

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27 October 2011

### **CERTIFICATE OF EDITING**

To whom it may concern

This certifies that I have edited the PhD thesis, UNDERSTANDING BENEFICIARIES' EXPERIENCES OF QUALITY IN EARLY LEARNING CENTRES, by Judy van Heerden, being submitted in 2011 to the University of Pretoria, South Africa.

#### **Disclaimers**

1. I focused on language issues, including grammar, tenses, subject-verb agreement, consistency with regard to UK spelling.
2. I improved the word order where necessary to improve the logical flow of the story line. I also made suggestions for the improvement of the structure and numbering of sections and consistency with regard to heading styles. Final decisions rest with the student as to which suggestions to implement.
3. I was not asked to edit the References.

**Sheyne Ball**  
Language editor