

Ntataise Report to ROYAL BAFOKENG ADMINISTRATION

Objective

To provide in-service training for 48 ECD practitioners with a special focus on the South African National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for children from birth to four years to improve the knowledge and skills of practitioners in support of the provision of quality early childhood development services for young children in a variety of contexts.

June – October 2020



On 24 January 2020, Ntataise was appointed by Royal Bafokeng Institute (RBI) to train and support 48 ECD practitioners working in community and home-based ECD facilities in Phokeng, on the South African National Curriculum Framework from birth to four years. The scope of work included:

1. To assist practitioners with practical facilitation sessions of how to interpret terminology and concepts;
2. Assist practitioners with understanding and application of activities aligned to the National Curriculum Framework, including planning and implementation of daily activities;
3. Assist practitioners with the promotion of learning through play and assessment of activities to promote learning and development;
4. Provide learning materials to support and guide implementation; and
5. Compile and submit a final comprehensive report.

The contract commenced on 10 February 2020 and was to continue until 15 December 2020. On 2 March 2020, Ntataise Executive Director met with Royal Bafokeng Administration and RBI management team to discuss the terms of the contract and implementation plan, which was to be configured so as to accommodate those ECD practitioners who were also enrolled in Level 4 qualification training. A draft implementation plan was submitted to RBI on 17 March and finalized on 24 March 2020.

The first orientation training workshop was scheduled to start on 20 April 2020. With the onset of the nationwide C19 Lockdown on 26 March 2020, the start of training was postponed and in early May Ntataise proposed a revised implementation schedule and mode of delivery for the training which included the use of digital platforms. With the re-opening of RBI at the beginning of June it was agreed to start the NCF training programme on 29th June 2020. The programme content was also adapted to include an additional topic with a focus on capacitating ECD Centre managers / principals and ECD practitioners in preparation for emerging from lockdown and the reopening of ECD facilities in compliance with government's Covid-19 Standard Operating Procedures. This was delivered in the form of a 5-session short course "Reopening of ECD Facilities & Psycho-Social Support – Capacity Building for ECD Workers."

Venue and technical logistical implications further extended the start of the programme, which commenced on 20 July 2020. Despite Covid-19 and related challenges, phase 1, being the training component of the programme, was completed by 2 October 2020.

By the beginning of October, with only 2 months left in the year, none of the 48 ECD facilities part of the project, had yet resumed operations – this being the same across the country. Phase 2 of the programme, being on-site demonstration, mentoring and support visits to ECD facilities, was therefore not possible. With an urgent need to focus support for the 48 ECD facilities to re-open, the second phase of the programme was thus suspended. Despite not having completed phase 2 of the project, the training has developed the knowledge, skills and competencies of the practitioners and empowered them to provide quality early learning and play programmes for young children aligned with the National Curriculum Framework (NCF).

The below report further details the activities of phase 1 of the project which was completed.

Activities and Outcomes

Support for the re-opening of centres and psycho-social support

The training commenced with capacity-building and support for the reopening of ECD facilities to equip ECD centre managers and practitioners to operate in the new Covid-19 context. On 6 July 2020, almost four months after ECD facilities had been required to shut down, the Gauteng High Court passed a judgement that ECD Centres should be allowed to re-open with immediate effect, provided they meet Covid-19 operating protocols. In response to the urgent need to support ECD practitioners and centre management to re-open their ECD facilities and comply with the Department of Social Development's Covid-19 Standard Operating Procedures, Ntataise developed a comprehensive 'Emerging from Lockdown: re-opening ECD facilities and psycho-social support' short course. The course provided practical guidelines for reopening ECD centres including safe daily routine activities to do with young children with required health and safety precautionary and preventative measure in place. Further to this, the course focused on self-care and unpacked ways of supporting the psycho-social wellbeing of staff members and children, as well as provided tools for effectively communicating with, and capacitating parents and community members in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The training was scheduled to take place in-person with the group of 48 ECD practitioners over the course of five consecutive days from 20 to 24 July 2020. To comply with Covid-19 social distancing regulations, the group was divided into two groups with one Ntataise Facilitator per group. 22 practitioners attended the first day of training: including 9 centre managers /principals in one group and 13 ECD practitioners in the other group. The training was discontinued on day two due to one of the practitioners at the workshop having been in contact with a possible Covid-19 positive person the day prior. The practitioners were provided with the Ntataise 'Emerging from Lockdown' course learner materials consisting of information, checklists and templates on the following topics:

- The Covid-19 pandemic – introduction and background
- Self-care and mental health
- Supporting staff members
- Supporting children's play and developmental opportunities
- Capacitating parents/ family members and preparing children to return to ECD services
- Planning requirements for reopening processes and operational effectiveness
- Department of Social Development Standard Operating Procedures

Despite the training for both groups having to be cut short, both Ntataise Trainers integrated any outstanding items of the short course into future NCF training sessions.

Training on the National Curriculum Framework

Ntataise delivered training on the National Curriculum Framework with the 48 ECD practitioners over 19 days in four block weeks on 11- 14 August, 31 August – 4 September, 14 – 18 September and 28 September – 2 October. The training workshops comprised of both theoretical and practical learning to not only develop the knowledge and understanding of ECD practitioners, but to also build their competencies to ensure the knowledge gained is transferred in practice. The learning which takes place during the training empowers ECD practitioners with the necessary skills, tools and support and significantly boosts practitioner's confidence and

abilities to better engage with both children and parents, implement quality programmes in the playroom with a variety of play activities which addresses the holistic development of young children. More specifically, the National Curriculum Framework training programme equipped the participating ECD practitioners to:

- Plan daily, weekly activities for different areas using themes to cover the six Early Learning Development Areas (ELDAs) and child holistic stimulation development.
- Create opportunities for early literacy, numeracy and life skills in a fun way through play.
- Improve the quality programme rendered in centres including a print rich environment inside and outside.
- Improve teacher-child interaction.
- Practice reflective learning, critical thinking and facilitation skills.
- Develop observation skills to address individual needs of children and practice.
- Build skills and competencies of practitioners to track children’s development and progress.

Each of the 48 ECD practitioners received an NCF-aligned Ntataise theme-based toolkit. The toolkit consists of 14 resource booklets and matching sets of visual educational aids. Each resource booklet includes a series of play activities that are divided into themes which enable children to discover their immediate environment including themselves, families, homes, food, clothing, community and the world. The ECD Practitioner support materials include instructions for play activities which draw on readily available materials and provide a box of educational aids (templates) to support preparation and implementation. A suggested weekly plan is provided at the back of each theme booklet. ECD Practitioners are able to use these weekly plans to immediately implement and to develop a monthly and yearly programme for the children in their playroom. This also means that ECD Practitioners have the tools to submit their ECD programme for programme approval with the Department of Social Development.

As a precautionary measure and in compliance with Covid-19 social distancing regulations, in an effort to decrease the risk of transmission, particularly for practitioners with comorbidities, the group of 48 practitioners were divided into two groups for the next set of training workshops. The intention was to group the ‘more at-risk’ practitioners with comorbidities together so that they could participate remotely in the training through digital platforms. The other group were convened in a face-to-face workshop. On 11 – 14 August 2020, the first set of training on the National Curriculum Framework commenced with the two groups using the two different modes of delivery. 17 practitioners attended the in-person training for the duration of 4 days and 23 practitioners participated in the distance training.

Each workshop was conducted in a block week in a series of between 4 and 5 days. The first 3 days focused on theoretical training to introduce theme planning and age-appropriate implementation of play activities to build knowledge and understanding. Day 4 and 5 of the workshops involved practical presentations and reflection assignments to support practitioners to work as a team towards a common goal, to enable the sharing of experiences and ideas and to encourage continuous reflection on learning and practice. The practical assignments are designed to support and enhance learning and test understanding. To keep practitioners engaged throughout the training workshops, Ntataise Trainers incorporated a range of training tools and techniques such as audio-visual clips. The sessions had a strong focus on resource-making, encouraging practitioners to practice creativity, innovation and play.

The first phase of the distance training required digital orientation and capacity-building with the group of practitioners to develop their digital competencies and comfort levels in using Google Meet and WhatsApp groups for online training and support. Digital orientation was conducted on 11 August. This was followed by 3 days of training on an introduction to and unpacking of the NCF and theme-based activities. The sessions delivered digitally included daily activities such as reading, responding to verbal and written questions, and participating in group online discussions and reflection activities. Video clips and voice notes were sent to practitioners to reinforce key points and to address any gaps in understanding. While some participants experienced connectivity issues and did not have access to smartphones, the general feedback was positive with some expressing a sense of empowerment and appreciation for the opportunity to learn about the Google Meet platform. Two participants did however feel strongly that they would prefer face-to-face workshops rather than online training. In the cases where practitioners were unable to connect for the online training, the Ntataise Trainer caught them up during the next training workshop.

Due to the complexities of having two different modes of delivery, as well as the connectivity issues, a decision was taken that the remainder of the training workshops would be delivered face-to-face.

Schedule of training, focus and outcomes

Date	Focus	Outcomes
20 – 24 July	Capacity building and support for reopening of ECD facilities and psycho-social support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reliable information and updates on Covid-19 reviewed and discussed, and personal experiences and reflections shared to support improved psycho-social wellbeing of practitioners Development of self-care plans including support plans for staff and children Improved knowledge and understanding for practical implementation and adaption of daily programmes in compliance with Covid-19 Standard Operating Procedures, including measures to ensure the health and safety of children and staff members Increased awareness of the importance of parental involvement and participation
11 – 14 August	NCF Training: introduction to understanding and exploring theme planning and effective and age-appropriate implementation, followed by practical demonstrations and reflections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved levels of confidence and proficiency in using digital platforms for the practitioners that participated in the digital orientation session Practitioners introduced to the NCF and improved understanding of the “why” and “what” in child learning and development Improved knowledge, understanding and implementation of theme-based activities linked to specific Early Learning Development Areas Improved knowledge-sharing, peer support, learning and reflection between practitioners Development of skills to improvise making of learning resources and equipment
31 August – 4 September		
14 – 18 September		
28 September – 2 October		

Highlights / Success Stories

The training conducted has resulted in improved knowledge, skills and competencies of practitioners to create stimulating early learning environments to improve children’s experiences and learning outcomes. During the practical component of the training, Ntataise Trainers observed improved planning and demonstrations of activities by practitioners, all of whom were able to clearly describe linkages to specific Early Learning Development Areas by the last training workshop.

Teamwork between practitioners improved significantly over the period. Ntataise facilitators observed improved communications, planning and interactions between the practitioners following each group practical presentation conducted. The interactive sessions enabled improved common purpose, peer support and learning between the practitioners, with many expressing having learnt a lot about themselves and their peers. Some also shared that at first, they felt nervous and uncomfortable to speak and present to the group, but now they feel confident and empowered to share ideas and contribute to discussions without any fear of judgement or ridicule.

In the words of some of the practitioners:

“My name is Mmule Seakgosing. Ntataise (NCF) training have opened our eyes towards the development of a child. It taught us how the child develops from the womb until 5 years old. The important themes showed that every child should know that she is competent, and that learning, and development is important. Children need the support of adults. They explained how the ELDA’s work in the development of a child, the aims, guidelines, the activities and how to assess the child. I enjoy most how to use the themes in the classroom, how to plan the activities and how to present them with children. They encourage us to make our own equipment like toys, games and they also encourage us to work together with the parents. The video clips showed us how to deal with the children. Thank you Mme Busi for being a good facilitator to us, you elaborate everything about NCF very well and now I think we will enjoy our duties at the centre, understanding what we are supposed to do. Ntataise make us better leaders and better teachers.

My plan is to have my own centre in the coming years. I am busy with the preparations, as I have been working for the people for a long time from 1998. I am prepared to continue with my studies, to obtain a diploma or degree of ECD.”

“My name is Tshегоfatso Temane from Rabothu Preschool at Luka village. How I wish that I could say this face to face but I am content and there's no words that I can explain the joy I have right now. Before I attended the NCF course I didn't trust myself and was walking on a very uni-directional road which was full of spikes made of fear, most of the things I thought it was right it was wrong but through Mme Busi and your help I can now say that all of that it's gone its now victory. The resources you have provided were a huge eye opener, a rich valuable legacy and a perfect tool that will enhance and make learning become profitable to children. Your video clips have motivated me and given me hope that I can make a difference in a child's life. Every time Mme Busi do an activity from the guide I would picture myself with my learners in the classroom because I cannot wait to practice what she has taught us. I want to assure you that the seed you have planted to me I will continue to water it, make it expand and bear sweet juicy fruits to learners of Rabothu Preschool. I am proud to say I am ready and eager to create a great impact and a solid foundation that will never crack nor break to my learners. Please continue to be a blessing unto us, continue to remind us that we can, continue to be the support we need. May the Good Lord bless you and to all Ntataise Team. Thank you!!! “

“My name is Thembeke Magida. Ntataise grew me spiritually, emotionally and mentally. The training made me to realise most of the things that I was not aware of, my rights and how to extend the themes and lessons to the children. It made me to know that I have the right to say no to something that I don’t agree with. It showed me how to run a pre-school. I am really thankful for what Ntataise is doing for us. It really encouraged me to open my own pre-school. It even made me to improve my presentation skills.”

“My name is Amohelang Nameng and I am 23 years old and I am a pre-school teacher at Semane pre-school in Rustenburg at [Phokeng] North West. Ntataise has taught me so much. Before this training I did not have a lot of skills that I have gained from the training. I have learned about the ELDA’s in NCF, how to incorporate them into my planning and also how to plan according to themes. Most importantly I have learned that children are competent, and we should treat them with kindness, love and respect as well as learn about daily programmes. I would say that I am a better person and a teacher. Ntataise has given me so much courage which is to be bold and proud of my work. It has given me tools and knowledge that I needed to be a competent teacher.”

Challenges

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges for the ECD sector. The loss of livelihoods for ECD practitioners has resulted in huge anxiety and stress; which has negatively affected their psycho-social wellbeing and mental health. The pandemic requires ECD Practitioners to prepare an early learning environment that meets government Covid-19 Standard Operating Procedures to ensure that all the necessary preventative infection control measures are in place. This is a daunting task for ECD practitioners, who themselves have been faced with extreme hardships during the lockdown period. The capacity-building and psycho-social support provided by Ntataise for the reopening of ECD facilities in the context of Covid-19 went a long way in empowering the participating centre managers and practitioners with the knowledge and confidence to prepare to reopen their ECD facilities, and the confidence to engage with parents/caregivers as children return to the centres.

One of the challenges identified as a potential barrier to digital training for practitioners was the high data costs and lack of access to Wi-Fi. To overcome this challenge, Ntataise made data available to the practitioners to support their participation in the training. For some practitioners, the network connectivity was erratic, and some practitioners did not have phones compatible with Google Meet, which made it difficult for them to actively participate in all group calls. Load shedding also caused some interference to some of the online training sessions. In response to these issues, the Ntataise Trainer made contact through phone calls to provide guidance and an overview of the content one-on-one. Delivery of the training using two different modes of delivery caused some confusion and frustration as the dosage of contact teaching was greater for those participating in the in-person training. A decision was taken to deliver the training for both groups through in-person workshops for the remainder of the programme.

During one of the workshops with centre managers / principals held on 14 – 18 September, the group experienced interruptions due to being temporarily called out of the session to complete or submit self-assessment forms required by DSD social workers for reopening of centres. Some participants were requested to obtain police clearance certificates at the local police station. This resulted in some delays, however the Ntataise Trainer managed to rearrange the agenda to ensure the full training content was covered.